

2004 CHRISTMAS CANTATA NARRATION
"PORTRAITS OF CHRISTMAS"



BEFORE JESUS, OH, WHAT A WONDERFUL CHILD

NARRATOR (Caryl Mosier)

The noise and bustle of the day began earlier than usual in the village. As night gave way to dawn, people were already on the streets. Vendors set out their wares on the corners of the most heavily traveled avenues. Store owners were unlocking the doors to their shops. At home, children were awakened by the excited barking of the street dogs and the complaints of donkeys pulling carts.....

One's imagination is kindled thinking about the conversation of a certain innkeeper and his family at the breakfast table. Did anyone mention the arrival of the young couple the night before? Did anyone ask about their welfare? Did anyone comment on the pregnancy of the girl on the donkey?

But, **(pause)** who had time to talk about them when there was so much excitement in the air? Augustus did the economy of Bethlehem a favor when he decreed a census should be taken. Who could remember when such commerce had come to the village?

No, it was doubtful anyone mentioned the couple's arrival or wondered about the condition of the girl. Everybody was too busy. The day was upon them. The day's bread had to be made. The morning's chores had to be done. There was too much to do to imagine the impossible had occurred.

JOSEPH (Tom Roddam)

(pause after first narration)

This isn't the way I planned it, God. Not at all. My child being born in a stable? This isn't the way I wanted it to be. A cave with sheep and donkeys, hay and straw? My wife giving birth with only the animals to hear her pain?

When you sent the angel and spoke of our son being born - - this isn't what I pictured. I envisioned **Jerusalem, the temple, the priests**, and the people gathered to watch. A pageant perhaps. **A parade...**

After all, **(pause)** this is **the Messiah!**

Any minute now Mary will give birth. Not just an infant, but to God. That's what the angel said. That's what Mary believes. And oh God, that's what I want to believe. But surely you can understand; it's not easy. It seems so...so... unbelievable...

I guess it's foolish of me to question you. Forgive my struggling. Trust doesn't come easy to me, God. But you never said it would be easy, did you?

NARRATOR (Caryl Mosier)

God was about to enter the world as a baby – and his name will be "Jesus"!
(start music)

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BEFORE CELTIC CHRISTMAS (Anita Manning)

"Blessed Are the meek", Jesus explained. "Blessed are the available. Blessed are the conduits, the tunnels, the tools"....

That's why the announcement went first to the shepherds. They didn't ask God if he was sure he knew what he was doing. Had the angel gone to theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had he gone to the elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching. Had he gone to the successful, they would have first looked at their calendars.

So he went to the shepherds. Simple men who didn't have a reputation to protect or an ax to grind or a ladder to climb. Humble men who didn't know enough to tell God angels don't sing to sheep and the messiah won't be found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feeding trough...

So....

While the theologians were sleeping
And the elite were dreaming
And the successful were snoring,
The meek were kneeling.

They were kneeling before the One only the meek will see. They were kneeling before Jesus.

(start music)

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BEFORE EMMANUEL(Robyn Martinez)

Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man...

Let's imagine a white-headed, wizened fellow working his way down the streets of Jerusalem. People in the market call to him, and he waves but doesn't stop. Neighbors greet him and he returns the greeting but doesn't pause. Friends chat on the corner and he smiles but doesn't stop. He has a place to be and he hasn't time to lose...

Simeon's one incredible moment occurs eight days after the birth of Jesus. Joseph and Mary have brought their son to the temple. It's the day of a sacrifice, the day of circumcision, the day of dedication. But for Simeon, it would be a day of celebration...

He stood on tiptoe, wide-eyed and watching for the one who has come to save Israel...

He was waiting with anticipation. Calmly expectant. Eyes open and arms extended. Searching the crowd for the right face, and hoping the face appears today...

(start music) In the end, the prayer of Simeon was answered. Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God; "Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace, as you said" (Luke :2:28-29)

One look into the face of Jesus, and Simeon knew the hope of his life had been fulfilled. One look into the face of our Savior, and we will know the same.

His name? **(pause)** Emmanuel!

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BEFORE GO TELL (Caryl Mosier)

Suppose you could give a gift to Christ, what would it be? How could you possibly select a gift for the One whom not only has everything, but who made everything?...

In addition to the gold, frankincense, and Myrrh, the wise men gave the Savior some gifts we can give him today...

(pause) They put their hope in Jesus.

When everyone else saw a night sky, this small band of men saw a light of promise. The guiding star touched their hearts and they went. They went, seeking Jesus.... their spirits full of hope.

The wise men also gave their time. Before the culmination of their journey the wise men spent many days, months, perhaps as long as two years before locating the prince of heaven. Time brought them to kneel before Jesus.

The final gift the wise men gave was to spread the message of Jesus Christ, our Savior – to tell his story. It is imperative we all must go out into the darkness of our society and tell the world there is hope, real undeniable hope. Go out – spend a moment of your time - tell the story of hope and love – **(start the music here) tell it far and wide!**

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When Love Came Down (Anita Manning)

We all wait in anticipation. Christmas Eve comes and we sit, looking out the window at the soft, falling snow thinking back over two-thousand years to a time "when love came down". It was a wonderful night like this when our savior came down to Earth.

