The Joy of Christmas

Created by Phil Barfoot
Arranged by Dave Williamson

Programming Ideas          Page 2
Dramatic Script            Page 5
Narrative Script           Page 19
Production Notes           Page 26
The Joy of Christmas

Programming Ideas

By Phil Barfoot

“The Joy of Christmas” is designed as a versatile collection with an eclectic variety of “moments” to make your Christmas Production a meaningful and effective celebration. It provides many opportunities for creativity to help you accomplish your goal of capturing the various elements of the Season.

For those of you who prefer a narrated musical or dramatic production, John Plastow has created an optional narration and dramatic script for you to use.

Regardless of how you choose to utilize “The Joy of Christmas,” we hope you will find this collection very useful and effective in celebrating this Christmas Season with your choir, congregation and community.

Here are some options that might help you program some of the songs.

“The Season of Joy with Joy to the World!”
Opener with choir entering the Worship Center from various locations during the one minute “mini overture” (ms. 1-35).

“Joy! A Carol Medley for Choir and Congregation”
A very effective opportunity for the congregation to stand and sing these carols with the choir.

“Follow On with Near the Cross”
A kings’ processional re-enacting the wisemen’s journey (with entourage) to see the Christ Child.

“Great Joy”
A “shepherds’ moment” re-enacting their journey to Bethlehem.

“Underneath the Tree with Near the Cross”
A very effective song to use immediately before the invitation. If presenting this in a Living Christmas Tree format, the lighting of the Christmas tree should change to the shape of a cross at ms. 37.

“A Big Band Christmas”
A great opportunity for special staging and choreography.

“Mary Had a Baby with Glory Hallelujah to the Newborn King”
A dramatic effect for this song would be the use of hand and arm choreography with black light and white gloves.
“Light of Hope with Silent Night”
A wonderful opportunity for choir and optional children’s choir to stage a candlelighting moment with the child soloist (ms. 9) standing center-stage (holding a lighted candle in a semi-dark setting) and then lighting the adult soloist’s candle (at ms.15). The adult soloist then lights a choir member’s candle, etc. until the entire choir and congregation’s candles are lit by the end of the song.

“The Twelve Days of Christmas”
This song is designed for use with audience participation. After bringing the house lights up to full, the choir director or host should “relax” the crowd and divide the audience into twelve pre-planned sections. (Posters designating these areas should already be in place.) As the director speaks, selected members of your adult choir or usher staff move quickly into the audience (dressed in elf costumes, etc. and teach a simple motion to their group. See the following suggested motions. These motions should be hilarious. This ice-breaker can be very valuable in setting a festive, fun mood of celebration.

Suggested Motions:

- A partridge in a pear tree entire audience conducts in a 2/4 pattern
- 2 Turtle doves form a “flying bird” with hands
- 3 French hens “flap wings”
- 4 Calling birds “phone calling” (with cell phones or hands)
- 5 Golden rings “big circle with arms”
- 6 Geese a laying “wiggle hips with hands on hips”
- 7 Swans a swimming “swimming motion”
- 8 Maids a milking “milking motion”
- 9 Ladies dancing “ballerina dance in circle”
- 10 Lords a leaping “jump up and down”
- 11 Pipers piping “flute playing”
- 12 Drummers drumming “drumming”
The Joy of Christmas

Created by Phil Barfoot
Arranged by Dave Williamson
Dramatic Script by John R. Plastow

This dramatic script is designed to be presented in a musical theatre style. The stage needs to be open with the ability to change scene settings. The choir functions as the chorus of the musical and is costumed per the musical numbers and storyline. They should be staged and/or choreographed depending on available space and experience of the cast. The important thing is that the choir should not act like a choir, but as part of the story. The actors keep the flow of the story moving from one song to another, which causes the audience to be fully engaged in the program from start to end. The full length is approximately an hour and thirty minutes without an intermission, including the welcome and invitation by the pastor.

Story
Through an old letter found in the shipping box of an antique nativity set, the faith of one believer is passed on to his now grown granddaughter and great-granddaughter. Though it is unstated, this story speaks of how we as a culture are now often several generations removed from faith and the common knowledge of the Christmas story. However, the light of hope and peace still shines when shared from one person to another and one generation to the next.

