

OVER THE HILLS AND EVERYWHERE: AN ADVENT LITURGY¹
DECEMBER, 2020

SPEAKING ROLES:

PLAYER:

3 VOICES - VOICE 1: BASS (*a sense of gravity*)

VOICE 2: ALTO (*to offer comfort*)

VOICE 3: TENOR (*declarative, an announcer*)

READER(S): (*usually the Gospel; could definitely be a youth or child*)

JOHN THE BAPTIZER

ANGEL GABRIEL/GABRIELLE

MARY

JOSEPH

ELIZABETH

EMPEROR AUGUSTUS

PAGE

DONKEY

COW

DOVE

SHEEP

INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE

ANGELS

SHEPHERDS

SHEEP

STARS

CHARACTERS BY SCENE:

ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING & ENTRANCE LITANY: VOICE 1, VOICE 2, READER, CONGREGATION

SCENE #1 (CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS): VOICE 1, VOICE 3, READER, JOHN THE BAPTIZER

SCENE #2 (FIRST READING): (READER?), ANGEL GAB, MARY

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SCENE #3 (SECOND READING): READER, JOSEPH, [SOLOIST(S),
INSTRUMENTALIST(S)]

SCENE #4 (THIRD READING): READER, ELIZABETH [MARY?]

SCENE #5 (FOURTH READING): VOICE 1, VOICE 2, VOICE 3, READER,
AUGUSTUS, PAGE, [CONGREGATION]

SCENE #6 (FIFTH READING): READER, INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE,
[CONGREGATION]

SCENE #7 (SPECIAL MUSIC): DONKEY, COW, DOVE, SHEEP, [CHILDREN'S
CHOIR]

SCENE #8 (SIXTH READING): READER, SHEPHERDS, ANGELS

SCENE #9 (CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE): VOICE 2, READER, MARY, [JOSEPH,
ANIMALS, ANGELS, SHEPHERDS; CONGREGATION]

SCENE #10 (OFFERING):

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

*This pageant is an entire worship service, including several liturgical elements. Avoid extra work by allowing this to be one of your Sunday worship gatherings.

*Invite a different household to adopt each scene. Let them each interpret costuming, setting, props, etc., as fits their creativity and resources.

*You might choose to have VOICE and READER parts read by the same people, throughout, so smaller households (i.e., individuals or couples) can focus on character parts.

*The PROPHETIC VOICES never need to be seen; they can always be a voice-over. They are meant to set the mood. This means they can be recorded over the phone or online or in person, without a camera. Whenever we hear a PROPHETIC VOICE let the visual be a still or moving image of something appropriate to the scene they precede.

*The music is optional. It enhances the service and aids its flow, but if tech or musical gifts are prohibitive, it is not essential.

*Lyrics to songs are included strictly for preparatory purposes. No copyright permissions are implied by their inclusion. Obtaining music production and distribution copyrights remains the sole responsibility of each congregation.

*Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV with minimal alterations made for gender expansiveness and inclusivity.

*Hymnal references include: *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW; Augsburg Fortress, 2006); *With One Voice* (WOV; Augsburg Fortress, 1995); and *The New Century Hymnal* (NCH; Pilgrim Press, 1995).

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

WELCOME

A congregational leader might record a welcome for online viewers. Keep in mind that you may have visitors!

CALL TO WORSHIP

PROPHETS

ISAIAH 60:2-3

ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

This scene should be dimly lit until the lighting of the wreath/lantern.

The image might be a video of an Advent Wreath, awaiting lighting. You might use the congregation's wreath, showing the sanctuary or you might use a wreath representative of wreaths the congregation has at home.

PROPHETIC VOICE 1: For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but God will arise upon you, and Divine glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and rulers to the brightness of your dawn.

ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING

The Advent Wreath candles may be lit as indicated as the following is shared.

Folks at home are invited to light their wreaths at this time, as well.

