

A BABY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Production Notes

by

Deborah Craig-Claar

Concept

A Baby Changes Everything was conceived as a Biblical-era musical with a very contemporary message. Set in first-century Bethlehem, there are numerous parallels between that small, sleepy village and our communities today. We have both allowed ourselves to be lulled to sleep by the temporal pleasures and lies of the world; we have both turned a deaf ear to the angels' song. No wonder so many in both "little towns" continue to sleep through the birth of the Savior. The challenge is clear: We must gently wake up our neighbors and colleagues and loved ones and help lead them through the dark night to the Everlasting Light in the Bethlehem manger. The chorus of Mark Hall's evocative song "While You Were Sleeping" captures this theme perfectly:

"O Bethlehem, what you have missed while you were sleeping
For God became a man and stepped into our world today
O Bethlehem, you will go down in history
As a city with no room for its King
While you were sleeping..."

Style

A Baby Changes Everything is best described as a "musical with drama." It is obviously not a narrated cantata, but it is also not a Broadway-style dramatic musical where the drama and musical numbers are 100% integrated and the chorus (choir) consistently performs as dramatic characters in the story. Perhaps it is best to label *A Baby Changes Everything* as a "hybrid" musical, which employs drama and choral music in equal, although separate, parts. The story is enacted by a small cast of dramatic characters. Several of the characters sing dramatic solos, but other solos are to be sung by non-dramatic soloists from the choir. The themes and ideas presented in the dramatic story are musically presented by the choir, who remain the choir throughout. Children play a prominent role in the musical, both in dramatic parts and as leaders of a worship sequence. This drama-choir configuration will allow you to utilize your best actors for the key parts and to allow your choir to concentrate on the musical numbers. I have carefully structured the musical so that the energy never lags, the scenes will flow seamlessly one to another, and the story will remain central throughout. Fashioning a "hybrid" musical will also help you keep your set and costume requirements at a bare minimum. (I certainly know that during these challenging economic times, church budgets need to remain very conservative. I have done my best to help you present a moving story without taxing production demands.)

In the following set of notes, I will present a variety of production ideas for your consideration. Because each auditorium and ministry are so unique, I know that you will

each need to create your own unique, creative staging to fit your personal environment, cast, choir, and vision. I would expect that each production will have a huge thumbprint on it that is exclusively yours! Having said that, I also want to offer you my services as a sounding board, a consultant, and a prayer partner. Please feel free to write me personally at any point in your rehearsal process; no question is too small. If I don't know the answer myself, I promise to help you find someone who does. Write me at: deborah.claar@sbcglobal.net. I dedicate Fridays to e-mail consulting, so you should always hear from me within a couple of days.

GENERAL TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Set

The scenic configuration for *A Baby Changes Everything* will naturally be uniquely designed to fit each individual auditorium. Take careful note of the scale of your room, especially the height of the ceiling. You do not want your scenery to overwhelm your space, nor do you want it to be swallowed up. You also need to decide where your entrances and exits will be. It is suggested that you use the aisles of the auditorium as well as plan for well-lit entrance/exits on the right and the left of the platform.

Also consider what you may need to cover up. Certain architectural features may be especially distracting and covering them with black cloths will help your audience focus their attention on the action of the production. It would also prove helpful to frame your performance space with a large, deep blue piece of canvas, muslin or scrim to function as a cyc or backdrop. Not only will this form an attractive backdrop for the choir but it will help suggest the open night sky. This backdrop can also serve as a soft screen onto which you can project lyrics for the two worship sequences.

There are three key areas in your scenic design that should remain stationary and permanent: a small area for the inn scenes, a larger area for the stable scenes, and an even larger area for the choir. Since many church sanctuaries already have a permanent area for the choir – usually center stage or to one side – I'd suggest you simply use the area that the choir is accustomed to occupying. If you are putting up risers, you are still encouraged to keep the choir in an area of visual prominence. There are a number of sequences in the musical that feature the choir and they should be as much a visual part of the production as the characters.

Once you have decided where the choir is placed, locate two additional areas for the inn and stable. These areas are easily placed on the far right and far left areas of the stage. The two areas can be framed with architectural features or can remain open, defined by their scenic pieces. The key is to be consistent. If you decide to define the stable with an A-frame or with flats that suggest walls, then you should do the same for the inn set. If you leave the inn open, defined only by a table and benches, then the stable should be open, defined only by the manger and bales of hay. No matter where or how you choose to portray the inn and stable, the one essential feature is that the two scenes be placed far enough apart so that the various "journeys" can be accomplished during the action of the script.

Lighting

Some church auditoriums are equipped with lighting systems that are the envy of most professional theatres. Other churches can only mount a couple of PAR cans and a follow spot. But the good news is that you can stage *A Baby Changes Everything* with a lot of lighting instruments, a few lighting instruments, or no special lighting instruments at all. If you are able to light the scenes in the inn and the stable separately, you'll be able to shift scenes easily. But remember that you can accomplish scene shifts simply by having actors exit one scene and make an entrance in another locale. The use of a follow spot can help you accomplish many of your scene shifts as well as follow individual actors. You can also create stars with gobos. A gobo is a small metal cut-out template that fits into the gate of an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight. With gobos you can create fields of stars and a large star of Bethlehem. Commercially-made gobos are available from theatrical supply houses.

