

Journey to the Manger

PRODUCTION NOTES

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PRODUCTION APPROACHES

Journey to the Manger is a Christmas musical purposely written to accommodate either a large or small scale production. You have the flexibility to choose from either the “small scale production” or “large/medium scale production” options, or a combination of both depending on your church’s needs and resources. The following suggestions are just that—suggestions. We encourage you to bring your own personal and creative flair to each portion of the production and pray that the uplifting words and songs draw both you and all you share it with closer to true meaning of Christmas—Christ Himself.

GENERAL STAGING

The choir is stationary either upstage, behind the actors or in any preexisting choir loft, depending on your church. The choir members can join into the production as noted in the “song-by-song staging suggestions,” or they can remain stationary throughout the production. Choir members can be dressed in traditional robes, festive Christmas attire, or in red shirts and dark pants or skirts for a more cohesive look.

The opening Street Scene, the England scene, the Manger scene and the final Church scene will take place centerstage. The two gallery scenes, and the “Silent Night! Holy Night!” guitar with duet scenes will take place stage right. The Depression Era scene, and the Renaissance scene will take place stage left.

Under the large/medium scale options, you can choose to have a “new set” for each scene stage right and left by creating a movable circular platform, or turntable on casters. A wall or backdrop in the center of the platform can be dressed to fit the era of each scene (providing two different backdrops each) and turned by crew members or cast members before the start of each scene. The scenes played out at centerstage can quickly be dressed with appropriate props while the drama is being played out at stage right or left, or costuming alone can reflect the change of eras.

LIGHTING

Consider lighting each section of the stage while the song and drama are being played, while keeping the areas of the stage not featured dark for set up and prop removal. Certain scenes such as the Manger scene and the quiet “Silent Night! Holy Night!” guitar scene lend themselves well to spotlights, or warm lighting. The more lively scenes such as the Depression Era and the Italian Renaissance call for wash lighting. If lighting is not an option for your church, I would suggest keeping props to a minimum so as not to detract from the songs and dramas as they are performed.

CHARACTERS

- Nathan:** Preferably 20-40 years of age, Nathan can also be older as well. Nathan has a good sense of humor, and as our protagonist he is very likable. Yet beneath his smile he is world-weary and has become somewhat cynical. Ultimately, he is open to hearing the true message of Christmas and embraces it with unabashed joy once he has opened his heart to Christ. He is costumed in casual, modern day clothing—the attire of successful artist.
- Christine:** Nathan’s wife—age to coincide with Nathan. Christine is an optimist with a big heart. She loves her husband despite his initial cynicism. She is costumed in modern day clothing, with an artistic flair to match her husband.
- Pastor Brad:** Of any age, Pastor Brad’s attitude is warm and personable. He is dressed in modern day clothing for the opening scene and may remain in similar costume for the church service scene at the end of the production.
- Mary:** 20-30 years of age, Mary has a young, even playful spirit. She laughs easily and is delighted to take Nathan on an adventure. Mary is dressed in a traditional long, simple robe, hooded cape and sandals in keeping with the days of Christ’s birth. Mary will be costumed in modern day, “Christmas church going” attire as she takes on the role of a church member in the final church scene.
- Joseph:** 20-30 years of age, Joseph is an open, calm presence, with a distinctive quiet authority. He is also costumed in traditional robe and sandals consistent with the times of Jesus. Joseph will be costumed in modern day, “Christmas church going” attire as he takes on the role of a church member in the final church scene.

SONG-BY-SONG STAGING SUGGESTIONS

“Celebrate! Opening Medley”

Small scale production: The choir sings this lively opening from the choir loft. A few choir members may act out the scene, turning to encounter each other on the street to add to a festive Christmas feeling.

Large/medium scale production: Choir members stroll centerstage along the “streets” creating a Christmas street scene. They can carry packages, bags and brightly wrapped presents, and are dressed warmly for the cold. Several children might also accompany their parents and sing along as well. Choir members continue to walk the streets, stopping to greet one another and chat throughout the gallery scenes. The number of choir members involved in this scene is open to the needs of your church, but the desired effect is one of a busy, festive holiday street.

