

# The Bethlehem Project: The Musical

*Book by Jeff Zimmer*  
*Songs and Music by Mike Renneker*

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## **DEDICATION**

*Dedicated to the memory of Carol, who brought the music,  
and Stan, who brought the laughs.*

## **STORY OF THE MUSICAL**

*The Bethlehem Project* is a fun-filled musical comedy about the people who witnessed Mary and Joseph's trip to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, and what happened afterward. Beginning with the catchy ensemble number "Yes, He Is," and ending with show-stopping "(This is) Not the End," this show has five great original new songs including a beautiful ballad from Mary, "I Didn't Think So," in which she contemplates why she was chosen to give birth to Jesus, as well as inspiring songs of praise and worship titled "Heavenly Light" and "The Light of Light."

In between these fantastic songs are lots of great comedy moments using interviews, monologues, and brief scenes to tell the story. Jacob and Naomi are the troupe members who interview the many zany characters, including a pair of awful songwriters; three women who argue that *they* should have been picked to bear God's son; Joseph's sister, who thinks he could have picked a better bride; a shepherd and her hand puppet Mugwump; a flamboyant fortuneteller; Jesus' babysitter, a mummy and many more. Over 40 characters in all!

The show is very modular. Productions can choose either to eliminate certain scenes or characters with little effect on the overall production. It's a fun musical for both audiences and cast members who get to play multiple roles! About 95 minutes.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*Very flexible cast of 15 – 46.*

*21 m, 20 w, 5 flexible. (With doubling 7 m, 8 w.)*

### **MEN**

**NARRATOR:** The leader. Considers himself a master showman.

**JACOB:** A member of the troupe that interviews the witnesses.

**EBON:** Wise old sage with the knowledge of the ages.

**LOUIE:** High energy song plugger.

**ABBIR:** Joseph's long-suffering brother-in-law.

**SIMON:** Construction contractor.

**OTTO:** Grotto operator who dreams of a show-biz career.

**AVIS:** High-pressure transportation broker.

**HYATT:** Innkeeper.

**EBAY:** Bethlehem merchant.

**PIECKA:** Henpecked traveler who mumbles incoherently.

**HASSIM:** Shepherd.

**BAIMA:** Worker at Migdal Eder.

**SOLOIST:** Singing shepherd.

**SAY-GAN:** Herod's astronomer.

**ALI:** Bears a vague resemblance to Oliver Hardy.

**STAHN:** Bears a vague resemblance to Stan Laurel.

**BAASHA:** Jesus' godfather.

**ROBERTUS:** Comedian reminiscent of Bob Hope.

**BARNEY:** Cue card holder.

**ZECHERIAH:** Friendly supply driver.

### **WOMEN**

**NOEMI:** A member of the troupe that interviews the witnesses.

**WOMAN:** Cast member who sees cousin in audience.

**LIRI:** High energy song plugger.

**YOLANDA:** Educated woman of Nazareth.

**GRIMMIE:** Sweet older lady of Nazareth.

**SURI:** Vain woman of Nazareth.

**SIRI:** Tall woman of Nazareth, a bit of an airhead.

**SALAMI:** Bossy lady of Nazareth.

**HANID:** Joseph's sister.

**MARY:** Mother of Jesus, soloist.

**THERESE:** Bethlehem public servant.

**NADIV:** Baker, owner of "The Dead Sea Rolls."

**RAMADA:** Innkeeper's wife.

**SHARI:** Shepherd's wife and puppeteer.

**ZEEMA:** Frustrated traveler.

**ERMINA:** Blind woman.

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**MADAME ZEHAVI:** Flamboyant Gypsy fortuneteller.