PROPHETIC VOICE 2: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; (*Light first candle.*) ...those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined... (*Light second candle.*) For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon this child's shoulders; and the child is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Abba, Ruler of Peace... (*Light third candle.*) This Child will establish and uphold [peace] with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. (*Light fourth candle - if presenting on Advent 4.*)

ENTRANCE LITANY

LIGHT

JOHN 1:1-5

Allow for a moment of contemplation after the Advent Wreath is lit.

Introduce the litany as follows and proceed directly through:

READER: Please share with me the Litany of Light:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,...

CONGREGATION: ...and the Word was God.

READER: The Word was in the beginning with God, all things were made through the Word,...

CONGREGATION: ...and without the Word nothing was made.

READER: In the Word was life,...

CONGREGATION: ...and the life was the light of all.

READER: The light shines in the darkness,...

CONGREGATION: ...and the darkness has not overcome it.

SCENE #1

CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS

JOHN THE BAPTIZER

**MALACHI 3:1-3
ISAIAH 40:3-5, 9
MARK 1:1-3**

The VOICES and READER may be heard over the image of JOHN THE BAPTIZER, who is frozen in tableau. Or, we might see a stretch of wilderness familiar to your congregation: either a literal outdoor, natural setting, or perhaps the part of town where some people fear to go. Or, take cues from the texts and create an image montage.

PROPHETIC VOICE 1: See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the One whom you seek will suddenly come to the temple...But who can endure the day of that One's coming, and who can stand when that One appears? For the Holy One is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; One who will ...purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to God in righteousness.

PROPHETIC VOICE 3: A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Holy One,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Holy One shall be revealed,

and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of our God has spoken.'

READER: As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of [our God],
make [God's] paths straight" '...

*As soon as the last words are spoken, we see JOHN.
He can move throughout his space; he's got a bit of swagger about him.*

JOHN: 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
"Make straight the way of our God" '...
That's one of my most famous lines!
Hey, my name is JOHN. I'm a little out of chronological order, here at the beginning, but it's tough to know where to put me: the Pharisees had the same problem, back in the day. They sent their minions to ask if I was the Messiah - which I wasn't. They asked if I was Elijah - which I wasn't. They asked if I was the prophet who would announce the end of all time - which I wasn't. They didn't know what to make of me then, and if we're honest, most folks don't know what to make of me now.
I'm Jesus' cousin and the messenger sent to prepare the way for him. I lived most of my adult life in the desert; I am the voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of our God!"
You could take me literally and *try* to get ready by tearing down hills, or paving over the prairie, or constructing a road. But you might be better off taking my words to heart - literally - and getting your heart straight and your systems straight, so that you - and your community - are ready for God... who is coming, by the way.
Make straight the way of our God!

*JOHN freezes with a flourish.
Either let the image of JOHN remain, or let us see a straight highway - perhaps one familiar to your congregation - as the image beneath the following words:*

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

MARK 1:4; ISAIAH 40:1-2, 9

READER: John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Let's get our hearts straight by unburdening our souls of grief and guilt.

Let the following words scroll or otherwise move across/along the screen:

CONGREGATION: In the wilderness of our lives, God, we lose sight of you and we lose hope. We give in to fear, to doubt, to anxiety, to anger.

Open our hearts and minds; open our eyes. Let us see you being born among us, right here and now.

Fill us with your grace, so that in this complex season of celebration, we might be more gracious as we offer and receive joy, peace, and belonging - in new ways - not only with those we love, but more readily with ourselves and with those we do not know. Prepare our hearts, and come, Christ Jesus, that your light may shine in and through us. AMEN

Let the PROPHETIC VOICES boom with confidence:

PROPHETIC VOICE 2: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from God's hand double for all her sins.

PROPHETIC VOICE 3: ...Lift up your voice with strength, ...lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'

READER: Comfort, comfort, your penalty is paid. Let the rough road of guilt be made smooth. Be lifted up from the valleys of despair and brought down from the heights of anxiety. Christ is coming. Christ is here. The light of Christ shines among and through us, now!