Pastor Brad (one of people in the street scene for large/medium scale) enters from DSL and stops to look at the gallery, then steps inside to talk with Nathan. Christine will enter DSR. Pastor Brad will then exit and move DSL.

(THE GALLERY)

Small scale production: A simple prop or two—statues glued to display podiums will create the feeling of an artist’s gallery. A small table will showcase the Nativity. The Nativity should be of considerable size—at least two feet wide and two feet high, and glued down (with the exception of the “Mary” figurine) on a board so it can be carried in for the later church scene. A chair will also be necessary for Nathan to sleep in during a later scene.

Large/medium scale production: The backdrop will provide an opportunity to place several paintings and/or windows, as well as simple displays for other sculptures to create the effect of an artist’s gallery. An actual doorway in the backdrop can provide an entrance for Christine—the feeling of another room beyond our perception. A “front door” can be built on the movable platform complete with bell that will announce Pastor Brad’s arrival to the gallery. The Nativity should be of considerable size—at least two feet wide and two feet high, and glued down (with the exception of the “Mary” figurine) on a board so it can be carried in for the later church scene. A chair will also be necessary for Nathan to sleep in during a later scene.

“Look at Them, It’s Christmas”

Small scale production: Christine and Nathan move to an imaginary window to look out onto the street. No “street members” necessary. Christine and Nathan gaze out onto the “street” or open stage as if seeing all the people readying themselves for Christmas.

Large/medium scale production: Members of the choir will continue to mill around the stage as Nathan and Christine are spot lit while they gaze out their window, watching. A spot light can also accentuate the people Christine sees—a little girl in blond braids running alongside her brother—a young couple holding hands—a man in a long brown coat and red scarf.

After the song, Christine exits DSR. Nathan focuses his attention on the Nativity while Mary enters DSR. Nathan will remove the Mary figurine before he notices Mary and will replace the figurine before Mary leads him off DSL toward the Depression setting.

“Forget Your Worries *with* Go and Tell It”

Small scale production: The choir sings from the choir loft, and a small family attired in depression era clothing (young boys in knickers, men in wide legged trousers, women in house dresses, long or rolled hair) can exchange gifts—simple gifts like a sweater, scarf, or a wooden truck or simple doll. The soloist sings from the choir.

Large scale/medium scale production: The choir sings as a group of men (and women) in depression era clothing stand around an oil drum/trash can (with a fire inside). Warm lighting illuminates a store front in the backdrop, a Salvation Army worker, complete with donation kettle rings a (silent) bell. The men (and women) warm their hands, as they sing along with the choir—the soloist steps out from the men warming their hands to sing his or her solo. If possible, young children skip down the street as well, stopping to listen to the soloist. One of the children can even break out into a tap dance to the music and the men, as well as the choir can join in clapping and enjoying the performance.

After the song, Mary will lead Nathan center stage as the depression family exits SL.

“England Medley”

Small scale production: Mary and Nathan will arrive centerstage where an English choir—six to twelve people sing along with the choir. The English choir is to be costumed in either traditional choir robes, or if possible period clothing similar to that of “Oliver!” A small children’s choir—six to ten children enter from stage right to sing along with the choir dressed in period costuming or choir robes as well. During the children’s choir number, Mary exits stage left while Nathan watches the choir.

Large/medium scale production: Mary leads Nathan centerstage as the depression family exits SL. Mary and Nathan will arrive centerstage where a King, Queen and several children all costumed in fine Victorian clothing decorate a Christmas tree.

A small children’s choir—six to ten children, dressed in either formal or informal period clothing enter from stage right to sing for the royal family who stop to watch and enjoy the young choir. During the children’s choir number, Mary exits stage left while Nathan watches the choir.

After the song, as Nathan watches the choir members exit stage left, Joseph enters from behind him, stage right. After their speeches, Joseph will lead Nathan stage right.

“Silent Night! Holy Night!”

