

A PUPPET PLAY IN ONE ACT

A Stranger in the Manger

Based on Luke 2:12 · Written by Carrie Elderberry



SUITABLE FOR
Ages 5 and up

CAST SIZE
6 puppets

PERFORMANCE TIME
10–12 minutes

PROPS REQUIRED
Black cloth with sparkles for a night sky effect

MAIN THEME

The greatest Christmas gift is Jesus—and His example calls us to give gifts of love, not just money.

Carrie Elderberry's Gospel Puppets · gospelpuppets.org

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To print just the play on its own, print pages 5-9.

PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

Synopsis

Two modern children discuss Christmas giving, and CHILD 2 learns that the best presents don't require money. A cast of stable animals—BABY LAMB, MAMA SHEEP, ROOSTER, and DONKEY—play out the night of Jesus's birth from their perspective, discovering that the mysterious Someone in the manger is the Son of God. When the children return, CHILD 2 leaves with a new understanding of what Christmas is really about.

Spiritual Concept

Christmas gifts are a way of celebrating the birth of Jesus and sharing God's kind of love. The best gifts aren't store-bought—they are gifts of time, love, and service to others.

Age Suitability

Best for ages 5-12; adaptable for all ages.

Performance Time

10-12 minutes

CAST & TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Characters (in order of appearance)

CHILD 1 – Strong-minded and likes to set people straight.

CHILD 2 – A little bit mischievous—initially focused on receiving, not giving.

BABY LAMB – Curious and innocent—the first to discover the baby in the manger.

MAMA SHEEP – Maternal and wise—gently brings order to the stable animals.

ROOSTER – Loud and not too intelligent—always too noisy at the wrong moment.

DONKEY – Old and wise—the one who knows the most about what is happening.

Prop Options

- Black cloth with sparkles for a night sky effect—add to the edge of the theater during the stable scene.
 - Other sleeping animals in the barn—make sure they pay attention once awakened.
 - Long black gloves for puppeteers so their hands seem invisible.
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PERFORMANCE NOTES FOR PUPPETEERS

New to puppets? General prep, technique, and voice tips live at gospelpuppets.org/getting-started.

Suggested Introduction

The following is Carolyn's suggested introduction to be read or spoken to the audience before the play begins:

"What was the manger like? How many of you have a garage for your house? Have you ever slept on the floor out there? We read in the Bible that Mary and Joseph had to stay out in a stable the night Jesus was born. That would be kind of like sleeping out in a garage on the floor, except it was much dirtier and smellier! Now, if you had to sleep all night in a garage, and you had a newborn baby with you, where would you put him? How about an old cardboard box with some crumpled newspapers for a little bed? Still, it is pretty awful, isn't it? And God arranged for Jesus to start life that way. Why do you think God did that? God wants us to be very sure that money, and fame, and looks, have no importance in His kingdom. Jesus came to be a different kind of king. He cares about what is in our hearts."

Character Notes

BABY LAMB's discovery of the baby in the manger is the heart of the stable scene—build the mystery gradually.

ROOSTER's attempt to demand quiet while being the loudest one in the room is the main comedic engine of the stable scene.

DONKEY's revelation about the angels should land with weight—this is the turning point.

Staging

CHILD 1 and CHILD 2 exit and can peek from the sides during the stable scene.

Add the black cloth to the edge of the theater when the animal scene begins. Remove it when CHILD 1 and CHILD 2 return.

Reading the Script

CAPS = Volume / intensity.

Extra commas = pause for breath.

A STRANGER IN THE MANGER

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(Enter CHILD 1 and CHILD 2. They greet the audience.)

CHILD 1: Wow, here it is, almost Christmas! Have you wrapped all your presents yet?

CHILD 2: Are you CRAZY? My mom and dad wrap my presents.

CHILD 1: I didn't mean THOSE presents, silly.

CHILD 2: If I wrapped my presents, I would already know what I'm GETTING!

CHILD 1: No, no! I mean the presents you are giving to everyone ELSE!

CHILD 2: Don't you think I'm a little too young to have to give presents? At my age, all I need to do is GET presents.

CHILD 1: What makes you think that you have to be OLDER before you can give presents to people?

