

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

*A one-act children's play
using traditional Christmas carols*

By Verlynn Kneifl and Laurie Larsen

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LULLABY AT THE STABLE

-2-

THE STORY OF THE PLAY

Preschoolers and children in lower grades will enjoy performing in this gentle and delightful Christmas pageant. Like many mothers of new babies, Mary is having a difficult time getting Baby Jesus to sleep. The Wise Men, shepherds, angels, lions, sheep, and mice sing their best lullabies, but all in vain. At last, one small, shy striped kitten comes forward and timidly asks if she may try to lull the Holy Child to sleep. The lions snicker. How could this small, foolish kitten think she might succeed where even the mighty king of beasts has failed? Then, purring with all her heart, the kitten "sings" the Holy Child to sleep. Older children can handle the few speaking roles while any number of younger performers can participate as the animals with few rehearsals. Easy costuming and staging and all the songs are traditional, well-known hymns. They include "Away in a Manger"; "Brahm's Lullaby"; "The Stable"; "What Child Is This?"; "Do You Hear What I Hear?"; "We Three Kings"; "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"; and "Silent Night."

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

-3-

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

NARRATOR: Adult or older child.

MARY: Speaking part.

JOSEPH: Speaking part.

MICE: Speaking parts.

BUNNIES

LIONS

SHEEP

SHEEP DOGS: One speaking part.

FOUR WISE MEN: Speaking parts.

ANGELS

SHEPHERDS: Speaking parts.

STRIPED KITTEN: Speaking part.

Setting: The Holy Family in the stable.

Props: Baby Jesus: large doll, wrapped in baby blanket.

Manger: shallow cardboard box filled with hay.

Running time: Approximately 45 minutes.

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

-4-

Costume Suggestions

Because the narrator identifies each group, costumes may either be kept minimal or developed as additional points of interest.

MARY - Long dress or robe, white or light blue; shawl over head; sandals.

JOSEPH - Bathrobe with wide sash; sandals.

MICE - Round cardboard ears; grease paint whiskers; lengths of yarn for tails. "Baby Mice" may carry stuffed animals.

BUNNIES - Long ears; whiskers; cotton ball tails.

LIONS - Whiskers; pointed ears; yarn tails with ends frayed. Manes can be curled strips of tan construction paper attached to headpieces.

SHEEP - Black ears; cotton ball crowns; tails may be made of strips of cloth.

SHEEP DOGS - Floppy cloth ears; cloth tails.

WISE MEN - Bright bathrobes; fake jewels; construction paper crowns decorated with foil stars.

SHEPHERDS - Bathrobes with wide sashes; squares of cloth draped over heads and held in place with headbands; staffs.

ANGELS.- White dresses or robes; construction paper halos attached to headpieces with light wire.

STRIPED KITTEN - Gray sweatshirt or sweatsuit with black stripes; whiskers; pointed ears; stuffed cloth tail.

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

-5-

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

(AT RISE: The Holy family in the stable CS. MARY is holding Baby Jesus while JOSEPH stands behind her. The manger is on the floor beside Mary. NARRATOR stands at side of stage.)

NARRATOR: *(Reads from script.)* It is the very first Christmas, and the Blessed Mother has a small problem sure to be understood by mothers everywhere: Baby Jesus is so excited about Christmas that He doesn't want to go to sleep. For one thing, animals from all over the world have come to the stable in Bethlehem to see Him.

(Enter MICE, shyly hunching shoulders. Putting their hands over their mouths, they giggle nervously. "Away in a Manger" may be played softly under their entrance.)

MICE: *(Falsetto, at random.)* Tee, hee. Tee, hee.

NARRATOR: The mice have brought their own babies to see the Newborn King. Mice are shy and tend to giggle when they're nervous, and as you can see, they are very nervous about visiting a King.

(Enter BUNNIES, hopping. "Brahm's Lullaby" may be heard softly under their entrance.)

NARRATOR: Bunny families came from distant fields, hopping all the way. They wriggle their noses at the Newborn King in that inquisitive way bunnies have.

(BUNNIES wriggle their noses. Enter LIONS, walking proudly. "The Stable" may be played softly under their entrance.)

NARRATOR: From a jungle far away came a pride of regal lions. They walk in a stately manner, holding their heads high, for the lion is called king of beasts.

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

-6-

(Enter SHEEP, herded by SHEEP DOGS. "Do You Hear What I Hear?" may be played under their entrance.)

NARRATOR: In nearby fields, sheep dogs had been guarding their flocks while the shepherds slept. They had seen the mice passing by and had asked them where they were going in such a hurry. The mice replied that of course they were going to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. The sheep dogs decided that they, too, would go to Bethlehem, and so they were off through the night, herding the sheep before them.

(ONE SHEEP runs across CS front. With a sharp bark and some fast footwork, A SHEEP DOG returns it to the GROUP.)

NARRATOR: As sheep often will, one ran off in the wrong direction, and had to be turned back by a watchful sheep dog.

(Enter FOUR WISE MEN.)

NARRATOR: From distant lands came Wise Men, following a star to Bethlehem. They wore fine robes and sparkling crowns, and had come to present gifts to the Holy Child. According to tradition, there were three Wise Men. Hmm. *(Pauses. Points finger and begins counting.)* One ... two ... three ... four. We seem to have four Wise Men. Obviously, the ancient scribes miscounted.

(Enter SHEPHERDS, led by ANGELS. "We Three Kings" may be played softly under their entrance.)

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, one of the shepherds had awakened and discovered that the sheep were gone. Alarmed, he awoke the other shepherds. They were

LULLABY AT THE STABLE

-7-

about to go in search of the sheep when suddenly an angel appeared to them. This had never happened before, so of course it nearly frightened them out of their wits. "Be not afraid," the angel said, "for I bring you tidings of great joy. On this night, in a stable in the city of David, there has been born to you a Savior." And so the shepherds, too, had hurried to Bethlehem, led through the starry night by a host of angels.

(OPTIONAL: At the back of the church one ANGEL may speak the part to the SHEPHERDS and then lead them up the aisle to the stage. Enter STRIPED KITTEN, "Silent Night" may play under her entrance.)

NARRATOR: There was even one small striped kitten. She was the youngest of a litter of five kittens born to an alley cat. No one had thought to tell her the news, so she came to see for herself what all the excitement was about. Unnoticed by the others, she sat in a far corner, watching quietly.

(ONE MOUSE yawns, politely putting his paw over his mouth, then another and another, until all the MICE are yawning.)

NARRATOR: As you can see, everyone is getting very sleepy. Everyone but Baby Jesus.

(BUNNIES, LIONS, SHEEP, and SHEEP DOGS: heads nod; they yawn and rub their eyes, trying very hard to stay awake. Even JOSEPH stifles a yawn.)

MARY: *(Firmly, laying BABY JESUS in the sweet-smelling hay in the manger.)* It's time to go to sleep, Little One.

NARRATOR: The mice stood on their tiptoes to see into the manger. Mary looked at them thoughtfully.

End of Freeview

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