SCENE #2 **FIRST READING**

ANGEL GAB

LUKE 1:26-27

*If possible, let ANGEL GAB and MARY sing this.
Otherwise, the READER can speak the lines.*

THE ANNUNCIATION² *(a capella?)*

ANGEL GAB: An angel went from God
to a town called, Nazareth,

² Haugen, Marty; *Holden Evening Prayer* (GIA Publications, 1990; 16-17).

to a woman whose name was Mary.
 The angel said to her,
 “Rejoice, O highly favored, for God is with you.
 You shall bear a child,
 and his name shall be Jesus,
 the Holy One of God Most High.”

MARY: And Mary said,
 “I am the servant of my God,
 I live to do your will.”

*GAB is a talker. Let this be hurried, flurried, and charismatically boisterous.
 The first words should be especially booming.*

ANGEL GAB:

Greetings, favored ones!

Oh, hey! Don't be afraid... it's just me: I'm [GABRIELLE/GABRIEL; *whichever name feels more comfortable to your actor*] - you can call me GABBY.

I'm a messenger of God, which I know is a little overwhelming, but you'll get used to it. I guess we could say that I was one of God's favored messengers, because, wow!, was I busy for a while:

First, I was sent to ZECHARIAH and ELIZABETH, who were getting on a bit in life. But then, “pow!”, out of the blue I show up to tell them they were going to have a baby - and a *boy* (which was all the craze back in the day - but I'm glad to see that fad has passed). They were like a couple of teenagers - giddy, they were.

I barely got back from that gig and God sent me to visit with MARY.

GAB reminisces:

That was a whole different scene: great kid, MARY. She eventually got excited, but I'd say “terrified” was more like it at first (*If present, MARY nods her agreement.*) - and maybe all the way through the baby's life.

She was young, you know - not a lot of life experience; no parents to help her out; the potential of getting dumped by JOSEPH...

He was my third big assignment - so much back and forth!

I told JOE that it was okay to MARY marry. (Which is so fun to say!) That was a nice piece of work by me, if I do say so myself. Dream work is tough, you know: getting the message across without freaking the poor sleeper right out...

Speaking of which, you should have seen the SHEPHERDS! Oh, it was priceless...

Anyway, I could keep talking - when you're a messenger you get the “gift of gab”, you know! But, I suppose they should tell their own parts of the story...

GABBY freezes.

SCENE #3
SECOND READING

JOSEPH

MATTHEW 1:18-25

The screen shot may continue to be an image of ANGEL GAB or a still image of an “angelic presence”: a brilliant light, an ambiguous light image, anything suggestive of but not too literally depicting an angel as the following is read:

READER: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of God appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’

The still image of the ANGEL may continue, or here, we might see JOSEPH rising from sleep.

...When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of God commanded him; [Joseph] took [Mary] as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and [Joseph] named [the child] Jesus.

JOSEPH is clearly thoughtful, but perhaps a bit airheaded, or maybe a slightly muddled middle-aged man; sweet, gentle and confused. He is unburdening himself.

JOSEPH:

Wow, it was a confusing time, you know? It was hectic and crazy and I kept feeling like I was having these out-of-body experiences, or something. I mean, even my dreams were wonky. Everything seemed topsy-turvy: I was a contented bachelor, and then got engaged, only to find out that MARY was pregnant! By law, I should make a public spectacle out of divorcing her and showing her for the indecent girl that she appeared to be - I mean, I hadn't touched her and she was pregnant! But then, I get a message in a dream that it's still okay to marry her, even though the law... You know, if God is going to give us a law about how marriage is supposed to be, then why would I be breaking it, just because someone told me to in a dream? But I really felt like the dream was right,

that I couldn't and shouldn't abandon MARY - no matter what the law said. So, I stuck with her - and the whirlwind continued! Jesus was so unexpected - and I don't just mean the fact that we had a baby before we were really married. Everything about his arrival, everything about his life: having to run to Bethlehem for that dumb census, with MARY ready to go into labor; giving birth in a barn - who does that these days?

