

Start with an empty location (shelf, table, tray) on which you will build your scene. Have all the pieces ready by the story teller so that the storyteller can hand the pieces to the children to put in place. Feel free to add other farm animals to your scene from your children's collection of toy animals or make other animals ahead of time)

This night is like no other night. It is a time to dream and sing our way to Bethlehem. Let's get ready to tell the story.

The little town we seek sits in the hill country some ten miles south of Jerusalem. For thousands of years the houses have gathered there on the hilltop like a family breaking bread. "Bethlehem" means "house of bread".

In the center of the village is a small inn. On this night it is overflowing with people seeking sleep and a place to eat. Behind the inn is a dark stable. The cows chew their oats and broken straw while a weary horse leans and rests after the day's plowing in the valley. A sheep nearby is nearly asleep, while the goats huddle together to keep each other warm.

All is still and quiet in the little town.

(Children place all animals except the donkey and sheep in the scene. Sing O Little Town of Bethlehem.)

As night gathers, the last two travelers come slowly up the road. Look, there is a young woman about to be a mother. She is walking with her husband. They are Joseph and Mary from Nazareth. They have walked for six days to come to this city where King David was born, so long ago. Their donkey is with them. Sometimes Mary rides on the donkey. Sometimes the donkey carries their bags. It is hard for Mary to get comfortable on such a long journey.

I wonder how they felt on such a long walk.

I wonder if they worried about where they would stay in Bethlehem.

They have come, like so many others, because the Roman emperor wants to count each person in the town, so he can take their money as a tax.

But it is late, and Mary is so weary. Where will they sleep? There is no room in the inn. They decide to sleep with the animals.

I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt when they were told they had to sleep in the stable.

I wonder what the stable sounded like.

I wonder what it smelled like.

I wonder if they were afraid.

(Children place Mary, Joseph and the donkey.)

Stars brighten slowly in the sky. All creation holds its breath. Suddenly, from the stable, comes the cry of a newborn child. Mary gently wraps the baby in a blanket and lays him in the feed box that his father has filled with straw.

(Children place Baby Jesus. Sing Away in a Manger.)

*I wonder what the animals thought when they heard the baby cry.
I wonder what Mary thought when she saw her baby.
I wonder what Joseph thought when he saw the baby.*

In the hills outside Bethlehem, shepherds watch their shadowy sheep. All at once, the dark is lost in light and in the midst of the light is something even brighter: the faces of angels.

The fearful shepherds then hear music in the sky and a voice says clearly, "Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by all people. Today in the City of David, a Savior is born! He is Christ, the Lord."

Then more angels appear - a whole heavenly host of them, praising God and singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to all people everywhere."
I wonder how this made the shepherds feel.

(Children place the angel, the shepherds and sheep. Sing Hark the Herald Angels Sing.)

The shepherds run across the fields to Bethlehem to the barn behind the inn. There they find the Holy Family and creep forward, overwhelmed with mystery and joy to find Nativity itself in the center of all that love.

I wonder if you have ever been overwhelmed with joy.

The shepherds tell Mary and Joseph what the angels had told them. Then they tell everyone what they had seen and heard.

(Sing Go tell it on the mountain)

Three camels plod up the road to Bethlehem. They have come from the East, far beyond the Arabian Desert. The camels carry three kings, the wise ones, the Magi. They are following the wild star, the destiny they had never seen before. They are following it, wherever it goes, to find the King. Its shining shows them the way.

*I wonder how the Magi felt, having only a star to guide them.
I wonder how they could travel so far.*

The Magi's journey will end in a new kind of king. They are still on the journey, and when they arrive they will give the baby bright gold, sweet-smelling frankincense, and bitter myrrh, brought so far with so much love.

(Children place the Magi somewhere away from the stable, maybe even across the room. Move them a little closer to the stable each day. The Magi arrive on Epiphany, January 6. Sing We Three Kings.)

All these things happened long ago and far away, but each year on a wintry day, we remember what happened in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. We give gifts to those we love, and we gather to sing joyful songs - songs to God. And all through the year Jesus's birth reminds us of how much God loves us, and so we love ourselves, too and we share that love with others in our world.

You are all a very important part of this story and we could not have this story without you.
I wonder which part of the story you like best...

(Sing Silent Night.)

Lord Jesus Christ,
your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder at
heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise as we
worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God.
Amen.