

MESSIAH
A CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Reading 1

The first promise of a coming Savior was given in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve heard that promise and looked for it to be kept quickly. Part of the joy at the birth of their first son was the hope that this child might be the promised Savior.

But Adam, Eve, their children, and their children's children lived and died without seeing the Messiah. From Enoch to Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph, the promise was passed on. But the waiting continued. The vision given to Daniel predicted the time of Jesus' first coming, but not everyone understood the message. Century after century of time went by, leaving many to wonder if the promise would ever be kept.

But like the endless dance of stars and planets, God's plans are not rushed or delayed. In heaven, the time for the coming of the Messiah had been set. And when the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

It was exactly the right time.

Song

Joy to the World, Hymn #125

Reading 2

Not even the priests and teachers knew that the most amazing event of history was about to take place. They said prayers they didn't mean; they went through the motions of worship only to impress others. Since they cared only about riches and honor, they weren't ready for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the Promised One.

Across the whole land, people seemed to care only about getting more of what they wanted. None of the joy of heaven reached them. But a few people waited and hoped that the Messiah would come soon. To those people, God sent angels with a message.

Some of those angels traveled with Joseph and Mary from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem. The Roman emperor was forcing everyone to make a trip to their home city, to the place where their family was from. That way the Romans could count every family and charge them taxes.

But God had a plan. He used Caesar Augustus' decree to bring Mary to Bethlehem at just the right time. Because Mary was a descendant of King David, she had to travel to David's city, Bethlehem, to be counted. Many years before, the prophet Micah had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And now, thanks to the Romans, He was going to be.

But in the city of their ancestor the king, Joseph and Mary were lost in the crowds. No one noticed them or cared about them. Tired and homeless, they wandered down the long narrow street from one end of the city to the other searching for a place to rest that night. But there was no room for them at the crowded inn. Finally, in a barn full of animals, they found a safe warm spot to rest. And there, the Savior of the world was born.

Humans didn't know it, but the news filled heaven with joy. Millions of angels gathered in the sky over the hills around Bethlehem, waiting for the signal to announce the happy news to the world. If the leaders of God's people had been waiting and watching for the Messiah, they could have been joined by the angels in announcing

Jesus' birth. But they were passed by. Instead, God searched for those who were faithfully waiting and watching.

Song

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear, Hymn #130

Reading 3

In the same fields where King David as a boy had watched over his sheep, shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks that night. Through the long hours, they talked about the promise that a Savior was coming. They prayed that the heir to King David's throne would come soon.

Then it happened. "An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:9-11).

When they heard these words, the shepherds began to imagine what this would mean. Finally, their country would have its long-awaited king! He would bring power and glory! He would free them from the Romans!

But the angel knew that Jesus was a different kind of king. He helped the shepherds begin to understand by telling them where to find Him. "This will be a sign to you: You will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12).

With great kindness, the angel had quietly explained how to find Jesus. They had given the shepherds time to get used to their glory. But now they couldn't hold back their joy any longer. It flashed out and lit up the hills and plains for miles around. Earth was silent, and heaven leaned down to listen to their song: "Glory to God in the highest, and

on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). The music of their song would carry to the whole earth and linger to the end of time.

Song

Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Hymn #122

Reading 4

Then the angels disappeared, the light faded away, and the shadows of night fell once more on the hills of Bethlehem. But the shepherds couldn’t forget what they had seen and heard. No humans had ever seen a more amazing sight.

The shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go and see this amazing thing that God has told us about.” They hurried to town and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby in the manger just as the angel had said. When they left, they were too happy to be quiet. They told everyone they met about the angels, and the baby, and everything they had seen and heard.

Heaven and earth are no farther apart today than they were on that night when shepherds heard the angels’ song. In those days, God sometimes sent angels to speak to people as they worked in the fields. He is just as close to us today. As we go about our work, as we live according to His will, angels are with us every step of the way.

Song

Go, Tell It on the Mountain, Hymn #121

Reading 5

About forty days after Jesus’ birth, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem. As all Jewish families did—it was required by Jewish law—they took their first-born son to the

temple to present Him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice. Even as a child, Jesus lived by all Jewish laws.

Since the earliest times, with God's promise that the First-Born of heaven would be given to save sinners, the first-born son of Hebrew families had been dedicated to God and to serving Him. Because of this, presenting first-born sons was very meaningful.

