

Who Will Save Us?

Cast of Characters

Narrator

Egypt

Amram

Jochebed

Pharaoh

Puah

Shiprah

Aaron

Miriam

Litter Bearers

Attendants

Bethlehem

Joseph

Mary

King Herod

Wise Man 1

Wise Man 2

Wise Man 3

Litter Bearers

Attendants

Lighting

Sound

Powerpoint

Props:

Litter to carry Pharaoh and King Herod in.

Camels built around the Hand trucks to carry the wise men in.

Overview

In the gospel of Matthew, the nativity (birth) story of Jesus is rather abbreviated. Much of what we consider to be part of Jesus' birth come from Luke: the shepherds, the sky full of angels, the census, the traveling to Bethlehem, no room at the inn, the birth in the manger. The emphasis in the gospel of Matthew is Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes of a

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*Messiah. The overall structure of Matthew is that a “Pentateuch” (five books) which Jewish readers would connect with the first five books of the Bible attributed to Moses. **Moses** was the one whom God sent to deliver the Hebrews from the hand of the Egyptians. So also, the gospel writer of Matthew believed that **Jesus** was the one sent by God to save God’s people as they lived in a land occupied by the Romans. This drama is written to highlight the parallels of Moses’ and Jesus’ birth stories and to lay the foundation of reading Matthew’s gospel of Jesus in the coming year.*

The dominant backdrops are two large cardboard pyramid/mountain type structures (Egypt-> a pyramid; Bethlehem-> Herodium-King Herod the Great’s palace and future burial place just east of Bethlehem). In the center is the set of a house that is divided in half—the left side (lector side) will be the house of Amram & Jochebed (Moses’ parents); the right side will be the home of Joseph (and later, Mary) the “parents” of Jesus., are some very simple house structures.

During the opening song, the actors will come in carrying props and decorations which they will place in the appropriate place. “

Opening Song - O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Act I. PERSECUTED PEOPLE

There have been times in the history of God’s people, when life was hard. When, instead of being a free and vibrant nation, they have been under the thumb of a foreign power. These are times that try one’s faith. Tonight’s story is about two times in the history of the Hebrews, when God heard their cries, and sent someone to lead them to salvation.

The first was around 1200 B.C. in the land of Egypt. Some 400 years earlier, God had acted to save Jacob and his family from a

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massive drought by bringing Joseph to Egypt, having him find favor with the Pharaoh, raising him to a position of great power, and then using his power to pardon his brothers and bring them and his father to Egypt. [If it sounds like the makings of a great story to do a play about... you're right! But that story is for another time.]

This was many years after that, however, and the Hebrews had grown to be a very numerous people. So numerous, in fact, that the Egyptians began to fear that they would take over their country. To keep them under control, the king of Egypt (Pharaoh), began to treat them like slaves.

One such Hebrew slave was Amram. Like the other slaves, he was forced to work on building those great stone structures which were tombs for the pharaohs... the pyramids. Amram was a faithful man who recounted the stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to his children. He was thankful for his wife, Jochebed, and for his children Aaron and Miriam. But sometimes he wondered... What kind of future was there for his children?... and God had been silent for almost 400 years...

Fast forward about 1200 years to what is modern day Israel, to a town named, Bethlehem. Meet another faithful Hebrew... a carpenter by trade, named Joseph. He also wondered when deliverance would come. For his whole life, the Romans had been the power of the land. Sure, they brought stability and order. And the king whom the Romans had put in place, Herod, had even done extensive improvements and enhancements to the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet, what he and the other people of Bethlehem woke up to with each sunrise was King Herod's place called Herodium, overlooking their town from a nearby hill. In fact, much of Joseph's business came from providing furniture for that palace... providing furniture for their rulers the Romans... A bittersweet source of income. God had been silent for a couple of hundred years... When would God restore the Jews to their rightful place?

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Song, Revised “*By the Babylonian River*” (Sung to violin)

1. *Sung by Amram.*

On the Bank of the River Nile we sat down in grief and wept;
Talked of good days back in Canaan, mourned for Zion when we
slept.

2. *Sung by Joseph*

All the Romans with their armies kept us captive in our land;
So we sat with staring vision, waiting for God’s mighty hand.

