

# *Once upon a Holy Night*

## *The Story of God's Promise*

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# Production Notes

The *Once upon a Holy Night* product line includes a performance DVD that allows you to choose between click tracks and split tracks. You also have the ability to choose individual song selections for use in other worship settings. A fun visual treatment for the song “Hallelujah Christmas” is included as a bonus feature. When using the performance DVD, you will need to pause between songs for the narrator and/or live action scenes. Black the screen if you have that capability. During rehearsal, determine the proper time to play again based on character delivery and timing.

This musical will work well in large or small churches. The choir may wear biblical costumes or concert dress. The staging suggestions below will work in either situation. A stage diagram is provided on page 3. The narrations and suggested biblical scenes with silent action are used to enhance the presentation of the Christmas story. There are four scripted scenes on pages 6-11 that can be used instead of the narration.

**Set/Lighting:** If the choir is wearing biblical clothing, consider covering the entire stage area and/or choir loft with sand-colored fabric. A backdrop will help transform the stage into a setting in Bethlehem. Bookstores, libraries, and theatrical/stage companies are great resources for backdrops. Enlist artistic people in your church to create a backdrop for you. Stage rocks, which can be made from Styrofoam®, and greenery will help create interest and add depth to the set.

The only necessary set piece is a stable/manger façade constructed in the middle of the stage, preferably upstage center. Be creative if the choir loft and stage platform prohibit its placement upstage center. Two platforms, one stage left and one stage right in front of the stage, would be great for the narrators, but are not necessary. They will add depth to the total picture, set the narrators apart from the choir, and raise them up off the floor.

Enlist men in the congregation who have carpentry experience or simply a desire to be involved to help build the set. Using people outside the choir to help with construction, costumes, or drama helps make your production a churchwide effort and can eventually help grow the choir. Another excellent resource for set building is the local high school drama department. Schools are often interested in doing projects like this for stagecraft classes. Set design construction books are available in your local Christian bookstore or library.

You will want to light five areas of the stage, plus the general wash to be used for the choir. You will also need a special light for the star. The five lighting areas are (1) the manger, (2) narrator platform stage right, (3) narrator platform stage left, (4) stage right main stage level, and (5) stage left main stage level. Theatrical/stage/lighting companies can be a great resource for answering questions and providing rental equipment.

**Costumes:** If you choose to have the choir wear biblical costumes, research the proper dress (for example, women should completely cover their hair and should not wear glasses or jewelry). Your goal is to be as true to the period as possible. If you choose concert dress, consider dresses in red, winter white, silver, blue, or black for the ladies and black suits or tuxes for the men. In both scenarios, biblical costumes should be provided for the narrators (with the exception of the Doubter, Narration 6) and the actors in the biblical scenes. Regardless of the choir dress you choose, the children’s choir can wear biblical and/or angel costumes.

# Parts of the Stage

*(The areas of the stage are named from the actor's point of view when standing on stage looking out at the audience.)*

Up Right	<b>Upstage</b>	Up Left
<b>Stage Right</b>	<b>Center Stage</b>	<b>Stage Left</b>
Down Right	<b>Downstage</b>	Down Left

<b>Audience</b>
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# Staging Suggestions

## **“Processional/For unto Us Overture”**

The choir should begin to process in as “Sing We Now of Christmas” begins (meas. 39). They should enter from all possible entrances, such as aisles and balconies. Choir members should be in place by measure 107. Adjust the entrance time to accommodate the size of your sanctuary or worship center. If you have chosen biblical dress, the choir should stand in small groups spread across the entire platform area. If you have chosen concert dress, use a traditional choir formation. In both scenarios, the choir should be in front of the manger. It will be revealed later.

## **Narration 1 (ELIZABETH)**

Elizabeth is on the stage right platform in front of the stage area. She could be holding a prop, such as a basket of fruit or bread.

## **“Messiah”**

Lights should start subdued and build in intensity as the song builds. Isaiah could take his place on the platform and be reading a scroll at measure 19.

## **Narration 2 (ISAIAH)**

Isaiah is on the stage left platform. He could be holding a scroll as a prop.

## **“God’s Promise”**

This energetic song should showcase the choir.

## **Narration 3 (ELIZABETH)**

Elizabeth is on the stage right platform in front of the stage area.

*(Optional Scene 1, pp. 6-7, may be used here.)*

## **“My Soul Does Magnify the Lord”**

Mary enters stage right on the stage level at measure 36. She could have a prop, such as a basket with fabrics, candles, breads, etc. The angel approaches (meas. 33, the second time through), and they have a conversation. The angel exits (meas. 38), and Mary prays and slowly begins to exit at measure 47.

