

If Christmas Happened Today

A Nativity Play

for

Schools and Sunday Schools

by

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If Christmas Happened Today

A funny and festive, yet thoughtful re-telling of the Nativity story set in modern times, with a charming transformation into a traditional crib scene at the end.

It has a running time of approximately 20-25 minutes and includes a suggested Christmas message and carol at the end.

The play is divided into seven scenes, so you can either break the action between scenes for carols, or run them straight through.

The parts are suitable for a range of ages:

- 11 speaking characters, suitable for older children or teens
- Hotel Staff and Angels, groups who speak just one line in chorus, suitable for younger children
- Sheep, who have no lines, suitable for the youngest children

The cast can range from 20 children (omitting sheep) to over 30.

The play requires only simple costumes, few props and little scenery. It is suitable for a church service, Messy Church or school play.

Characters

Speaking Parts

Narr	Narrator, 'reads' from large Bible
Mary	College student
Mum	Practical and friendly – also plays Postie
Gabriel	Think 'The Fonz'
Joe	Likes computer games
Manager	Ultra-polite and apologetic
Amos	Boss shepherd
Laban	Apprentice shepherd
Balthazar	Wise man
Melchior	Wise man
Gaspar	Wise man
Postie	Played by same person as Mum

Chorus parts

Hotel Staff	At least five tallish people who form the 'wall' which hides the crib scene.
Angels	Gabriel's team. Can be in two groups.

Non-speaking parts

Sheep	Younger children.
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Costumes

Most characters are initially in modern dress and transform into traditional costumes ready for the final reveal. They do this behind a 'wall' made from Hotel Staff and Angels.

Costumes do not have to be complex. Modern dress can be jeans and a hoodie, or a white shirt or t-shirt with school uniform trousers. You can make simple robes with a blanket draped like a cloak, or you can use supermarket nativity costumes. If possible, avoid clothing that goes on over the head because the change to traditional costumes happens on stage. Zip-up hoodies are great because they are easy to take off, and you can hide a whole lot underneath.

Many characters transform into angels for the final reveal. They wear white shirts or t-shirts as part of their modern dress, then remove any outer layer (jacket, apron, etc) and add a lollipop-shaped piece of tinsel. This can be worn as a halo with the tail down the back, or as a tie by placing the loop under a shirt collar. They can hide the tinsel halos/ties in a pocket until needed for the final reveal.

Costume suggestions:

Narr	White shirt, black or grey trousers → Add tinsel halo/tie if joining the crib scene.
Mary	Large zip-up hoodie and leggings, blue dress (skirt tucked into hoodie), cushion for scenes 3 & 4 → Remove hoodie, add blue shawl draped over head.
Mum/Postie	White shirt, jeans and coloured cardigan → Remove cardigan, add cap to become Postie → Remove cap, add tinsel halo/tie.
Gabriel	Leather jacket, white shirt or t-shirt, jeans, big boots, optional wings → Remove jacket, add tinsel halo/tie.
Joe	Robe tucked up under zip-up hoodie, jeans → Remove hoodie, add head dress.
Manager	White shirt, black or grey trousers and jacket → Remove jacket, add tinsel halo/tie.
Staff	Apron, white shirt, black or grey trousers → Remove apron, add tinsel halo/tie.
Shepherds	Robe tucked up under zip-up hoodie, high-vis jacket, jeans → Remove hoodie and high-vis, add head dress.
Sheep	Sheep costume, or party clothes and holding sheep toy → No change. You can have one child dressed as a cow or donkey as a joke for the shepherds.
Angels	Christmas jumper, jeans, tinsel halo/tie → No change.
Wise men	Robe tucked up under white lab coat → Remove lab coat, add optional crown or beard.

Props

Large comfy chair

Free-standing door (optional)

Scene 1	Large Bible (Narr), textbook (Mary)
Scene 2	VR headset (safety goggles painted black), phone (Joe)
Scene 3	Cushion (Mary), letter (Joe), phone (Joe)
Scene 4	Cushion (Mary), suitcase with clothes (Joe)
Scene 5	2 chairs, two mugs (Amos and Laban)
Scene 6	3 travel bags containing Lynx Gold gift set (Bal), large bottle marked 'Frankincense' (Mel), large hand cream (Gas)
Scene 7	Large parcel containing a phone (Postie), box or small stool (Gabriel), Jesus doll (Mary)

The VR headset is at one side of the chair.