3. *Sung by Amram and Joseph together.*

So we keep on singing God’s song; we are sons of Abraham.
We hope and pray and listen, trusting in the great I AM.

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Act II. JOSEPH'S DECISION

There was a bright spot in Joseph's life. He was about to be married to a young girl name Mary. As soon as he had accumulated a little more money, he was going to throw her a wonderful celebration for their wedding. Then one day, she told him some news. She was pregnant. And he knew that the child was not his. Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

Song to the *Green Leaves of Summer* tune: (accompanied with violin).

1. My bride is pregnant. With another man's child.
Betrayal. Adultery. My Mary is defiled!
How could she have done this? What a fool I have been.
I should teach her, I should shame her. Let her suffer for her sin.
2. But this is my Mary... the woman that I love.
She tells me a story, of inception from above!
She says this is God's doing. To bring hope to humankind.
How I wish that I could believe her, but I'd be out of my mind!

[While the melody continues to be played in the background.]

²⁰ **But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord 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." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." [Matthew 1:20-23]

3. My God, you are faithful. Everlasting is your care.
You've chosen to hear your people, You have answered my prayer.

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You have called me to be your servant; to care for your son.
So I will wed Mary, let your kingdom come.

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

Have the little children dressed up as angels come and sing “Silent Night” around Jesus at the manger.

- 1.Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant,
so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.**
- 2.Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light
radiant beams from your holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at your birth. Jesus, Lord at your birth.**

Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792-1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820-1885

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Act III. THE MIDWIVES & PHARAOH

Returning back to Egypt... we find the Hebrew midwives...

The Midwives' Song

Have Puah and Shiprah come skipping in arm in arm, to the tune of the "Time Out" song and greet Jochebed and Amram.

1. My name is Puah. *My name is Shiprah.*
We work together so babies are delivered.
My name is Puah. *My name is Shiprah.*
We work together so babies are delivered.
2. Shalom Jochebed. *Amram, shalom.*
We can't wait for your baby to come!
Shalom Jochebed. *Amram, shalom.*
We can't wait for your baby to come!

Jochebed raises her hands to say, "I don't know."

Puah and Shiprah shrug their shoulders and then start skipping toward Pharaoh's house hang out with Amram and Jochebed While the Pharaoh is carried in on a litter.

In the land of Egypt, the ruler of the land was the Pharaoh. There had been many, many Pharaohs. 400 years earlier, one of them had made Joseph his right hand man. That Pharaoh had long since died and the current one did not have a very favorable view of the Hebrews. They were getting too numerous. [The Pharaoh has arrived on the set borne in on a litter.] So he summoned the Hebrew midwives (Puah and Shiprah arrive) and told them that whenever a Hebrew child was being born, they were to see if it was a girl or a boy. If it was a girl, they were to let it live. If it was a boy, they were to kill it. Puah and Shiprah decided not to participate in this plan...

Puah and Shiprah skip off singing...

2. I am a Hebrew. *I am, too.*

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We pray to God to show us what to do.

I am a Hebrew. *I am, too.*

We pray to God to show us what to do.

3. We won't kill. *That is wrong.*

We'll tell him Hebrew women are too strong.

We won't kill. *That is wrong.*

We'll tell him Hebrew women are too strong.

And this is what they did... They told Pharaoh that the Hebrew women were too strong and did not need the help of the Hebrew midwives. This did not make the Pharaoh very happy...

I am Pharaoh, Pharaoh, O Babies I say you gotta go. OOOOh

I am Pharaoh, Pharaoh, O babies I say you gotta go.

1. A bunch of Hebrew slaves filling up my land

Challenging the power of my hand.

Gotta find a way to stem that tide,

I'll get the Hebrew midwives to make sure they've died. I am...

2. The midwife plan ended up being wrong,

The Hebrew women were much too strong!

I got another plan to get the numbers down,

All I have to do is have the baby boys drown!

While Pharaoh is singing his song, Puah and Shiprah go back to Jochebed's house and "help her" deliver her child. When the song is up, they hold it up and the narrator comes back in...

[Jochebed] conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.

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Act IV. THE WISE MEN & KING HEROD

During this narration, King Herod is carried in on a litter and, by the end, takes his place at his “throne” (i.e. the pulpit).

