

# What Child Is This?

**INFORMATION ONLY**

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Plays by Pam

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The following pages are only extractions from our play “What Child is This?”

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# What Child is This? EXCERPTS ONLY

**Time:** 85 min (*estimated dependent upon song selection*)

**Synopsis:** *Taken from the Narrator’s Introduction of the play:* We have heard the birth of Jesus told from various views. Today we will give you a glimpse through the eyes of Mary and Joseph—both living in Nazareth, a small, often overlooked city in Galilee. In fact, it is not mentioned in the Old Testament.

Joseph, a carpenter is in the midst of his year-long engagement to Mary, when suddenly their lives are forever changed. Mary must choose between embracing the prophecy or risk losing the man she loves. Joseph must decide to trust the woman he loves and believe in what seems impossible. It has been four hundred years since anyone has had a word from the Lord. No prophecy. No angelic visitation. Joseph has to find a way to believe that he and Mary and her cousins Elisabeth and Zacharias have been elected by God to not only hear from Him after generations of silence, but to be the ones to usher in and birth the Messiah.

What child is this, born of a virgin entrusted into the care of an earthly father who is a carpenter?

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**Characters:**

Mary

Joseph

Zacharias (*father of John the Baptist*)

Elizabath (*mother of John the Baptist*)

Timothy (*Joseph’s friend*)

Gabriel (*angel*)

Angel of the Lord

Shepherds (*non-speaking roles – can be 3 or 4*)

Narrator

Choir

## Act I EXCERPTS ONLY

**Setting:** Have backdrop of a country hillside. Mary is sitting on a wooden bench. She is properly dressed in clothes worn during biblical times.

**Narrator:** (*lights out - Narrator is heard only, not seen; soft music. Should be spoken dramatically*). We have heard the birth of Jesus told from various views. Today we will give you a glimpse through the eyes of Mary and Joseph—both living in Nazareth, a small, often overlooked city in Galilee. In fact, it is not mentioned in the Old Testament.

Joseph, a carpenter is in the midst of his year-long engagement to Mary, when suddenly their lives are forever changed. Mary must choose between embracing the prophecy or risk losing the man she loves. Joseph must decide to trust the woman he loves and believe in what seems impossible. It has been four hundred years since anyone has had a word from the Lord. No prophecy. No angelic visitation. Joseph has to find a way to believe that he and Mary and her cousins Elisabeth and Zacharias have been elected by God to not only hear from Him after generations of silence, but to be the ones to usher in and birth the Messiah.

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*(lights on)*

**Mary:** (*facing the audience—sitting on a bench outside enjoying the scenery*)

**Joseph:** (*walks up from behind to where Mary is seated*) Now, how did I know I would find you out here?

**Mary:** (*smiling as sits next to her*) Joseph, when did you get back?

**Joseph:** This morning. We finished the woodwork early.

**Mary:** Well, I know Timothy was disappointed.

**Joseph:** (*smiling*) He sure was, but I did give him the opportunity to explore the land, as he puts it.

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**Mary:** I do and I love that you built this bench for me in my backyard so I can take in all the beautiful hills of Nazareth.

**Joseph:** Well, don't get too comfortable. I'm taking you home with me just as soon as our engagement time has ended.

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**Gabriel:** Rejoice! You are highly favored, the Lord is with you. You are blessed among women.

**Mary:** *(standing and slowly backing away; looking frightened)*

**Gabriel:** Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

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**Narrator:** *(voice heard only. Stage is dark as you set up for the next scene)* And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judea.

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**ACT II, SCENE I  
EXCERPTS ONLY**

*(knock on door is heard)*

**Zacharias:** *(let's Mary in - this can be visible to the audience or not)*

**Mary:** Zacharias, how are you?

**Zacharias:** *(silent as he leads Mary into the room where Elisabeth is and takes a sit in an area away from the ladies, allowing them privacy)*

**Elisabeth:** *(sitting until she hears Mary's voice and she immediately stands – Elisabeth is visible at all times. It is evident that she is six months pregnant)*

**Mary:** *(excited as she sees evidence of what Gabriel told her)* Elisabeth!

**Elisabeth:** *(placing her hand on her stomach as she feels the baby leaping inside of her and visible overcome with joy)* Mary, you are blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! *(placing her hand on her heart)* How is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me? *(removing her hand from her heart)* .....

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**Act II, Scene II  
EXCERPTS ONLY**

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**Elisabeth:** All these years we have heard of the prophecies. Who would have thought that God would have chosen us?

**Mary:** It is amazing. Elisabeth, what a miracle to see you with child. Something you and Zacharias have always wanted.

**Elisabeth:** I know. In God's timing. He had a reason for all the delays. We just never imagined anything of this magnitude.

**Mary:** (*hesitantly*) The normally talkative Zacharias was quiet. Is he alright?

**Elisabeth:** That's all part of the miracle! (*smiling*) On an ordinary day, he went to the temple and was doing his duties when an angel, Gabriel, appeared to him. Gabriel told him that his prayer for a child had been heard. (*shaking her head*) To think, we stopped praying about that years ago, seeing we are old in age. But God never forgot.

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**Elisabeth:** (*laughing*) Child, it's been so quiet around here! After I conceived I went into seclusion for five months. You know it can be hard carrying a promise and having to fend off naysayers and if God had to silence my own husband—child, I knew I had to get away.

**Mary:** (*holding her head down*) I don't know what I'm going to do. (*looking up at Elisabeth*) At least you and Zacharias are already husband and wife. I'm engaged to Joseph, I'm with child, and it is not his. What do I do?

