

Born To Set Us Free (or The Cross to the Cradle)

Note: All songs in this drama can be replaced with other songs. Before using any songs, be sure that you have permission from the copyright holders.

(The scene is set with two people on stage, a young child taking a test and a grown man doing his taxes. They are both working diligently, but pause to think as a sinister character, Satan, slithers between and around their desks. He should be well-dressed and well-groomed.)

Satan: *(looks over Character 1's shoulder)* April 12. You've got a few more days. *(he moves on and smiles)* Cute kid! *(He says to the audience as he tussles the boy's hair. The boy continues working without reacting.)*

(Satan takes his position to the side of the stage as the choir begins to sing. By the end of the song the three kings should have made their way onto the stage. They are filled with joy and ready to tell the world that the Messiah is here.)

Follow That Wondrous Star - Full Choir **Arranged by George L. O. Strid**

We have traveled from afar,
Following a wondrous star.
For it leads the way to the child, they say.
Oh, how joyful we are.
O, follow, follow that wondrous star.
Follow, follow wherever you are!
It will guide you through the night,
So follow that star to the perfect light.

We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gift we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.
O, Star of wonder, Star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Balthasar: Welcome, welcome! We're happy to see such a large crowd here tonight.

Caspar: It brings us such joy to see so many interested in hearing about Christ's birth year after year.

Melchior: *(interrupting and pointing)* Follow that star!

Balthasar: *(shoots an odd look at Melchior and continues)* It is our prayer that tonight you will be rejuvenated and inspired to live your life sharing Jesus' message in your daily life.

Melchior: *(interrupting louder)* Follow that star! *(This time he moves toward the front of the stage looking up.)*

Balthasar: Melchior, we're trying to tell a story here.

Melchior: *(turning)* Ha! You're putting me to sleep.

Caspar: We haven't even started yet.

Melchior: That's exactly the point! Now, let's follow that star!

Balthasar: You're not making any sense.

Melchior: Just let me tell the story here, will ya? *(Balthasar and Caspar look at one another unsure of what to do as Melchior continues talking to the audience.)* Do you see that star up there? That's where we're headed. Let's go.

(The three kings head across stage. Balthasar and Caspar follow Melchior. As they move across stage the attention should be refocused on the action on stage.)

Satan: (Insert Name), you know you don't even need to turn your head to see Sara's paper? No one will even notice if you "check your answer" with hers. *(Character 1 only pauses to think as he did earlier. Satan then turns to the other character.)* (Insert Name), remember that "vacation" you took last summer?

Character 2: *(thinking)* I did work most of that trip.

Satan: Vacation. *(laughs)* Business trip is more like it. *(Character 2 goes back to work.)*

(Count to three and flip the lights off and put spot lights on the cross or have Jesus on the cross depending on how you want to stage this. A sound effect as the lights change could help add to the effect as well.)

Jesus: *(groans, possibly into mic offstage)* Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

(Again there should be a pause for effect. Bible Reader #1 should slowly make his way to the podium.)

Reader #1: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." – John 3:16-17

(During the following song the modern scene from the beginning of the show should be replaced with the manger scene. The focus of the play should always come back to the manger, so it should be present throughout.)

**Born To Set Us Free – Full Choir
Words and Music by Jay Althouse**

On a dark night filled with wonder
All the world awaited His birth.
And the wise men came to greet Him,
The Lord of all the earth.
Come, o come, Emmanuel;
Ransom captive Israel.
God's own son for all to see,
Born to set us free.

And there was within the heavens
A star to guide the way,
For the shepherds and the wisemen
To a manger bed of hay.
Come, o come, Emmanuel;
Ransom captive Israel.
God's own son for all to see,
Born to set us free.

On a dark night filled with wonder
He is born to set us free.