Reminisces: Poor MARY, what a rough night she had, but she's got guts, my wife. Then there were SHEPHERDS popping up out of the woodwork and a couple years later, here come the Magi, and then we lose Jesus in the Temple and then - the list goes on and on of crazy things. But I guess, that's someone else's part of the story. Suffice to say: pay attention to your dreams.

JOSEPH freezes.

If you are including music, the following might be nice on or with a simple flute, clarinet or violin (played by a young person?) and sung by a soloist (or two) or the congregation.

If producing this music is too challenging, the song can be dropped.

SOLOIST(S) OR CONGREGATION *Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear* NCH #105
verses 1 & 2

1)

"Gentle Joseph, Joseph dear, stay with me, for the baby's near;
God will surely your goodness hear,
as you will love this newborn child," says Mary.

2)

"Gladly Mary, Mary mine, I will cradle the child divine;
Here will heaven and earth combine,
for you will bear God's child, O dearest Mary."

SCENE #4
THIRD READING

ELIZABETH

LUKE 1:39-45

*If a dirt road is available, that'd be a great still image while the following is read.
You might also use video of MARY walking the road.*

READER: In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my God comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by God.'

If you've got her, let ELIZABETH be an elder of the congregation. She is a sweet, strong matriarch.

ELIZABETH:

Why, hello there! I'm ELIZABETH.

ZECHARIAH, my husband, the priest, was serving in the temple and praying when all of a sudden God's messenger appeared and said we'd be having a baby. It was ridiculous! We were so old! We'd been trying for years! But when it seemed totally impossible, God surprised us with a baby boy.

JOHN was precocious from the start! He kicked and danced in my womb like everything. He was an excitable child...

He grew up to wear camel's fur and eat locusts and honey and lived in the desert. Raising him there was never an easy day and never a dull moment. But what a privilege; what an honor! To mother the man who would prepare the way for the Messiah...

Little Cousin MARY came to visit when I was about five months along - and she was pregnant, too!

She reminisces:

Poor little thing... But I'll let her tell her own story.

She put it best - the excitement we felt, knowing that things were about to change - when she sang that song; so profound for someone so young...

ELIZABETH is done and freezes.

If possible, we might see MARY singing any of the myriad lovely versions of the Magnificat.

If MARY or tech do not support sharing such a video, the READER can read the Magnificat from your favorite translation of Luke 1:46-56.

Whether read or sung, this might be a voice-over to an image of MARY and ELIZABETH dancing, or, if your congregation is open to it, create an image montage of

contemporary events in which we see how society is being transformed, as informed by the lyrics.

SOLO*Magnificat***LUKE 1:46-56**

Use any version for which you have copyright permission and which is suitable to your singer.

Suggestions include:

Mary Haugen's Holden Evening Prayer, Magnificat

NCH #119: My Soul Gives Glory to My God

ELW #251: My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness

ELW #723: Canticle of the Turning - which feels especially suited to 2020

The video freezes on its final image.

SCENE #5
FOURTH READING

EMPEROR AUGUSTUS

ISAIAH 11:1-10³
& LUKE 2:1-2

AUGUSTUS and the PAGE might be a parent (or older sibling) and child.

Possible images:

AUGUSTUS and PAGE in tableau (unless AUGUSTUS can pull off unobtrusively getting really annoyed with the VOICES and gesturing for them to hurry up without detracting from their pronouncements).

Some austere governmental building, either Roman or contemporary.

Symbols of governmental authority and power, either Roman or contemporary.

PROPHETIC VOICE 3: Then a shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse;

from Jesse's roots a branch will blossom.

The spirit of YHWH will rest on [this One] -

a spirit of wisdom and understanding,

a spirit of counsel and strength,

a spirit of knowledge and reverence for YAHWEH.