Small scale production: One person plays (or mimes playing) a guitar, accompanied by a soprano/alto duet and the choir.

Large/medium scale production: A monk, dressed in a long robe, plays (or mimes playing) a guitar, accompanied by a soprano/alto duet and the choir. The platform backdrop is of a church, complete with stained glass windows.

After the song, Nathan takes a beat, then, moved by the song, follows Nathan stage left.

“Fum, Fum, Fum”

Small scale production: Nathan and Joseph arrive stage left to gaze at an imaginary world as described by the dialogue. The choir sings.

Large/medium scale production: Nathan and Joseph arrive stage left to take in a Renaissance of color and activity—a madrigal choir of 6 to 12 members, costumed in Italian Renaissance clothing, jugglers, rich merchants and ladies in fine, colorful clothing celebrate in the street. The platform backdrop can be decorated as a street scene complete with fountains and beautiful Renaissance churches and buildings in the background. As with the opening street scene, this scene is filled with life and energy.

After the song, Nathan and Joseph remain stage left until Joseph leads Nathan centerstage to the Nativity.

“Bethlehem”

Small scale production: Nathan arrives with Joseph as he takes his place next to Mary who cradles a baby in her arms. Your Nativity scene may be as grand as you’d like. No props beside the baby are necessary. Nathan, moved by the Christ child, will kneel to worship next to Mary and her baby at ms. 68 (“O come, let us adore Him”), and about ms. 79-80 (or as the music build

to the angel reveal) he needs to exit. Hopefully his exit will not be noticed. But to keep the time period valid, he shouldn't be "in" the manger scene when it all comes to life.

Large/medium scale production: Nathan arrives with Joseph as he takes his place next to Mary. Mary, who cradles a baby in her arms, is illuminated by a spot light. Nathan, moved by the Christ child, will kneel to worship next to Mary and her baby at ms. 68 ("O come, let us adore Him"). Reveal angels (which you may chose to spot light) at ms. 85. Nathan should then quietly exit stage right when wash lighting will feature a full processional which can arrive down the church aisles—wise men, shepherds, live animals (if desired) such as camels, sheep, donkeys, who have come to worship baby Jesus. This processional begins at ms. 103 and they all should kneel at ms. 145. The processional gently exits during ms. 148-158. The angel remains throughout the processional (ms. 147).

After the song, Mary and Joseph step forward into a spotlight, down stage center as Nathan exits to stage right to the gallery set. The rest of the processional group exit stage left and right. Nathan will "fall asleep" in a chair in the gallery.

After Mary and Joseph's speeches, lights up on stage right, illuminating Nathan who sleeps in a chair. Christine will enter from stage left into the gallery and wake up Nathan. After their speeches, Nathan will take up the Nativity and lead Christine to centerstage.

"Christmas Morning Medley" (Church Scene)

Small and Large scale production: A small congregation of church members gather. Small benches will be brought in by choir members or crew members. A table to put the manger on, and a pulpit for Pastor Brad will also be necessary. The church members will rise to sing "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

Mary and Joseph, now dressed in modern day costumes will be asked by Pastor Brad to come to the front by the pulpit to recite the Christmas story from Luke. Joseph will be finishing up his passage just as Nathan and Christine arrive centerstage and enter through the back of the "church," with Nathan still carrying the manger. Nathan will walk down the aisle of the "church" to place the Nativity on the table in front of the podium as a gift for the church. Nathan will then join Pastor Brad, Mary and Joseph (Christine can join also) for "Away in the Manger" and "Silent Night! Holy Night!"

"Carol Celebration"

Small and Large scale production: At this point the "real" church pastor may step forward for a time of prayer, reflection and/or invitation. The pastor asks the "real" church to stand to join along in singing the Finale, lead by the Choir and Music Minister who will move centerstage to join the cast and choir. The entire ensemble—processional, madrigal and English choir singers, Depression era players, monks—everyone involved in the production joins left, right and centerstage, even down the aisles for a rousing end to *Journey to the Manger*.