**CHARLEEN:** Heartbroken woman of Bethlehem.

**BREA:** Young migrant with annoying sisters.

**NORMA:** Jesus' babysitter.

**FLEXIBLE**

**SHORAL:** Traveler who saw Mary and Joseph on the road.

**STAGE MANAGER:** Self-conscious show manager.

**NEZ:** Weary census taker.

**ZOLLE:** Herod spokesperson/spin doctor.

**KLARIS:** Mummy.

**SONGS**

Song #1: YES, HE IS! - Soloist and Cast

Song #2a: PHAROAH - Louie and Liri

Song #2b: MY DEAR OLD MUMMY- Louie and Liri

Song #2c: YOU GOTTA SIGN UP- Louie and Liri

Song #3: I DIDN'T THINK SO - Mary

Song #4: THE LIGHT OF LIFE - Soloist and Cast

Song #5: HEAVENLY LIGHT - Soloist

Song #6: (THIS IS) NOT THE END - Cast

**PROPS / COSTUMES**

Roman tunics for Narrator, Noemi and Jacob. Ball, bow, arrow, apple, and playing card for Otto. Apple with arrow going through it for Jacob. Bowls of barley. Sheep puppet. Walking stick. Board. Several scrolls. Tarot cards, eyepatch and coin for Madame Zehavi. Golf club and cue cards for Robertus. Mummy costume, top hat and cane.

**SET / LIGHTS**

An outdoor theater circa 3-5 A.D. There is a podium CS for the Narrator. A chair can be behind the podium so he's not on and off so much, but he should exit for longer scenes. There could be four main acting areas for this show--center, right, left, and upper left. You may place scenes in the locations that work best. Lights help define the numerous quick scenes. The script calls for blackouts and light shifts (lights down on one section of the stage and up on another). These can be done in the way that works best for your theatre.

## **ACT I**

*(AT RISE: The stage is dark. MUSIC: Fanfare. LIGHTS up to reveal what appears to be an outdoor theater circa 3-5 A.D. The NARRATOR, dressed in a Roman tunic, walks to a podium at CS. He is a bit pompous and considers himself a master showman. At his sides are troupe members JACOB, who tends to be eager to please, and NOEMI, who is more dry and cynical. They are also dressed in Roman tunics. They begin the opening song, "Yes. He Is!")*

### **Song #1: YES, HE IS!**

**NARRATOR:** *(Sings.)* IS HE GOD OR IS HE MAN?

**NOEMI and JACOB:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE THE LION OR THE LAMB?

**NOEMI and JACOB:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE THE SAVIOR OF ALL  
NATIONS? CORNERSTONE AND FOUNDATION,  
WORTHY OF ALL EXULTATIONS? YES, HE IS!

*(The rest of the CAST enter and join THEM onstage as the song continues.)*

**CHORUS:** YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE HUMBLE YET A KING?

**CHORUS:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE THE LORD OF EVERYTHING?

**CHORUS:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:**

IS HE THE ALPHA AND OMEGA? FATHER, LORD  
OF ALL CREATION, PROPHESED BY ISAIAH? YES, HE IS!

**CHORUS:** YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE SOMETHING THAT THE WORLD HAS  
NEVER SEEN BEFORE? IS HE SOMEONE THAT MANKIND  
WILL WORSHIP AND ADORE? YES, HE IS!

**CHORUS:** YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE GRACE OR IS HE JUSTICE?

**CHORUS:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE GOOD AND IS HE RIGHTEOUS?

**CHORUS:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** WAS HE BORN OF A VIRGIN,  
UNLIKE ANY OTHER PERSON, HE THE BEARER OF  
OUR BURDENS? YES HE IS!

**CHORUS:** YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!!!

**ALL:** IS HE SOMETHING THAT THE WORLD HAS  
NEVER SEEN BEFORE? IS HE SOMEONE THAT MANKIND  
WILL WORSHIP AND ADORE? YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
LORD OF LORDS— THEY WILL CALL HIM!  
KING OF KINGS! HE IS THE ANOINTED ONE!  
HE THE SON OF GOD! BREAD OF LIFE,  
LIGHT OF THE WORLD, THE RIGHTEOUS SON,  
THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.

