

“The Nativity Set”

by
Paul Neil

What This is a short play about a family putting together the nativity set that’s been passed down through generations. When interspersed with songs by the congregation, choir, or special singers, this can be expanded to about an hour.

Themes: Christmas, Family, Nativity, Choir, Musical

Who Austin- husband and father. Age 35-55
Sue- wife and mother. Age 35-55
Sam- teenaged son. Age 13-17
Abigail- daughter. Age 8-12.

When A week or so before Christmas.

Wear (Props) Austin and Sue return home in the first scene, so coats and scarves may be appropriate over their normal street clothes. Sam should be dressed casually. To reflect her enthusiasm, Abigail could be wearing a “Happy Birthday, Jesus” shirt or something similar. Additionally, a realistic baby doll (or a real baby, if you’re brave) appears in the final couple of scenes.

Why Luke 2

How A simple living room set—can be suggested by a couch, chair, and coffee table. A decent-sized vintage-looking Nativity set, including a stable, is needed. The poems can be written out on index cards made to look aged.

Time Approximately 18-20 minutes with no songs. About an hour with songs in all the suggested places.

Sam is laying on the couch playing games on his phone. Abigail is struggling to carry in several boxes from the hall. One box already on stage should contain the nativity set pieces.

Abigail: Samuel, Mom and Dad are gonna be home from choir practice soon, and you're gonna be in trouble for not helping me get the nativity set out!

Sam: *(doesn't look up from his phone)* Looks like you're doing a pretty good job, sis.

Abigail: You'd better at least help me set it up.

Sam: Yeah, sure. Definitely. Whatever you say.

Abigail: Ugh! *(she exits to get another box)*

Sam: BAM! Gotcha. Try to sneak up on me will ya?

Abigail: *(enters)* You have to help me. I can't reach the rest of the pieces.

Sam: Kinda pointless if you ask me. Put up all these decorations only to take them down again in a couple weeks.

Abigail: You're such a heathen. I love all the decorations. And the nativity should've been out a month ago!

Sam: We all know that, Abigail. You've been pestering mom about it since Labor Day.

Abigail: It's my favorite part! Don't you have a favorite part of Christmas?

Sam: Umm...ham, I guess. Maybe opening presents. Oh, and last year when Santa came to visit and slipped on the ice on the front porch. That one paramedic who came to patch him up—she was really funny. She was my favorite part of that Christmas.

Abigail: You need help. *(puts hands on hips)* Samuel, Mom and Dad are gonna be home anytime, and I'm gonna tell them that you didn't help me like you were supposed to.

Sam: FINE.

Sam puts his phone down, they both exit. Sue and Austin enter, wearing coats.

Sue: Where are the kids?

Austin: *(calling out)* Samuel! Abigail!

Sam: *(offstage)* Be right there, Dad!

Austin looks at his watch.

Austin: We gotta get this show on the road so we can finish up before our special guest arrives.

Sue: Oh, Austin, I'm so glad it worked out that we could do this. Abigail is going to be so excited.

They hear the kids approaching offstage.

Austin: Shhh. Not a word.

Sam and Abigail enter, carrying the rest of the Nativity boxes.

Abigail: Mom! Dad! Come on! Let's get started! I've been sooooo patient.

Sam: Patient? I don't think that word means what you think it means.

Sue takes a seat in the chair. Austin knocks Sam's legs off the couch so he can sit.

Austin: Alright. I guess we're ready.

Abigail: Great. *(gung-ho)* Now let's do this thing!

Austin: *(chuckles)* OK then. I do appreciate your enthusiasm, Abigail. It means a lot to me! As always, I'll start with the note. *(pulls a yellowed piece of paper from the nativity box.)* "Dear Austin, the first Christmas I was married to your grandmother, we were given this beautiful nativity set by a dear friend. Since I fancied myself something of a poet back then, I was inspired to write these poems to accompany it. May it bring you and yours the same joy it has brought to us all these decades. Love, Grandpa Nathaniel."

Sue: I still just think that's so sweet!

Abigail: Here's the first one, Dad!

Abigail hands Austin a yellowed index card from which he reads. As he reads it, Abigail reverently carries the stable to a side table and sets it up angled to face the audience.

Austin: In Bethlehem, a quiet town, there was a little inn.
And out behind it was a shed Sheltered from noise and din.
That stable, plain and filled with dirt, Built some years before,
Would 'ere long host a miracle Upon its earthen floor.
Cows and donkeys, sheep and goats Cozily bedded down.
And soon they'd get to witness As God moved into town.

SONG SUGGESTIONS: "Light of the Stable"; "O Little Town of Bethlehem"; "O Sing a Song of Bethlehem"

Austin: *(looking at the stable)* Looks good, Abigail. What's next?