PROPHETIC VOICE 2:

[This One] won't judge by appearances,

or make decisions by hearsay.

³ Reading from Priests for Equality, *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*; Sheed & Ward, 2007.

[but] will treat poor people with fairness
and will uphold the rights of the land's downtrodden...

PROPHETIC VOICE 1:

On that Day, the Root of Jesse will serve as a symbol to the peoples of the world; nations will flock to this One, whose whom will be a place of honor.

READER: In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Immediately, AUGUSTUS and PAGE begin.

AUGUSTUS gestures with a tightly rolled scroll. He is a spoiled brat and a rotten ruler.

EMPEROR AUGUSTUS: I need cash! The troops are grumbling; their stomachs are grumbling. I don't want any more grumbling!

He hands the scroll to the PAGE, possibly poking PAGE in the ribs with it, once or twice, before actually relinquishing it.

Remind the people that they benefit from my benefactoring. I keep the peace and peace is not free... Remind them that I am their god! I need their money!

PAGE *reading from the scroll, straight to camera:* Ave! Ave! EMPEROR AUGUSTUS decrees: "Everybody needs to pay more taxes. Pax Romana isn't free! You rely on me to keep the peace. I rely on the troops. We don't want the troops going hungry... (*as an aside/going "off-script"*) ...you know how they get when they get hungry; no one wants that...

Back to the scroll: Your taxes will increase only nominally over the next.... ah, the foreseeable future. NO COMPLAINING, NOW, I MEAN IT! There will be no more grumbling!

Everyone go to your hometown and get counted, so I know how much I can count on. Be good citizens. Remember, I am a god: you do NOT want to make me grumpy!" So decrees the EMPEROR!

PAGE rolls up scroll and he/she/they and EMPEROR AUGUSTUS freeze.

If including music, this is for sure a CONGREGATIONAL sing-along.

If producing this music is too challenging, the song can be completely dropped.

CONGREGATION

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

NCH #116

vss. 1, 2, 4 & 7

1

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Child of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!

2

O come, O Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show, and help us in that way to go.

Refrain

4

O come, O shoot of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny,
From depths of hell your people save, and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

7

O come, Desire of Nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;
Make envy, strife, and quarrels cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace.

Refrain

SCENE #6
FIFTH READING

INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE'S STORY

LUKE 2:3-7

As the following is read, let us see a rustic but comfortable scene with any or all of the following elements: straw/hay, manger, pitcher, candle in a simple holder, towel or small blanket or sheepskin throw.

READER: All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE is completely harried: overworked, under-paid; flustered.

INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE:

I don't know where my master was - on the craziest night we've ever had! It wasn't just us, either - the whole *town* was packed to the gills! There were strangers wanting to sleep in peoples' houses and making lean-tos in the streets. It was bedlam. We hadn't seen anything like it before!

This poor couple straggled in from the road - she wasn't much older than me and he was so tired from their walk. I felt terrible telling them we had no room, but ...well, we had no room!

Boss always tells me I'm a good problem solver, though... And I took one look at her belly and knew they weren't going to make it much further.

Fortunately, our inn has a little stable out back. I mean, when times are crazy you gotta use what you've got, right? "Innovate", that's my motto.

It wasn't much - just a little chink in the side of the hill, but it was warmer than being outside, and safer than the streets. In fact, they might have been better off out there than in the inn!

I did what I could to make them comfortable, which wasn't much given all the other demands on my time. But they got a candle nub and a pitcher of water - that's about all I could do...

I guess others will have to pick up the story from here.

If music is included, the following can be played with a simple single-instrument accompaniment (guitar, clarinet, flute, etc.), or full fanfare. This is definitely a CONGREGATION song.

If producing this music is too challenging, the song can be completely dropped.

CONGREGATION

Joy to the World!

NCH #132

vs. 1

Joy to the world! the Lord is come: let earth its praises bring;
Let every heart prepare Christ room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

SCENE #7

ANIMAL'S STORIES

LUKE 2:3-7

If there is a family/pod/bubble with four young people to fill these roles, this scene can be done all together.