**NARRATOR:** IS HE MIGHTY, IS HE MEEK?

**CHORUS:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE STRONG WHEN WE ARE WEAK?

**CHORUS:** YES, HE IS!

**NARRATOR:** IS HE THE HOLY HEALER, THE WAY,  
THE LIFE, THE TRUTH? SPEAKS WISDOM OF THE AGES,  
WHILE HE'S MAKING ALL THINGS NEW?  
IS HE THE ONE WHO PURIFIES—

**INDIVIDUALLY SPOKEN:**

SANCTIFIES— GLORIFIES— MYSTIFIES—  
MAGNIFIES— JUSTIFIES— RECTIFIES—  
SATISFIES— CLARIFIES— DIGNIFIES—  
EDIFIES— GRATIFIES— QUALIFIES—  
FORTIFIES— BEAUTIFIES— TESTIFIES—

**ALL:** *(Sings.)* AND UNIFIES!

YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS! YES, YES HE IS!  
YES, YES HE IS!

*(Song concludes with full CAST on stage. They wave, smile and blow kisses at the audience. The NARRATOR is bit perplexed when they don't leave.)*

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**NARRATOR:** Okay, you people can go now. Go, go, go...  
now!

*(SOME leave reluctantly, while OTHERS stay.)*

**WOMAN:** *(Complaining.) But we just got here! (Points to audience.)* That's my cousin Stan! *(Waves.)* Hi, Stan! Thanks for coming!

**NARRATOR:** Oh, for goodness' sake. Very well, you can stay. But just be quiet while I do my soliloquy.

**WOMAN:** *(Disturbed.) Soliloquy?* Are you going to do that now?

**NARRATOR:** Yes!

**WOMAN:** *(To audience member.)* See you after the show, Stan!

*(The WOMAN and the OTHERS all quickly exit except for NOEMI, JACOB and the NARRATOR.)*

**NARRATOR:** *(Bombastic style.)* Friends, Romans, citizens, lend me your ears! *Behold!* Tonight, the members of the Great Emperor and General Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus Theater Company—

**JACOB and NOEMI:** *And petting zoo!*

**NARRATOR:** *(Reluctantly.)* ...And petting zoo— *(Back to bombastic.)* Will be presenting the *remarkable* story of a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem! You've heard tales about it! You've heard rumors about it! And I'm sure you've heard *lies* about it! But tonight, you get *the truth!* Our troupe members visited Bethlehem and interviewed many of the local residents who witnessed that blessed event *with their own eyes!* We also talked to the people of Nazareth, Egypt and many other locations so that we could create a full and complete narrative about what happened in the days before, during and after the birth. The play we present to you tonight is a compilation of those interviews.

**JACOB:** *(Applauds, sycophantically.)* Very good, sir!

**NARRATOR:** I think I can do it better. (*Broader.*) *Friends, Romans—*

**JACOB:** *No, no!* That was perfect!

**NOEMI:** No need to do it again.

**NARRATOR:** You really thought it was *perfect*?

**JACOB:** You were never better, sir.

**NARRATOR:** Indeed... Okay, on with the show!

**JACOB:** (*Aside to audience.*) That's why they call him "Pompous Pilate." (*Exits.*)

**NARRATOR:** Troupe member Noemi began our investigation by speaking to the great sage, Ebon of Judea.

(*LIGHTS shift to NOEMI and EBON. Ebon is a wise old man who speaks the wisdom of the ages. Dramatically.*)

**EBON:** The events at Bethlehem occurred recently, but the story actually begins in ancient times, many *hundreds* of years ago.

**NOEMI:** *Hundreds?* Can you skip ahead a few centuries and get to the part where Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem? This show needs to be over by Tuesday!

