

# A Birthday in Bethlehem

## A Christmas Musical

by Patricia Kae Hill

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**DEDICATION**

*Our wonderful Father, His Son and Holy Spirit -  
and His wonderful family!*

**STORY OF THE MUSICAL**

What if Jesus had been born in your town? Rather than tell about the birth of Jesus from the traditional viewpoints of Joseph and Mary, this musical gives us a refreshingly different look from ordinary people who were there. A small group of adults and children befriend the holy family for more than a year, from helping them find the stable for the birth to a celebration for 15-month old baby Jesus, which turns into a bittersweet evening when the Wise Men warn them to flee.

The story begins as Bethlehem prepares for visitors in "Company's Coming" and we see travelers as they arrive in "Back to Bethlehem." Before venturing on their quest, the Wise Men sing "Song of the Magi" as they hope for fame, having discovered the birth of the Jewish Messiah. In the touching song, "Tiny Heartbeat," Mary and a small ensemble express praise and wonder at the Savior's birth.

In Act II, the children want to celebrate Jesus's first birthday, even if it was three months ago. So at the Feast of Dedication they give Jesus their gifts, followed by Gaspar, Balthazar and Melchior, who also give gifts but warn that King Herod will harm Jesus. However, if you knew your time with Jesus was short and you had no gift good enough to give him, what would you do? Young Aaron sings "What Shall I Offer Him?" and kneels before Jesus to give his only belongings: his carpenter's apron and a wooden mallet Joseph helped him make. Aaron also promises to love and serve his Lord. The musical ends with the company singing the uplifting "What We Have We Give."

**ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

"What Shall I Offer Him?" was the only song written for *A Birthday in Bethlehem* when first presented as a reader's theater for the Christ's Birthday Observance of the Women of the Church of God in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Seven more songs were written later, when the play was revised. "Tiny Heartbeat" and "Mary Had a Baby Boy" were added for a 2015 full production in Bradenton, Florida. "Where Is Messiah?" with reprise and counterpoint in "On to Bethlehem" joined the score in 2017. *A Birthday in Bethlehem* has an abridged version with rhymed narrative and no dialogue, and a reader's theater version.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(Widely flexible cast. Main roles for 7 m, 3 w, 5 boys, 4 girls.*

*Additional roles for 2 m, 2 women.*

*Numerous extras, 1 toddler, and an optional children's choir.)*

**Main Roles**

**HARAN:** Bethlehem innkeeper.

**JAEL:** Haran's wife.

**DEBORAH:** Young teen, daughter of Haran.

**AARON:** Young teen, Bethlehem carpenter's son.

**JOSHUA:** Young teen, Bethlehem shepherd.

**RACHEL:** Girl from Bethlehem.

**SARAH:** Girl from Bethlehem.

**HADASSAH:** Girl from Bethlehem.

**SAMUEL:** Boy from Bethlehem.

**EZEKIEL:** Boy from Bethlehem.

**JOSEPH:** Carpenter, husband of Mary.

**MARY:** Young woman, wife of Joseph and mother of Jesus.

**BALTHAZAR:** Middle-aged Persian Sophist (Wise One).

**GASPAR:** Elderly Persian Sophist.

**MELCHIOR:** Young Persian Sophist.

**BOY:** Young Persian servant.

**JERUSALEM MAN and JERUSALEM WOMAN**

**RABBI**

**Additional Roles**

**ZERUBABEL:** Ezekiel's uncle.

**BASEMATH:** Zerubabel's wife.

**CENSUS TAKER:** Well-to-do man.

**MIDWIFE**

**More Flexible Roles**

**VERY YOUNG CHILDREN:** Optional for introduction.

**VILLAGERS:** Living in Bethlehem.

**TRAVELERS:** Family groups; relatives of Villagers.

**SHEPHERDS**

**JERUSALEM BYSTANDERS**

**TODDLER JESUS (See note below.)**

**Toddler:** Plan for Mom to be close, if needed. Have Mom appear earlier as the Midwife or she can just be in costume. If he becomes upset, offer food, period-appropriate toys, and/or interaction with the children onstage. Be sure to expect a toddler to be a toddler and likely to not sit still. We're sure Mary had to chase down Jesus when he was that age.

**Note:** The dictionary pronunciation of "Magoi" is with a long a, a soft g and silent o. "Darius" is pronounced with a long "i": "Dah-*ri*-us."

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

1. **“Mary Had a Baby Boy”** (*Optional Introduction*)  
*Very young children*
2. **“Company’s Coming”**  
*Haran, Jael, Deborah, Aaron, Joshua, Rachel, Sarah, Hadassah, Samuel, Ezekiel, Midwife and Villagers*
3. **“Back to Bethlehem”**  
*Joseph, Mary, Zerubabel, Basemath and Travelers; with (at end) Deborah, Aaron, Joshua, Haran, Jael, Rachel, Sarah, Hadassah, Samuel, Ezekiel, Midwife and Villagers*
4. **“Song of the Magoi”**  
*Balthazar, Gaspar, Melchior, Boy*
5. **“Tiny Heartbeat”**  
*Mary, Joseph, Midwife, Jael, Deborah, Rachel, Sarah, Hadassah, Joshua, Shepherds*

## ACT II

6. **“Where Is Messiah?”**  
*Rabbi, Jerusalem Man, Jerusalem Woman, Jerusalem Bystanders*
7. **“Where Is Messiah? Reprise”**  
*Jerusalem Man, Jerusalem Woman and Jerusalem Bystanders*
8. **“On to Bethlehem” and “Where Is Messiah?”**  
*Balthazar, Gaspar, Melchior, Boy, and Jerusalem Group*
9. **“A Carpenter’s Son”**  
*Joseph and Aaron*
10. **“What Shall I Offer Him?”**  
*Aaron*
11. **“What We Have We Give”**  
*Company*
12. **“Benediction”**  
*Company*

### **SETTINGS**

Village square, Bethlehem of Judea.  
An observatory/library in Elam (Persia).  
The streets of Jerusalem.