If such a group doesn't exist, you can "splice" actors together into one screen, or let us see each as though they are in separate barn stalls.

Or, you might invite kids from different households/pods to videotape in a large barn, where they can be socially distanced: let them occupy different areas (including the DOVE in the loft?), but when edited together, we'll see they are in the same space.

If filming within one family/pod, COW, SHEEP, DOVE and DONKEY are jostling/arguing over who will speak for them as the scene opens.

The DONKEY, being the most stubborn, "wins", but the others keep butting in:

DONKEY is the bossy know-it-all; COW is the timid wanna'-be side-kick who is thrilled by the spotlight - and terrified of it; DOVE is meek and mild; and SHEEP is sheepish.

DONKEY: You would not believe what's been happening. I took MARY to Bethlehem - all the way from Nazareth. It was a long trip - and she was extra heavy.

COW: I gave her my manger...!

DOVE: Coo! Coo!

SHEEP: Baaaa!

DONKEY: *To Cow:* Not yet - we're not to that part, yet!

To Audience: Anyway, when we got to Bethlehem, the man tried to get into a house for her, but no one would let them in.

COW: I gave her my manger...!

DOVE: Coo! Coo!

SHEEP: Baaaaaa!

DONKEY: *To Cow:* We're not to that part, yet!

To Audience: Finally, an INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE let them in. Well, sort of let them in; actually, they came out to the stables with me, and COW, and DOVE and SHEEP - and all the other animals. Fortunately, they were all friendly beasts, because in the stables, **that night**, Jesus was born. He was different from a lot of them; nicer, maybe - I can't really put my hoof on it... So, all of us ANIMALS chipped in to be sure he was comfortable, 'cuz he seemed so frail and cold and new...

COW: Now is it my turn?

DONKEY: Yes, tell them what you did.

COW: *suddenly shy:* I gave the baby my manger and hay so he could have someplace to sleep. *COW tucks back behind DONKEY/anything to find a spot to not be in the spotlight.*

SHEEP: I gave him my wool, so he could stay warm.

DOVE: I cooed him to sleep with a little song...

KID'S CHOIR/SOLOISTS *The Friendly Beasts*⁴

If the four kids playing the ANIMALS can sing it, great!

If you have a Children's Choir and can record them all singing it in a virtual format, also great! You might costume the Choir so they are all some manger scene animal...

If tech or other factors don't allow for performing the song, it can be dropped.

ALL:

Jesus our brother kind and good
was humbly born in a stable rude.
And the friendly beasts around him stood.
Jesus our brother, kind and good.

DONKEY [OR ALL]:

"I," said the donkey, all shaggy and brown,
"I carried his mother up hill and down
I carried his mother to Bethlehem town."
"I," said the donkey, all shaggy and brown.

COW [OR ALL]:

"I," said the cow, all white and red,
"I gave him my manger for his bed.
I gave him my hay to pillow his head."
"I," said the cow, all white and red.

SHEEP [OR ALL]:

"I," said the sheep, with curly horn,
"I gave him my wool for a blanket warm.
He wore my coat on Christmas morn."
"I," said the sheep, with curly horn.

DOVE [OR ALL]:

"I," said the dove, from the rafters high,
"I cooed him to sleep so he would not cry
We cooed him to sleep, my love and I."
"I," said the dove, from the rafters high.

⁴ Lyrics from memory and from [The Hymns and Carols of Christmas](https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/friendly_beasts.htm) (https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/friendly_beasts.htm; accessed 10.23.20)

ALL:
 Thus every beast, by some good spell
 In the stable rude was glad to tell
 Of the gift they gave Emmanuel;
 The gift they gave Emmanuel; the gift they gave Emmanuel.