The box and doll are hidden behind the chair.

The Jesus doll is wrapped in a pillowcase.

Mary and Joseph's traditional costume items can be hidden behind the chair.

Staging

There is a large comfy chair centre stage, not too near the front. There needs to be enough room in front of the chair for the suitcase and two rows of children (which hide the assembling crib scene), and for scenes 5 and 6 to happen in front of that. Behind the chair is a box or small stool, and a doll wrapped in a pillowcase. The VR headset is next to the chair.

At one side of the stage, towards the front, there is a real or imaginary door to the outside. All characters entering and leaving to the outside go through this door. Other entrances and exits happen at the other side or towards the back, as convenient.

Stage directions are given *in italics*. Stage directions at the end of a scene happen while the next scenes take place. For example, at the end of scene 4, Mary changes into traditional costume *during* scenes 5 and 6. You do not wait for her to do this before starting scene 5.

Two sound effects are needed: something falling over, and a knock at the door.

If it is possible to dim the lights at the back of the stage over the crib scene at the end of scene 4, then raise the lights for the final reveal, that will add to the effect.

Crib Scene

During scenes 4, 5 and 6 a crib scene builds up around the chair. The chair and surrounding characters are hidden behind a wall made of Hotel Staff, Angels, and other characters. The wall opens to reveal the crib scene at the end of scene 7.

Mary sits in the chair holding Jesus, and Joseph sits on the chair arm.

There is an open suitcase at Mary's feet for the manger.

The shepherds stand to one side behind the chair, and the wise men to the other side, forming an arc.

Gabriel stands in the middle of the arc, directly behind the chair, on a box to give him height.

The Hotel Staff form the wall that hides the crib scene.

The Angels form another line of wall behind the Staff, giving the Staff, Manager and other characters chance to transform into angels for the final reveal.

The wall parts to reveal the crib scene.

Angels, Staff etc stand or kneel to the left and right, framing the scene.

The sheep enter and sit on the floor at the front.

Mary places Jesus in the suitcase-manger by her feet.

If Christmas Happened Today

Scene 1

Mary enters slowly, reading a textbook, and flops sideways on the chair

Narr In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth in Galilee.

knock at the door

Mary Muuuuum! There's someone at the door.

Mum [offstage] Can you answer it, Mary?

Mary I can't. I'm in the middle of college work.

Mum And I'm in the middle of fixing your curtain rail, and if I'm not careful I'll ... ooo, errr, oh dear!
[*crash sound effect*]

Mary Oops.

knock at the door

Daaaaaad! There's someone at the door.

Mum Your dad's gone on a park run and I'm a bit tangled up right now. You'll have to get it.

Mary [*getting up*] Oh, OK. Sorry about that by the way.

knock at the door

Mary Alright, alright, I'm coming. Keep your wig on. [*opens 'door'*]

Gabriel steps inside 'door'

Gabriel Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.

Mary You what?

Gabriel Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.

Mary Right. OK.

Gabriel Hello Mary, I am Gabriel. I have a message for you, from God.

Mary Gabriel? You mean you're an ... How do you know my ...? A message from ...?
You'd better come in.
[*both move to chair*]
Sit down?

Gabriel I think you might need the chair.

Mary Why?

Gabriel You're going to have a baby.

Mary Well yes, probably, some day. But Joe and I only got engaged last month. We've not even set a date for the wedding yet. We certainly weren't planning on having a baby anytime soon. I'm still at college!

Gabriel This will be God's son, not Joseph's

Mary [*sitting down suddenly*] But ... but ... I mean ... well ... y'know ... ummmmn ... how?

Gabriel Oh, Holy Spirit and all that, you know. You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

Mary Oh. Right. [*talking to self, rapidly*] Wow! God's son? I mean, WOW! Why me? It's gob-smacking! It's incredible! How will I cope? [*continue*]

Gabriel [*speaking over Mary's mumbling*] So is that OK then?