Characters
Kim (Kim) A sweet, curious eight-year-old girl
Dot (Dot) Kim’s mom
Deliveryman (Del.) Two lines only
Great-grandfather (GGF) Seen as both a young, newlywed man and 38 years later in 1984 (Same actor)
Great-grandmother Seen only in 1984 (non-speaking)
Little Girl Dot as a child (non-speaking)
Little Boy Dot’s younger brother as a child (non-speaking)

Settings
The first setting is the living room of a modern day home at Christmas, with a Christmas tree and furniture. The second setting consists of a stable and hillside in Bethlehem when Jesus was born.

Time Period
Modern day (2007) with a flashback to 1984 and to Bethlehem

The Joy of Christmas
Dramatic Script
By John R. Plastow
PROGRAM OPENING

Song:   “The Season of Joy with Joy to the World!”
This is the program opening number.

Welcome by Hosts or Pastor
This leads to an “ice-breaker” with the participation of the audience.

Song:   “The Twelve Days of Christmas”

Song:   “A Big Band Christmas”
This song serves as a re-opening number for the story portion of the program

Scene One

It’s Christmastime, and many gifts are spread under the tree. On this particular Saturday, about nine
days before Christmas, packages arrive. Among them is one from Dot’s aunt, who had been cleaning
out the old family home. In this package is an antique nativity set. Kim, a sweet, curious eight-year-
old girl, and her mother, Dot, unwrap the set, piece by piece. Included in the box is also an antique
candle set.

(As the scene opens, Kim is sorting and arranging the presents under the family tree.)

Kim    And this one is for me from Mom and Dad. This one is for me from Uncle Phillip. This one
       is for me from—hey, this one doesn’t say who it’s from… Oh, well, it’s still for me. (She
       giggles.) And this one is for my little brother. He’d better enjoy it because he’s definitely not
       going to make it onto Santa’s good list this year, the little brat.

Dot    (First few lines are from offstage) Kim?

Kim    Yes, Mom?

Dot    What are you doing?
Kim    I’m sorting presents.

Dot    Didn’t you do that just a few minutes ago?

Kim    Yes, but I’ve come up with a new plan so I can be more efficient when we’re ready to open
       the presents.

Dot    Christmas is still over a week away, sweetie. Why don’t you leave them alone for a few
days, and then you can do all the planning you want.

Kim    Oh, Mom.
(Dot enters.)

Dot (Onstage) Besides, I need you to help me finish the baking. I want to get everything wrapped to give out at work on Monday.

Kim Can I take some to school for Miss Hicks?

Dot Absolutely. You can have first choice and wrap it up special. Your brother will want to take a batch to school as well.

Kim Don’t give him cookies! He’ll eat ’em on the way to school.

Dot I’ll make sure they get to his teacher. Come on into the kitchen and let’s get to work. The presents will still be here later.

Kim I’m just trying to keep track of them all. I don’t want to miss any.

Dot You won’t, I’m sure. And there’ll be more to come.

Kim Really?

(The doorbell rings.)

Dot (Looking out, as if through the window) See? Here’s another delivery. I bet it’s more presents. (She exits.) I’ll get the door; you make some room under the tree.

(Kim clears a space.)

Dot (From offstage) Good morning. Merry Christmas!

Del. (Also from offstage) Merry Christmas! I’ve got two boxes here for the Thomases.

Dot Yes, that’s us.

Del. Please sign here. Thanks.

(Dot returns with two large boxes.)

Kim Wow! Who are those from?

Dot (Setting things down in front of the tree) Let’s take a look. They’re from Aunt Betty.

Kim Your sister?

Dot My mother’s sister. She’s your great-aunt.

Kim Open, open.

Dot Maybe we should wait until your dad and brother get back.
Kim: That'll be hours. You know how long those soccer games go on and on! Can't we please see what's inside?

Dot: Oh, all right. But then we have to get back to the baking.

(Kim opens the first shipping box and pulls presents out.)

Kim: Look at all these presents! This one is for you and Dad. This one is for Ryan. This one is for Ryan. This one is for Ryan. Hey, what's going on here?

Dot: Keep looking.

Kim: And this big one is for me! I wonder what it is.

Dot: You'll have to wait 'til Christmas for that.

(Dot opens the second box.)

Kim: What's in the second box?