Costumes and Dress

The cast of Biblical characters will, naturally, be dressed in first century Judean attire. If you choose robes of deeper natural tones (rust, deep green, caramel, etc.) the presence of Gabriel, any stars, and other lighting effects will all appear that much brighter. Remember that the best Biblical costume fabrics are usually made with large weave, knobby napped, textured material. The drapery and bedspread sections of thrift stores often yield terrific amounts of material at extremely low prices. Create layers for your characters' costumes by fashioning coats with open sleeves and wide, multi-textured sashes and belts. Because the production happens during the evening hours, none of the men should wear head scarves. If any of your female characters have short hair, they should wear creative head wrappings to hide their contemporary hair style.

Gabriel is the only angel you will need to costume. Because angels are always described in terms of light, this should be your primary consideration. White fabric (such as satin, lame, or even velvet) with a high reflective quality should be used. The presence of silver or chrome in the fabric (and even the makeup) will also help reflect light. Create a robe that has significant weight and drape. Gabriel should have a single lighting instrument that will be dedicated to lighting only him. Although the choice is yours, remember that Gabriel can appear without actual wings and still convey a strong angelic presence.

The choir, although not in Biblical dress, should also appear in uniform apparel. Depending upon your set and overall amount of light, you might ask your choir to dress in uniform black or black and white. You can also put them in simple, unadorned choir robes. Your goal is certainly not to hide them or make them disappear, but you also do not want them to be distracting. Uniting them in a uniform color should prove very successful.

The character of the Storyteller should be dressed in contemporary attire that communicates a certain timeless quality. A pair of black slacks and a bright, solid-colored shirt (cranberry, dark purple, Columbia blue, etc.) with full or dress sleeves would work well, as would simple vests.

Props

There are a small number of hand props that are essential to the story of *A Baby Changes Everything*. They can all be fashioned out of everyday materials.

The lamps that Cassius, Hannah and Seth use should be open lanterns. Appropriate period lanterns (usually made out of tin or black metal) can be purchased at décor stores like Hobby Lobby or Pier One. They can also be constructed. They are usually open square or rectangular boxes with a real (votive) candle placed inside. You will also need to make three smaller versions of these lanterns for Sarah, Aaron and Rebekah. Remember that every time you have any type of open flame in a sanctuary (especially around straw) you should consult your local fire marshal as to the proper safety precautions. (Always spray hay bales with flame retardant.)

The parchments that Cassius uses can be made out of sheets of printer or butcher paper and an old pot of coffee. Pour the old coffee into a baking dish. Dip each sheet of paper into the dish, and then lay them out on newspaper to dry. Leaving the parchment in the coffee longer, or re-dipping it after drying, can create a darker coloration. Crumple the paper before, or after, you dip it into the coffee to give it a rougher look. Tear the edges of the paper to a rough edge, and then carefully use a candle to scorch the edges of the paper. Fold the paper and also scorch the parchment with a candle along folds and at corners. Experiment some until you get the desired effect.

Hannah's old box/trunk with cloths should be a basic wooden box with a large amount of folded material. It is best to put out a call to your congregation for old wooden boxes or trunks that you can "distress" even further with diluted brown and black paint. (If you have trouble locating a trunk or box, a large wicker basket will do; simply alter the dialogue line.) Inside the trunk there should also be several rough (non-contemporary-looking) blankets, white "swaddling" cloth, and some simple, hand-made objects a young girl might have played with during this early era: a cloth doll, an ornate head scarf, a small bowl and spoon, a simple musical instrument like a drum or tambourine, etc.

Seth's and Nathan's provisions can be burlap sacks and other soft bundles tied with rope. Stuff the bundles with Styrofoam or other lightweight material so that the actors do not need to struggle with the objects. If you would like to make the "provisions" more visual, you can have the characters carry bundles of fruits, vegetables, and bread (the real variety or the artificial variety you purchase at craft stores).

CHARACTERS

The dramatic cast of *A Baby Changes Everything* is of modest size and includes a wide variety of ages. There is flexibility in many of the parts so that you may cast men or women and singers or non-singers. The following character descriptions are meant to serve as a guide.

- **The Storyteller.** The character of the Storyteller was created to clearly tie the events of the story together and to provide a contemporary link and voice for the

audience. The Storyteller also takes on the role of worship leader near the end of the musical. The character can be played by a man or a woman; you can also cast someone of virtually any age, from a talented teen to an energetic senior.

Although you can, conceivably, cast a non-singer and let the Storyteller's two solos be performed by soloists from the choir, it is far more dramatic to have the Storyteller perform both "One More Silent Night" and "While You Were Sleeping." This will create a tighter theatrical continuity for the production. The Storyteller should possess an engaging and high-energy persona, possessing the ability to talk directly to a large audience and hold the stage. (For those of you who are familiar with musical theatre, the Storyteller resembles the characters of the Narrator in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and the Leading Player in *Pippin*.)