Sue: *(she holds the figure, admiring it)* This is so beautiful. The artist really captured a peaceful expression on her face.

Sam: *(takes the figure from his mother, looks at it, then says a bit scornfully)* Peaceful. Right after having a baby in a barn. Seems unlikely. We watched a video in health class, and let me just say...

Austin: *(interrupting)* Uh...why don't you just NOT say.

Sue: *(taking the figure back)* Well, you have a point, Sam.

Abigail: Don't encourage him, Mom.

Sue: I'm sure Mary was in pain, and I don't doubt there was some fear and uncertainty in her heart. But she'd been visited by an angel. Even though she didn't know details, she knew that this Baby was sent by God to bring healing and peace and salvation to her and to the whole world. I think that's what I see on her face. Peace...because the Savior has come.

Abigail: Ooooh...let me read the Mary poem! Please, Mom?

Sue: OK. Go ahead.

Sue hands Abigail the card. As Abigail reads, Sue places the Mary figure in the stable.

Abigail: The Virgin Mary, meek but strong,
The Son of God did bear.
She knew her child was not just hers
But for people everywhere
As she knelt down in the straw
With Jesus swaddled tight.
She wept and thanked God for the Child
Born that holy night.

SONG SUGGESTIONS: "Breath of Heaven"; "Be Born in Me"

Sue: *(hands Sam the next card)* Alright, Sam, it's your turn. Read the Joseph poem.

Sam: *(he looks at the card and frowns)* There's part of this one I've never understood. "The Great I Am." What does that even mean?

Austin: Well, you remember the burning bush, right? *(Sam nods)* When God spoke to Moses all those centuries before..."I Am" is the name God gave himself. It would have sounded something like "Yahweh" in Hebrew.

Sam: That's a strange name. "I Am".

Abigail: That's mean. Your name is weird, too. (*separating the syllables and stretching it out to sound alien*) Sah-MOO-ell.

Sue: Samuel is a fine name. We picked it because one of the meanings is "God heard". We knew God heard our prayers when He blessed us with you.

Sam: Aww, shucks.

Abigail: And my name means "my father's joy!" Right?

Austin: Yep. And you are!

Sue: And just like your names...the name that God gave for Himself has a lot of meaning, too. Part of it is that He was saying I am—and I will be—all you need.

Sam: (*conceding*) Ok, I guess that's more cool than strange.

Abigail: Just read the poem, Sam.

Sam: Joseph was the one God chose
To call young Mary his bride.
He did not run; He did not flee.
He stayed right by her side.
Though but a lowly carpenter,
He held God's perfect Lamb
And deep down in his soul he knew
The Child was the great I Am.

SONG SUGGESTION: "Joseph's Song" (Michael Card), "Joseph's Lullaby," "I Am a Carpenter"

Abigail: Hey, Dad?

Austin: Mmhmm?

Abigail: Why...why the shepherds? I mean...this seems like kind of a big moment. Why didn't God tell EVERYBODY?

Austin: Because it wasn't time yet. It was still sort of a secret. The Bible doesn't say exactly why the shepherds were chosen, but I can tell you what I think. God just had the best news ever, and since it was sort of a secret, maybe He was just bursting to tell someone. So he sent more angels to announce it to some of the lowest working-class people there were. After all, Jesus came to save them as much as anybody. (*to Sue*) Here, sweetheart, why don't you read this one.

Austin hands Sue the next card.

Sue: The shepherds out in darkened fields
On that quiet night
Could not have known what was to come
When the sky was filled with light.
The angels sang and brought great news
Of joy for all the earth.
Those shepherds were the first to know About the Savior's birth.
The news they heard caused them to go
To find this heav'nly Child.
They left their flocks to worship Him
The Savior, sweet and mild.

SONG SUGGESTION: "The Shepherds Found a Lamb," "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks"

Abigail: These are my favorites! The three kings!

Sue: Well, remember, they weren't exactly kings.

Abigail: Huh?

With these next lines, Sam should pick up steam as he goes. He starts off confidently, but it becomes evident that his brain is working faster than his mouth. By the end of it he is almost manic.

Sam: *(stopping Austin)* Allow me, mom. They weren't kings like King David or King Solomon or King *(struggles for another Biblical king but fails)* ... Kong. They were wise men. Ancient astronomers. Magi? Gift-bringers. Camel-riders from the east. And they might not have been there that same night. Maybe, but maybe not. But whatever...they came...so they're still part of the story. There were three of them. At least, there were three gifts. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Bible doesn't really say how many magi there were. Coulda been two guys that brought it all. Mighta been six. Maybe a few each with gold and frankincense and just one weirdo that brought myrrh. That was a burial spice. A BURIAL SPICE! I mean, seriously, who brings that to a baby? Why not some diapers? Am I right? Hmm?

Everyone stares at him.

Austin: Riiiiight.