**EBON:** (*Ignoring NOEMI.*) The child's birth fulfilled— (*Overdramatically.*) *The prophecy!*

**NOEMI:** "The prophecy"?

**EBON:** *The prophecy!* "The Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."

**NOEMI:** I see.

**EBON:** *The prophecy!* Two chapters later, Isaiah wrote, "For to us a child is born, a son is given, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

**NOEMI:** Another—

**EBON:** *Prophecy!*

**NOEMI:** Why is it people had to travel to Bethlehem?

**EBON:** Because of Micah 5, verse 2! Or was it verse 3? I'm not sure, I'm not a big Micah fan. He only wrote 6 pages... *6 pages!* He's no Isaiah, that's for sure.

**NOEMI:** Who is?

**EBON:** Micah wrote that the savior would be born in Bethlehem *800 years* before it happened... *800 years!*

**NOEMI:** Another "*prophecy*"?

**EBON:** More like a lucky guess.

**NOEMI:** But why did *the government* require all the people to go to Bethlehem?

**EBON:** (*Pronunciation note: SEFF-OR-IS and TAH-PEN-EASE. EBON taps his knee when he says Tahpanhes.*)

They didn't. They only had to go to Bethlehem if they were *born* in Bethlehem. If they were from Sepphoris, they would have to go to Sepphoris. If they were born in Tahpanhes, they'd have to go back to Tahpanhes.

**NOEMI:** But wouldn't it have been simpler to register in the town you were currently living in?

**EBON:** Absolutely.

**NOEMI:** So why—

**EBON:** *Because they could.* The Romans are keen at showing people who's boss. Inconvenient? They don't care. Tiring? They don't care. Disobey? *They care.*

(*BLACKOUT on EBON and NOEMI. LIGHTS up on NARRATOR.*)

**NARRATOR:** Jacob spoke to Louie and Liri, two songwriters.

(*LIGHTS shift to JACOB, LOUIE and LIRI. Louie and Liri are the very model of old-fashioned, fast-talking, hard-selling song pluggers.*)

**JACOB:** You two actually worked for the Romans on the census?

**LOUIE:** Are you kidding me? (*To LIRI.*) Is he kidding me?

**LIRI:** Nah, I think he's kidding you.

**LOUIE:** (*To JACOB.*) We're L&L! Louie—

**LIRI:** —and Liri, we write witty songs and snappy patter!

**LOUIE:** The most popular songwriters from here to Constantinople!

**JACOB:** So how are *you* involved with the census?

**LOUIE:** You gotta understand this whole census idea was NOT very popular.

**LIRI:** Much like our last song!

**LOUIE:** Hey, that was a good song! It was just poorly promoted. *Behold!* (*Sings "Pharaoh" song.*)

**Song #2a: PHAROAH**

**LOUIE:** (*Cont'd.*) PHARAOH...

**LIRI:** PHARAOH...

**LOUIE:** PHARAOH...

**LOUIE and LIRI:**—ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT AND NEVER BROUGHT TO MIND—

**JACOB:** Never heard of it.

**LOUIE:** See what I mean? Poor promotion.

*(The next song is sung to the tune of "Swanee.")*

**Song #2b: MY DEAR OLD MUMMY**

**LIRI:** You must've heard this one—

*(Sings.)* MUMMY! HOW I LOVE YA' HOW I LOVE YA'—

**LOUIE and LIRI:** MY DEAR OLD MUMMY!

**LIRI:** I'D GIVE THE WORLD TO BE—

**LOUIE:** IN THE TOMB AT M-E-R-O-

**LIRI:** E-VEN THOUGH MY MUMMY'S EMBALMED ALREADY, WRAPPED AND READY!

**LOUIE and LIRI:** MY DEAR OLD MUMMY!

**LOUIE:** I'D WALK A MILLION MILES FROM ONE OF YOUR SMILES... MY MUMMY!

*(THEY strike an ending pose.)*

**JACOB:** Isn't that offensive to the mummy community?

**LIRI:** We never heard any complaints.

*(LOUIE clears his throat meaningfully.)*

**LIRI:** *(Cont'd.)* Oh, Tut always complains about *everything*.

**JACOB:** So, tell me why the census people hired you.

**LIRI:** To write a song to explain the census and to make it more popular!

**LOUIE:** You know, something you could sing to lift your spirits on your long trip to wherever you're reporting to for the census.