Mary What? Oh, yes. Yes, let's do it! [*talking to self again*] Crumbs, God's baby! I wonder if he'll look like me? What kind of nappies does God's son wear? [*continue while Gabriel leaves*]

Gabriel I'll let myself out, then. Bye.

Gabriel exits through 'door' and Mum enters from other side, wiping hands

Mum Who was that, dear?

Mary [*gets up and walks out with Mum, taking textbook*] You'll never guess, Mum. You'll never guess!

both exit

Scene 2

Narr Now, Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.

knock at the door, mum enters and answers door

Mum Hello, Joe dear. Come on in. You know Mary's away, staying with her cousin Elizabeth?

Joe enters, looking cross

Joe Yeah, I know she's away. That's why I've come round now. I got this text from her last night. [*showing phone*] A baby? Did you know about this?

Mum Ah, yes dear, I did. I know it looks bad but don't ...

Joe [*interrupting*] Looks bad? It *feels* bad! Right here. [*thumps chest*] She's broken my heart, that girl. Told me some rubbish about an angel visiting her. Does she think I'm an idiot?

Mum No, Joe, not at all. She loves you. Come and sit down, dear.

Joe Well, she's got a funny way of showing it! The wedding's off. [*flops in chair*] I've only come round to bring back her CDs.

Mum Now don't let's be hasty, dear.
Let me get you a cup of tea and you can have a go with that Minebox Playtendo game that you like so much.

Mum exits and changes character to Postie

Joe Yeah, OK then. Thanks. [*puts on VR headset and starts miming*]
What was I playing? Oh yes, hang gliding. Resume.
Swoop left ... swoop right ... ah, this is great.
Ooh, that hilltop looks nice. I think I'll land there. [*mimes landing*]
[*looking round*] Wow! The view up here is brilliant. Great graphics.

Gabriel enters and walks round Joe

[*thinking that Gabriel is part of the game*] Amazing detail! That angel looks so real.
[*following Gabriel as he walks around*] I could almost reach out and touch him.

Gabriel Joseph!

Joe Woo! Great 3D sound too!

Gabriel Joseph! Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the baby in her belly is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Joe's jaw drops. Gabriel exits, Joseph follows him in stunned silence

Joe [*removing headset*] What just happened there? [*exiting towards Mum*] Er, you know what I said about the wedding? Forget that. It's back on. And could I have a couple of sugars in my tea, please?

Joe exits, taking headset

Scene 3

Narr In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all people must register ...

Joe and Mary enter, Joe is reading a letter, Mary is heavily pregnant

Mary What's that you're reading, Joe?

Joe A letter from the school board in Bethlehem. We have to get Junior's name down if we want a place in the best school.

Mary Already? He's not even born yet!

Joe Yeah, it's very oversubscribed. They've got a waiting list as long as the orbit of Jupiter.

Mary So do we fill in a form, or can we do it online?

Joe No, we have to register up in person. They have an open day next week. We could go to that.

Mary Do I have to go too?

Joe Yeah, sorry. They need both of us. We could make it like a holiday, a mini-break in Bethlehem. What do you say?

Mary I dunno. The baby's nearly due and I feel like a whale on legs.

Joe I'll make it OK. I'll book us a nice hotel and we'll be back before Junior comes along.

Mary Oh, alright then. But somewhere nice, mind. None of your Travel Inn Express.

Joe Whatever you say, my sweet. [*tapping on phone*] Full English breakfast or continental?

Joe and Mary exit, Joe tapping on phone

Scene 4

Narr So Joseph went to the town of Bethlehem with Mary, who was expecting a baby.

Mary and Joe enter, Joe has a suitcase

Joe I'm sorry. I know you didn't want Travel Inn Express, but everywhere else was booked up solid. And this was their last room.

Mary Joe, I'm so tired after that long journey that all I want is a nice comfy bed.

Joe I'll get the keys. [*puts suitcase down, mimes desk bell*] PING!

Manager enters

Manager Good evening sir, may I help you?

Joe Yes, I made a reservation online. Room 25. Could we have our keys, please?

Manager Oh dear. Room 25?

Joe Yes. Is there a problem?

Manager Indeed there is, sir. I do wish sir had rung to confirm. Room 25 is unavailable, I'm afraid.

Mary [*very quiet*] Joe.

