

**What a Story!**  
**A Children's Christmas Service**

**Opening (Processional) Hymn: "O Come, All Ye Faithful" (CW 354)**

1 O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold him, born the King of angels: (Refrain)

*Refrain*

O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
Christ the Lord!

2 God from true God, and Light from Light eternal,  
born of a virgin, to earth he comes!  
Only-begotten Son of God the Father: (Refrain)

3 Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest: (Refrain)

4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n!  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing: (Refrain)

## INTRODUCTION

### **Narration: Hunter**

It's easy to get lost in a good book. With the words "Once upon a time," our interest sparks and we are compelled to listen. With these familiar words, we anticipate the chance to dream and live happily ever after.

What makes a good book? Drama, excitement, suspense, interesting characters . . . If a story is really good, we'll read it over and over. Sometimes great stories are even made into movies.

Have you read any good books lately? What stories do you love so much that you've read them many times? What book would you guess is the most popular and best-selling of all time? You might guess *A Tale of Two Cities* or one of the Harry Potter books. They may rank pretty high on the best-seller list, but one book that holds the highest spot: the Bible. It's the most sold book of all time—billions of copies—and it's been translated into hundreds of languages. The Bible records many events and parables spanning more than a thousand years.

The life of Jesus, recorded in the Bible, is read again and again. In fact, it has been called the greatest story ever told. And it's more than just a story—it's fact! It really happened, with all of its real-life twists and turns. At this Christmastime, we want to look at a specific part of Jesus' life—his birth. It is full of dreams, scandal, and desperation. Let's take a closer look at the elements of this beloved account: its setting, plot, characters, conflict, and theme. And as we do, may we be moved to say by faith, "What a story!"

**Hymn by Children: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (CW 333)**

*The congregation sings verse 4*

1 O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by;  
yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

2 For Christ is born of Mary,  
and, gathered all above  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wond’ring love.  
O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the King  
and peace to all the earth.

3 How silently, how silently  
the wondrous gift is giv’n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heav’n.  
No ear may hear his coming,  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.

**4 O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Immanuel!**

# 1. THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

## **Narration: Eleanor**

Before we look at the account of Jesus' birth itself, let's look further into the past. Writers often use foreshadowing to give their readers hints about things to come. Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, Old Testament prophets predicted Jesus' coming. The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies about Jesus. And each one of them came true, including Jesus' miraculous birth, his sinless life, his many miracles, his death, and his resurrection.

Listen to some of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Jesus. In those prophecies we are told from whose family Jesus would come, what his name would be and where he would be born.

## **Recitation: Jude**

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

## **Recitation: Joe**

The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

## **Recitation: Jude**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

## **Narration: Eleanor**

But why was Jesus to be born? It all began with humans falling into sin. After God created a perfect world with perfect people, those people chose to disobey him. They became imperfect—sinful—and deserving of death and an eternity in hell, forever separated from God's love and presence. And every one of their offspring, right down to you and me, would be sinful and destined for eternal death. But out of great compassion and love for us, God planned a way for us to be forgiven and saved from those awful consequences. Throughout the Old Testament, God reminded his people of his promise that a Savior would come. When the wait was over, God's gift of love took his place on earth and fulfilled all the prophecies about the Savior. That Savior is Jesus.

**Hymn by Congregation: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (CW 327)**

**1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear. (Refrain)**

*Refrain*

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

**2 O come, O Root of Jesse, free  
your own from Satan’s tyranny;  
from depths of hell your people save,  
and give them vict’ry o’er the grave. (Refrain)**

**3 O come, O Dayspring from on high,  
and cheer us by your drawing nigh;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death’s dark shadows put to flight. (Refrain)**

**4 O come, O Key of David, come,  
and open wide our heav’nly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery. (Refrain)**

## 2. AN ANGEL'S STARTLING MESSAGE

### **Narration: Cathrine**

How would you react if an angel appeared out of nowhere? Most of us would be amazed and scared. That's what happened to the first character we read about: Mary. She was a young woman who lived in the town of Nazareth and was engaged to a man named Joseph. One day, an angel appeared to Mary. She was frightened at the sight of the angel, and what the angel had to say was outrageous. Mary, a virgin, was going to have a baby. And this was not just any baby—Mary had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God. The angel instructed Mary to call him Jesus and told her he would be the Savior of all people.

