

THE NATIVITY ICON

Adapted by Phyllis Meshel Onest from THE BIGGEST BIRTHDAY PARTY: AN ADVENT CALENDAR FOR THE ORTHODOX FAMILY by John Boojamra, Department of Christian Education, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, Englewood, NJ, 1979.

The book divides the Nativity icon into 12 sections with an accompanying Bible reference and narrative. Each section can be enlarged several times, colored with markers, and laminated.

During the program each section is carried in procession by the younger students (ICON BEARERS) and given to an older/taller student to place it in its correct position on a large board that is divided into 12 sections of the same size. Plasti-tak can be used to stick the icon section to the board. The Nativity icon is complete when the last section is in place.

Suggestion: Number each icon section and corresponding position on the mounting board.

If desired, the ICON BEARERS can be dressed in their respective characters. Once they have recited their line and given their icon section, they can situate themselves at one end of the staging area in order to form a "live icon."

CAST: In order to get more students involved,

1. group 1 reads the scripture verses
2. group 2 serves as the choir, [or have the music taped]
3. group 3 serves as the "icon bearers"
4. group 4 reads the narrative
5. either an individual or another group of older/ taller students serve as "Vanna White" (from TV's Jeopardy Game) placing the icon sections in their correct position

MUSIC:

Besides adding to the overall production, the songs provide the ICON BEARERS time to get across the stage. The number of verses to be sung depends on the amount of time it takes the ICON BEARERS to do their job. Adjust as needed. Taped music can also be used.

COSTUMES:

Costumes are optional, but they do add to the production. The ICON BEARERS, as well as the narrators and scripture readers can be in costume, i.e. angels, Mary & Joseph, Wise Men, camels, shepherds, sheep, or just general biblical attire.

STAGE SETUP:

[Suggestion] Scripture Readers and Narrators stage left. They approach a podium to speak, in turn, then return backstage. Icon Bearers enter from stage right and walk toward the left where the mounting board is in position, handing their section of icon to the individual who's playing "Vanna White." They then move to center stage to form a "live icon."

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"NATIVITY ICON" CAST MEMBERS

ICON SECTION 1

Joseph and Mary:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 2

Bethlehem:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 3

Ox/Cattle:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 4

Star:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 5

Wise Men:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 6

Gifts:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 7

Camels:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 8

Angels:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 9

Shepherds:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 10

Sheep:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 11

Joseph:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 12

Mary:
Scripture Reader:
Icon Bearers:
Narrator:

ICON SECTION 1: JOSEPH & MARY

SCRIPTURE READER 1: LUKE 2:1-5

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled... each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed, who was with child.

SONG 1: JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

ICON BEARERS 1: HERE ARE MARY AND JOSEPH ON THEIR WAY TO BETHLEHEM.

Have 2 students dressed as Mary & Joseph. Since these characters appear again in the icon, have them return to stage right. Place 2 chairs around the manger where they should sit.

NARRATOR 1:

Joseph and Mary made a long and tiring journey to the small town of Bethlehem. It was a difficult trip for Mary because she was going to have a baby. Instead of walking Mary rode a donkey most of the way to make the trip a little easier. Mary must have been very tired after the long and dusty trip. When she and Joseph got to Bethlehem they looked for a place to stay and rest. They went to an inn, which is what people used to call motels.

ICON SECTION 2: BETHLEHEM

SCRIPTURE READER 2: MICAH 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephratha, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days.

SONG 2: O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

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.

ICON BEARER (S) 2: KING DAVID WAS ALSO BORN IN BETHLEHEM.

Have one dressed as King David; the other in Biblical attire.

NARRATOR 2:

When Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem the town was very crowded with a lot of visitors. They could not find any room in the inn where they could rest for the night. Mary must have been very unhappy. The man who owned the inn, the innkeeper, was very kind to Mary and Joseph. Although he had no room for them in his inn, he let them stay in his stable. A stable is a place where animals live. Mary and Joseph must have enjoyed sharing the stable with the animals.

ICON SECTION 3: O X / C A T T L E

SCRIPTURE READER 3: Isaiah 1:3

The prophet Isaiah (1:3) wrote, "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib."

