

FIRST CHRISTMAS LULLABY

By Patricia Cole Stauffer

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Leah, a teenager, has never spoken a word in her life and her mother, an old servant woman at the inn, feels guilty and worried about the future. But all that changes when Baby Jesus is born at the inn's stable. As shepherds come to worship Him, another miracle occurs and Leah speaks for the first time, to sing a lullaby, "What Child Is This?" A beautiful, dramatic story.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6m, 7w, extras)

NARRATOR: Can also play Amos.

REBECCA: Teenage girl at well.

SARAH: Another.

JOAB - INNKEEPER: Mid 30s.

ESTHER: Joab's kind-hearted wife; early 30s.

HAGAR: Widow, servant of Esther, old beyond her time.

LEAH: Mute daughter of Hagar; sings a solo.

JOSEPH: Seeking shelter.

ABRAHAM: Patriarch of the shepherds.

JEREMIAH: Abraham's eldest son.

ZACCCHAEUS: Abraham's youngest son.

AMOS: Zacc's friend.

SHEPHERD BOYS (2 or more): Young sons of Jeremiah.

ANNA: Herbal storekeeper.

MARY: Mother of Jesus.

EXTRAS as SHEPHERDS and ANGELS: As many as you need.

OPTIONAL: Infant as Baby Jesus.

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PLAYING TIME: 20 to 25 minutes depending on selected Christmas carols of choice. Suggested songs include: *"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks"*, *"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"* or *"O Come, All Ye Faithful"*, and *"What Child Is This?"*

SETTING

Scene 1: (*Before curtain.*) Outdoor well. Joab's small inn in Bethlehem.

Scene 2: Shepherd fields outside of town.

Scene 3: (*Before curtain.*) Outside herbal shop. Stable behind Joab's inn.

PROPS

Scene 1: A barrel covered to look like a well; three water jugs; a pitcher for drawing water. At inn: table and chair; bench; money and pouch; sewing basket; 2 dust cloths; coin.

Scene 2: Campfire (red light under a small stack of branches) food; bedding.

Scene 3: Pouch of herbs; manger; hay (optional); chair or stool for Mary; Baby Jesus (*if using doll*).

LIGHTING

Use an additional spotlight as the guiding star and on the angels. Also, special lighting can enhance the effect of the manger scene.

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Scene 1

NARRATOR: *(Before CURTAIN.)* I heard Jesus speak today. He was standing on a hilltop talking about peacemakers. For a carpenter's son, He is truly a remarkable man. Many people are beginning to believe He is really the Messiah, our hope in Israel. I'm still not sure what I believe, but I do know what happened 31 years ago had to be a miracle. Caesar had issued a decree that all the free people in his empire must return to the places of their birth and be registered for taxes. It was a hectic time. The inns of Bethlehem were overflowing. Some families were forced to spend the night in the stables with the animals. This is the exact time Jesus was born. One person who witnessed this strange event was a young girl named Leah. No one is sure how it happened, but on this night, Leah was able to speak for the first time in her life.

(SPOTLIGHT focuses on the well, [OS before curtain] located at the edge of town. REBECCA and SARAH, with water jugs, enter SL talking.)

REBECCA: *(Lowering HER pitcher into the well.)* And then Miriam said, father agreed we would have the betrothal at noon at Caleb's Inn in Jerusalem.

SARAH: Ooh, that sounds wonderful. That will set your father back a lot of drachmas.

REBECCA: But I'm the only daughter among five sons! He dotes on me.

SARAH: My sister Rachel is so ugly, I don't think anyone will ever want her. And I have to wait in line.

REBECCA: I feel bad for you Sarah, I wish there was something I could do. *(Gasps.)* Oh no, who let her out this morning?

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(LEAH enters walking slowly in from SL with pitcher on her head. She lowers it to her hand and then stands patiently to one side until the GIRLS finish. She is not wearing a head scarf.)

SARAH: My mother said to just ignore her. She's a poor helpless waif with not much brains, or she'd be able to talk.

REBECCA: Maybe she's too conceited to talk to us. *(Mockingly.)* Hey, Leah has an Egyptian cat got your tongue? Are you bewitched? If you talk to me, I'll be your friend. We'll have a lovely time together.

(LEAH fights to hold back the tears. She turns her eyes away from THEM.)

REBECCA: Don't turn away from me, you beggar! I know you can hear every word I say. You're probably just too stupid to answer. There's nothing between your ears except empty space.

SARAH: That's funny, Rebecca! UGH, what's that smell!

(ZACC and SHEPHERDS enter from SR.)

ZACC: I wouldn't treat a dog, the way you are treating her right now. And you're suppose to be the daughters of Bethlehem's leading citizens.

REBECCA: Yuk! How dare you talk to me like that. I'll tell my father and he'll make your disgusting group of shepherders leave the valley. You're not suppose to be this close to town. The smell alone could spoil our water. I'm getting sick. Let's leave. *(SHE and SARAH both grab their jugs and exit SL quickly.)*

(ZACC turns to LEAH. She has a look of surprise on her face. He looks down at his feet.)

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ZACC: I think I better get back to my sheep now. *(HE runs off SR; OTHER SHEPHERDS follow.)*

(LEAH pushes back her hair that has fallen partially over her face. She looks after ZACC and smiles, hugging the jug closer. Then she fills it at the well and hurries off SL. AT CURTAIN RISE: It is late afternoon at a back room at Joab's Inn. Door SR leads to rest of inn while door SL leads to outside. JOAB is seated at a table counting his day's profits. His wife, ESTHER, enters SR, with sewing in hand.)

JOAB: What a nice profit I've made so early on this day! The sun has not yet set and my rooms are already full to bursting. I could not fit another small child on this floor.

ESTHER: *(Stands behind HUSBAND.)* And how do you know those whom you've forced to pay in advance will fit in this small room?

JOAB: I believe I know my own space woman! They'll fit. *(Thinking.)* If only I could stack them up a little. But of course, that's impossible. I feel almost kindly toward Caesar just now. He's done me a real favor.

ESTHER: Lower your voice, you foolish, greedy man! Do you want the tax collectors to hear you? They would be glad to help you with your extra cash. Besides, no good Jew would ever give credit to ... that heathen!

JOAB: *(Pats HIS WIFE'S hand.)* Now Esther, you have nothing to worry about. I hate Caesar as much as any man. I just think it's about time, I got a bonus for being a shrewd businessman and keeping my nose out of the affairs of others.

ESTHER: *(Walks to CS, appears to be looking out a window.)* I've been thinking how right the time is for our promised Messiah to appear. It would be so wonderful if I could live long enough to see his face.

End of Freeview

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