Mary was going to have a baby. Who would ever believe this bizarre story? Her fiancé? He knew the baby wasn't his. Her family? They would struggle to comprehend how she was having a baby before getting married. How could she expect anyone to understand when even she had questions?

Although her story was extraordinary, in faith Mary believed the words of the angel and trusted in the promise that with God all things are possible. Luke recounts the incident in chapter 1 of his book.

### **Recitation: Emma**

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

### **Recitation: Titus**

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

**Recitation: Amelia**

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.” “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her (Luke 1:26-38).

**Narration: Cathrine**

As we might expect, Joseph didn’t believe Mary. After all, who would believe she saw an actual angel and that it was possible for her to be a *miraculously* pregnant virgin?

But Joseph also knew that Mary could be hurt or killed for this seemingly disgraceful act, so he showed concern for Mary and decided to end their relationship quietly. Before he could do so, God intervened. He sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to tell him about the very special child Mary was carrying. Listen to the account from Matthew chapter 1.

**Recitation: Cate**

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

**Recitation: Titus**

“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:18-21).

**Hymn by Congregation: “The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came” (CW 328)**

**1 The angel Gabriel from heaven came,  
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame:  
“All hail,” said he to meek and lowly Mary,  
“most highly favored maiden.” Gloria!**

**2 “I come from heav’n to tell the Lord’s decree:  
a blessèd virgin mother you shall be.  
Your son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold,  
most highly favored maiden.” Gloria!**

**3 Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;  
“To me be as it pleases God,” she said.  
“My soul shall praise and magnify his holy name.”  
Most highly favored maiden, Gloria!**

**4 Of her Immanuel, the Christ, was born  
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,  
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,  
“Most highly favored maiden.” Gloria!**



### **3. A BABY IS BORN**

#### **Narration: Emma**

What image comes to mind when you think of an important person being born? If it were someone of royalty, we might expect to see top-notch medical facilities, the best doctors and nurses, and maybe a big party or even a parade announcing the arrival of the child. Jesus was the Son of God and the King of the Jews, and yet his birth did not attract a lot of attention. There was no party, no parade, not even the assistance of a doctor or nurse to deliver the baby.

Not long before Jesus was to be born, Joseph and Mary needed to travel to Bethlehem. Caesar Augustus, the Roman ruler at the time, wanted to take a census of everyone in his empire. Each person was to go to the hometown of his or her ancestors to register. Since Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, he and Mary set out on a difficult journey, difficult especially considering Mary's advanced pregnancy.

#### **Narration: Hunter**

After a long and grueling trip, Mary and Joseph would have loved to be able to just sit and rest. But Bethlehem was a very crowded place. Many people were following the orders of Caesar and were in town to register too. Finding a decent place to stay was no easy task, but Joseph didn't give up. He knew Mary would need shelter—soon. So Joseph looked everywhere but was told that every inn in Bethlehem was full.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and with the baby on the way, Mary and Joseph ran out of options and took shelter in a stable. That stable was where Jesus was born. The long-awaited Holy One of Israel, the very Son of God, was born in a barn, and Mary laid Jesus in the feeding trough of the animals. We hear again from Luke in chapter 2:

#### **Recitation: Amelia**

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them (Luke 2:1-7).

## **Hymn by Children: “Away in a Manger” (CW 340)**

1 Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.  
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

2 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,  
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

3 Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay  
close by me forever and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
and take us to heaven to live with you there.

## **4. UNEXPECTED GUESTS**

### **Narration: Cate**

Having a baby is a joyous event. Oftentimes, the proud parents receive lots of visitors. Can you imagine receiving visitors in a barn? The next people we encounter are the first to visit Jesus after his birth, and again, angels play a part in the announcement.

Shepherds were outside of Bethlehem tending to their flocks when a brilliant angel pierced the darkness. After the shepherds’ initial shock, they listened to the wonderful news that Jesus was born, where they would find him, and how they would recognize him.

Then, in all their glorious splendor, hundreds—perhaps thousands—of angels appeared to declare God’s praises. Once the angels were gone, the shepherds left their sheep to search out the Christ Child. They found him in Bethlehem, just as the angel had said. We continue hearing the gospel from Luke.

**Recitation: Joe**

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

**Recitation: Jude**

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**Recitation: Matt**

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

**Recitation: Amelia**

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

**Recitation: Titus**

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told (Luke 2:8-20).