SONG 3: THE FRIENDLY BEASTS

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.

"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."

or AWAY IN THE MANGER

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

The CATTLE are lowing, the poor baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.

I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky, and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

ICON BEARER (S) 3: THE OX SHARED HIS STABLE WITH BABY JESUS.

Have one student wearing the mask of an ox and the other leading him/her with a rope.

NARRATOR 3: The ox is a hard working animal. He shared the stable with Mary and Joseph. He must have been surprised when he saw them rest with him. He probably helped the innkeeper do his work, plowing the fields and carrying food to and from the market. The ox was there when Jesus was born. He must have been very happy to see the baby Jesus. The ox knew that Jesus was his creator and master.

ICON SECTION 4: S T A R

SCRIPTURE READER 4: Matthew 2:2

And the wise men said, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his STAR in the East, and have come to worship him."

SONG 4: Refrain from WE THREE KINGS

Star of wonder, star of might; star of royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

ICON BEARERS 4: THE STAR LEADS US TO BETHLEHEM, TOO.

Have one student hold a larger star to be held later in the "live icon."]

NARRATOR 4: The star of Bethlehem was very big and bright. It showed the people where Jesus was born. Even space celebrated Jesus' birth! The wonderful Star led the Three Wise Men to the place where Jesus was born. Many people long ago prayed to stars. Here we see a Star that came to praise Jesus. From the Troparion of the Feast of the Nativity we hear: "Those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness."

ICON SECTION 5: WISE MEN

SCRIPTURE READER 5: Matthew 2: 1

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem...

SONG 5: WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE

We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder Star.

ICON BEARERS 5: THE WISE MEN WERE THREE, CASPAR, MELCHIOR AND BALTHASAR.

Have 3 students dressed as the wise men.

NARRATOR 5:

The Wise Men are also called the Magi. They used to study the stars and even prayed to them. When they saw the Star of Bethlehem they knew that a King was born. They followed it as it moved across the sky. When it stopped they found the newborn king. It was Jesus and they worshipped Him. When they came to the stable they brought gifts for a king - gold, incense (frankincense), and myrrh, which is like a perfumed powder. The Kontakion of St. Romanos says: "and the Magi journeyed with a star."

ICON SECTION 6: GIFTS

SCRIPTURE READER 6: Matthew 2:9-11

When the wise men had heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the East, went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.

SONG 6: HYMN OF CHRISTMAS VESPERS

What shall we give Thee, O Christ, for You did appear on earth a man for our sakes?
Every creature whom You did create offers You thanksgiving. The angels give You praise; the heavens, the star; the Magi, gifts; the Shepherds, wonder; the earth, the cave; and we, the Virgin Mother.

ICON BEARERS 6: THE WISE MEN GAVE GIFTS TO BABY JESUS, THE KING OF ALL.

Have students dressed in biblical costumes carrying the gold, frankincense and myrrh.

NARRATOR 6:

The Magi brought with them beautiful gifts for the baby Jesus. We give gifts to people who are special to us and whom we love very much. We give gifts at Christmas to remind us that God gave us the best gift of all. He gave us His Son Jesus Christ to share our life with us. As Christmas gets closer we think more and more about the presents we will get from our friends and relatives. We must remember that special gift that God gave to us.

ICON SECTION 7: CAMELS

SCRIPTURE READER 7: Genesis 24:11

And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening...

SONG 7: THE FRIENDLY BEASTS

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.

Thus every beast by some good spell,
In the stable dark was glad to tell,
Of the gift he gave Emanuel,
The gift he gave Emanuel.

ICON BEARERS 7: CAMELS CARRIED THE WISE MEN TO SEE THE NEWBORN KING.

Have 3 students wear camel masks.

NARRATOR 7:

Camels are animals that are very common in Palestine, the country where Jesus was born. God created camels, too. He made them especially to work and live in the desert. They can travel for a long time without stopping for water. Even though they don't look like donkeys or horses, people ride them to travel from city to city. The three Wise Men rode camels to follow the Star and find the now-born Jesus in Bethlehem. The camels quietly praised Jesus, too.

ICON SECTION 8: ANGELS

SCRIPTURE READER 8: Luke 2:13-14

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

SONG 8: HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King."