SCENE #8
SIXTH READING

ANGELS' AND SHEPHERDS' STORIES

LUKE 2:8-14

LUKE 2:15-18

The image might be of a spectacular night sky, the Northern Lights, a crowd of (ambiguous) angels, a mountainous scene of sheep and shepherds, or the ANGELS and/or SHEPHERDS in a tableau.

READER: In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of God stood before them, and the glory of the Holy One shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Sovereign. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, [*cue the recording, if there is one, and do not speak the words; if there is no recording of the Gloria, finish the reading as follows: Glory to God in the highest, and peace among the peoples of earth.*]

If possible, any configuration of choir - children, youth, adults, soloists, small group - can be recorded singing the Gloria - any version will do. It can be as simple or elaborate a rendition as you like.

If tech or voices prohibit this, let the READER conclude the reading as indicated.

READER: When the angels had left [the shepherds] and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which God has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

If possible, let the ANGELS be aloft in some way: perched in trees, sitting on hay bales, standing on a porch overlooking a lower yard, up on a ladder, etc.

As with the ANIMALS, the ANGELS might be all from one family/pod, or, with strategic placement, you might record multiple households of kids scattered around one location, then edit so they appear to be close to one another.

ANGEL 1: We were loud!

ANGEL 2: We were bright!

ANGEL 3: We gave the shepherds quite a fright!

ANGEL 1: We sang joy!

ANGEL 2: Mercy mild;

ANGEL 3: We told them 'bout the newborn child.

ALL ANGELS: We said, "Go"!

SHEPHERDS could be an intergenerational bunch from one family or safely distanced young people from several households. Let them appear on the run, shouting their lines as they dash, hither and yon.

SHEPHERDS: So, we went!

SHEPHERD 1: We totally got where we were sent!

SHEPHERD 2: From the hills

SHEPHERD 3: We headed down

SHEPHERD 1: Straight into that Bethl'em town.

SHEPHERD 2: There it was...

SHEPHERD 3: What they'd said...

SHEPHERD 1: A newborn babe in a manger bed.

If possible, they "lead" the audience to the final manger scene as they share the following lines: enacting what they say they did, with us:

SHEPHERD 2: Back we went...

SHEPHERD 3: All around...

SHEPHERD 1: Telling the story of what we'd found!

The SHEPHERDS disappear.

We see the ANGELS in tableau.

STATION #9 **CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER**

MARY'S STORY

ISAIAH 7:14

LUKE 2:19

We see MARY in tableau as the following is heard:

PROPHETIC VOICE 2: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel: God with us...

READER: But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

MARY is young, thoughtful, confident, but vulnerable.

MARY: I'm MARY. There's so much I could say, so much I maybe should say, but so much that is impossible to put into words.

Really, there are no words. The ANGEL was terrifying, as angels tend to be, and the ANGEL's message even more terrifying.

The pregnancy was terrifying, as pregnancies tend to be; and absolutely the most wonderful reason to be alive.

Delivering the baby in a cave, with nothing but ANIMAL body heat to keep us warm, and virtually no water, no midwife, nothing really, but poor JOSEPH - who tried his best and was such a help - was terrifying, as child-birth tends to be. And it was beyond thrilling.

And then, almost immediately it seemed, we were surrounded by strangers, all clamoring to see the baby.

I could hardly breathe: I was exhausted, I was frightened, I felt so alone, even with JOSEPH right beside me. I didn't know which end was up. I'm surprised I didn't faint or die or something. The whole world felt like it was spinning out of control.

When the strangers left I finally had a minute to collect my thoughts. Too many thoughts to collect in that one short night.

I didn't even try to put them into words.

I just pondered... and wondered... and prayed...

MARY addresses the audience more directly as we move into prayer:

These days, everyone is being asked to be me; everyone is called to bring Christ into the world. And these days, there is way too much worry. Too much excitement. Too much to wonder about. Too much to take in.

I learned that night that the only thing to do is to hold all these amazing and terrifying concerns before God.

Would you join me in sharing with God our worries and excitements, our wonder and our fears?