(As the song ends a Woman approaches a well that has appeared at centerstage. She looks lost and forlorn. A group of 3-4 women pass her, looking and obviously gossiping as they pass by. She looks toward them annoyed and possibly with bitterness. Jesus approaches her. As the Woman sees Him she looks away to avoid eye contact. He continues approaching and she glances curiously at Him occasionally.)

Jesus: Will you give me a drink?

Woman: *(surprised)* You're a Jew. I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

Jesus: If you knew who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would give you living water.

Woman: *(confused)* Sir, you have nothing to draw with. Besides, where would you get this living water?

Jesus: Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.

Woman: *(half-laughing)* Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.

(Jesus and the Woman should continue to talk in pantomime. The Woman should become increasingly interested in His words. While this is taking place a few disciples should enter from the side with Satan.)

Peter: *(breaking in immediately after the previous line)* There He is!

Andrew: Who's He talking with?

Satan: A Samaritan.

James: A Samaritan?

Satan: A Samaritan woman.

Peter: Why's He talking with *her*?

Satan: What will people think?

John: What will people say?

(The disciples should continue to talk in pantomime as the scene cuts back to Jesus and the Woman.)

Woman: *(with hope)* I know that the Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.

Jesus: I who speak to you – I am He!

(Jesus and the Woman should continue in pantomime as the scene cuts back to the disciples.)

Satan: Someone should stop Him. *(Satan slips away.)*

Peter: Come on. *(The disciples break in and the woman runs off.)* Rabbi, we got what you asked for.

Andrew: You should eat something.

Jesus: I have food to eat that you know nothing about. *(they walk off together)*

(The spotlight hits the manger as the three kings return once again to narrate.)

Melchior: Jesus went on to explain how these people were “ripe for harvest.” They needed God’s message too!

Balthasar: Many Samaritans came to believe in Jesus that day because of this woman’s testimony.

Caspar: *(confused)* They even asked Jesus to stay with them longer, *(pause)* but what does this have to do with Christmas?

Melchior: You’ll see when we get there. Now, let’s keep moving. Follow that star!

Reader #2: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob, and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” – Isaiah 49:6

(During the following hymn a table should be set up on the stage. The disciples should sit on one side and the tax-collectors on the other. Twelve disciples are not necessary.)

You Light of Gentile Nations – Full Choir

You Light of Gentile nations,
Your Savior from above,
Drawn by Your Spirit’s leading,
We come with joy and love
Into Your holy temple
And wait with earnest mind
As Simeon once had waited
His God and Lord to find.

Let us, O Lord, be faithful
Like Simeon to the end,
So that his prayer exultant
May from our hearts ascend:
“O Lord, now let Your servant
Depart in peace, I pray,
Since I have seen my Savior
And here beheld His day.”

You seem Lord, in my weakness,
At time to frown on me,
And through my tears I often
Can scarce distinguish You;
But in the heavenly mansions
Shall nothing dim my sight;

There shall I see Your glory
In never-changing light.

(The table should erupt with laughter, chatting, and pantomime eating immediately following the hymn.)

Satan: I'm telling you guys, he's eating with tax collectors. Follow me.

Pharisee 1: *(following Satan they approach)* What does He think he's doing now?

Pharisee 2: Unbelievable. *(Satan slinks away)*

Pharisee 1: *(to James)* Why is your Master eating with tax collectors and sinners?

James: *(stumbling)* Well...uh...this is for...uh...Matthew.

Pharisee 2: Isn't he a tax collector too!

James: Yeah, but...

Jesus: *(conversation should halt when Jesus begins)* Is there anything I can do for you two gentlemen?

Pharisee 1: Why are you here?

Jesus: I was invited to be part of this meal.

Pharisee 1: But why are you eating with *them* – the tax collectors and the sinners?

Jesus: *(patient)* They need me to be with them.

Pharisee 2: We need you to be part of us – part of the righteous!

Jesus: It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

(The spotlight hits the manger as the three kings return once again to narrate.)

Melchior: *(interrupts scene gesturing toward the Pharisees)* The Pharisees were like doctors who diagnosed a disease, but were too repulsed by it to do anything.