- **Miriam.** Miriam is the proprietress of a small inn in Bethlehem. She has two young children and so the part can easily be played by a woman in her mid-20's up until her early 40's. Although it is never stated outright, Miriam is a widow who is running the inn after her husband's death. She is, as the Storyteller says, affable, stubborn...and loud. This is a classic character part which should be played with a certain broad, comic touch, without losing the character's believability. Because Miriam interacts consistently with the children in the musical (including the children's vocal group), it would be helpful if the actress playing this role was very comfortable with youngsters – and experienced in helping manage them! Miriam can certainly be played by a non-singer; the script assigns the short opening solo in "O Come Little Children" (in the "Precious Jesus, Precious Savior" medley) to her, but this solo can be talk-sung or even performed by a soloist from the choir.
- **Cassius.** Cassius is a world-weary, hardened Roman census-taker. He has been assigned to Bethlehem against his will and finds himself on the evening of the story in a darkly reflective mood. As he later admits, he was once addicted to power, but by the dawn of Christmas morning, finds himself ready to vow allegiance to a new King. Cassius can certainly be played by an actor of almost any age, but it would prove advantageous to cast someone significantly older than the actor playing Seth. This would help distinguish their perspectives and also provide a good contrast vocally. (I always envisioned Cassius to be between the ages of 45-60). Cassius needs to sing a modestly-ranged solo on "My Heart Is Bethlehem."
- **Hannah.** Hannah is a tender-hearted, sad young girl who has worked at the Bethlehem inn for many years. She lost her parents when she was young and was taken in by Miriam. Although she functions as a servant at the inn, she is really more of a big sister to Sarah and Aaron. Lonely and feeling abandoned by God, Hannah rediscovers her faith with the new life that is born in the stable. Hannah can also be played by an actress of varying ages, but I would suggest that she be younger (or at the very least played younger) than the actress playing Miriam. (I

wrote the part of Hannah to be played between the ages of 15-30). Hannah also has a mid-voiced solo on “My Heart Is Bethlehem.”

- **Seth.** Seth is described by the Storyteller as a practical man – someone who is only concerned with matters of immediate necessity and comfort. This philosophy has served Seth well during his years of herding sheep in the hills over Bethlehem, but lately, he seems to be searching for something more. When Rebekah asks her uncle if he can hear the angels’ song, he replies sadly, “No. I wish I could.” Seth does eventually hear the angels’ song as he holds the newborn Christ Child...and gazes into the face of God. Seth’s age is also flexible, but I would cast an actor younger than the actor playing Cassius. I imagine Seth to be anywhere between the ages of 25-40. Seth has the third solo on “My Heart Is Bethlehem.”
- **Nathan.** Nathan is Seth’s brother and Rebekah’s father. He is everything Seth is not: where Seth is practical and a man of the soil, Nathan is a dreamer and always has his eyes fixed on the skies. Optimistic, excitable, and somewhat of a large child himself, he hears the angels with Rebekah and rushes back to the hills to receive their good news. Although written (and recorded) as a male part, Nathan can be turned into a female role quite easily and played by a woman. (Women did help tend sheep during this time period; in fact, entire extended families served as tenders of sheep – which is the case here.) Simply rename the character with an appropriate Biblical name and make her Seth’s sister. Nathan can be played between the ages of 25-40. He does not sing any solos.

The Children

There are three major parts for children in *A Baby Changes Everything*. This presents a wonderful opportunity – and a clear challenge. Children always add a terrific measure of energy, realism, and warmth to any production. But they are also occasionally unpredictable and take an extra amount of rehearsal to integrate them naturally into adult dramatic scenes. Choose your three actors carefully and make certain they have the discipline, maturity...and *time*...to devote to your production. (Children of adult performers in the production sometimes make perfect choices since they can travel with their parents and be looked after between scene rehearsals.) All three children’s parts can, conceivably, be played by either gender and at any age between 5-12. None of them have to sing solos. (Although the script assigns the a cappella rendering of the final stanza of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” in Underscore 6 to Sarah, there are a wide variety of performance options, as described in the Scene-by-Scene Staging Suggestions.)

- **Aaron.** Aaron is Miriam’s youngest child. Precocious, inquisitive, and blunt-as-only-small-children-can-be, Aaron loves God’s Word and has “written it on his

heart.” He has made friends with Cassius over his week’s stay at the inn and wants nothing more than to see the scowling man smile. Aaron is played on the recording by a pistol of a kid who is barely 5 years old. The younger you cast this part, the more effective it will be.

- **Sarah.** Miriam’s older child, Sarah, possess an infectious wonder at the event of birth. She is certain that this miracle will finally bring joy to her friend Hannah, who has been sad for so long. Your chief challenge with Sarah is to help her create a sense of excitement without rushing her lines. Sarah can be played by a young girl at any age, but the ages of 7-9 may prove the best. In addition to her part, Sarah has been given an optional closing prayer and optional a cappella solo. (See alternative performance options in the Scene-by-Scene Staging section.)
- **Rebekah.** Seth’s niece literally enters the scene with her eyes fixed on the heavens. A dreamer like her father Nathan, Rebekah is also a young girl of firm faith and is the first to hear the angels sing. She eventually wakes up her uncle in time to hear the newborn Savior of the world cry. She has been scripted as the oldest of the children, and ideally will be played by a child between 8-12.