Dot: Let's see. There's lots of tissue paper. Here's a note. (Dot opens up the note and reads) "Dear Dot, I found this old set when I was cleaning out Grandma's house this year. It was packed away with her Christmas decorations. I don't know if you have a use for it. If not, just toss it. We have all the Christmas stuff we know what to do with. Merry Christmas! Love, Betty."

Kim: Do you know what it is?

Dot: I don't. Let's unwrap it. (Kim starts to take wrapped pieces out of the box.) Careful. (The first piece is the stable of a nativity set.) Oh, look.

Kim: What is it?

Dot: I remember this. It's Grandma's old nativity set.

Kim: Nativity set? What's a nativity set?

Dot: It's the stable where Jesus was born. It tells the story of the first Christmas.

Kim: Jesus was born in a stable?

Dot: Yes, that's how the story goes. On that first Christmas Jesus' parents couldn't find a place to stay so they had to sleep in a stable, and that's where Jesus was born.

Kim: Weird.

Dot: This set is very old.

Kim: Well, it did belong to your mother.
Dot Not just my mother, but my mother’s mother. I remember this from when I was a little girl. My grandma and grandpa would put it right under their Christmas tree.

Kim What else is in here? (They open the pieces one by one.)

Dot Here’s the manger where the baby slept.

Kim Doesn’t look very comfortable.

Dot No, I bet not. Here’s the baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph, his parents…and a few animals.

Kim Animals?

Dot It was a stable, you know.

Kim Not very sanitary.

Dot Nope. And here’s a shepherd, some sheep, and an angel.

Kim Angel?

Dot Yes, this was my favorite piece. Look at all of these.

Kim Why was this your favorite?

Dot I used to pretend the angel was flying all over the room.

Kim Like this? (She swoops the angel in the air.) Varoom, varoom.

Dot Not quite like that, but sort of. (She takes one more piece out of the box.) And look here.

Kim What? What?

Dot This is an antique candle set.

Kim Why’s it with the stable?

Dot Grandma used this to light up the nativity set. It was always on the table next to her Christmas tree.

Kim Cool. Anything more in the box?

Dot Nope, that’s it. It’s sure been a long time since I’ve seen these.

Kim Are you sure there’s nothing else?

Dot Sure. Is there something missing?

Kim Well, if it tells the story of Christmas, shouldn’t Santa and a few reindeer be in there?
Dot (Laughing) Oh, those came much later. That’s a different story.

Kim There’s more than one story of Christmas?

Dot Well, yes. The nativity was just the first Christmas story. Haven’t I ever told you about that?

Kim Nope. Christmas has always been Santa and reindeer and snowmen and stuff.

Dot I never told you that Jesus was part of the story?

Kim Not really.

Dot (Thinking about that) Hmm.

Kim So all of this belonged to my great-grandma? Wasn’t her name Dorothy?

Dot Yes. I was named after her.

Kim But Dad calls you Dot.

Dot Yes, that’s my nickname.

Kim This set is kind of cool, even if it doesn’t have a Rudolph or Frosty.

Dot The nativity tells a totally different story.

(The lights fade as the music begins.)

Song: “Mary Had a Baby with Glory Hallelujah to the Newborn King”
Scene Two

Kim    So, Mom, how come, in all these years of Christmases together...

Dot    (Interrupting) You’re only eight, sweetie.

Kim    Still, that’s a lot of Christmases. How come you’ve never told me about the nativity story?

Dot    Well, I guess I just didn’t think about it. It wasn’t really a part of Christmas for me when I was growing up.

Kim    Didn’t your mom tell you?

Dot    No. The nativity is part of going to church, and I never went to church as I was growing up except for a few times with my grandma.

Kim    But you said that you played with the angel of this nativity set.

Dot    Yes, when I was really little, and only when we visited at your great-grandma’s house. That was a very long time ago, but still, just seeing this set brings back wonderful memories for me. I can remember playing with the angel as the candle would light the set from the little table right between Grandpa’s chair and the front window where they would put their little Christmas tree. My grandma would bake cookies for me and my little brother, and we’d play for hours with these pieces. He’d play with the animals and set them up in different ways, but I was fascinated by the angel. Grandpa would tell us the story of Christmas before we’d go with them to their little church. I can still smell the cookies and hear the music they would play. It was all so joyful.

Song:    “A Classical Christmas”
Scene Three

Kim Look, Mom, there’s something on the bottom of the stable.