**JACOB:** That sounds like a really... *bad* idea.

**LOUIE:** Yeah, but it's a *great* song! Wanna hear it?

**JACOB:** Not really.

**LOUIE:** We have a da-da-da-da-dum-dum opening: *one, two, three four!*

**LOUIE and LIRI:** DA-DA-DA-DA-DUM-DUM!

*(Song: "You Gotta Sign Up" is sung in a military marching cadence as LOUIE and LIRI do a little march in place.)*

### **Song #2c: YOU GOTTA SIGN UP**

**LOUIE and LIRI:** *(Cont'd.)*

YOU GOTTA SIGN UP! YOU GOTTA SIGN UP!  
IT'S TIME FOR THE CENSUS NOW!  
YOU GOTTA SIGN UP! YOU GOTTA SIGN UP!  
WE'RE GONNA TELL YOU HOW!

**LOUIE:** IT'S EASY! IT'S SIMPLE! HERE'S THE LOWDOWN!

**LIRI:** ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS GO TO YOUR HOMETOWN!

**LOUIE:** REGISTER YOURSELF, YOUR KIDS AND YOUR WIFE—  
ISN'T THAT BETTER THAN LOSING YOUR LIFE?

**LIRI:** IT'S A ROMAN DECREE!

**LOUIE and LIRI:** A DECREE FOR BOTH YOU AND ME!

**LOUIS:** SO GET YOUR CAMEL IN GEAR!

**LOUIS and LIRI:** BECAUSE CENSUS TIME IS HERE!

**LIRI:** So? What do you think?

**JACOB:** Like the Pharaoh once said: I think it Sphinx.

*(Quick BLACKOUT. LIGHTS up on NARRATOR.)*

**NARRATOR:** We found out very quickly the story was centered around two people named Mary and Joseph. They came from a small farming village called "Nazareth." Yolanda of Nazareth.

*(LIGHTS shift to YOLANDA. Yolanda is an educated woman of Nazareth.)*

**YOLANDA:** *(Very matter-of-fact.)* The town of Nazareth is a small town but is also an old one. Even older than many of the jokes in this show. The word Nazareth means "a sprout from the branch." The branch of David. The Romans have their own term for it: "Dumpe Grande."

*(LIGHTS shift to NARRATOR.)*

**NARRATOR:** Grimmie, a citizen of Dumpe Grande—I mean *Nazareth*.

*(LIGHTS shift to GRIMMIE, a sweet older lady of Nazareth.)*

**GRIMMIE:** Mary and Joseph are the best. Don't let anybody tell you different. She is a quiet, God-fearing woman who loves her husband. He is a good, honest carpenter who loves his wife. It's as if God himself put them together! But people will talk...

*(LIGHTS shift to NARRATOR.)*

**NARRATOR:** Three ladies of Nazareth: Suri, Siri and Salami.

*(LIGHTS shift to SURI, SIRI and SALAMI, who sit on a bench. Suri is vain, Salami is bossy and Siri is the tallest, and a bit of an airhead.)*

**SURI:** I just do not understand why God chose *her* to bear his son. What's so great about her? I'm *cuter*.

**SALAMI:** You think?

**SURI:** I won the Miss Pyramid contest three years in a row!

**SALAMI:** Your *uncle* was the judge, Suri.

**SURI:** Coincidence.

**SALAMI:** Besides, if God chose anyone to have his baby, he should have chosen *me!*

**SURI:** *You?* Why you?

**SALAMI:** I've already delivered *seven* children. All healthy. No problems. You would think God would want a *proven* mother for his son. And I am proven. Another child would be no big deal to me.

**SURI:** I think maybe that's the point. It *should* be a big deal. Besides, do you really think God would want the mother of his son to be named *Salami*?