Balthasar: *(again breaking in with his own narration)* It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done, Christ came for you.

Melchior: Because of the teaching of the Pharisees many people believe they're not worthy of being saved.

Balthasar: Jesus set us all free from the bondage of sin.

Caspar: Wait a minute...I think I'm beginning to understand. (*meaning why they're visiting these stories*) Jesus was born to rescue us from a life of sin!

Melchior: Come along you two. We still have a long way to go.

Caspar: Follow that star! (*shrugs and smiles*)

Reader #3: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."
– Galatians 1:6-8,10

Child Of The Poor/What Child Is This – Full Choir

Arranged by Scott Soper

Helpless and hungry, lowly, afraid, Wrapped in the chill of midwinter; Comes now among us, Born into poverty's embrace, New life for the world. Who is this who lives with the lowly, Sharing their sorrows, knowing their hunger? This is Christ, Revealed to the world in the eyes of a child, A child of the poor.	What child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing; Haste, haste to bring him laud, The babe, the son of Mary.
--	---

Who is the stranger here in our midst, Looking for shelter among us? Who is the outcast? Who do we see amid the poor, The children of God? Who is this who lives with the lowly, Sharing their sorrows, knowing their hunger? This is Christ, Revealed to the world in the eyes of a child, A child of the poor.	Why lies he in such mean estate Where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear, for sinners here The silent word is pleading. This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing; Haste, haste to bring him laud, The babe, the son of Mary.
---	--

(These last two verses are sung simultaneously)

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, Come peasant, king, to own him; The King of kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone him. This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing; Haste, haste to bring him laud, The babe, the son of Mary.	Bring all the thirsty, all who seek peace; bring those with nothing to offer. Strengthen the feeble, say to the frightened heart: "Fear not: here is your God!" Who is this who lives with the lowly, Sharing their sorrows, knowing their hunger? This is Christ, Revealed to the world in the eyes of a child, A child of the poor.
---	---

(Before the three kings begin their narration a twelve-year-old Jesus should wander onstage looking around intrigued by his surroundings.)

Balthasar: Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve-years-old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. *(Satan enters)*

Melchior: The women left by caravan ahead of the men letting them catch up later.

Caspar: When it came time for the men to leave, Joseph assumed Jesus was with his mother; Mary assumed Jesus was with the men.

(Joseph begins to enter with a few buddies and Jesus wanders offstage. Satan stands by watching.)

Joseph: I suppose we'd better get going if we want to catch up to the women by nightfall.

Buddy 1: Where's Jesus?

Joseph: *(thinks briefly)* He must be with Mary.

Buddy 2: I haven't seen him in awhile.

Joseph: Yeah, he's with Mary. Let's go. *(they exit)*

Melchior: As you can probably guess, he wasn't with Mary.

Balthasar: He was among the Pharisees and Chief Priests asking questions.

Caspar: His questions and understanding amazed the teachers of the law.

Mary: *(enters with Joseph frustrated and concerned)* Jesus!

Satan: Didn't you tell Joseph that Jesus wanted to stay behind?

Mary: *(turns)* I told you he wanted to stay behind with the men.

Satan: She *never* said that.

Joseph: You didn't tell me that! I thought he was with you.

Mary: Does it look like he's with me?

Joseph: *(sees him and sighs)* There he is!

Mary: Jesus! *(Jesus enters slowly as Mary runs to him)* Oh, my son! *(hugs him)*

Satan: *Where* has he been???

Mary: *(stops and looks him in the eye)* Where have you been? Why weren't you with your father?

Jesus: Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house? *(Mary looks back at Joseph)*

Melchior: That's why he came!

Balthasar: He came to do his Father's will.

Caspar: Which was to save us.

Melchior: *(softly)* Let's go.

Reader #4: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time."
– 1 Timothy 2:1-6

(During the following song Mary and Joseph should bring the baby Jesus to the manger. A spotlight should surround the manger scene during this small choir song.)