Dot Let me see that. It’s an old letter.

Kim Who’s it from?

Dot Apparently it’s from your great-grandpa to your great-grandma.

Kim Read it! Read it!

Dot It says:

(The letter is read by Great-grandfather. He is seen to one side of the above scene. The lights dim on the living room with Dot and Kim.)

GGF To my dearest Dorothy on our first Christmas together, December 1946.

You are my most beautiful bride and the love of my life. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, my desire is to shower you with gifts which will show you how much I love you, just as God has given us the greatest gift of all in Jesus because of His great love for us. I know you’ve had your eye on the beautiful nativity set we saw in that shop window a few weeks ago, but you understand that we can’t afford it on the modest salary I make right now. Some day, but not yet. So, I hope you will accept this in the meantime. I’ve made you a nativity set from the wood out back with my own hands. It’s not as beautiful as the one you will buy someday, but it’s made with love, and I give it to you with all of my heart. Use the candle included to light up the nativity set just as Jesus came to be the light of the world. As it lights our home this Christmas, my prayer is:

“Light of hope, light of peace, all over the world let there be harmony; share the joy, watch it grow; beautiful light, light of hope.”

Merry Christmas, my love,
Timothy

(The lighting changes and the scene shifts back to Dot and Kim.)

Kim That is so sweet! He must have loved her so much to do that.

Dot All these years and I don’t think I knew that he made the set.

Kim It also seems like they knew a lot more about Jesus than you and I do.

Dot I would definitely agree with that.

Kim I don’t understand. If your grandparents knew so much about the first Christmas, why didn’t your mom tell you about it?

Dot I don’t know. Sometimes there are things that just don’t get passed down. Church just
wasn’t part of the way my mom and dad lived. We celebrated Christmas every year, and I have great memories of it all, but Jesus wasn’t talked about. Christmas was about presents and cookies and all the fun.

Kim Kind of like ours is today.

Dot Yes. Obviously there was much more to Christmas for your great-grandparents.

**Song: “Underneath the Tree with Near the Cross”**

(Dot sings the first verse solo to Kim, telling what she remembers about Christmases past. The second verse, sung by the choir, is actually a flashback of Dot’s grandparents and how Christmas was all about their Savior. Visually the scene shifts to Dot and Kim looking on as it shows the Christmas when Dot first sees the nativity set while visiting her grandparents as a child. Dot’s brother is seen playing with the animal figurines as Dot plays with the angel and their grandfather looks on. The grandparents are seen explaining what the various figurines are and the children respond to them. The scene should be dreamy, obviously a warm memory of Dot’s. Dot’s grandmother should bring in a plate of cookies as well.)
Scene Four

Kim Mom, can you tell me more about the first Christmas?

Dot I can try. Unfortunately, I don’t know the story very well myself. (She picks up the letter and realizes there are some other pages with it.) Look, here’s some pages from the Bible my grandfather included with his letter.

Kim Isn’t this story about Jesus out of the Bible?

Dot Yes. (Scanning the pages) Here it is! Let’s read it together. (Dot reads first. The Scripture is Luke 2:1-16, NIV.)

(During the reading of Scripture, the Bethlehem scene is set in place. Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds act out the story.)

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 his 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.

Kim 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 room for them in the inn.

Dot And 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, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ 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,

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

Song: “Great Joy”
(This song is staged in Bethlehem. The angels and shepherds are featured in the song. Dot and Kim look on, but they remain in modern time.)

Dot 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.

(Kim picks up one of the kings from the nativity set.)
Kim: So, I understand the angels and the shepherds. But who is this guy?

Dot: He's one of the kings. I remember that there were three kings who came to see Jesus.

Kim: Kings? How did they know about Jesus?

Dot: I guess somehow they heard about it.

Kim: Well, with all those angels celebrating, I'm sure they made lots of noise!

Dot: (Remembering) It was a star, I think. Here, there's more in the Bible about it. (Reading from Matthew 2, NIV.)

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have seen his star as it arose, and we have come to worship Him.” The star appeared to them, guiding them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house where the child and his mother, Mary, were, and they fell down before him and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Kim: Cool.

Song: “Follow On with I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”
(During this song, the kings are seen on their journey.)
Scene Five

Kim That’s quite a different Christmas story than I’ve heard before.

Dot That’s for sure.