The night he came began as an ordinary night with an ordinary sky.

"An occasional gust stirred the leaves and chilled the air. The stars were diamonds sparkling on black velvet. Fleets of clouds floated in front of the moon...

(start music here)

"The sheep were ordinary. Some fat. Some scrawny. Some with barrel bellies. Some with twig legs. Common animals. No fleece made of gold. No history makers. No blue-ribbon winners. They were simply sheep – Lumpy, sleeping silhouettes on a hillside.

"And the shepherds. Peasants they were. Probably wearing all the clothes they owned. Smelling like sheep and looking just as woolly. They were nameless and simple.

"An ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds...

"But God dances amidst the common. And that night he danced a waltz

"The black sky exploded with brightness. Trees were no longer shadows. Sheep that had been silent became a chorus of curiosity." One minute the shepherds were fast asleep, the next they were rubbing their eyes and "staring into the face of God."
(coincide with trumpets big note)

(right before the time change) "The night ***(pause – new tempo/change)*** was ordinary no more."

SING WITH JOY, GLORIA HALLELUJA

No narration before this

WHO WOULD IMAGINE A KING? (Tom Roddam)

You're excited and scared - the day has come – your wife tells you it is time for the birth of your baby. You rush off to the hospital in anxious anticipation of the arrival of a newborn baby, your very own child! You hope for the best – dream of a life fulfilled - but you know you will have to wait years in anticipation of your child's accomplishments. Will he or she become a doctor, a lawyer, a musician or maybe an artist? At this moment, you can't imagine what your child will become and whose life he might touch. A miracle is about to happen, so you put your trust in God. Now, consider Mary and Joseph – how could they have imagined their tiny babe would be a King!
"THE King"! ***(start music)***

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Winter Medley (Caryl Mosier)

The noise and the bustle begin earlier than usual. As night gives way to dawn, people are already arriving at the mall. Brightly decorated businesses are positioned along the high traffic areas. Store owners unlock the doors to their shops. At home, children are awakened by the excitement of the Christmas season – Santa Claus, Rudolf, Frosty the snowman

Who has time to talk about Jesus when there is so much excitement in the air?
Who can remember when such commerce has come to the town?

How similar this scene is to the events of over two thousands years ago. But what might we be missing in the jingle, jangle of our modern holiday? Will we, like the innkeeper so long ago, let the worldly excitement cause us to miss the real meaning of Christmas?

Heaven's Lamb (Robyn Martinez)

The first Christmas carol ever heard on this earth was brought by heavenly messengers. Angels from on high sang to the lowly shepherds in a remote part of the world known as Judea. God, who created everything, saw our greatest need. An unknown writer has identified this greatest need and told us how it was met:

If our greatest need had been information,
God would have sent us an educator,
If our greatest need had been technology,
God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need had been money,
God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure,
God would have sent us an entertainer,

But our greatest need was forgiveness,
So..... God sent us a Savior!!

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Festival of Carols (Caryl Mosier)

(walking, muffler, many packages, checking off large list, "ooing" while walking to first part of "City sidewalks ..through.. holiday style")

(Singing) "In the air there's a feeling of Christmas. Children laughing, people passing, meeting smile after smile, and on every street corner you hear" *(salvation army bell ringer)* "Silver bells, silver bells. Soon it will be Christmas day!"

The hustle & bustle of Christmas!! Parties, shopping - it's exciting & fun, but don't let it make you miss the miracle! The Messiah has come!!

He gives himself to us over & over but we get too busy to notice.

Did you hear the message? New life, new hope, new joy He brings, every Christmas - every day! In the midst of the bustle, take a breath & really listen to the Christmas music. It's all around you! Let it lift your spirits, claim the joy, hear the message, accept the gift.

Join us now as we sing the carols & share the glad tidings of Christ's birth.

That Night (Anita Manning)

O God, (pause) you have given us life through your Son, Jesus Christ. You have given us the security of faith in a world that longs for something on which to rely. We thank you for your gifts to us.

We yearn, O Father, for the simple beauty of Christmas – for the music and words that remind us of that great miracle when He who had made all things was one night to come as an infant, to lie in the crook of a woman's arm. Before such mystery we kneel, as we follow the Shepherds and Wise Men to bring Thee the gift of our love.

And what of our love for God? We can seek the Lord's society. We can think about Him...read about Him...fill our imaginations with His grace. We can be much with Him...sing to Him...talk with Him...tell Him our yearnings and confess to Him our defeats. And love will be quietly born. And we are with one who yearns for our love and seeks in every way to win it. "We love Him because he first loved us. When we truly love God, every other kind of holy love will follow. Given the fountain, the rivers are sure."

This is God's Christmas greeting. In the beautiful story of Jesus' birth, it was sung by a chorus of angelic voices. Heard at first only by Judean shepherds outside the town of Bethlehem, nevertheless, it is a message that the whole world should hear. On each Christmas Day, God repeats His greeting. Recounting this story has been our Christmas gift to you.