

Performance Notes

How Long Is the Play?

- & The play takes approximately **20 minutes**.
- & It was designed to be performed before the children's Christmas Eve service.
- & To make it a longer, stand-alone play:
 - & Add Christmas carols at transition points in the script.
 - & Carols can be sung by the congregation or a children's choir.

Music

There are **three a cappella songs** in the play, so no musical accompaniment is needed.

- & **Storyteller's song:**
 - & A Christmas version of *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*.Sung by Daddy Dog (or Dove, Donkey, Cat) and the animal family.
- & **Mary's song:**
 - & Mary sings to baby Jesus.
 - & We have used *Isn't He Beautiful* by John Wimber.
 - & Other options include:
 - & The first verse of *Mary Had a Little Lamb*
 - & The opening lines of *Silent Night*, sung slowly as a lullaby
 - & If Mary does not want to sing:
 - & Someone else can sing.
 - & A group can sing while Mary smiles at the baby and rocks Him in her arms.
- & **Closing song:**
 - & The chorus of *Go Tell It On the Mountain*.
 - & Mama and her family sing as they skip down the aisle at the end of the play.

Casting the Parts

- & If more than one person wants the same part:
 - & Put the names in a hat.
 - & Close your eyes.
 - & Pull out a name.
 - & **Let God pick!**
- & Not everyone wants to be an actor or actress—and that's perfectly fine.
- & Children can participate simply by:
 - & Watching.
 - & Being part of the storyteller's family.

- & Enjoying the experience together.
- & The suggested ages for each character are just that—**suggestions**.
- & Have fun with the casting!

One Frequently Asked Question

- & We **do not use a pillow under Mary's outfit** to indicate a "before and after" arrival in Bethlehem.

Make the Play a Christmas Tradition

There are **four versions of the play**, each featuring a different storyteller, but the plays are primarily the same.

The idea is for churches to make the play an **annual Christmas tradition**.

- & As children act out different characters over the years, they can:
 - & Experience the Bethlehem story from a new perspective.
 - & Discover new truths about God.
 - & Grow in their understanding of the Christmas story.

The Four Storytellers & Advent Themes

Each storyteller represents one of the themes of the four Advent candles:

- & **Grammie Cat — Hope**
- & **Nana Dove — Peace**
- & **Daddy Dog — Joy**
- & **Grandpa Donkey — Love**

In *Grammie Cat's Christmas*, each character has a chapter telling how they discovered God's:

- & Hope
- & Peace
- & Joy
- & Love

The purpose is to help children learn how to find God's hope, peace, joy, and love for themselves.

Bring the Book Into Sunday School

The four stories can be used during the **four weeks leading up to Christmas**.

They could be shared:

- & During Sunday School.
- & During a rehearsal.
- & As part of a Christmas lesson or activity.

Each story creates another opportunity to **open our hearts, experience God, and learn more about Him.**

Bible Verse Challenge

At the end of each chapter in *Grammie Cat's Christmas* is a Bible verse related to that chapter's theme.

- & Encourage children to memorize the verse.
- & Offer a small gift or surprise to children who recite it.
- & Remember that every child learns differently.
- & "Close" counts!
- & Children can also say the verse together as a group.

For additional help, see "**Activities**" on the website for Bible-verse memorization games I have used with my Sunday School classes.

Keep the Children Busy During Rehearsals

Young shepherds, sheep, wise men, and manger animals may have a long time to wait before their part in the play.

One simple solution is a **Christmas Box**.

- & Fill a box with:
 - & Christmas coloring books
 - & Small packs of crayons
- & Children can sit and color while they wait.
- & At the end of rehearsal:
 - & Coloring books and crayons go back into the Christmas Box.
 - & Everything is ready for the next rehearsal.

Bringing the Christmas Story to Life

As the play progresses:

& **Mary, Joseph, the Angel, and the Innkeeper**

& Enter and exit stage left.

& Act out the Christmas story as it is told by the storyteller and Narrator.

& **Shepherds and sheep**

& Enter from the back of the church.

& **Wise men**

& Enter from the back of the church.

& A camel follows as they follow the star.

Pantomime

& Actors who are pantomiming the Bible story do **not need to speak or make sounds**.

& However, I have often had children and parents add their own lines.

& Feel free to let children use their imagination and creativity.

& If actors want to add words, please have the **play director approve them first**.

Make Rehearsal Fun!

Practice doesn't have to feel like work. **Make a game out of it!**

Game #1: Classic Charades

& Play classic charades with the children.

& See "**Activities**" on the website for ideas and instructions.

Game #2: Act It Out!

This is a fun variation of charades:

1. Put character names in a hat.
2. Three people take turns acting out the same character.
3. The audience watches.
4. Give the audience soft, stuffed animals.
5. The audience votes for their favorite performance by tossing a stuffed animal toward that performer.
6. The person with the most stuffed animals wins a prize.

But the real goal isn't winning.

Younger children can be shy about performing. After their first attempt, I often call out:

"I think _____ did great!"

That becomes the cue for everyone else to throw their stuffed animals toward the brave little actor.

The purpose is to:

- & Compliment one another.
- & Encourage creativity.
- & Build confidence.
- & Celebrate self-expression.

I believe everyone should win by being themselves.

My #1 Rule: "We Only Use Kind Words!"

Play acting is a form of self-expression, and children need to feel safe enough to try.

My classes have heard me say this many times:

"We only use kind words!"

- & If someone breaks the rule, repeat it loudly and consistently.
- & After a child performs, ask the other children what they liked about the performance.
- & In a large group:
 - & Have children raise their hands and share something kind.
- & In a small group:
 - & Go around the room and let each child say something encouraging.

The goal is to create an environment where children feel comfortable being creative, taking risks, and being themselves.

Make Family Memories

The idea behind casting adults and parents in this children's play is simple:

Create an opportunity for families to make memories together.

Whether or not a parent has a part in the play, children are performing alongside other adults.

Rehearsing at home can become a game when parents and children:

- & Pretend to be the different characters.
- & Practice lines together.

- & Make up their own actions.
- & Laugh and play together.
- & Imagine themselves inside the Christmas story.

Pantomime also leaves room for creativity. Children—and adults—may sometimes want to add their own words or actions.

- & Please feel free to create and improvise.
- & Have fun with the characters.
- & Let families add their own joy to the performance.
- & **Get the play director's approval before adding new lines to the script.**

Most of all, **travel together into the heart of the Christmas story.**