Joe What! I booked it last week!

Manager If sir had read the small print, he would have noted that online reservations expire at 10pm. It is now 10:05, sir. And rooms are in great demand.

Mary [*quiet*] Joe.

Joe So you've given our room to someone else?

Manager To three someones, as it happens. We had a sudden influx of foreign VIPs, just arrived from somewhere out east, I gather. Very happy to find a vacant room in the middle of Bethlehem.

Mary [*medium*] Joe.

Joe But where are we going to stay? Do you have any other rooms?

Manager I'm afraid not, sir. We are like a brand-new library - fully booked.

Mary [*getting louder*] Joe.

Joe I suppose you don't have ... a stable round the back, or anything, do you?

Manager A Stable? Sir is having a laugh.

Mary [*loud*] Joe!

Joe What is it, Mary?

Mary The Baby! It's coming!

Joe [*horrified*] What, now?

Mary Now!

Manager Oh, my word! Staff! Staff!
[to Joe] You can use my office. There's a snack machine and free Wi-Fi.

Hotel Staff run on

[to Hotel Staff] Take these good people to my office and make them as comfortable as possible.
Break out the emergency pot noodles if you need to.

Staff The emergency pot noodles? Certainly sir!
[to Mary and Joe] Come this way please.

Mary, Joe and Staff move to chair.

Mary sits on chair and Joe kneels beside (he will sit on the arm for the big reveal).

Staff form a wall in front of chair, backs to the audience, hiding Mary and Joe.

Manager paces around stage.

Manager Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear! There was nothing about this on the staff training days.
They'll need some baby clothes.
Ummm ... Oh! A pillowcase! That'll do.
Now what about a bed? All the travel cots are in use.
[spots Joseph's suitcase]
Perfect!
[to Mary and Joe] Look! You can use this suitcase as a cot for the baby!

Manager takes suitcase behind the wall and places it open at Mary's feet.

Manager joins wall.

While hidden, Mary and Joe change to traditional clothes.

Mary hides her cushion behind the chair.

Mary gets Jesus doll from behind chair.

If possible, dim the lights over the crib scene until the reveal at the end of Scene 7

Scene 5

Narr And there were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Amos and Laban enter, each with a chair and mug, and place chairs centre stage, in front of wall of Staff

Amos [*sitting*] Ah, modern technology. It's great, innit?

Laban [*sitting*] Yeah.

Amos I mean, when I was training to be a shepherd, we didn't have none of this tech. [*indicating imaginary screens in front of them*] None of these closed-circuit TVs and drones and whatnot. We had to watch sheep by actually watching them. Out in the cold, all seated on the ground.

Laban Yeah.

Amos It's so much better these days, sat in our cosy cabin, with a fully-automatic sock washer and endless cups of tea, eh?

Laban Yeah. [*clink mugs*]

Amos Anyway [*looking at watch*] it's time to count the sheep.

Laban Yeah.

As Amos names each sheep, a child runs on stage and waves (if dressed as a sheep) or holds up sheep toy, then runs off. Adjust the number of sheep to suit.

If you have one child dressed as a cow/donkey, Amos and Laban are silent and then shrug as the child runs on stage and then off.

Amos Right, there's [*sheep runs on stage*] **Baatholemew, Lambert, Ewenice, Rambo, Baarbara, Petewenia, Rameses, Baatimeaus, Jewedy, Ramona and Shaun.**

Yep, that's the lot. Time for more tea. Put the kettle on, Laban. [*hands Laban his mug*]

Laban Why do I always make the tea, Amos? It must be your turn.

Amos [*pointing to self*] Who's got BTec Certified Shepherding Level Two? [*pointing to Laban*] Who's the apprentice? Make the tea!

knock at the door

Who's that? It's the middle of the night and we're miles from nowhere out here!

Laban opens the 'door' and stares outside with mouth open

Tell 'em to come in quick, you're letting all the heat out. And make sure they wipe their feet. I'm not having muddy wellies all over my nice clean cabin.

Laban I ... I ... I don't think they're wearing wellies, Amos. [*stands back to let Gabriel in*]

Gabriel strides in

Gabriel [*loud voice*] Do not be afraid!