Kim So Christmas isn’t all about reindeer and snowmen after all.

Dot No.

Kim It’s really about Jesus.

Dot Yes.

Kim I thought the most important thing about Christmas was the presents under the tree, but I was wrong.

Dot I remember now that my grandma would tell me that the best Christmas present we could ever get was the one that God gave to us on the first Christmas.

Kim But why did God do that?

Dot I somehow remember that it was because God loved us and wanted a way to be with us.

Kim Grandpa’s letter said, “Light of hope, light of peace, all over the world let there be harmony; share the joy, watch it grow; beautiful light, light of hope.” Is the light of hope Jesus?

Dot I think so, but I don’t know all the story. We need to find out more.

Kim I wish Great-grandpa was here so we could ask him.

Dot Well, sweetie, in a way he is. Through the letter he told us a lot, including where we can look for the rest of the story.

Kim I’d like to do that.

Dot Me, too.

Kim Can we do it together?

Dot I would love to. (She pauses.) Sweetie? (She chokes up a little.)

Kim What’s wrong, Mom?

Dot Kim, I’m sorry.

Kim For what, Mom?

Dot I’m sorry that I never told you any of this.
Kim: It's all right, Mom. Great-grandpa did. I never knew him, but now I feel like I do. Mom? Can we put the nativity set under our tree, like your grandparents did?

Dot: That's a great idea.

Kim: And the candle can go right here. (She places it on a table next to the tree.) It can shine and light up the whole room.

(Dot picks up the candle.)

Dot: The light from this candle should never have burned out.

Kim: That's okay, Mom. It can start again with us. Together we'll keep it shining.

(They light the candle as the song begins. Kim and Dot sing the solos of the song.)

**Song:** “Light of Hope with Silent Night”  
(The candle is multiplied all over the auditorium as, one by one, the flame is passed along -see production notes. The storyline is complete with the singing of the song.)

**Wrap up and Invitation**

The pastor or the hosts now give a brief wrap up, making sure not to retell the story or tell a different story. An invitation to meet Jesus is given. After this, the audience is given a chance to celebrate together and join in the singing.

**Song:** “Joy! A Carol Medley for Choir & Congregation”  
(The audience should remain seated in order to see the staging, which should be highly festive with a nativity processional of kings, angels, banners, etc.)

**Song:** “Go Tell Everyone”  
This is the finale of the event and should be fully staged.

**Cast Bow:** Reprise of “The Season of Joy”

Begin song (instrumental only) at measure 88 or 90, which will allow approximately a minute for a cast acknowledgement from the audience as well as time for the cast to give praise to God, then at measure 113 or 136, the cast vocalists join in and sing to end. (See production notes.)
The Joy of Christmas
Narrative Script
By John R. Plastow

The narrative script is designed to be presented with two adult “hosts” and a choir. Staging the musical numbers per the production notes will still bring about the most effective program, however, to what extent the choir is staged is at the discretion of each production director. The hosts should be a male and female, preferably at least friends as then their genuine rapport will help put the audience at ease and add warmth and authenticity to the dialogue. Ideally, the narrators could be a married couple or siblings. For the sake of this script, the narrators are named Bob and Sheri, however, please insert the actual names of the actors playing these parts!

The length is approximately an hour and twenty minutes including the invitation by the pastor.

Settings
A unified setting which doesn’t require changing of sets is sufficient for the narrative presentation. On one side of the stage, the hosts can be stationary in front of a Christmas tree or in a “living room” scene. A working fireplace would be a nice touch. The narrators can sit in chairs or stand or both as they guide the audience through the presentation. The choir is set center, but not on risers so that they can be a part of the staging of the music. On the other far side is Bethlehem; stable, hillside, and buildings depending on the available space.

Song: “The Season of Joy with Joy to the World!”

Welcome by the Hosts or Pastor

H1 Merry Christmas, everyone, and on behalf of ___________ (insert actual church name), we welcome you to “The Joy of Christmas.”

H2 For the next few minutes we invite you to join us as we fill this building with music, laughter, and a reminder as to why this is such a wonderful season.

H1 My name is Bob (insert real name) and this is Sheri (insert real name). We are your hosts for this evening’s presentation, and it’s our hope that you’ll be able to relax and enjoy yourself as we celebrate the many joys of Christmas.