### **SCENES and PROPS**

**Act I, Scene 1, 2:** Bethlehem village square with benches, flowers in a pot, large water jar, smaller water jar, lashed-together v-style sawbucks; brooms, buckets, linens, travelers' packs, bags of coins.

**Act I, Scene 3:** observatory/library in Elam with observatory platform, lancet-arch window, sconces, tapestries, couch, table, shelves; primitive scientific apparatus, oil lamp, scrolls, quills, jars.

**Act I, Scene 4:** in front of closed curtain. Wrapped baby doll.

**Act II, Scene 1, 2:** Jerusalem street.

**Act II, Scene 3:** Bethlehem village square.

**Act II, Scene 4:** Bethlehem village square as above; saw, plank, carpenter's tools, wooden mallet.

**Act II, Scene 5:** Bethlehem village square: as above; lighting effects of increasing overhead glow.

**Act II, Scene 6:** Bethlehem village square as above, with low table and lamps hung from trees; lilies and other flowers, vase, bowls of fruit, rag doll, wooden toys, platter of cakes, nine-branched lampstand and lamps, lighted oil lamp, punk stick, pitcher, cups, two sets of shepherd's pipes, ornate bag of "gold," ornate bag of "frankincense," ornate bag of "myrrh."

### **COSTUMES**

New Testament-era tunics, robes, and sandals, with a sharp distinction between the Judeans' and the Persians' dress, hair/beard styles, makeup, and jewelry. Carpenters' aprons/tool belts for Aaron and Joseph.

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**ACT I**

**Optional Introduction**

*(AT RISE: VERY YOUNG CHILDREN enter in front of curtain. MUSIC begins.)*

**Song 1: "Mary Had a Baby Boy"**

*(To the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.")*

**CHILDREN:**

MARY HAD A BABY BOY.  
HE IS ALL OUR HOPE AND JOY.  
WISE MEN SAW HIS STAR ABOVE.  
SHEPHERDS HEARD OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE.  
JESUS CAME FOR YOU AND ME  
SO WE CAN LIVE ETERNALLY.

*(MUSIC ends. CHILDREN exit.)*

**Scene 1**

*(HARAN enters in front of closed CURTAIN.)*

**HARAN:** We remember with wonder the story of Jesus's birth: how the young woman, Mary, was told by the angel Gabriel she would bear a son who would be called "Son of the Most High." We know the carpenter, Joseph, who was pledged to marry this girl who was "found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." We know of the "decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed," which is why Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was the City of David, and all David's descendants, including Joseph, had to come here to register. Our town was a whirlwind of activity getting ready for all the travelers.

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*(CURTAIN rises on Bethlehem village square. There is an inn with two benches and a water jar outside its door. Nearby is a carpenter's shop, with a pair of sawbucks outside. Building doors are open. MUSIC begins. JAEL, DEBORAH, AARON, JOSHUA, SARAH, RACHEL, HADASSAH, SAMUEL, EZEKIEL, MIDWIFE, and VILLAGERS are in a flurry of activity, sweeping with brooms, carrying buckets and linens, etc. HARAN joins the group.)*

**Song 2: "Company's Coming"**

**ALL:**

AIR OUT THE ROOMS. OPEN THE DOORS.  
GET OUT THE BROOMS. SWEEP ALL THE FLOORS.  
HANG UP THE CURTAINS. SHAKE THE RUGS.  
AND BE CERTAIN TO SQUASH ALL THE BUGS.  
BRING IN THE CAT TO KILL THE MOUSE.  
COMPANY'S COMING TO STAY IN THE HOUSE.

POLISH THE PLATES. CLEAN OUT THE LARDER.  
GATHER MORE DATES. SCRUB THE POT HARDER.  
GO AND PICK BERRIES. READY THE TABLE.  
SPREAD SOME VERY FRESH HAY IN THE STABLE.  
MAKE SURE THE LINENS ARE SPARKLING WHITE.  
COMPANY'S COMING TO STAY TONIGHT.

**MEN and BOYS:**

*(While women sing "Aunts and cousins" through "all the others.")*  
POOR US. POOR US. POOR US.

**WOMEN and GIRLS:**

AUNTS AND COUSINS AND UNCLES AND BROTHERS  
COMING BY DOZENS WITH ALL THE OTHERS.  
EVERYONE'S GETTING A FAMILY VISIT.  
WHEN THEY KNOCK ON THE DOOR, DON'T ANSWER, "WHO  
IS IT?"  
YOU KNOW IT'S YOUR KIN AND YOU MUSTN'T BE SNOOTY.  
LET THEM IN. IT'S YOUR FAMILY DUTY.  
PUT FLEECE ON THE FLOOR. LAY BEDS SIDE BY SIDE

**BOYS:**

HOPE THAT THE NIECE NEXT TO YOU ISN'T WIDE.  
THEY'LL SNORE IN THE NIGHT. IT'S GOING TO BE  
THUNDER.

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