Am/Lab ARGHHHHH! [*both run screaming to other side of stage*]

Gabriel [to audience] This always happens.
[to shepherds] Seriously. I'm not going to hurt you. Did I hear the kettle?

Amos opens and closes his mouth like a goldfish, pointing at Gabriel

Laban Er, yes. I was just making tea. Would you like some?

Gabriel Oh yes. I'm parched. [sitting]

Amos [still looking like a goldfish] Whaa ... whaa ... whaa ...

Gabriel [to Laban] Is he alright?

Laban He wants to know what you are doing here. We don't get angels knocking on our door every night.

Gabriel Oh yes. Sorry. Nearly forgot.
[standing] Behold, I bring you good news of great joy. Today your Saviour is born in Bethlehem. He is Christ, the Lord. And this is how you will know him: You will find the baby wrapped in polycotton and lying in a suitcase.
[sitting and addressing the door] Come on in, team!

Angels enter and stand along front of stage

Narr [while angels get into place] And suddenly, with the angel there was a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying:

Angels 1 [raising arms] Glory to God in the highest heaven!

Angels 2 [raising arms] Peace on earth among people of goodwill!

Laban Crikey!

Amos Yeah.

Laban C'mon, let's go and find this baby. What did he say, in a suitcase? Weird!

Gabriel exits, taking the chairs with him.

Amos and Laban move behind the wall and form half of arc behind chair, kneeling to remain hidden. They change into traditional dress.

Angels form a second row of wall, in front of Hotel Staff, backs towards audience.

Scene 6

Narr And wise men came from the east saying ...

Balthazar, Melchior and Gaspar enter and stand in a row, Melchior in the middle

Bal ... 'where is the one born king of the Jews?' is the question I would ask if I didn't have a much bigger question on my mind.

Mel What question is that, Balthazar?

Gas Is it 'Why have we only got one hotel room for three of us?'

Bal Er, no, but that is a good question. Who got the room?

Bal/Gas [*pointing*] **MELCHIOR!**

Mel It was all I could get! The other hotels were booked up solid. I only got this room because some other guests didn't turn up.

Gas Oh well, it'll do I suppose. But if it's not the room, what is Balthazar's question?

Bal I'm glad you asked, Gaspar. It is a question that wise men like us have wrestled with since the dawn of time. [*gazing into the middle-distance, others follow his gaze*]
A question of eternal significance and timeless consequence.
A question that rivals DNA in complexity, and exceeds the ability of the human brain to fathom.

Mel/Gas What is the unending question, O knowledgeable one?

Bal Where on earth is our luggage?

Mel Our luggage?

Gas You're saying the airline lost our luggage?

Bal Yes! It's a complete disaster, a total nightmare, a catastrophe, a tragedy, a cataclysm, a ...

Mel [*interrupting*] Calm down! Losing our luggage is not that bad.

Gas We can always buy more socks tomorrow.

Bal It's not the socks. Haven't you realised? [*blank looks*]
The gifts for the new baby king. [*blank looks*]

All [*realising*] **They're in the luggage!**

Bal What are we going to do? We can't turn up empty-handed. He'll think we're a right bunch of cheapskates.

Mel Maybe we've got something in our hand luggage.

Gas For a baby? I don't think I packed a teddy bear in my carry-on.

Bal The original gifts weren't exactly child-friendly. These can't be any worse.
[*rummaging*] I've got this shower gel and shaving foam set.
[*shows Lynx Gold, others give him a questioning look, miming shaving*]
He'll grow into it.

- Mel** *[rummaging]* I got this for my mum from the duty free.
[shows large perfume bottle, mimics advert with heavy French accent]
Frankincense, eau de parfam, pour homme, pour femme, pour vous.
[others bend forward to look at each other and shrug]
- Gas** Yeah, right. *[rummaging]* Here's something a bit more practical.
[shows bottle of hand cream]
Hand cream *[reading label]* with aloe vera and myrrh. Perfect for the royal botty. Don't want him getting nappy rash now, do we?
- Bal** Come on, it's getting late. We should try to find the baby.
I'll ring down to the front desk and ask the manager if he knows anything.
[mimes using phone]
Hello, yes, it's the three gents in room 25.
Would you happen to know anything about a new baby?
You do? *[to others]* He does! *[cheering]*
He's in this hotel? *[to others]* He's in this hotel! *[cheering]*
Mmhhm, mmhhm. OK, thanks. Bye.
- Mel** Well?
- Gas** Where is he?
- Bal** He's in the manager's office. It's just off the lobby, downstairs. You remember when we came in, there was that large, spiky lampshade? The manager's office is right underneath that.
- Mel** So we just ...
- Gas** ... have to ...
- All** ... follow the star!