H2 To help us all do that, we’ve got a song that we want you to sing with us to get us all in the mood for Christmas. Are you ready to sing, Bob?

H1 (Makes warming-up sounds) Fa-la-la-la-la. Fa-la-la-la-la. Fa-la-la-la-la.

H2 Oh, please!

H1 I’m all set! Fa-la-la-la-la.

H2 Set for what?
H1 Didn’t you hear? I’ve got a call back for “America’s Got Talent.”

H2 More like “America’s Gone Crazy!”

H1 Hey! This is “The Joy of Christmas,” and you’re supposed to be nice to me.

H2 Who made that rule?

H1 It’s in the script! (He pulls out a script and shows her.)

H2 All right! Just keep the singing down, would you?

H1 Do you want to argue or do you want to have these nice people sing with us?

H2 I think we should sing.

H1 Me, too. Everyone, here’s the deal. We know that you’re all still spinning from your busy day, so we want to have a little fun to get us all loosened up for the rest of the show.

(Choir or ushers take their places, including twelve people with oversized props in their assigned places in the audience. See production notes.)

H2 You each have a leader in your area and we want you to sing along as they do. Follow them, and when your part of the song comes along, stand and sing it out louder than all the other groups. We’re going to see which section of our audience can make the most noise! (Feel free to re-word this narrative to customize your version of how you will do this particular song. You may want to briefly explain logistics, having each section rehearse their motions etc. Be sure to make it fun and encourage everyone’s participation!

H1 All right, everybody. Here we go!

**Song:** “The Twelve Days of Christmas”

(At the end of the song, the hosts encourage everyone to give themselves a big hand and then congratulate the crowd.)

H2 That was great, everyone!

H1 So, who won?

H2 That’s a tough one. Everyone did a great job!

H1 They sure did. We all win!!! Give yourselves one more big hand.

H2 Singing that song brings back great memories for me. I used to sing that song around the house when I was a kid.

H1 Me too, plus lots of other songs.
Certainly one of the joys of Christmas is the music. So much of what everyone remembers about the holidays is a favorite song or two. Let’s take a few minutes now and enjoy more of the music of Christmas!

**Song:** “A Big Band Christmas”

You gotta love that swing! But Christmas music covers virtually every style and every age group. From pop to country, jazz to showstoppers, there’s something for everyone. For many of us, when we think of great Christmas music (change vocal pattern to sophisticated), classical is the only way to go.

(With the same sophisticated voice) Is that so?

Why, yes, my dear!

**Song:** “A Classical Christmas”

All of heaven and earth celebrate Christmas through music. Even the angels are usually shown to be singing as they announce the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem…and that’s what Christmas is all about.

And it all started with the birth of a little baby boy.

**Song:** “Mary Had a Baby with Glory Hallelujah to the Newborn King”

Yes, it all began with the birth of Jesus in the small village of Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. It was a gift from God like no other gift ever given.

Giving gifts…definitely one of the great joys of Christmas!

God’s gift first to us is where our tradition of giving gifts to each other came from.

What did you get me this year?

I’m not going to tell you. You have to wait.

Aw, come on. I’ll tell you what I got you!

That would spoil the whole thing.

I sure hope you got me something more interesting than you did last year.

I thought they were very cute.
Sure, but fuzzy slippers that play “Silent Night” get a little embarrassing at the Scout campout.

And just think, I got you the matching night shirt this year!

Beautiful.

Seriously now, giving gifts to each other is one of my favorite joys of Christmas. I love to see the tree fill up each year with surprises for all the family. And as I see those gifts underneath the tree, I am reminded of the gift of Jesus.

**Song:** “Underneath the Tree with Near the Cross”

It was a beautiful and awesome gift that God gave His creation in Jesus, His only Son. For two thousand years we have celebrated what happened on that first Christmas night in Bethlehem.

(Reading from Luke 2, NIV) 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 his 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 room for them in the inn.

And 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, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ 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,

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

**Song:** “Great Joy “

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.
(Reading from Matthew 2, NIV) Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking,

“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have seen his star as it arose, and we have come to worship Him.”

**Song:** “Follow On with I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

The star appeared to them, guiding them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house where the child and his mother, Mary, were, and they fell down before him and worshipped him.

Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

As the kings worshipped, let us do the same. Sing with us as we celebrate!