Sue: *(to Abigail)* They were wise men, and through signs in the stars, God told them that a new King had been born. And with one extra bright star, God guided them to the Christ child.

Abigail: I remember. And they brought gifts to honor Him.

Sam: Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. *(proud)* I know I got that part right.

Austin: Just read the poem, Sam.

Sam: They turned their wisdom to the sky,
These learn-ed, faithful ones.
And through those twinkling heav'nly lights,
God told them of His Son.
With myrrh and gold and frankincense,
They journeyed many days.
And when they found the baby Boy,
They lavished Him with praise.

SONG SUGGSTION: "I Have Seen the Light" (Chris Machen), "Immanuel (The Kings' King)," "We Three Kings"

Abigail: It's such a wonderful story.

Sam: Wonderful and weird.

Abigail: You can't call the Christmas story weird!

There's a knock on the door. Austin and Sue exchange an excited look and rise from their seats. Sue exits as Austin speaks to the kids.

Austin: Y'all stay here. We'll be right back.

He follows Sue through the exit.

Abigail: *(to Sam, with excitement)* Who do you think it could be?

Sam: Hopefully somebody collecting little sisters for charity. Seriously, it's none of your business.

Abigail: I find your lack of curiosity disturbing. Nobody just knocks on the door anymore. Do you think Mom and Dad knew somebody was coming?

Sam: Don't know. Don't care.

Abigail sticks her tongue out at Sam. She peeks down the hall.

Abigail: It's two people. Mom and Dad are talking to them. Ohh...oh! Here they come!

Austin and Sue enter. Austin is carrying a diaper bag. Sue is carrying a baby.

Abigail: *(squeals)* It's a BABY!!!!

Sam: *(surprised)* Who is THAT? *(points at the baby)*

Sue: This is Nathaniel. His mother, Marta, has been coming to church for a few months. She's having surgery, and her family can't get here for a few days.

Austin: So, Nathaniel is going to be staying with us for a little while his momma is in the hospital.

Sam: Nathaniel. *(to Austin)* Just like your grandpa.

Sam: Hey, Dad, what does that name mean?

Austin: *(smiles)* Grandpa loved to tell it. Nathaniel means Gift of God.

Sam: *(sincere)* Yep. That's just right.

SONG SUGGESTIONS: Any good mid-tempo or up-tempo Christmas song about Jesus.

Abigail: Nathaniel got here just in time. There's just one more piece to put in the manger scene. Do you want to read this one, Mom?

Sue doesn't answer. Everyone turns to look. She is intently looking into the baby's face, smiling. Is she crying as well? We can't quite tell.

Sue: *(quietly, with a voice full of emotion)* You were just like this once, Sam.

Abigail: *(sincerely)* Aww, don't cry, Mom. It's not your fault Sam turned out the way he did.

Sue: *(laughs softly)* That's not why I'm crying, Abigail. I've just been thinking that Jesus was just like this, too. A tiny baby boy. Totally helpless and dependent on His mother.

Austin: *(nodding, he gets what she's saying)* And yet He was God. He came just like one of us so that He could close the gap that sin opened.

Sue: Sam, I think you're right. It's a weird story. But it's weird...and wonderful. He loves us so much that He gave up the splendor of heaven...for a dirty, smelly stable.

Sam: *(thoughtfully)* Yeah...yeah that is pretty great.

Sue: *(to Sam)* Would you like to hold Nathaniel?

Sam: Uh...I really don't think...

But it's too late, Sue is transferring the baby to Sam's arms. He is unsure, but as Nathaniel settles in, he relaxes.

Sue: Here, Abigail. Will you put the last piece in?

*She takes the last poem card and reads it as **Abigail** reverently places the Christ child figure in the creche. **Austin** moves beside **Sue**, and they alternate reading the poem.*

Sue: Oh little child
From heaven come down,
Welcome to this earth.
We have not much to offer you—
Nothing that's of worth.

Austin: From God's right hand you've come to this,
A broken, mixed up mess.
You've brought your love, your joy, your peace,
Your grace and forgiveness.

Sue: I have no gold or myrrh to give,
No angelic song to sing.
All I have is soul and heart,
So that is what I bring.

Austin: I will follow you, my King.
From stable to the cross.
For there you'll take my sin on you,
My brokenness and loss.

Sue: You'll bear the load that I could not
And leave it in the grave.
Then You will rise and bring new life
For the world You came to save

Austin: It all starts here in Bethlehem
With a tiny baby boy.
God made flesh to dwell with us?
What great, unspeakable joy!

Sam: *(still looking at the baby he's holding)* Hey, Abigail, I think I have a new favorite part of Christmas.

Abigail sits beside him and reaches out to gently touch the baby.

SUGGESTED SONG: Welcome to Our World (Chris Rice)

THE END