What an amazing thing it was when the baby Jesus was presented at the temple! How sad that the priest who conducted the ceremony had no idea what child he held. Day after day, he assisted parents and their newborn sons, paying little attention to either unless the family appeared to be wealthy or important. Clearly, Joseph and Mary were neither. Their humble clothes marked them as Galileans; their offering showed that they were poor.

The priest went through the motions. He took the baby in his arms and held it up before the altar. Then he handed it back to Mary and wrote the name "Jesus" on the list of first-born sons. Little did he think, as the baby lay in his arms, that he was holding the Majesty of Heaven, the King of glory, the reason behind all the Jewish ceremonies.

In the simple temple service, the Son of God was dedicated to the work He had come to do. The priest didn't see or feel anything special, but God's act in giving his Son to the world was seen. Someone did recognize the Messiah.

At that moment, a dedicated believer named Simeon entered the temple. He was old, but he had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. He saw the poor family presenting their first born son and the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart. To the amazement of the priest, he took the baby from Mary's arms and held it up to God. With a joy beyond any he had felt before, he said, "Sovereign Lord . . . My

eyes have seen your salvation, . . . a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29,30,32).

Turning to Mary and Joseph, who stood amazed at what he was saying, Simeon blessed them. He said to Mary, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul also” (Luke 2:34,35).

Just then, another believer named Anna, who was also a prophet, came in. She confirmed Simeon’s words. As he spoke, her face lighted up with the glory of God. She also poured out heartfelt thanks that she had been allowed to see the Messiah.

These two humble worshippers had studied the prophecies of the Messiah and had opened their hearts to God. But the priests and rulers in Israel—with the same prophecies to study—did not follow God in their hearts. Their eyes were closed to the miracle that happened right before them.

And it still happens today. Events that are the center of attention in heaven go unnoticed by Christians on earth. Religious leaders talk about the “Jesus” of history and ignore His call to help the poor and suffering. The call to do His work in spite of poverty or criticism is as ignored today as He was 2000 years ago.

As Mary looked at the baby in her arms, she remembered the words of the shepherds of Bethlehem. Those words and the prophecy of Simeon filled her heart with joy and hope. The words of the prophet Isaiah came to her mind:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, KJV).

Song

O Come, All Ye Faithful, Hymn #132

Reading 6

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, ‘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’”
(Matthew 2:1,2, KJV).

These wise men from the East were philosophers and scholars. They were some of the most wealthy and most educated people of their land. Some of their fellow “magi” were little more than magicians who fooled naïve people for their own profit. But these men were honored for their wisdom, kindness, and integrity.

As these wise men studied to understand the stars of the heavens, they were impressed that a mighty Creator must exist. Wanting to know more, they studied the Hebrew scriptures. They knew of the scriptures because Balaam, once a prophet of God, had been a “magician” or wise man in their land. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Balaam had foretold the success of Israel and the appearing of the Messiah. His words had been handed down century after century.

When they read the Old Testament scriptures, the wise men found more promises of the Messiah. To their joy, they determined that His coming was near and that it would change the world with a new understanding of God.

These men had seen a mysterious light in the heavens on the night that God’s glory had flooded the hills around Bethlehem. And as that light faded, a bright star appeared. It was not a star or a planet, but it remained visible in the same spot each night.

This 'star' was actually a company of brilliantly-shining angels, but the wise men didn't know that. It did seem that the star had a special meaning for them. They spoke to priests and philosophers and searched the oldest scrolls in the land. Balaam's prophecy claimed, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17).

Was the strange star a sign that the Promised One had arrived? These wise men believed the truth when they discovered it. Now God rewarded them. In a dream, they were told to go and find the newborn Prince. Because it was their custom to give gifts to newborn royalty, they brought with them the most valuable things they owned. The richest treasures of their land were brought as an offering to the One who would bless every family on earth.

Song

We Three Kings, Hymn #137

Reading 7

Following the star meant that the wise men had to travel at night. Through the long dark hours they repeated the prophecies and sayings that they knew. At every rest stop, they searched the Scriptures again and felt even more strongly that God was leading them. The star was a visible sign to follow, but their hearts carried the message just as strongly. The long journey went quickly because of their hope and joy.

Finally they arrived in the land of Israel. As they walked down the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem, the star stopped above the temple and slowly faded from view. The wise men hurried on, certain that everyone they met would be talking about the Messiah's birth. But when they asked, no one knew what they were talking about. They

found their way to the temple, where to their amazement, no one knew anything about a newborn king. Even worse, rather than causing joy, their news brought them looks of fear and contempt.