**Song:** “Joy! A Carol Medley for Choir and Congregation”
(The audience should remain seated in order to see the staging, which should be highly festive with a nativity processional of kings, angels, banners, etc.)

**Wrap Up and Invitation**

(Coming off of the worship experience of the previous song, the pastor can give a brief invitation to meet Jesus and celebrate this Christmas as a new believer. After this, the hosts return as the next song introduction begins.)

We’ve celebrated many joys of Christmas this evening.

The music and the memories…

And the gifts and laughter…

You’ve seen the shepherds, the angels, and the kings all bow down in worship.

And you’ve been invited to join in the celebration and accept the gift of Jesus from God.

Now, take the light of joy…the light of peace…and the light of hope into the darkness and shine the light of Jesus to everyone.

**Song:** “Light of Hope with Silent Night”
(A single candle begins this song and is multiplied all over the auditorium as, one by one,
the flame is passed along -see production notes. The next song segues directly with no
dialogue between.)

**Song:**  “Go Tell Everyone”
(This is the finale of the event and should be fully staged.)

**Cast Bow:**  Reprise of “The Season of Joy.”
Begin song (instrumental only) at measure 88 or 90, which will allow approximately a
minute for a cast acknowledgement from the audience, as well as time for the cast to give
praise to God, then at measure 113 or 136 the cast vocalists join in and sing to end. (See
production notes.)
The Joy of Christmas
Additional Production Notes and Staging Suggestions
John R. Plastow

PRODUCTION NOTES:

Whatever your performance venue, please make sure to have plenty of space for staging, settings, props, and cast. Regardless of the complexity or simplicity of your setting and décor, make sure it’s done well! The effectiveness of your message is always influenced by the visual impression you make on your audience. If you do it excellently, the audience will have a great first impression and be more receptive to what you have to say.

A few sentences on lighting…
One of the most important tools you have at your disposal is theatrical lighting. Even though there are costs involved in the rental or purchase of equipment, it is well worth it. Even basic lighting can give you control of your audience’s focus, mood, and enjoyment of the program. If you have to decide between scenery, props, or lighting, go with simple sets and props so that you can afford good lighting. It is money well spent!

Pre-Show
The auditorium should have a warm, friendly tone. Colored theatrical lighting should give the stage a feeling of anticipation. The use of Christmas lights in trees and garlands will also set the mood, as well as house music kept under the volume of conversation. If you can, put together strolling caroling groups to entertain the people as they wait for the program to begin.

Opening: “The Season of Joy with Joy to the World!”
This is a great opening number in which to stage your full cast. Include all your children, youth, and adult choirs as well as choreography teams. There are a good amount of key and musical changes built into the song, which allow for visual staging changes to happen. Keep things moving visually, always giving the audience something new to watch, just as if they were watching a theme park parade. The cast should be very well rehearsed and polished, as this song will set the tone for the rest of the program. If you catch the audience in the opening number, they’ll stay with you throughout.

The pageantry sound of this song lends itself to the use of tall props parading in the aisles and hand props on the stage. I suggest staging your youth in the aisles with tall Christmas banners and flags, your children on the stage with stuffed animals, the adults on stage with coordinated gift packages, and the choreography team on the floor in front of the stage with ribbons. The costumes should be festive Christmas sweaters or coordinated outfits. Make sure the color scheme is consistent throughout the whole cast.

“The Twelve Days of Christmas”
This is an ice-breaker for your audience. If they came in with any stress, this is your opportunity to
work it out of them! Assign a choir member or two to each of twelve sections of your audience. Each section represents a different one of the twelve days. Also give each section a big, outrageous and clever prop, which exaggerates the day’s gift, i.e., gigantic gold rings. Encourage the audience to out-sing and out-do each other.

Other suggestions are to give out hand props to the audience members as they take their seats prior to the program and to dress your children or youth up in bird costumes and have them “fly” around in apparent chaos (choreographed, of course) throughout the song to add to the comedy. By the end, everyone should be laughing and loosened up. (See suggested motions on page 3.)

“A Big Band Christmas”
This is your re-opening number, so use the same approach as you did in “The Season of Joy.” Include the full cast, make many visual changes, and do it well! If your church has a dance ministry or studio, this is a wonderful medley in which you can feature them. Costume changes to match the style of music are a must!