I invite you to name, in the silence of your heart, those things that are too much for you to take in right now...

2

ANIMALS: The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes,
but little child Jesus, no crying he makes.

SHEPHERDS: We love you, Christ Jesus; protect us, we pray,
and stay by our side until night turns to day.

3

CONGREGATION: Be near us, Christ Jesus; we ask you to stay
close by us forever and love us, we pray.

Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and help us to see you being born, everywhere.

SCENE #10 **OFFERING**

THE STAR'S STORY

MATTHEW 2:1-12

We might see a single brilliant star or a fabulous night sky full of stars as the following is heard.

PROPHETIC VOICE 1: For thus says the Holy One of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Holy One of hosts...

READER: In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Then Herod secretly called for the wise ones and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search

diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Again: if possible, let the STARS be UP somehow (raftors, ladders, etc.).

STAR is a bit of a diva, but is aware that they are not this show's leading role.

STAR:

Hi! I'm the STAR. Oh, not the star of the *show*, that's little Immanuel. No, I'm *THE STAR*.

Christ is born; hallelujah! God is with us; hallelujah!

STARS: Christ is born. God is with us: Hallelujah!

STAR: God put me in the sky to let *everybody* know that a whole new chapter was starting, with a whole new set of rules, laid down by a whole new ruler.

That was my job: I showed people wise enough to read the signs that even the cosmos - all of us way out here beyond your sky - resonate with the Voice that was born in Bethlehem.

It took 'em a couple years, but I led the wisest people on Planet Earth to see our Creator, a toddler, in Bethlehem. God wanted them to come see Jesus right away so they could tell the story around the globe. That's taken a few years, too.

Those first visitors from afar brought gifts with them to show their love and hope and joy. If you've got gifts you'd like to bring, my fellow STARS will collect them - and they'll help share the story that Christ *is* born. Hallelujah!

STARS: Christ is born. God is with us: Hallelujah!

OFFERING/OFFERTORY

Depending upon how you are collecting offerings, you might scroll your contact info or other pertinent data across the screen as the song is sung.

This can be a curtain call; bows are indicated during appropriate portions of the song. Bows can be literal or a wave and a smile from each actor.

Singing can be provided by any group available: the actors listed, a small group or a choir.

Invite the CONGREGATION to sing along at home if this has been your norm.

SONG

Go Tell It on the Mountain

NCH #154

Refrain:

PROPHETIC VOICES & READER(S) take a bow.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hill and everywhere.

Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!

1

STARS, SHEPHERDS and ANIMALS take a bow.

While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,

Behold throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.

Refrain

EMPEROR AUGUSTUS & PAGE take a bow.

2

ANGEL GAB & ANGELS take a bow.

The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! Above the earth

Rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth.

Refrain

JOHN THE BAPTIZER & ELIZABETH take a bow.

3

INNKEEPER'S APPRENTICE, MARY & JOSEPH take a bow.

Down in a lowly manger th humble Christ was born,

And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.

Refrain

SENDING LITANY

Record each character sharing their sending line; be sure to allow time for the CONGREGATION to respond between clips.

Present the litany words on the screen.

JOHN THE BAPTIZER & APPRENTICE: *Get everything ready!*

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

ANGEL GAB & ANGELS: You have heard the Story:

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

JOSEPH: For the timid and frightened:

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

ELIZABETH: For the old and the young:

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

EMPEROR AUGUSTUS & PAGE: For peace between nations:

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

ALL ANIMALS: For the health of creation:

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

STAR & STARS: You've seen a great light:

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

SHEPHERDS: Now go tell the story!

CONGREGATION: Christ is born!

SENDING

ALL PLAYERS [*shouting!?!?*]: Go in peace. Tell this Great Story: Christ is born!

CONGREGATION: God is with us: Hallelujah!

Close with appropriate music. If you normally share announcements, you can post them as the music plays. You might frame them in terms of how the congregation is bringing Christ to birth or where we might find the Christ being born, today.