

Joseph's Gift

A Chamber Opera in Two Scenes

Cast in Order of Appearance

Joseph	Baritone (or tenor)
Aaron, husband of Naomi	Tenor
Mary	Soprano
Naomi, cousin of Mary	Mezzo-soprano
The Angel of the Lord	Soprano
Cornelius, a Roman centurion	Tenor
Marcus, a Roman legionary	Baritone
Seeress	Contralto
First acolyte	Soprano (or boy treble)
Second acolyte	Mezzo-soprano
Quintus, a Roman magistrate	Bass

SATB chorus of Nazarene villagers (scene 1); angels (SA) and shepherds (TB) (scene 2)

SATB quartet (or semi-chorus) of narrators

Optional SA children's chorus of Bethlehemite children

Non-singing roles: dancers (scene 1); Roman soldiers (scene 2)

Scene One: village of Nazareth

No. 1: Prelude, Dialogue and Solo: Aaron's Counsel (7:11 for both No. 1 & 2) [0:00]

(Scene: a street in the village of Nazareth. Stage left: the workshop of Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth. Joseph is seated at a workbench. His friend Aaron enters.)

Aaron: Come, Joseph, it is time for you to meet your betrothed.

Joseph: Yes, Aaron, you are right. *(Joseph gets up and pauses for a moment.)*
Tell me again about Mary. I know she is your wife Naomi's cousin.

Aaron: Are you having second thoughts?

Joseph: Perhaps I am. It is a big change, to be married.

Aaron: You are so very right about that. And yet it is a most marvelous change.

There is a world of which you do not know;
Though you may dream, you cannot understand.
Into this place, no single man may go—
Only those who are walking hand in hand
With a partner in life then may enter
Into this wonderful, magical state.

You will give thanks that the Lord has sent her
Into your life to become your true mate.

Mary is quiet but strong and steady:
She understands what it means to be true.
If for a wife you think you are ready,
She is the one to partner with you.

Joseph: You make it sound just too good to be true!

Aaron: Make no mistake, there will be times of pain:
Arguments, problems, and sadness will come.
But beyond all of these, you will regain
Strength that is only allotted to some.
There is a world of which you do not know;
Though you may dream, you cannot understand.
Now follow me, and see where we will go:
You will see that this is the promised land.

Joseph: I don't know, Aaron. I seem to be unlucky with women.

Aaron: Nonsense! You just haven't found the right one till now.

Joseph: But what do I know about being a husband?

Aaron: Well, as a carpenter, you know how to build a good home.

Joseph: Very funny. But what if she doesn't like me?
My family tells me that I snore— something awful.

Aaron: A wife doesn't care about that.
Her duty is to love you, not to like you.

Joseph: But I don't want to be a husband who commands his wife like a slave.
Most of all, I don't want her to be unhappy.

No. 2: Duet with Chorus: Joseph's Trepidation

Joseph: Shall I take this wife?
Can I change her life
And make it that much better for her?
Why would she want me?
Who would wish to be
The wife of this poor carpenter?

(Aaron leads Joseph outside to where the chorus is waiting.)

Chorus: I recall how all my friends did tell me:
Joseph, you must take a bride!
Joseph: I really don't know what befell me.
Aaron: Now, Joseph, put aside
All of the fears you hide
And take hold of Mary's hand.
When you meet her you'll understand.
Chorus: When you meet her you'll understand.

(The chorus parts to reveal Mary. She steps forward and takes Joseph's hands.)

No. 3: Solo and Chorus: Mary's Pledge and Betrothal Dance (4:11) [7:11]

Mary: Peace be to you, my husband-to-be,
I pledge my troth will be sacred to me.
We will share in life's joys and woes,
Embracing all that comes with our love as it grows.
All that you need, I will help you to find;
When you are tired, I'll be patient and kind.
Should we be blessed by the grace of the Lord
With children, then our love shall be their reward.
Peace be to you, my husband-to-be,
I pledge my troth will be sacred to me.

(Mary and Joseph separate and gaze at each other from opposite sides of the stage.)

Chorus: Come, celebrate! Come, celebrate!
Mary and Joseph shall wed, and thus are blessed.
Come and celebrate the Grace of the Lord!
Come, celebrate! Come, celebrate!
Mary and Joseph will wed in the Grace of the Lord!

(Dance)

No. 4: Duet, Dialogue, and Narrative: Mary's Departure (2:45) [11:22]

(Chorus and dancers exit, leaving Mary, Naomi, Aaron, and Joseph on stage.)

Joseph: Mary, my betrothed one,
I now pledge my troth to you that we will wed.
Mary: Joseph, my betrothed one,
I will be your loving wife when we are wed.
Together: [Mary/Joseph], my betrothed one,
We will cherish our new life when we are wed.
Naomi: And now, Mary, we must go and make ready for our visit to our relatives.

(Exit Mary and Naomi.)

Aaron: Come, Joseph, you and I shall celebrate your good fortune with a jug of wine I have saved.

(Exit Joseph and Aaron.)

Narrators: But that night when Mary lay in her bed, not yet asleep,
 there the Angel of the Lord came upon her
 and revealed that she would bear a Son who would be
 holy; holy, holy the Child.
 And so Mary went away, to her cousin Elizabeth,
 And Joseph did not see her until three more months had passed.

No. 5: Solo and Dialogue: Mary's Return (3:18) [14:07]

(Joseph's workshop: J., shaping a wood block, pauses and looks up.)