CHILD 2: Well... because presents cost a lot of MONEY! Especially the kind of presents I like! Where could I find that amount of money?

CHILD 1: The very BEST presents don't cost any money at all. They are gifts of your TIME, gifts of your LOVE...

CHILD 2: That sounds really MUSHY.

CHILD 1: Christmas is a mushy time, isn't it? We only get presents because God gave us Jesus.

CHILD 2: Oh, yeah, right! I knew that!

CHILD 1: So giving Christmas presents is a way of sharing our love, like God did.

CHILD 2: Ok, but I STILL don't have any money.

CHILD 1: Presents don't HAVE to be store-bought!

CHILD 2: You're losing me, here... where ELSE can you get them?

CHILD 1: *(big sigh)* I tell you what... I know some other puppets that might help you understand. How about letting them tell us a STORY?

CHILD 2: You know I LOVE a good story!

CHILD 1: In this one, the Christmas Present is in a MANGER.

CHILD 2: A MANGER... that's the box thing in a barn, right?

CHILD 1: Right! People put hay and grain into it, for the animals to eat.

CHILD 2: OK! Bring on the show!

(Exit CHILD 2 and CHILD 1. They can peek from the sides.)

(Add black cloth to edge of theater if possible.)

(Enter MAMA SHEEP and BABY LAMB. BABY is center stage, MAMA is sleeping to one side. Enter DONKEY sleeping at the other side. Enter ROOSTER sleeping up above. Other animals can sleep or listen also.)

BABY: *(nudging MAMA)* Mama? Mama?

MAMA: *(very sleepy)* mmmm

BABY: I'm HUNGRY, Mama.

MAMA: So? Go get a mouthful of grain from the manger. Now let me SLEEP.

BABY: Mama? Mama! There is a PROBLEM.

MAMA: Wha...? What is the problem?

BABY: The MANGER.

MAMA: *(starting to wake up)* WHAT is wrong with the manger?

BABY: There is nothing wrong with it, EXCEPT...

MAMA: Except WHAT?

BABY: That there is Something ALIVE in it!

ROOSTER: *(way too loudly)* Cock-a-doodle-doo! Let's have a little less NOISE down there please! Some of us need our BEAUTY rest!

MAMA: Sorry, Rooster! But little Lamby is hungry, and you know how BABIES are.

ROOSTER: *(shouting)* Humph! Tell him to wait until MORNING, like the REST of us.

DONKEY: *(waking up)* Morning? Is it morning ALREADY?

ROOSTER: No! NOW see what you have done? Waking up the whole STABLE with your racket!

DONKEY: What's going on? Is somebody HURT?

MAMA: Nobody's hurt. It's just that Lamby is hungry, and he says there is no food in the manger.

BABY: No, Mama, it's not EMPTY! I never said it was empty.

MAMA: Oh, for heaven's sake. Why did you wake me UP, then?

BABY: The manger is FULL, but of, full of, a blanket... and Something Else. And It is warm and smells nice, but not like FOOD...

MAMA: Let me take a look.

(MAMA looks and comes back.)

MAMA: I think I know what is going on now.

(BABY, ROOSTER, and DONKEY all at once, ad lib: Tell us! Tell us!)

MAMA: Remember just before we went to sleep, those two young people came in and made a bed on the FLOOR?

ALL: Yes!

MAMA: Well the young woman has had a BABY! And now, He is all wrapped up and lying in the manger.

BABY: So THAT is what that funny taste was!

ROOSTER: *(shocked)* You do not mean to say you took a BITE out of the baby!

BABY: Oh, no! No! I just sort of... LICKED him...

MAMA: What I do not understand, is why the baby was born out HERE, in the stable. Humans always go inside their HOUSES to have their babies.

DONKEY: I think I know the reason. The house was too CROWDED. But there is more.

(ALL: What? Tell us! (ad lib))

DONKEY: A little while ago, while you were all asleep, many SHEPHERDS showed up, and asked to see the baby in the manger.

ROOSTER: And I slept right through it?

DONKEY: Yes. The woman—and I heard her husband call her MARY—asked the shepherds how they knew. They said an ANGEL had told them all about it!

MAMA: Oh, how exciting!