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**Act III, Scene I  
EXCERPTS ONLY**

**Joseph:** *(leaning back to take in all of Mary)* Let me look at you.

**Mary:** *(smiling nervously)*

**Joseph:** *(speaking slowly, as if to not offend)* You look... you look different somehow.

**Mary:** Oh?

**Joseph:** You are still as beautiful as ever, you just look different. *(brief pause - sounding serious)* Mary, why did you leave so suddenly without communicating to me?

**Mary:** I'm sorry. Everything happened so quickly that I just didn't have time...

**Joseph:** *(calmly)* I'm your fiancé. You didn't have time.... Mary, you left without a word to me.

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**Mary:** I'm sorry.

**Joseph:** *(brief pause)* How are Elisabeth and Zacharias?

**Mary:** *(smiling, excitement in her voice)* Joseph, it is truly amazing. God has blessed them in their old age to conceive a son. Not just any son, but a prophet. The one we have been waiting for. The one who fulfills the Scriptures.

**Joseph:** *(not smiling. Looking concerned and responding in disbelief)* Um hump. Is that right?

**Mary:** I saw with my own eyes that nothing is impossible with God.

**Joseph:** *(silent)*

**Mary:** *(starts slowly, but confidence picks up as she speaks)* Joseph, the reason I left suddenly was because I too was visited by the angel Gabriel, the same one who told Zacharias and Elisabeth of the birth of their child. He told me that I will conceive a son, and will call his name Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High.

**Joseph:** Mary, please, stop.

**Mary:** I am with child. Carrying the Son of God.

**Joseph:** (*quickly standing, shaking his head no*) Mary, are you trying to tell me that you are...with child?

**Mary:** Joseph...

**Joseph:** I can't believe this. How could you? (*pacing back and forth*)

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**Soloist or Choir:** Joseph Dearest (also called Joseph Dearest, O Dear Joseph Mine)

**Act III, Scene II  
EXCERPTS ONLY**

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**Timothy:** Joseph, how long are you going to keep moping around here?

**Joseph:** *(silent)*

**Timothy:** *(shaking his head as he look at Joseph)* Joseph, I know you are not going out like that!

**Joseph:** *(silent – staring into nothing - not looking at anything in particular)*

**Timothy:** C'mon, Joseph. *(claps his hands once)* Snap out of it! Mary suddenly disappears for three months and then returns and she's with child and says the Holy Ghost is the father. Oh, my Lord! I know you are not falling for that. You go to Temple all the time, so I know you know it's been 400 years since an angel or a prophet appeared to anyone!  
.....

**Joseph:** *(holding his head down)* I know. *(looking at Timothy)* But she says it's fulfillment of the Scriptures.

**Timothy:** *(frowning)* What Scriptures?

**Joseph:** Something about a virgin bringing forth a son.

**Timothy:** Oh, yeah. Isaiah 7:14. Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. ....So you are trying to tell me that Mary believes she, living in this hidden, small town of Nazareth that is not even mentioned anywhere in all our temple studies, is the one spoken of in this Scripture?

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**Timothy:** – What does the Law require? *(not giving Joseph a chance to respond)* Stone her for bringing this shame upon you. *(shaking his head)*

**Joseph:** What do you know about the Law?

**Timothy:** Plenty. The orphanage drilled it into us morning, noon, and night. I have had enough Temple to last me a lifetime.

**Joseph:** I sure can't tell.

**Timothy:** (*ignoring Joseph's comment*) Man, I like Mary and things, but she got to be stoned for what she did to you. That's the Law.

**Joseph:** I can't do that to her.

**Timothy:** Don't let me hear you whining about how much you love her again. ....

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**Timothy:** Just handle your business. If for no other reason stone her for thinking you're crazy enough to believe that an encounter with the, what did she say, "Holy Ghost" has made her to be with child. Stone her for lying on God. Stone her for saying she is carrying the Son of God? Isn't that like the Messiah?

**Joseph:** (*Just looks up at him, but says nothing*)

**Timothy:** (*continuing without a break*) The girl has lost her mind! Handle your business.

**Joseph:** I hear you.

**Timothy:** Didn't she say her cousin Elisabeth, the very one she ran away to stay with, just gave birth to some prophet who's supposed to be the next Elijah?

**Joseph:** Yes.

**Timothy:** Is the Holy Ghost the father?

**Joseph:** No, her cousin Zacharias is, but she said it's a miracle because...

**Timothy:** (*holding up his hand and interrupting*) Bunch of nuts. (*speaks slowly emphasizing each word*) Handle your business.

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**Act III, Scene III  
EXCERPTS ONLY**

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**Narrator:** (*voice heard only*) Joseph, Mary's fiancé, being a righteous man, did not want to expose Mary publicly or to disgrace her, decided to end the engagement privately. But as he was thinking about how to do it an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

**Angel of the Lord:** (*voice heard only*) Joseph, you son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary as your wife, for what is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son and you shall call his name JESUS for he shall save his people from their sins.

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**Choir:** sings "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

**Act IV  
EXCERPTS ONLY**

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**Narrator:** And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that a census should be taken. So all went to be registered, every one into his own city. Joseph also went up from Nazareth into Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David to be registered with Mary, his wife, being great with child. And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. *(spotlight off of Joseph and Mary, but they remain on the stage)*

**Choir:** *Away in the Manger*

*(spotlight on the shepherds as the Narrator speaks)*

**Narrator:** And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

**Shepherds:** *(Standing, looking at their flock or you may have them reclining for the evening Looks stunned and frightened when the angel of the Lord appears.)*

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**Choir:** Sings Hark! The Herald Angels Sing or "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

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**Narrator:** And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they went with haste and found Mary, Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.....

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**Choir:** Sings "Joy to the World"