**Narration: Cate**

Sometime later, more visitors came to Mary and Joseph. Magi, wise men from the East, traveled a long way searching for Jesus, the King of the Jews. A special star had appeared when Jesus was born and guided them to the promised Savior. They followed the star all the way to the place where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lived. They brought gifts for Jesus, but these were no ordinary baby gifts. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh—gifts of incredible value. They bowed down and worshiped Jesus as their king.

But this account has a twist. In general, babies do not have enemies—but Jesus did.

Through the Magi, King Herod learned that a new king, Jesus, had been born. Feeling threatened, Herod used the wise men to try to find where Jesus was because he intended to kill Jesus. But the Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went home a different way. Matthew records the event in chapter 2 of his book.

**Recitation: Eleanor**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

**Recitation: Cathrine**

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

**Recitation: Eleanor**

“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: “ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

**Recitation: Cathrine**

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

**Recitation: Eleanor**

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

**Recitation: Cathrine**

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route (Matthew 2:1-12).

**Hymn by Congregation: “Angels from the Realms of Glory” (CW 347)**

**1 Angels from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o’er all the earth;  
once you sang creation’s story,  
now proclaim Messiah’s birth: (Refrain)**

*Refrain*

**Come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn King.**

**2 Shepherds, in the fields abiding,  
watching o’er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing;  
yonder shines the infant light. (Refrain)**

**3 Magi, leave your contemplations,  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great desire of nations,  
you have seen the Savior’s star. (Refrain)**

**4 Saints before the altar bending,  
watching long in hope and fear,  
suddenly the Lord, descending,  
in his temple shall appear. (Refrain)**

**5 All creation, join in praising  
God the Father, Spirit, Son,  
evermore your voices raising  
to th’ eternal Three in One. (Refrain)**

**Prayers**

**Benediction**

## 5. CONCLUSION

### **Narration: Emma**

How does the story of Jesus' birth compare to other stories? Stories that begin with "Once upon a time" and have happy endings are fairy tales, purely fictional, meant for our enjoyment. The story of Jesus has so much drama that one might not believe it's real, but the birth of Jesus as told in the Bible is different: it is not a fairy tale or fiction. It's the truth of our existence—our sinful condition and its dire consequences and God's immense love in restoring us to himself for eternity through our Savior Jesus.

Is there a similarity between a typical fairy tale and the life of Jesus? When we read or hear a fairytale, we wait with great anticipation for a happy ending. We long for a hero to enter, ready to sacrifice everything to save the distressed, restore the broken, and redeem the fallen. Is there a happy ending to the story of Jesus? Is there a happy ending to the story of you and me and all people? Absolutely! But only because Jesus' story and our story are so closely intertwined.

### **Narration: Cate**

God's unconditional love for us prompted him to send Jesus to this earth. Jesus sacrificed himself by dying on the cross, paying for the sins of all people past, present, and future—including yours and mine! It's a heroic act of love like no other, and through faith, we receive benefits like none other. The best part of the story is that Jesus didn't stay dead. He was raised from the dead, securing our salvation and a place for us in heaven. Our ending in death is truly happy because it's not an end at all—it's the beginning of life with Jesus in heaven forever!

Read God's story in the Bible. See yourself in that story, and receive all that God has done for you. The Christmas story, like all of God's Word, has been shared for many years and will continue to be read and shared until Jesus returns. We base our faith on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His love has produced the greatest story ever told. With it, we have hope of everlasting life and a reason to celebrate now and always the birth of our Savior and King!

**Closing Hymn by Congregation: “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” (CW 350)**

**1 Hark! The herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King;  
    peace on earth and mercy mild,  
    God and sinners reconciled!”  
Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
    with th’\_angelic host proclaim,  
    “Christ is born in Bethlehem!” (Refrain)**

*Refrain*

**Hark! The herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”**

**2 Christ, by highest heav’n adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
    late in time behold him come,  
    offspring of a virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
hail th’\_incarnate Deity!  
    Pleased as man with man to dwell,  
    Jesus, our Immanuel! (Refrain)**

**3 Hail, the heav’nly Prince of Peace!  
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!  
    Light and life to all he brings,  
    ris’n with healing in his wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that man no more may die,  
    born to raise the sons of earth,  
    born to give them second birth. (Refrain)**