The lights should fade to black at the end of “My Soul Does Magnify the Lord,” and the choir should split down the middle to reveal the manger.

## **“Star So Bright”**

The special light representing the star should come up. The manger is empty, and the light assigned to it should only be on about 25 to 30 percent.

## **“Hallelujah Christmas”**

Choir feature; no action.

## **Narration 4 (JOSEPH)**

Joseph is on the stage left platform in front of the stage. Mary enters the stage with the baby and crosses to the manger in the darkness during the narration. You can add an angel to the scene if you wish.

*(Optional Scene 2, p. 8, may be used here.)*

### **“Behold Emmanuel”**

As Joseph begins his solo, the light comes up on the manger. At the end of his solo, Joseph crosses to join Mary at the manger. The two interact with the baby and each other.

### **Narration 5 (SHEPHERD)**

Shepherd is on the stage right platform in front of the stage area.

*(Optional Scene 3, p. 9, may be used here.)*

### **“Once upon a Holy Night”**

The shepherds enter at measure 33 and make their way toward the manger. They should reach the manger by measure 50. They will interact with one another and then bow and worship at the manger. The kings\* enter at measure 50 and begin to move to the manger, arriving by measure 64. They arrive and bow at the manger. Timing for the shepherds and kings’ arrivals should be adjusted based on the size of your sanctuary/worship center.

\*Although biblical history reveals that kings/magi did not appear until well after the birth of Jesus, church pageants and programs most often include them at the manger. We have made this provision for dramatic purposes.

### **“Holy Is the Lord”**

Mary and Joseph step back out of the light, staying in character. The focus of this song is the baby in the manger.

The lights on the manger and choir go black. Joseph and the angel (if you use one) exit. Mary crosses down right with the baby during the narration.

### **Narration 6 (DOUBTER)**

Doubter is on the stage left platform.

*(Optional Scene 4, pp. 10-11, may be used here.)*

### **“You Can Know Him”**

Mary is downstage right with the baby. You can disguise a stool by using a plant or stage rock if you want her to sit with the baby. The light stays up on her throughout the song. At measure 15, an adult Jesus enters downstage left with a group of children. Men and women can come in and out of the scene to interact with Him. You could even have Him perform a healing. At measure 38, the light on the adult Jesus begins to fade and the scene freezes. The light stays on Mary and the baby. All exit at the end of the song.

### **“Finale”**

The finale showcases the choir. The lights should be at 50 percent until “Hallelujah Christmas,” and then they should gradually build until the end. Mary, Joseph, and the baby can enter at the beginning of “Hallelujah Christmas” and cross to downstage center for the remainder of the finale.

# Optional Scenes

## Optional Scene 1 for use before “My Soul Does Magnify the Lord”

If you choose this option, Elizabeth’s narration and the action during the song will be modified.

Characters:

**Mary**

**Elizabeth**

*(Elizabeth delivers the first two lines of the narration at the front of the set. She then steps into character and into the scene.)*

**Elizabeth:** Hundreds of years later, Isaiah’s prophesy was fulfilled. I never dreamed I would see it unfold! It was late one afternoon when my cousin, Mary, appeared at my door.

*(Elizabeth steps into the scene. She is standing at a table, stirring a bowl or using some other prop. Her back is turned to Mary’s entrance. As Mary enters and speaks, Elizabeth’s baby moves and she touches her stomach.)*

**Mary:** Elizabeth, Elizabeth, it’s me, Mary.

**Elizabeth:** *(turns and smiles)* Oh cousin, come in. I’m so happy to see you. Here, sit! Would you like some water?

**Mary:** I’m fine. You sit and let’s talk.

**Elizabeth:** Let’s. *(both sit)*

**Mary:** I’m not sure how or where to begin.

**Elizabeth:** Sounds important.

**Mary:** It is. You know I’m engaged to Joseph. He’s a good man and has been so respectful toward me, and our relationship is pure. I just don’t know what will happen when he finds out.

**Elizabeth:** Mary, just tell me.

**Mary:** An angel, Gabriel, came to me and told me that I am to have a son...that I have found favor with God. He said I will have a son named Jesus. *(Elizabeth smiles; Mary continues.)* I asked him how that could be—I’d never been with *(struggling)*...but Gabriel said that I would have a holy child. He would be called the Son of God.

**Elizabeth:** I knew it. The moment I heard your voice, the baby in me moved with absolute joy.

**Mary:** What will I do about Joseph...about everything?

**Elizabeth:** I am so thrilled to have you in my home. You are the mother of my Lord. You will stay with me for a time, and there will be no worrying. Mary, God has blessed you, and He will take care of you. You believe Him; now trust Him.