News of the wise men's arrival spread quickly through the city. Their strange search created a stir of excitement that reached all the way to King Herod's palace. The talk of a new king concerned Herod. Being an alien in the land of Israel, he knew he was hated by the people he ruled. His only security was the Romans. But a new prince born in the kingdom would have a stronger claim to the throne.

Herod suspected that the priests were plotting with the strangers to stir up the people and throw him off the throne by force. He said nothing of his suspicions, though. Instead he called the chief priests and scribes to the palace and questioned them about the prophecies in the Scriptures. He wanted to know what was said about where this Messiah would be born.

The Jewish teachers and leaders were offended to be questioned by their alien king—especially because of the heathen strangers. But their lack of interest about finding the answers to his questions made Herod angry. He thought they were trying to hide something from him. With threats of violence, he forced them to search their prophecies and find the answer.

“The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem in Judea,” they reported. “The prophet Micah said: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel” (Matthew 2:5,6).

Knowing this, Herod met privately with the wise men. Inside he was boiling with anger and fear, but his face was calm. Politely he asked when the star had appeared. He acted joyful to hear the news of the Messiah's birth. "Search for this child," he said to his visitors, "and when you find him, come and tell me. Then I can go and worship him also." Then he sent them on their way to Bethlehem.

Song

O Little Town of Bethlehem, Hymn #135

Reading 8

Night was falling as the wise men rode alone out through the gates of Jerusalem. Disappointed by the attitude of the Jews, they left feeling less sure that God was leading them. Unlike the shepherds, angels had not directed them to the baby king. But to their great joy, the star appeared again and led the way to Bethlehem.

In the tiny town, they found no royal guard defending a newborn King. They found no priests, no scholars, no presidents. Only a baby, cradled in a manger, and his simple peasant parents. Could this really be the One of whom the Scriptures spoke? Could this be the One who would raise the nation of Israel and be a light that would shine to the ends of the earth?

"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him" (Matthew 2:11). Beneath the appearance of a small helpless baby, they recognized the presence of God. With remarkable faith, they knelt and gave their hearts to their Savior, then laid their gifts at His feet—gold, frankincense, and myrrh, a precious spice.

With their journey complete, the wise men prepared to return to King Herod in Jerusalem and tell him what they had seen. They didn't know that he intended to harm the baby. But in a dream, they were told to avoid King Herod, so they took a different road home.

Joseph had a similar dream warning him to leave town and take his family to Egypt. The angel said, "Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him" (Matthew 2:13). Joseph wasted no time getting his family out of town, leaving after dark for greater safety.

God used the wise men to draw the attention of the Jews to the birth of His Son. Their questions in Jerusalem, the jealousy of Herod, the actions of the priests—all these things led many to consider the prophecies about the Messiah again. It made them think that something great might have happened right before their eyes.

Satan was determined to shut out God's light from the world, to destroy the Savior. But the God who never sleeps was watching over His Son. He gave Mary and the baby Jesus a hiding place in Egypt. The gifts of the wise men paid for the journey and their expenses in the years they were gone.

Even before he was thrown out of heaven, Satan hated Jesus. He hated Jesus all the more because Jesus had promised to save the lost humans of earth. Yet into this world where Satan rules, God allowed His Son to come as a helpless infant to meet life's dangers just like every other human. He allowed His Son to fight the battles that every person must fight, at the risk of failing and losing His eternal life.

Every father worries over his children. Looking into their faces, he can't help but tremble at the dangers of life. There is nothing he would like more than to protect those

children from Satan, to keep them safe from harm and temptation. Yet God sent His only Son into this world to meet even greater dangers, to take even greater risks so that our children could be forever safe someday.

Only love could do such a thing, a love beyond the understanding of humans, a love that amazes even the angels of heaven.

Song

I Will Sing of Jesus' Love, Hymn #183

Closing Prayer

Narration taken from *Messiah*, by Jerry D. Thomas.

Note: Hymn numbers are from the SDA Church Hymnal.

Suggestions for using this program:

1. You can use one narrator throughout, or involve several narrators. This is a good opportunity to include the youth in your church.
2. The songs can be sung as congregational responses, or you can use soloists, choirs or instrumental music for variety.
3. You can use a PowerPoint presentation with pictures from the life of Christ to illustrate the narration.