Singing-Only Parts

- **Gabriel.** The angel Gabriel sings the tenor solo in “Gloria in Excelsis Deo.” It is intended that the part be dramatically rendered and sung.
- **Soloist for “A Baby Changes Everything” and “A Baby Changes Everything Reprise.”** The title song(s) of the musical is sung by a female soloist from the choir. Specific action for the character of Hannah is scripted to occur during this emotional song. (See the Scene-by-Scene Staging section.) Although it is assumed that the same soloist will sing both the song and the reprise, you can certainly share the wealth and have different soloists on these two powerhouse numbers.
- **The children.** A small group of children in Biblical costume will enter down the aisles at the beginning of “Precious Jesus, Precious Savior” to sing this worship medley around the manger.

Non-Speaking Parts

There are several additional dramatic characters that don’t have individual lines but will need to be cast (and costumed) to help complete the various scenes.

- **Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus.** The holy family never speaks or sings but is, obviously, a central part of this story. You might consider casting a young family with a new infant in these parts. (Using a live baby is an individual choice you will need to make for this production. Remember that a significant amount of time is spent in the stable, and that the infant Jesus must be held by several different individuals.)
- **Bethlehem Extras (optional).** You can elect to cast a small group (4-8) “Bethlehem extras” that will be costumed in Biblical attire and will serve as part of the “One More Silent Night” number and any subsequent scenes you desire.
- **Several shepherds.** You will need to cast and costume several additional shepherds who will enter with Nathan and Rebekah in Scene E and approach the manger.

SCENE-BY-SCENE STAGING SUGGESTIONS

The following discussion of staging ideas for the songs and dramatic scenes in *A Baby Changes Everything* is meant to help spark your own creativity. Because each auditorium’s space and each church’s technical resources are so unique, these ideas are purposely broad in nature and there are often multiple approaches offered. Please use them as suggestions only...trust your own directorial instincts and make your production your own!

I will start with some general staging categories and principles, and then move to a scene-by scene discussion.

General Staging Principles: The Songs

Reflecting the “hybrid” nature of the musical, the songs of *A Baby Changes Everything* can be split into three different categories. These categories suggest the type of staging that should be used in presenting these numbers.

- Theatrical Songs. These songs are completely theatrical in nature. They are sung by actual characters in the musical and so should be presented dramatically, letting the characters and context of the story carry the number without external

enhancements. These songs include “Gloria in Excelsis Deo,” “A Baby Changes Everything (Reprise),” and “My Heart Is Bethlehem.”

- Narrative Songs. These songs are narrative in nature, commenting on the themes and incidents in the story. The songs are largely sung by the choir and, in two incidents, the character of the Storyteller, who is himself a narrative character. As opposed to the theatrical songs described above, these four narrative songs would benefit from visual and performance enhancements, including media, dance, and/or small character ensembles. These songs include “One More Silent Night,” “Your Light Has Come,” “A Baby Changes Everything,” and “While You Were Sleeping.”
- Audience Participatory Songs. These songs invite the audience to join in corporate worship moments. One song is theatrical in nature (“Precious Jesus, Precious Savior” with “O Come, Little Children” and “We Fall Down”) and one song is narrative in nature (“Come and Worship Medley”), and each should be staged accordingly, with the added feature of inviting the audience to participate.

General Staging Principles: The Scenes

The **dramatic scenes** in *A Baby Changes Everything* have been designated by letters. (There are so many numbers in a musical – pages numbers, measure numbers, trax points, etc. – it seemed helpful to use an alternate method of labeling.) These scene letters are primarily “rehearsal markers” to help you and your actors and production team communicate; there really are no scene breaks in the production. The musical should be performed without interruption, each scene flowing seamlessly into the next.

Special Note: “Where are Scenes A and E?” *The labels for Scenes A and E were inadvertently left out of the printed choral book. Please advise your production team to enter the labels by hand:*

SCENE A is the Storyteller’s monologue that occurs over m.5 to 38 in the

“Prologue” and over the opening measures of “One More Silent Night.” This scene is found at the top of pg. 8 in the choral book.

SCENE E is the Storyteller’s monologue that occurs over “Underscore 4,”

directly after the conclusion of “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” and preceding

“Precious Jesus, Precious Savior.” This scene is found at the top of pg. 87 in

the choral book.

The dramatic scenes should be performed in dedicated dramatic spaces, defined by the set pieces of your choice. The two permanent areas are the inn and the stable, most probably placed at the far right and left areas of your platform. The scenes are performed realistically and with warmth, but should retain the “higher energy” delivery that is appropriate for dialogue that connects musical numbers.

The **Storyteller** begins every scene, providing a narrative bridge from the previous song. He can deliver these short monologues from center stage, from the sides of the stage, even from the floor of the audience. He can move about as he speaks or he can remain stationary. These decisions are entirely yours. Once each of his monologues are complete, he can either exit until his next monologue or he can sit on a tall stool over to one side, watching the action of the scene. Whichever approach you choose, just remember to be consistent throughout the production.