*All move behind the wall and form other half of arc behind chair, kneeling to remain hidden.
They change into traditional costume.*

Scene 7

During the talk, Angels add tinsel halos/ties.

Hotel Staff remove aprons and add tinsel halos/ties to become more angels.

All other characters remove jackets, caps etc and get ready for the big reveal.

The talk can be delivered by the Narrator (use left section), or by a different speaker (use right section).

Narr And it came to pass that there was delivered upon that night the greatest gift of all time.

Postie enters with large parcel

Postie Delivery!

Narr *[taking parcel]* Thanks.

Postie Sign here.
[offering hand, Narr signs hand]
Careful, it's fragile.

Postie joins Hotel Staff in wall

Narr ...

Narr And it came to pass that there was delivered upon that night the greatest gift of all time.

Postie enters with large parcel

Postie Delivery for *[name of speaker]*!

Speaker *[taking parcel]* Thanks.

Postie Sign here.
[offering hand, Speaker signs hand] Careful, it's fragile.

Postie and Narr join Hotel Staff in wall

Speaker ...

Oh, I'll be careful, don't you worry. I've been waiting for this for such a long time.

[carefully opening box] This is the one that we all have been expecting. The promised one. The one spoken of from ages past. The one who changes everything. The greatest gift of all time.

[gently takes out and cradles new phone]

Isn't he lovely? *[talking to phone like a baby]* Yes, you are. You're so lovely. Who's the best phone in the world? You are!

[noticing audience] What?

Isn't this the great gift of all time?

Maybe you're right. I mean, Christmas presents are great, (ta very much for the phone, Mum) but in a few months they'll bring out a new model and this one won't be so trendy anymore.

And the food at Christmas is great, all the roast potatoes and fancy nibbles, but come the day after Boxing Day we're all sick of it.

And all the glitz and glitter of Christmas, I love it! I love the decorated trees and the lights and the Christmas films on the telly, but it won't be long before we clear it away and go back to real life.

There's lots about Christmas that is great, but it doesn't last. When the holiday ends and we're back at work, back at school, will it have made any difference? Is a few days of over-eating and wearing novelty jumpers all there is?

Even this, the most famous birthday on earth, we watch it once a year then we pack it away in a box marked 'Cute Stuff for Kids', or 'Ancient Myths and Legends'.

Sure, it happened a long time ago, but this isn't a fairy tale. Even the Roman historians agree that Jesus was a real person.

So what if ...

What if this isn't just a cute story for kids? Does it matter that this baby grew up and told me to love my neighbour as much as I love myself, to love my enemy, and to forgive people even when they are not sorry. That's really hard. I can't say that I manage it.

What if ...

What if God is not Santa, and life is not about being on the naughty list or nice list. None of us are good enough to get on the nice list, and God knows that, so there's no point pretending. But he doesn't put coal in our stockings and leave us on the naughty list, he does something to fix it. God sent Jesus to move us to the nice list because Jesus is good enough. That's why we have Christmas.

What if ...

What if Christmas really does happen today? I wonder where you would be in this story, where I would be. I wonder where we will meet the child who changes everything. [*turns to look at crib scene*]

If lights have been dimmed, raise them now.

Gabriel walks to centre stage with jacket over shoulder.

Gives jacket to Narr/Speaker and adds tinsel halo/tie, then walks behind wall and stands on box behind chair.

Lifts arms and opens them wide.

Wise Men and Shepherds stand, Joe sits on arm of chair.

All angels (inc Staff, Manager etc) part and move to sides to reveal the crib scene.

All angels raise arms.

Sheep join the scene and sit around suitcase.

All watch as Mary places Jesus in the suitcase at her feet.

Song: Silent Night.