In Jerusalem, the ruler was King Herod who was called “Herod the Great.” He was called “Herod the Great” because during his lifetime, he undertook many “great” building projects. He renovated the temple in Jerusalem. He also built many fortresses and palaces including one a hill just east of Bethlehem called “Herodium.” In addition to being a great builder, he also had a way of killing people around him who threatened his power... And he was having one of those power problems.

The 3 wise men enter on “camels” from the side aisle and head toward Herod’s place.

1 We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.

Oh, star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright;
westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light!

The wise men (probably more like astrologers) came from the East following a star which signified to them the birth of a new king. Naturally they assumed this birth would happen in the king’s palace so they went to Herod the Great’s palace in Jerusalem and asked:

“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.”³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘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.’ ”

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⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.”

The wise men go back to their camels, go the short distance to Bethlehem, and then worship the baby Jesus.

Oh, star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright;
westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light!

2 Born a king on Bethlehem’s plain, gold I bring to crown him again;
king forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign. *Refrain*

3 Frankincense to offer have I; incense owns a deity nigh;
prayer and praising, gladly raising, worshiping God Most High.

4 Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

5 Glorious now behold him arise, King and God and Sacrifice;
heav’n sings alleluia: alleluia the earth replies. *Refrain*

Text: John Henry Hopkins Jr., 1820-1891, alt.

When King Herod realized that the Wise Men did not return to tell him the whereabouts of the newborn king, he was not too pleased!

I am Herod the Great! O babies, I say you gotta go. OOOO
I am Herod the Great! O babies, I say you gotta go. OOOO

1. Three wise-uh men who came into town,
Said there’s a baby who’s threatenin’ my crown.
There’s no room for two of us at the top,
This insurgency I have to stop! I am...
2. The wise men didn’t come back and tell me the place
So to Bethlehem I’ve got to race.
This baby king can be no more than three

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I've got to eliminate him so that I'll be free! I am...

I wonder who's next? Who's after me?

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Act V. MOSES' DELIVERANCE

Jochebed's baby continued to grow and get stronger, but she knew that the Pharaoh and his soldiers would soon find him and kill him along with all the other Hebrew babies. So she... "got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him."
[Exodus 2:2-9]

1. Oh, sleep now, holy baby, with your head against my breast,
Meanwhile the pangs of sorrow are soothed and put to rest.

A la ru, a la me, a la ru, a la me,
a la ru, a la me, a la ru, a la ru, a la me.

2. You need not fear *the Pharaoh*, he will bring no harm to you;
So rest in the arms of your mother who sings you a la ru.

During the singing of the song, Jochebed puts Moses in the basket, places it in "the Nile" (made with a long strip of blue cloth). Miriam watches to see what happens. At the bottom of the steps up to the Sacristy, the daughter of the Pharaoh finds the baby, and takes it up to the Lectern (symbolizing the Pharaoh's palace). Miriam then comes and mimes offering a nurse maid and then brings Jochebed over to the Pharaoh's daughter.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then *Miriam* said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.

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Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Praise, Praise, Praise God

**1. Praise, praise, praise God! Praise God's holy name, Alleluia!
Praise God's holy name, Alleluia! Praise God's holy name,
Alleluia!**

5. We have seen your glory, *Streaming through the clouds, Alleluia!*

7. Praise, praise, praise God! *Praise God's holy name, Alleluia! (3x)*

African Spiritual

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Act VI. JESUS' DELIVERANCE

Now after the Wise Men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Matthew 2:13

During the singing of "Oh, Sleep Now, Holy Baby", Mary and Joseph bundle up Jesus and "travel" to Jochebed's house in Egypt.

1. Oh, sleep now, holy baby, with your head against my breast,
Meanwhile the pangs of sorrow are soothed and put to rest.

A la ru, a la me, a la ru, a la me,
a la ru, a la me, a la ru, a la ru, a la me.

2. You need not fear King Herod, he will bring no harm to you;
So rest in the arms of your mother who sings you a la ru.

Joseph and Mary remained in Egypt until the death of Herod. Then they traveled back to the land of Israel and settled in a town in the district of Galilee, called Nazareth... All the time marveling in what God was doing!

At this point the whole cast starts pouring out onto the stage for the finale...

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive its King;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.
- 2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 3 No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.
- 4 He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove

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**the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.**

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

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