Scene by Scene Staging Suggestions

“Prologue”/Scene A

“The Prologue” underscores the Storyteller’s opening monologue to the audience, drawing strong parallels between Bethlehem and our world today. Although the narration references “Christmas Eve, 2009 A.D.,” you are welcome to insert the specific date that you are performing the musical. You can also substitute the name of your specific city in place of “our world.” This would make the link that much stronger for your audience.

As the auditorium lights dim, it would be very atmospheric to light the stage area in blue lights, backed by a backdrop or cyc of stars. (You might also consider creating a black silhouette of a Bethlehem skyline to run the length of your stage.) The Storyteller should be lit by a follow spot as he appears to begin his monologue to the audience. He can enter down the aisle of the auditorium or from the side of the stage. The images referenced in the opening monologue might be shown in a series of media images during the monologue – especially images from local communities, the nation, and the world. After the Prologue music ends, the Storyteller continues to talk, segueing into the beginning of “One More Silent Night.”

“One More Silent Night”

The opening number of the *A Baby Changes Everything*, “One More Silent Night,” describes the emotional urgency in ancient Bethlehem as they wait for the Messiah. The song begins and ends with solos for the Storyteller, but I suggest you keep him on stage and in the center of your staging for the entire song. (He can easily sing the melody with the choir throughout the song, following the basic vocal arrangement established in the first stanza.)

There are basically two functions that “One More Silent Night” can perform: The song can either be used to set the emotional atmosphere for the musical or it can be used to begin the story. Your choice as to the function will determine how you stage this number.

If you would like to simply set the atmosphere with this song, then you should probably enhance the number with an additional visual element such as media projections. The media images can take their clues from the imagery of the lyrics: burning flame, darkened streets, distant star, etc. You can also use traditional artistic renditions of Bethlehem and/or other rural scenes of the day. The choir will provide the exciting music and the Storyteller will keep the visual, personal connection with the audience.

A second option is to use “One More Silent Night” to begin to tell the story. For this approach you’ll need to cast a small ensemble of actor/singers who will play, in essence, a mini-chorus. (For convenience in the remainder of these production notes, I’ll refer to them as the Bethlehem Extras.) They will be dressed in Biblical attire and many should carry props (bundles, baskets, staffs, etc.). Depending upon the size of your stage, the number of Bethlehem Extras could be as few as six and probably not more than 12. I would make sure you have a fairly equal number of men and women. They will sing the entirety of “One More Silent Night” along with the choir – but the Bethlehem Extras will interact with each other and also sing directly to the audience, just as a Broadway-style chorus would sing. You can easily pace the number in this manner. After the Storyteller sings his opening solo, the Bethlehem Extras can enter, singing, down the aisles of the auditorium and/or from stage right and stage left. They should all be on stage and center for the “distant star” stanza (m. 56-66), which they will sing directly to the audience. At the start of the “No room...” sequence (m. 84-91), Miriam can enter from the inn set and mingle with the Bethlehem Extras center stage. Although they will continue singing, they will interact with Miriam, who will send each of them (individually, or as couples) away, indicating there is “no room in the inn.” This sequence should be completed by m. 91, allowing the Bethlehem Extras to turn full front and sing the final stanzas to the audience. The Storyteller, who has continued to sing from the side of the platform once the Bethlehem Extras took the stage, now returns to end the song center stage.

If you do elect to use the Bethlehem Extras option and stage this number with a small group of townspeople, then you need to bring this group back at least two more times in the production. (A theatre “rule” is to never do anything once; this way, you will be stylistically consistent.) I will suggest other places for you to use this group.

Scene B

As “**Underscore 1**” begins, the Storyteller steps forward to talk directly to the audience. (“Underscore 1” will taper off naturally under the scene.) If you’ve used the Bethlehem Extras, they should move naturally toward the inn set, talking in an physically animated but vocally muted fashion among themselves. Miriam will enter (earlier than indicated in the script) and “stop” them. She’ll deliver her first lines directly to the group, and with “Thank you for your patronage and your haste in vacating the premises!” they move off stage, grumbling. If you haven’t used the Bethlehem Extras, then the script proceeds as written. Miriam makes a “loud” entrance into the inn set, followed by her two children. Miriam calls after the last customers who, presumably, have just departed. The only one who remains in the inn is Cassius, who is busy at work at one of the tables. He is writing on parchments. A lit lantern sits on the table next to his work.

Miriam sets Aaron and Sarah to work “cleaning up.” You will need to set a very specific course of action for the children; they must truly have work to do, it must not distract from the scene between Miriam and Cassius, and the activity must be finished by the time Miriam says, “Aaron...Sarah...come now.” If you have room, place one additional table upstage in the inn set and preset it with plates, utensils and (possibly fake) food. Then the children’s work will involve one specific area. They can clear the table’s objects into several large baskets and place them upstage. If an extra table isn’t possible, one of the children can sweep and the other can fold modest table cloths to put in a trunk or basket.

Miriam is engaged in simple clean-up work herself until she stops to confront Cassius directly at “Cassius, listen to me.” This is when Cassius also stops working and gives Miriam his undivided attention. This progression will help build the scene.

The parchment (with the Old Testament Messianic prophecies) that Miriam hands Cassius can be produced from a pocket in her costume or from a box or other specified location in your inn set. She can have it with her when she sits down next to Cassius, or you can work her movement to retrieve the parchment into your blocking.