This Peaceful Night – Small Group Choir
Words by Nancy Price and Don Besig
Music by Don Besig

Shadows fell, the air grew cold on that night long ago.
In a stable dark and bare sat a maiden pure and fair.
All the world was still that night; all was still that night.
Quietly the gift did come; He was born, God's true Son.
In a manger stall He lay on a bed of new-mown hay.
Love came down to the world that night; love came down that night.

(This verse is accompanied with the "Ah"ing of Silent Night)

To the stable come once more.
Gather 'round; keep Him warm.
Worship now this tiny King.
Share the love and joy He brings.
Peace has come to the world this night;
Peace has come this night.

(Shepherds should appear on a different part of the stage, so that the audience can still see the manger scene.)

Shepherd 1: Where is Little Judah?

Shepherd 2: You're not supposed to name the sheep! It only makes it more difficult for you when we send them to the Temple.

Shepherd 1: What am I supposed to call them? *(mocking)* Here Sheepy Sheepy Sheepy!

Shepherd 3: I think I see him. I'll be right back. *(Shepherd 3 walks across the stage where we find Satan petting a lamb.)*

Satan: *(to the lamb)* I'm trying to protect you, little one.

Shepherd 3: There you are.

Satan: *(to Shepherd 3)* This one will *not* be sacrificed.

Shepherd 3: Come on. *(He pokes the lamb with his staff. It does not move. He hesitantly continues.)* Uh...come on, Sheepy Sheepy?

Satan: *(approaching Shepherd 3)* "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." Where is this lamb that you wait for? *(pauses as Shepherd 3 looks sadly at the lamb pondering)* Stop waiting for myths and legends to come true. *(he exits)*

Shepherd 3: Come on, Little Judah. *(He picks her up and carries her back.)*

Shepherd 1: *(rushing forward)* Little Judah!

Shepherd 3: You need to stop kidding yourself. He isn't your pet!

Shepherd 2: Whoa, what got into you?

Shepherd 3: *(sighs)* Nothing, I was just thinking. Sorry.

Shepherd 2: Thinking?

Shepherd 3: Where is this promised Messiah? *(gesturing to the sheep)* I mean, what's the point of this lamb's life? So he can be sacrificed?

(A trumpet blares. The three Shepherds fall back and look up into the sky. Music for the following song should start soon afterwards.)

Glory to God! – Small Group Choir
Words and Music by Lloyd Larson

The shepherds were out in the fields one night;
 Glory to God in the highest!
 Watching their sheep by the stars' faint light;
 Glory to God in the highest!
 Suddenly! The night sky blazed;
 An angel said, "Do not be afraid;
 I bring you good news of great joy this night!"
 Glory to God in the highest!

But joy filled their hearts as the angels cried:
 "Glory to God in the highest!"
 "To Bethlehem in a manger bed,
 Go worship Him," the angel said.
 Rejoicing they journeyed to see the Child
 Singing "Glory to God in the highest!"
 Jesus is born: The hope of the world!
 Peace on earth; Good will to all;

Jesus is born: the hope of the world!
Peace on earth; Good will to all;
Glory to God in the highest!
In silence, the shepherds were terrified;
Glory to God in the highest!

Glory to God in the highest!
Jesus is born: The hope of the world!
Peace on earth; Good will to all;
Glory to God in the highest!

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Glory to God in the highest!

(The Shepherds should join the manger scene at this point. The three kings enter to narrate once again.)

Balthasar: So the shepherds went to see the baby that the angels spoke of.

Melchior: The long awaited Messiah is here! They rejoiced!

Caspar: *(wrapping up)* And now we've had a glimpse of why He came.

Melchior: Whoa, whoa, whoa! This story isn't over yet!

Caspar: What do you mean?

Melchior: You'll see. *(they exit)*

Reader #5: "...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." – 1 Peter 3:15-17

(During the reading King Herod should appear on stage with Satan and the chief priests.)