ICON BEARERS 8: ANGELS ARE GOD'S MESSENGERS

Have as many angels as needed.

NARRATOR 8:

God also created angels. They are his special messengers. It was an angel who first told the people that Jesus was born. He came to shepherds in the field at night. He told them that he had good news that would bring lots of happiness to all people. When we finish this icon you will see that the angel seems to bring heaven and earth together by the way he is leaning over the mountaintop. Mountains are also God's creatures and they are one of his most beautiful creations. Look carefully and you will see a mountain, too!

ICON SECTION 9: SHEPHERDS

SCRIPTURE READER 9: Luke 2:8-9

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

SONG 9: THE FIRST NOEL

The first Noel the angels did say was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

ICON BEARERS 9: THE SHEPHERDS WERE VERY SURPRISED WHEN THEY SAW THE ANGELS. *Have as many shepherds as needed.*

NARRATOR 9: Shepherds take care of sheep in the fields. They work very hard and many times they have to stay through long and dark nights with the sheep to protect them from wild animals like wolves and lions. It was during one quiet and dark night that the angels came to the shepherds in the field. They told them that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The shepherds were very surprised and excited to have angels give them this message. They hurried to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. They found Jesus in a manger. A manger is a box where food is kept for the animals. Mary put Jesus in the manger to sleep when she was not carrying him or feeding him. The shepherds knelt and worshipped Jesus. Then they went to tell other people the good news about Jesus' birth.

ICON SECTION 10: SHEEP

SCRIPTURE READER 10: PSALM 8: 8-9

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all SHEEP and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

SONG 10: THE FRIENDLY BEASTS

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.

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

ICON BEARERS 10: THE SHEEP CAME TO PRAISE JESUS, TOO!

Have students wear sheep masks and/or dressed in footed pajamas or jogging suits with their noses blackened, a cottontail pinned to the pj's, and cottony sheep ears attached to headbands.

NARRATOR 10:

God made sheep also. Sheep are gentle animals and are especially useful to people. Wool is made from sheep's hair. Men called shepherds care for sheep. When the shepherds went to see the baby Jesus, their sheep went along with them, too. Like the camels, they quietly praised Jesus.

ICON SECTION 11:

J O S E P H

SCRIPTURE READER 11: Matthew 1:18-21

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

SONG 11: THE CHERRY TREE CAROL

Joseph was an old man, and old man was he.
He married Virgin Mary, the Queen of Galilee.

ICON BEARER 11: ST. JOSEPH TOOK CARE OF JESUS AND MARY.

Have the student dressed as Joseph.

NARRATOR 11:

St. Joseph was a fine and good man who was married to Mary. He trusted God with his life and believed God's promises. He took care of Mary and Jesus. He was a carpenter, a person who builds cabinets and furniture. He taught Jesus to be a carpenter and must have spent a lot of time with Him in his workshop. He also took Jesus and Mary on trips to different cities in Palestine. Once, when Jesus was a baby, he took them on a long trip to another country, Egypt.

ICON SECTION 12: M A R Y & J E S U S

SCRIPTURE READER 12: Luke 1:39-42

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered in the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Or Luke 2:12

And this will be a sign for you; you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

SONG 12: THE MAGNIFICAT

More honorable than the Cherubim,
And more glorious than the Seraphim,
Without defilement you gave birth to God, the Word,
True Theotokos we magnify you.

ICON BEARER 12: MARY WAS CHOSEN BY GOD TO BE JESUS' MOTHER.

Have one student dressed as Mary.

NARRATOR 12:

Mary is also called the Mother of God - Theotokos - because Jesus is God. He is the Son of God. After Jesus was born, Mary laid Him in a manger. She and Joseph took care of the baby Jesus themselves because there were no hospitals or doctors. Mary is very special to us. Without her Jesus could not have been born. God used Mary to bless the whole world and all

people and animals and things. Christ is Born! Let's glorify Him with the animals, the star, and all of creation.

ALL TOGETHER:

"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE." John 3:16

TROPARION OF THE NATIVITY

Your Nativity O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom!
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star
To adore you, the Sun of Righteousness;
And to know You, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to You!