After the conclusion of Miriam’s scene with Cassius, she exits with Sarah. Aaron hangs back, watching Cassius intently. Their interaction must be very sweet and unaffected. After Aaron exits, the introduction to “Your Light Has Come” begins. It would be appropriate to alter the lighting at this point, to set the atmosphere for the coming song.

“Your Light Has Come”

As “Your Light Has Come” begins, the music turns minor with a Hebraic flavor. Cassius closely studies the parchment, reading the Scripture aloud. The power of the prophecies stuns him, and he stops, looking up and reflecting deeply as the choral music takes over. This sequence repeats itself three times, as Cassius reads three Scriptures and reflects three times as the choir musically expresses the truths of the prophecies read.

The inn scene should remain dimly lit during the entire song; Cassius’ actions and words will maintain the dramatic continuity in the musical number. Because “Your Light Has Come” is narrative in style, it would be appropriate to communicate the themes of the song through additional visual means. This song would make a perfect vehicle for an interpretive dance. The first two verses/choruses could be interpreted by a solo dancer or a duo of dancers. With the change of tempo at m. 73, a dance ensemble could enter. Iconic images of the Judaic heritage could be incorporated into the dance, including banners with Hebrew writing, torches, and a large menorah. (These same images could also be used in a series of media slides or video.)

After the conclusion of the song, “**Underscore 2**” begins. Cassius looks at the parchment a final time and speaks to himself. Then he rolls the parchment up and prays aloud. At the conclusion of his prayer, Cassius blows out his lantern, quietly exiting in the dark. At the exact same moment Cassius extinguishes his light, Hannah should light her lantern. Hannah should be placed at a distance from the inn set – perhaps in the open space of the

center stage or on the floor of the auditorium. The idea is that she is entering the inn's main room from another area.

Scene C

The Storyteller introduces Hannah to the audience as she makes her rather frantic entrance into the inn set. She is anxiously looking for Miriam. Miriam responds to her calls and enters quickly with Sarah. Miriam and Hannah's exchange must have an urgent energy; it should be animated and driven by their mutual concern for the young family in the stable. After Miriam exits in the direction of the stable, Hannah and Sarah bring forward the large wooden box (or trunk) to gather the provisions, blankets and swaddling cloths that Miriam requested. Rather than have the two girls bend over the box, it would prove helpful to put the box on the table or one of the benches in the inn. You will want to be sure there are enough items in the box to keep the girls busy with work, but not so many that the props begin to distract the actors from their dialogue. When Sarah is ready to exit, she should have a folded blanket or two and some swaddling cloth in her arms. Miriam calls to Sarah from offstage as Sarah exits in the direction of the stable.

As the music to "A Baby Changes Everything" begins, Hannah becomes deeply reflective, and clutches one of the childhood items from the box.

"A Baby Changes Everything"

This powerful emotional song that recounts Mary and Joseph's story up to and including the birth of Christ should be sung by a soloist from the choir. (The point of view of the lyrics really makes this song inappropriate for Hannah to sing herself; she could not possibly know the circumstances surrounding Mary's pregnancy and her relationship to Joseph, nor could she foresee the coming heavenly response.) The song is narrative in structure, providing a key chapter in the story of the birth of our Savior.

During the song, Hannah should slowly go through the items in the box, pausing with each toy or doll she extracts. These evoke powerful personal memories for her, greatly enhanced by the impending birth in the stable. You might time this activity so that a new item is taken out as each musical section in the song changes.

At m. 75-77, a newborn baby is heard crying. (This sound effect is included on the left channel of the Split-Trax mix, allowing you flexibility with this effect. You can also elect to perform the effect live or use an alternate sound effect. But it is important that the specific event of the birth of Jesus is indicated in this manner.) Hannah responds to this joyous sound with relief and happiness. As the song ends, she holds a small handmade doll close to herself. Immediately after the end of "A Baby Changes Everything," "**Underscore 3**" begins. Hannah closes her eyes and prays out loud. At the conclusion of the prayer, she blows out her lantern, just as Seth lights his lantern from another area. Hannah will then quietly exit in the dark toward the area of the stable. Because Seth, Nathan and Rebekah will be making their entrance as if from a road outside the inn, it is suggested that Seth be situated in the auditorium space, perhaps in an aisle. "Underscore 3" continues under the beginning of Scene D, eventually fading out under the dialogue.

Scene D

As the Storyteller introduces Seth, Nathan and Rebekah to the audience, they make their entrance, moving toward the inn area. They should all bring at least one bundle or sack – their “provisions.” They drop them just outside the inn set, and Nathan calls “into” the inn. Hannah should hear them, light her lantern, and make her entrance from the direction of the stable. The majority of Scene D should take place in the inn set. Rebekah keeps her attention focused on the sky, as she has from the beginning of the scene. Once the music to “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” begins and the first angel solo is heard, she should separate herself from the rest of the group as she eagerly responds to the music only she can hear.