“Mary Had a Baby with Glory Hallelujah to the Newborn King”
Because you have had three big, visually-complex numbers in a row, it’s time to give your audience a little rest. Do this song with full-out energy and minimal choreography (hands, arms and some step touches). Think like a gospel choir, which is stationary as a block group, yet still highly energetic within the box. Have the choir change costumes to choir robes for this song only! Another option would be the use of hand and arm choreography with black light and white gloves.

“A Classical Christmas”
This is a kicked-up version of some classical greats. Okay, you can keep the choir in robes for one more song, but they have to act like they’re having a great time. No stuffy choir members allowed! Choreography isn’t needed on this song, but you may want to mix up the staging positions as the song makes its musical changes.

“Underneath the Tree with Near the Cross”
In the “dramatic version,” this song is a flashback for the modern-day Dot. She sings the first solo and then looks on as the song progresses. She sees herself and her little brother when they were children visiting their grandparents for Christmas. The children are seen with their grandparents as they play with the nativity set. The grandparents are seen explaining what the various figurines are and the children respond to them. The scene should be dreamy, obviously a warm memory of Dot’s. The use of nice lighting and fog will also be helpful. Note: If presenting this in a Living Christmas Tree format, the lighting of the Christmas tree should change to the shape of a cross at the key change in measure 42.

In the “narrative version” of this song, the use of multi-media can be very effective. Have images on the screens tell the story which is being sung.

“Great Joy”
This song shows the nativity in real life. Set your scene to be a full-size nativity set and show the shepherds in the fields as they encounter the angels telling the news of Jesus’ birth. This is a great moment for your dance company (trained ballet dancers) to shine as they portray the angels praising God. The choir should be dressed biblically. Choreography isn’t needed as long as you have great movement from the angels and shepherds. Great lighting will also enhance this number.

“Follow On with I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”
This song takes place as the kings’ journey to Bethlehem. Show the kings with their entourages traveling and following the star. The angels from the previous song can also continue to be featured. If you have adequate aisle space, use them to give your kings and their company space to move throughout the auditorium. This song could culminate with the kings bowing down at the manger, however, my suggestion is that you save that for a little later. Have the kings process, but then exit as they continue on their journey. They’ll be back in a few minutes.

Note: This number is a great opportunity to involve your youth choir. Dress them all in costume as the kings and their entourage members, give them packs, bundles, supplies, and royal flags as well as the gifts to carry. It will be a great visual moment and a good way to get the youth to participate.

“Light of Hope with Silent Night”
In the “dramatic version,” this song features Kim and Dot singing the solos. Kim lights Dot’s candle at ms. 15 and then at ms. 21, Kim passes her flame to the choir & Dot passes her flame to the congregation, starting from the front to the back. By the end of the song, the entire choir’s candles and congregation’s candles should be lit. In the “narrative version,” the soloists pass the light to the choir and congregation etc. Make sure to follow local fire safety ordinances when dealing with candles. The best way to use a lighted candle is in a hurricane lamp which shields the flame. If your production is outdoors and you are brave, give all the audience members a candle as they enter prior to the program and pass the flame on to everyone. For an added touch, give your youth or additional cast members battery-operated lighted wreaths on poles and have them surround the audience with additional light for a nice frame to the look.

“Joy! A Carol Medley for Choir & Congregation”
This is your big processional to the manger. Give every cast member a praise banner, flag or ribbon as they all gather in worship. Your youth, who are still dressed as the kings and company, now finish their journey to Bethlehem. Encourage the audience to sing, but have them stay seated so that they can soak up the highly visually stimulating experience.

“Go Tell Everyone”
During the introduction of this song, the cast deposits props offstage and returns for a big gospel finish. Stage the choirs with movement and choreography matching the style of the song. End big!

Cast Bow
Using a reprise of the opening number music as outlined in the script, this time gives the audience an opportunity to express their joy and thanks to the cast. Have the cast do one full company bow together (no individual bows), then as a full cast, raise their hands to heaven, giving God the glory! Follow this up with one more full cast bow and have the cast sing the final chorus of the song. Everyone will leave joyful and ready for Christmas!

Once the program is over, have the cast greet the audience in the lobby in order for the ministry of the program to end with a personal touch.
Enjoy your production as you use this great tool to reach people for Christ this Christmas!

Merry Christmas!

John Plastow
(a.k.a. The Christmas Guy)