**Mary:** Thank you, Elizabeth. I am *so* honored to have been chosen by God, my Savior. Holy is His name.

*(Music begins. The two ladies continue to talk and work with props at the table. They bow, pray, and exit, arm in arm, by meas. 47.)*

## Optional Scene 2 to replace Joseph narration

Characters:

**Mary**

**Joseph**

*(Mary is standing alone, and Joseph approaches her from behind.)*

**Joseph:** Mary?

**Mary:** *(not turning around)* Joseph, please, I can't do this. You made your feelings quite clear.

**Joseph:** I wanted to tell you...

**Mary:** *(interrupting him)* Trust me, I get it. This is all too much for you. Joseph, you're a wonderful man, and I realize that you want to spare me any public humiliation with a secret divorce.

**Joseph:** Mary, will you just let me talk. *(Mary turns to look at him.)* You're right, that is how I felt; it was a shock. I mean...a baby. But that's all changed now. I couldn't wait to find you so I could tell you what happened.

**Mary:** *(cautiously)* Here I am.

**Joseph:** *(taking Mary's hands in his)* An angel came to me in a dream. He said, "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." I love you. I want to take care of you and be faithful to God in all that He asks of me.

**Mary:** Sometimes it's so overwhelming to think about, and sometimes it's scary. Are you sure about this?

**Joseph:** God has chosen us to raise our Son, His Son, the Messiah...together.

*(Mary and Joseph exit and the music begins.)*

### Optional Scene 3 to replace Shepherd narration

Characters:

**Jethro**

**Ruben**

**Kenan**

**Angel**

*(Two shepherds are sleeping, a third is whittling on a piece of wood, and an angel approaches.)*

**Jethro:** *(shaking two sleeping shepherds)* Ruben, Kenan...wake up.

**Ruben:** Jethro, is something wrong? Is there a problem with the sheep?

**Kenan:** My watch doesn't start for...

**Jethro:** Look! *(indicating the angel)*

**Ruben:** *(nervously)* Is he here for us?

**Angel:** "Don't be afraid...I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. This will be the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10-12).<sup>1</sup>

*(The shepherds look at one another.)*

**Kenan:** We better leave for Bethlehem.

*(Blackout. Shepherds and angel exit. Music begins.)*

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotation taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

#### **Optional Scene 4 to replace Doubter narration**

Characters:

**Lee**

**Terry**

*(Terry, a young woman or woman, is seated at a table with a computer and a cup of coffee in front of her. Lee, a man or woman, enters and crosses to the table.)*

**Lee:** I thought I'd find you here. *(sits)*

**Terry:** You know me too well. Nothing is more comforting than a hot cup of caffeine.

**Lee:** Is it helping?

**Terry:** No, not really. I guess you've heard.

**Lee:** Some of it. I thought you might want to talk.

**Terry:** I don't know what there is to say. I messed up. There's no coming back from this one.

**Lee:** I don't know that it's that drastic.

**Terry:** It seems like every time I turn around I'm making a bad choice or a bad decision of some kind. This time I really hurt the people I love the most.

**Lee:** I'm sure they'll forgive you.

**Terry:** That's just it, I'm not so sure that I deserve to be forgiven. You don't even know what I did.

**Lee:** I don't need to know what you did.

**Terry:** I wish I were like you. You're so confident and patient. You've probably made very few serious mistakes in your life.

**Lee:** Listen, I'm not the one you should be trying to be like. I make mistakes every day. Just like you, I've done some things that really hurt people. I always have to ask for forgiveness.

**Terry:** But look at you...you're so happy and seem to be so at peace.

**Lee:** Sure I'm happy, and sure I have peace, but it doesn't mean that I never mess up. We are human, and that means that we'll always mess up. We'll always sin. But if we work at it, we can get to that place where we mess up less and make better decisions.

**Terry:** How?

**Lee:** When we give our lives to Christ, when we ask Jesus to become Lord and Savior in our lives, when we have a relationship with Him and live our lives trying to please Him.

**Terry:** That works for you, but I've messed up too bad for Jesus to ever want to have a relationship with me.

**Lee:** Not true. I know that you've heard about Jesus before. You know that He died on a cross for our sins. He did that because He does want a relationship with us and that includes you.

**Terry:** He died so that we could go to heaven.

**Lee:** Exactly, the Son of God wants a relationship with you for eternity in heaven. He wants to forgive you no matter what you've done.

**Terry:** I want to believe that. I want to be forgiven, but I don't know how to get there.

**Lee:** I can help you with that. Trust me, you *can* know Him.

*(Cross fade lighting. Terry and Lee exit. Music begins.)*