**SALAMI:** And what's wrong with that?

**SURI:** You'd be married to Joseph. "Salami and Joe"? Sounds like you're ordering a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

**SALAMI:** What do you think, Siri?

**SIRI:** *(Pauses to think.)* ...It *does* sound like a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

**SALAMI:** No, I meant who do *you* think should have borne God's son?

**SURI:** Me. I think *I* should have had God's son.

**SURI:** *You?* Why you?

**SIRI:** *(She stands.)* I'm *taller*.

**SALAMI:** *Taller?*

**SIRI:** Yes.

**SURI:** What does *that* matter?

**SIRI:** Because I think God would want someone taller—they're closer to heaven. Closer to God. *(SIRI sits and waves up to God.)*

**SURI:** You amaze me, Siri.

**SIRI:** Thank you, Suri.

**SALAMI:** So why do you think God picked Mary?

*(THEY think, all tilting their heads one way, then the other, then back to center.)*

**SURI:** Well... she's left-handed.

*(THEY consider this and shake their heads no. They repeat the head tilt move.)*

**SIRI:** She *is* very humble.

**SALAMI:** *(Angry.) Humble? I'm more humble than she is! In fact, I'm the humblest person I know! Nobody's humbler than me! Nobody!*

**SURI:** Agreed. I've often said nobody's humbler than Salami. And she's got *plenty* of reasons to be humble.

**SALAMI:** Thank you. *(THEY repeat the head tilt move.)*

**SIRI:** *I know!* Maybe God created Mary without sin just so she could bear him a son.

**SURI:** So? *I'm* pretty sinless.

*(SIRI and SALAMI look at each other and burst out laughing.)*

**SURI:** *(Cont'd.) What?*

*(This makes SIRI and SALAMI laugh even louder and stagger off stage laughing.)*

**SURI:** *(Cont'd.)* God should have picked me! *Me!*

*(SURI exits after them. BLACKOUT. LIGHTS up on NARRATOR.)*

**NARRATOR:** Hanid and Abbir of Ashi.

*(LIGHTS shift to HANID and ABBIR. Hanid and Abbir are married. Hanid is Joseph's clueless sister and Abbir is her long-suffering husband.)*

**HANID:** I hate to admit it, but I didn't like my brother Joseph marrying that woman.

**ABBIR:** You don't *hate* to admit it; you say it *all the time*. You just don't like Mary.

**HANID:** My brother could have had the pick of *any* woman in the town! And just think of the dowry Joseph would have gotten if he had married Helba: *10 sheep! 10 sheep!*

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**ABBIR:** 11.

**HANID:** Really? I thought only 10.

**ABBIR:** Have you seen Helba lately? *Ewe!*

**HANID:** It's those tunics she wears. They just make her look big.

**ABBIR:** *(Like a sheep.)* Baaaaaaaaaaaa!

**HANID:** Oh, stop it, Abbir. Anyway, it's not that I don't necessarily like "Mary"—

**ABBIR:** You don't.

**HANID:** It's just that—he could have done so much *better*. Like *you*.

**ABBIR:** *Me?* What are you talking about?

**HANID:** I'm just saying I think you married very well.

*(HANID smiles at ABBIR. He says nothing, as he considers his possible responses. She gets tired of waiting.)*

**HANID:** *(Cont'd.)* ...You married *me!*

**ABBIR:** *(Sour.)* Yes.

**HANID:** *(Oblivious.)* Have you ever regretted it?

**ABBIR:** Not for a minute.

**HANID:** *Oh!* Me either, sweetheart.

*(SHE hugs HIM. He thinks back on the occasion.)*

**ABBIR:** I got 4 oxen, a plow, 12 sheep, 2 cows, 5 pigs, 6 kegs of wine, a cistern, a horse, a jar of myrrh, a bale of hay, two dogs and 6 acres of land.

*(As HE goes through his dowry, HANID slowly reacts. This is not what she expected.)*

**HANID:** *And me!*

**ABBIR:** ...Yes. *You.* *(SHE hugs HIM tighter. He shakes his head.)* I should have held out for more wine.

*(LIGHTS shift to the NARRATOR.)*

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