Hannah motions for Seth to follow her into the inn as she says, “Yes, I have some blankets. Just follow me,” and proceeds to exit into the inn set and off stage. Seth should follow Hannah, but not completely exit, pausing to look back and exchange his final dialogue with Nathan and Rebekah. As the music grows, Nathan begins to hear the angels, and he and Rebekah exit by running down the aisles of the auditorium in great excitement. Seth shakes his head in frustration, saying his final line to himself – “Why don’t I hear anything?” After this line he blows out his lantern and exits in the dark into the inn area, in the exact direction that Hannah used for her exit.

“Gloria in Excelsis Deo”

This exuberant number is a full dramatic presentation of the angels’ announcement of the birth of our Savior. There are several ways that you can present this exciting sequence.

First of all, you can build the number around the character of Gabriel, the featured soloist of the song. In this approach Gabriel will be fully costumed and will sing the entire song. He can be revealed with sudden bright light on m. 41 or m. 44. He will sing the opening stanzas with the choir then take his extended solo from m. 56-87. He will sing the rest of the song with the choir, as before. Gabriel should be placed center stage and as far above the stage as you can safely place him; if you have placed your choir center stage, Gabriel can appear in front of them, behind them, or even among them – as long as he is clearly lit and elevated.

Another approach is to costume a small ensemble of angels who will accompany Gabriel. (You can use your same group of Bethlehem Extras from the opening scene, or you can use a dance ensemble.) This group will interpret the number with movement or sing with the choir as if to visually represent the heavenly host and their song. Gabriel will still remain the featured figure and will perform his solo as a fully costumed, dramatic character.

A third idea is not to costume any individuals as angels and to simply perform the number vocally, allowing Gabriel’s solo to be performed by a soloist from the choir. Visual interest can be provided by lighting, media images, or both. (Sometimes what an audience imagines is far more powerful than what you can actually create.)

And, of course, you can combine any of the above approaches. After the conclusion of the number, “**Underscore 4**” begins. The lights will dim out on Gabriel and/or the angels, and the Storyteller will come forward to talk with the audience.

Scene E

The scenic focus of *A Baby Changes Everything* now shifts from the inn to the stable. The infant Christ has been born, and the different characters in the musical will each find their way to the manger scene. The group that finds their way first, however, is the children. The underscore changes to herald their arrival. You should bring the lights up on the holy family in the stable during the Storyteller’s monologue.

Miriam slowly approaches the manger, along with Sarah and Aaron. They stand at the manger in wonder. When the Storyteller is finished speaking, Miriam turns toward the back of the auditorium (or the sides of the platform) and calls out happily for the children to come and see the baby Jesus. This is the signal for the children to start running down the aisle toward the stable. Encourage the children to laugh and chatter happily, to establish a mood of uninhibited joy. The children should be costumed in Biblical attire. (Time this entrance carefully. If the aisles are too long, have the children enter from the side of the stage area. Rather than use your standing children’s choir, you might want to assemble a specially-formed choir of the children participating in the musical. Put out a special call for kids under the age of 7; the younger the children, the more charming the effect. You can have several adult women enter with them, also costumed Biblically. They will help keep control, assist in getting the children in place, and make certain the children are ready for their vocal entrance.)

“Precious Jesus, Precious Savior” with “O Come, Little Children” and “We Fall Down”

The female solo (m. 4-12) should be performed by Miriam, welcoming the children as they arrive at the manger. (Even if your actress playing Miriam isn’t a true singer, simply have her talk-sing this chorus.) The children join in the chorus at m. 14. Miriam (and any other adults who may have accompanied the children) should sing with them.

At m. 23, the mood turns more worshipful. Be sure that all of the children have entered and are in place by this point. As the following worship sequence starts, Nathan, Rebekah, and several shepherds should slowly enter down the aisles of the auditorium. You can also have the Bethlehem Extras group return at this time, also entering slowly from various points in the auditorium. They will all naturally join the group of children in worship around the manger.

This medley was created so that the children around the manger can lead the audience in worship. If you have a media screen in your auditorium, you should project the lyrics of the three songs so that the audience might sing with the children. (If needed, the Storyteller can step forward to serve as a worship leader and encourage the audience to sing.) The audience can sing on all three songs, or join in (as scripted) on “We Fall Down.” The sequence should end with the children singing alone on the final stanza of “Precious Jesus, Precious Savior.”

At the conclusion of the song, you have a decision to make. If you like, you can leave your children gathered around the manger for the remainder of the musical. However, you may decide to exit the group (or at least the younger children in the group) at this point.

At this time, Miriam beckons Sarah, Aaron and Rebekah to come forward. She speaks to them privately, as the Storyteller talks to the audience. The introduction to “While You Were Sleeping” begins midway through the Storyteller’s monologue. At this point, have Miriam and several other adults help light three small lanterns for Sarah, Aaron and Rebekah to take with them. When the Storyteller begins his solo in “While You Were Sleeping,” the three children should head off in different directions. I suggest you send one off right (on the auditorium floor), one off left (also on the auditorium floor), and one down the center aisle.

“While You Were Sleeping”

This compelling song from Casting Crowns provides the perfect thematic statement for the musical: “O Bethlehem, what have you missed while you were sleeping? Will you go down in history as a city with no room for its King?” The lights on the stable set can dim slightly – but not go out – during the Storyteller’s solo (m. 10-27). He sings directly to the audience. As he did in “One More Silent Night,” the Storyteller should remain onstage during the entire song; I suggest he sing (on the melody) with the choir throughout, and remain a central part of the stage picture.