King Herod: Where is this Messiah?

Priest 1: The prophecy says He will be born in Bethlehem.

King Herod: *(ponders)* Is this what you believe?

Priest 1: Yes.

Satan: *(interrupting)* The people will want to crown him king. You have to do something to stop this.

King Herod: Do you believe he is here now?

Satan: *(confidently and simultaneously with Priest's line)* He is here!

Priest 1: *(timidly and simultaneously with Satan's line)* I don't know.

King Herod: You are dismissed. *(chief priests exit and King Herod turns to the audience)* He must be killed. *(Satan smiles and exits)*

Reader #6: “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” – Isaiah 53:3-6

(By this time the manger should be gone because the baby Jesus is now a toddler.)

Joseph: *(enters with Mary)* I don’t know how to tell you this.

Mary: *(turns)* Just tell me.

Joseph: *(quickly)* We have to go to Egypt.

Mary: We have to *what?!?*

Joseph: King Herod is searching for our son to have him killed.

Mary: How do you know this?

Joseph: I had another dream. We have to go.

Mary: Egypt?

Joseph: Yes.

Mary: *(sighs)* Well, at least we have gold to pay for our travels.

Joseph: You see? God is taking care of us.

Mary: We could even sell the frankincense and myrrh if we have to.

Joseph: *(smiles)* Let’s go.

(During the following song the opening scene should be set again. Satan should be back at work overlooking the young child’s test as well as the man and his taxes.)

**Noel Pastorale – Full Choir
Arranged by Audrey Snyder**

The first noel the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep.
On a cold winter’s night that was so deep:

Lo, in a poor and humble stable
A babe was born that holy night,
While the Child lay blissfully sleeping,
The shepherds beheld a wond’rous sight,

Noel, noel, noel, noel.
Born is the King of Israel.

For high above shown a heavenly light,
High above shone a heavenly light.

They looked up and saw a star,
Shining in the East, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night:
Noel, noel, noel, noel.
Born is the King of Israel.

Satan: (Insert Name), you know you don't even need to turn your head to see Sara's paper? No one will even notice if you "check your answer" with hers. *(Character 1 only pauses to think. Satan then turns to the other character.)* (Insert Name), remember that "vacation" you took last summer?

Character 2: *(thinking)* I did work most of that trip.

Satan: Vacation. *(laughs)* Business trip is more like it. *(Character 2 goes back to work.)*

Character 1: *(bows head)* Dear God, *(Satan's head jerks)* please help me to do my very best on this test. I studied so hard. Please help me to keep my eyes on my own paper and trust that you will help me remember what I studied. In Jesus name, Amen.

Satan: *(looks over Character 2's shoulder and smiles)* Well, one out of two ain't bad. I guess I have more work to do here. *(He begins walking out and then turns to the audience for one last comment.)* I guess it's about time to make a little call to the IRS. *(exits laughing)*

Reader #7: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

OR

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Melchior: Did this story seem backward to you – working from the cross to the cradle? A king wearing a crown – of thorns? A prince born – in poverty?

Balthasar: *(realizing the genius behind Melchior's storytelling)* God does seem to write history – His story – backward. His end goal is to have us in heaven with Him; He worked backward all the way to Adam and Eve and His promise in the Garden.

Melchior: In fulfilling that promise He opens the way for us to move forward to the day of our death – another backward event because, as soon as we die, we will begin to live forever.

Balthasar: Sure. We followed the star to Bethlehem, and saw and worshiped our Messiah.

Caspar: We presented Jesus with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Melchior: But we are not here to tell our story. We continue to tell His story.

Caspar: Jesus lived, He died, He rose, and He still lives for you.

Melchior: May God's backward message move you forward in faith as you celebrate your Savior's birth! *(they exit)*

Silent Night, Holy Night – Congregation

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing, Alleluia!
Christ, the Savior is born!
Christ, the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.