

Jesus, The Bread of Life

Christmas Choir Presentation 2002

Adapted from an article by Sherrie Johnson (Ensign, Dec. 1998, p. 47)

“Good Christians All Rejoice” – (Beryl Red, Triune Music) –
Sung by Choir, Children and Bells

Narrator: The narrow passage down to the cave was dark and crowded. Heat and noise mingled in the heavy, stale air. People jostled for position, nudging, pressing, seeking to see the silver star that marked the place where some say the Savior of the world was born.

People kissed the walls. Some left trinkets, or icons, or silver lanterns. Some knelt and kissed the floor despite the pressing throng. By straining, I caught a glimpse of the star embedded in the rock floor. I had seen what I came to see, but had not felt what I had hoped to feel.

How could this be the place of the Savior’s nativity? In an attempt to push away the disappointment, I let my mind wander over what I had learned of the event in Bethlehem that I had come to love.

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” – *Hymns* 208 - Violin and Piano
(Introduction played softly to underscore narration)

Narrator: Bethlehem --- the name means “house of bread.” Whether or not the cave below was the actual stable of Christ’s birth, this was the town. Words came to mind, words that I had heard most every Sunday since I was a child: “Bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son.” (D&C 20:77)

Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, was born in the “house of bread” and placed in a manger.

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” – Sung by Choir and
Congregation

Narrator: As a child I had thought *manger* was a synonym for *crib*. I remember my surprise at learning that a manger is a box made to hold food for animals, a *feeding trough*! Now as I sat in Bethlehem, I imagined a manger filled with oats that beasts of burden hungrily devoured. They, like me, would eat and in a few hours want more. No matter how nutritious earthly fare

is, it is never enough. The next day, even the next hour, the stomach growls for more.

In my mind's eye, I saw hands brushing away the last few oats. The same hands filled the manger with fresh straw and placed the babe in the feeding trough. Words leaped to mind: "*He that cometh to me shall never hunger*" and "*He that eateth of this bread shall live forever.*" (John 6:35,58) The heavenly fare offered in the manger was not only eternal, but capable of lifting us to God. How fitting that Mary should cradle her son, the Bread of Life, in a manger.

"The Bread of Life" – (Betsy Lee Bailey) - Sung by the men of the choir

Narrator: I thought of Mary, His mother. The intense emotion of birth was familiar to me, but Mary was the mother of God's child. I thought of the joy and sorrow she bore and wondered what her feelings were as she wrapped the Son of God in swaddling clothes.

Oh, the swaddling clothes! As Mary beheld Him in the manger, did her heart race with premonitions of a time when she would see Him wrapped in linen and laid in another cave, called a sepulcher? In a stable-cave Mary gave Jesus mortal life, and from a sepulcher-cave Jesus came forth to give Mary and all mankind immortal life. Both caves are mortal reminders of Jesus' condescension, or of His descending "*below all things.*" (See 1 Ne. 11:16,D&C88:6)

"Away in a Manger" –(arr. by Betsy Lee Bailey) – Choir, Soprano Soloist

Narrator: His condescension is difficult to understand. He was God "*but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*" (Phil. 2:7) The same verse in the Greek New Testament does not mention reputation, but instead says that He "*emptied himself.*" He was God, yet He emptied himself of power to begin anew, growing from grace to grace.

He was the Word, and yet He came as a wordless infant. He was the Almighty One, and yet helplessly, He took nourishment at Mary's breast. He was King of Kings, and yet He came as servant of man. He, the great I Am, condescended to be the beast upon which all burdens would fall, born among animals at Passover time.

"On a Sacred, Still, and Silent Night" – (Betsy Lee Bailey, Jackman Music)
Sung by Choir, Violin

Narrator: I thought of the significance of the Passover. As families throughout the land prepared their symbolic meal of lamb, the Lamb of God was being born, and because of His living and His dying, the nullifying effects of death would pass over us. But Passover also meant springtime---lambing season. A few miles away, shepherds were helping to bring new lambs into the world. Deemed by the upper classes as men of naught, the shepherds were nonetheless, saviors to the sheep.

Besides assisting in the births, they nourished, gathered, comforted and protected their flocks, sometimes risking their lives to defend them. There was deep irony in the fact that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would be deemed by the Pharisees and Sadducees as a man of naught while in the very act of giving His life to save them.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) How fitting that the angelic announcement was made to humble men serving the needs of sheep that might die in similitude of the Lamb of God. It is still to those who are feeding His sheep that the Lord reveals himself. It is to those who serve that the testimony is revealed, the testimony that all who are unclean have a Savior and can come forth from the darkness of their tombs into the Light of Life.

“Christmas Bells” and “Who Is the Child?” – Sung by Children

Narrator: Thoughts of Jesus, the Light of Life, brings to mind another light, the Christmas star. Piercing the darkness, it stood above all nations, far above and untouched by anything worldly. Christ, the Light and Life of the World, is like that star. His light, the light of Christ, still guides wise men and wise women to their promised land, where they can behold for themselves the greatest star, the Son of God.

“With Wondering Awe” – Hymns 210 - Sung by the choir and congregation

Narrator: Of all the stories associated with the Nativity, the story of the Wise Men intrigues me most. They must have had scriptures or an oral tradition that prophesied of Christ’s birth, or they would not have recognized the sign or known where to go once they saw it. We are told they saw the sign in the East and then traveled west to Judea. It was a long journey, and once in Jerusalem they began to inquire, *“Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.”* (Matt. 2:2)

News of their inquiries concerning a king reached Herod, and he sent for them. He was troubled by prophecies that another would rule Israel--after all, wasn’t he king of this land? But the Wise Men knew that he was not

the king they sought. After they left, they followed the star until they reached Jesus, and there they presented their gifts to Him.

And what marvelous gifts they were: **gold**, the metal of kings and a symbol of a celestial world because of its refined purity; **frankincense**, used in making incense that was burned on the temple alter as a symbol of prayers arising and connecting God and man; and **myrrh**, and aromatic gum used to make incense, perfume, and ointment for embalming. I remembered a picture of a myrrh plant and was startled anew by its spike-like thorns. Even at the Christ child's tender age, the gifts given Him bore testimony of who He was and what He would do. **Gold** for the **King of Kings**, **frankincense** for the **Mediator between God and man**, **myrrh** for the **body that would be buried** for us.

“If This Child Were Born Today” – (Poorman/Poorman, Alfred Music) - Choir

Narrator: For us! That is the most important part. If He had not died for us, no light, no sign, no bread would be enough. We would spend our lives in futility and then perish. But because of Him, we live and will live. Because of Him, all who desire will find light. Because of Him, all who seek with pure intent will find God.

All who seek! I ventured into the crowded cave once more and looked again at the worshippers and icons that surrounded me. Something had changed. Before, these sights and sounds so foreign to my upbringing had made me uncomfortable. Now, instead of gaudiness, I saw expressions of love. Instead of strange behavior, I saw devotion. Instead of disappointment, I felt peace.

And in that moment of recognizing the peace, a symbol came to me that I hadn't thought of before. The celebrated birth was to a virgin, innocent and pure. As if calling me from a deep sleep, chastening words whispered, ***It is only in a pure heart that Christ can be born again.***

“Rejoice! Rejoice This Christmas Morn” – (David Len Allen, Jackman Music) -
Sung by Choir