One additional idea is to not have the choir sing on this number, but give the choral parts to your Bethlehem Extras ensemble. If you have cast a group of singers in the true Broadway-style chorus tradition, this would be an ideal number to feature them. Along with the Storyteller they will sing this song directly to the audience.

During the instrumental interlude (m. 39-50), three short scenes occur in locales apart from the stable. They can be located in the same general areas through which Sarah, Aaron and Rebekah exited: stage/floor right, stage/floor left, and the center aisle. Be sure the three scenes are well lit and miked. Cassius and Aaron first appear, then Hannah and Sarah, and finally Seth and Rebekah. Each should be carrying their lanterns. Starting at m. 51, the three children slowly lead the three adults to the manger area. If you can’t truly dim out your full stage during these three scenes, be sure the Storyteller (and possibly the Bethlehem Extras ensemble) don’t visually detract. They can either all turn their heads and watch each of the scenes as they happen or they can drop their heads until it is time to sing again. (If you use the Bethlehem Extras for this number, they should rejoin the manger scene after “While You Were Sleeping” concludes.)

“A Baby Changes Everything (Reprise)”/Scene G

The end of “While You Were Sleeping” segues directly into the beginning of “A Baby Changes Everything (Reprise)” and Scene G. Miriam stands and welcomes Cassius, Hannah and Seth to the manger. Aaron, Sarah and Rebekah kneel by the manger. Miriam gently picks up the infant Christ and places Him in Cassius’ arms, as indicated.

A soloist from the choir (the same one as before, or another singer) starts her solo at m. 14. During the remainder of the number, Cassius will gently put the infant in Hannah's arms, who will then put the Child in Seth's arms. They each regard the infant with wonder and a deep sense of understanding of who the Child is and what He has come to do. Their three short solos (m. 33-39) reveal this profound epiphany. The infant should be put back into Mary's arms before the solos begin. (She can continue to hold Him or put Him back into the manger.)

Scene H

At the conclusion of "A Baby Changes Everything (Reprise)," the music to "**Underscore 5**" begins. The nativity scene "freezes" as lights dim on the scene. Cassius, Hannah, and Seth slowly move out of the scene and down to the front of the stage. They should slowly turn to face the audience from three individual areas: stage right, center stage, and stage left. Ideally they will be lit by three separate pools of soft light. They each speak directly to the audience, as scripted and timed, over "Underscore 5." Although this sequence must be carefully timed, encourage your actors not to rush their lines; they must speak from their hearts. The end of "Underscore 5" segues directly into the beginning of "My Heart Is Bethlehem."

"My Heart Is Bethlehem"

This simple, heart-felt song is sung directly to the audience – first by the characters Cassius, Hannah and Seth, and then they are joined by the choir. Each of the three characters should sing their solos from their respective stage areas, in individual pools of light. When the choir joins them at m. 55, the entire stage can dim up slightly. Other characters from the musical (Miriam, Nathan, Aaron, Sarah, Rebekah) can also move forward to join Cassius, Hannah and Seth along the front of the stage. The entire cast should sing this invitation directly to the audience, "My wish for you this Christmas Eve..."

Scene I

At the end of the "My Heart Is Bethlehem," the lights should dim on stage and the assembled cast should back up several steps. At this time your pastor can deliver a message or invitation. You can also insert a time of prayer or worship. If you wish for the musical to continue uninterrupted, I have provided a simple prayer to be voiced by the character of Sarah. It is underscored by "**Underscore 6.**" She should speak directly to the audience from a single pool of light. This prayer segues into an (optional) a cappella rendering of the final stanza of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." This short solo could be performed by Sarah, by any child soloist, by a small group of children, by an adult (especially the character of Miriam) singing with a child soloist, or even by the choir. You could also elect to have Sarah (or someone else) speak the lyrics as the end of the prayer. This prayer leads directly into the beginning of the Finale.

"Come and Worship Medley"

As the Finale's music begins, lights should flood the stage. The entire cast moves forward once again to the front of the platform. (You may take lights out on the stable scene, or

you can keep the stage scene lit with the holy family. If the stable remains lit, the cast should gather around the stable so that the nativity scene remains the visual center of attention.) The Storyteller will function as worship leader for the Finale and invite the audience to sing at the appropriate places.

Cassius, Hannah, Seth and the Storyteller have inserted declarations from the prophetic Scriptures of Isaiah during the opening reprise of “Your Light Has Come.” To help the audience join in and sing the three carols, the Storyteller could invite the audience during m. 59-60, perhaps saying “Come to Bethlehem, and join us in praising the newborn Savior!” The three carols were selected for their strong “come to Bethlehem” references. The lyrics can be projected on a media screen. You can also use the final worship medley as an opportunity to process the magi in and have them kneel in front of the stable and offer their gifts. The audience stops singing at m. 127, as the choir takes over for the huge choral ending. If possible, visually enhance the final measures of the “Come and Worship Medley” by once again lighting up the stable area, having Gabriel reappear, and projecting a large star of Bethlehem over the scene.