DONKEY: The angel said, that they would find a baby WRAPPED up, and lying in a manger, in the city of BETHLEHEM.

MAMA: An ANGEL? A real live angel! Just imagine...

DONKEY: Yes! THOUSANDS of them! The shepherds said the sky was just FULL of angels, all praising God!

ROOSTER: *(always too loud)* I still don't get it. What is so SPECIAL about this baby?

DONKEY: Well, the angels said that this baby is no ORDINARY baby.

BABY: Is he an ANGEL baby?

DONKEY: No, He is much more special than THAT. He is the SON OF GOD.

ALL: Ohhhh... the One we have been WAITING for!

DONKEY: Yes! That means He is the Savior of the WORLD, and He has come to earth as a little baby. He is a gift from God to ALL of us.

MAMA: Well. I think it's high time we all quieted down, or we might wake Him up.

DONKEY: Poor little thing.

MAMA: And I am sure Mary and her nice husband need THEIR sleep, too!

ROOSTER: (*loudly*) Yes! That is what I have been TRYING to say all along, but nobody ever LISTENS to me! Cock-a-doodle—

ALL: Shhh! Hush!... ok... goodnight...

(Ad lib, settle down, then a little pause before BABY speaks again.)

BABY: Mama?

MAMA: mmmm?

BABY: Will He be SAFE, there in the manger?

MAMA: Yes, my little lamb. I am sure it is just for tonight, and in the MORNING they will move into a house.

BABY: Well, I am still hungry... but I am glad I got to KISS Him... goodnight, Mama.

MAMA: Goodnight, Lamby. Sweet dreams!

(Everyone snores quietly for a moment.)

ROOSTER: WAIT a minute! We have to let the OTHER puppets come back out now! Let's go!

(Exit all animals. Remove black cloth.)

(Enter CHILD 2 and CHILD 1.)

CHILD 2: It's so EASY to forget the true meaning of Christmas.

CHILD 1: It sure is.

CHILD 2: OK, I'm going to spend some time today, thinking about WHAT I can give to my family, for Christmas.

CHILD 1: Even WITHOUT any money?

CHILD 2: Even without any money. I can give OTHER kinds of presents!

CHILD 1: Like what?

CHILD 2: Like waiting my TURN, and sharing my TOYS, even when I do not want to!

CHILD 1: And helping with the dishes?

CHILD 2: And feeding the animals!

CHILD 1: Your family will love those presents!

CHILD 2: Oh, good. Hey, can the animals come back for the ending?

CHILD 1: Sure, why not?

CHILD 2: Come on out everyone!

(Enter all animals.)

ROOSTER: A one—and a two—and a cocka-doodle-do!

ALL: You can read about the first Christmas in the Bible, in the books of Luke and Matthew.

(All puppeteers stand forward for a bow.)

THE END

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Discussion Questions

1. What did CHILD 2 think about Christmas at the start of the play? What changed?
2. Why was Jesus born in a stable instead of a house?
3. Who did DONKEY say the baby in the manger was? Why is that so important?
4. What kinds of gifts can you give to people without spending any money?
5. Why do we give each other presents at Christmas?

Related Bible Passages

Primary Text: Luke 2:1-20 – The full story of the first Christmas.

Additional Scripture:

- Luke 2:12 – "And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." (NLT)
- John 3:16 – "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (NLT)
- 2 Corinthians 9:15 – "Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!" (NLT)

Song Suggestions

- "Away in a Manger" – Cedarmon Kids –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/7goBnTbLzva3bStodv6Esh>
- "O Little Town of Bethlehem" – Old Time Christmas Carol Singers –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/79AUEyZFtqePFWhn08VXNp>
- "Joy to the World" – Crouch End Festival Chorus / City of Prague Philharmonic –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/5CMdoNV604ZtngSF6378hr>
- "What Child Is This?" – Third Day –
<https://open.spotify.com/track/3q3FJV1gFNZt0fd74CIOAI>

Ministry Context

This play works well for Christmas programs, Advent services, and Sunday School. The stable-animal perspective is engaging for young children and makes the nativity scene feel fresh and

funny. Consider pairing with a reading of Luke 2:1–20 before or after the performance.