Joseph: Mary is to return today! I shall see my betrothed again;
 after three long months, at last, we shall meet again this day.

 Was it only a passing dream?
 But how lovely it all did seem!
 There so briefly I held her hand,
 And her eyes seemed to understand
 That our hearts would be soon entwined
 In this paradise we would find
 In the sharing of all our dreams;
 But how distant it all now seems...

(Enter Aaron, Naomi, and Mary.)

Aaron: Joseph, we are here!

(M. approaches J. solemnly. They take each other's hands, facing each other.)

Joseph: My betrothed, are you well?

Mary: Quite well, thank you. I am sorry to have been away so long.

Naomi (*eagerly*): It was our cousin Elizabeth— no one thought that she could bear a child.

Joseph: Yes, I have heard. And is all well with her, as well?

Aaron: Yes, a strong baby boy— mother and child are fine.

Mary: It was necessary that I should go. (*pause*) And now, I must speak to Joseph alone.

Joseph: Is this proper? I don't know—

Naomi: We will be just outside...

(Exit Naomi and Aaron.)

Mary: Joseph, please be patient with me. I have much to tell you.

No. 6: Solo: Mary's Revelation (3:08) [17:25]

Mary: In the dark of that windy spring night,
After we parted, after the dance,
My chamber was filled with a strange bright light.
My heart skipped a beat, and I thought that perchance
I was having a nightmare— a dream,
Or a vision; but then came a voice
That spoke words in my head, it did seem.
And the Angel of the Lord said: Rejoice!
You shall conceive and bear a son
Named Jesus, the Son of the Lord Most High.
Then I asked, how can I be the one?
For as yet, no knowledge of man have I.
But all is possible with the Lord,
Said the Angel in answer to me:
A Holy Child shall be your reward,
Mother to the Son of God, your destiny.

The Angel went on to tell me this:
That I should have no reason to fear it.
The Child that fills my whole body with bliss
Was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

I am with child, yes, Joseph, it's true;
Though the Child is Holy it is not of you.
If you wish that we should now part,
I will go quietly and hold no blame for you in my heart.

No. 7: Duet and Narrative: Joseph's Reluctance (2:55) [20:33]

Joseph: I am at a loss— I don't know what to say.
How can I be like a father to such a Child as this?

Mary: You would fill his needs; of that I am quite sure.
No one need know that the child is not your very son.

Joseph: I cannot decide— I must have some more time.
Will you come back tomorrow? I will decide this night.

(Mary nods and quietly exits with hands folded. Joseph stares into the distance.)

Who am I, for this? No man of holiness...
A lowly worker of wood. Why should the Lord choose me?

(Resumes working on the wood. Narrators enter downstage.)

Narrators: And so Joseph put aside his troubled thoughts and set to work.
But by the end of day he had decided what to do.
He would free his betrothed one from her promise.
It seemed the only proper thing to do.
He felt he was not worthy of such a Child.
But that evening, when at last he fell asleep, Joseph had a dream.

No. 8: Solo and Narrative: Joseph's Dream (2:06) [23:28]

(The Angel of the Lord appears.)

Angel: Joseph, son of David: I am the messenger of the Lord.
Do not fear to take Mary home as your wife,
for the Child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.
She will give birth to a son, which you must name Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.
You must be like a father to this Holy Child.

Narrators: And when Joseph awoke on the morning,
he remembered and pondered the dream.

(Exit narrators.)

No. 9: Solo: Joseph's Gift (by Doris Reeser) (2:52) [25:34]

Joseph: I am the son of a carpenter's son,
So a carpenter I shall be.
Mary, my betrothed, is the Chosen One
To make God's Son a reality.

What does this mean for me?

I have not wisdom, nor stature, nor gold;
Yet the Angel has called on me.
What can I give this holy babe foretold
That is worthy of His destiny?

A messiah should have jewelled rings;
Yet the heavens have chosen me
To raise this Child, the King of Kings,
In quietness and modesty.

My life is simple, meager, and mild;
Yet the Son of God comes to me.
What can I give, befitting this sacred Child
Who comes to save humanity?

(Musical interlude while Joseph ponders deeply.)

I am the son of a carpenter's son,
So a carpenter I shall be.
What can I give this Holy, Blessed One?

(pause)

I will offer the Gift of Humility.

No. 10: Duet and Chorus: Scene One Finale (4:37) [28:26]

(Enter Mary.)

Mary: Joseph, I am here.

Joseph: Mary, my betrothed one,
I have had a holy vision in a dream.
Mary, blessed mother,
Let us wed and take this Child into our home.
Though I am but a carpenter,
Somehow the Lord chose me.
Though I kneel with fear and trembling,

(Kneels and places his hand reverently on Mary's abdomen.)

I pledge my love for this Child to be.

Mary: *(taking his hand in hers)*
Joseph, my betrothed one,
I am filled with joy and thankful for this gift.
Joseph, humble father,
You are now a blessed servant of the Lord.
Though I am but a lowly maid,
Somehow the Lord chose me.
Though I wait with fear and trembling,
I now have you who will comfort me.

Together: Only with the help of the Lord
Will we be able to love;

We must now accept this reward,
Granted by heaven above.
We will strive together to be
Parents to this holy boy,
Who from sin shall set us all free—
Praise we our God in our joy!

(Aaron and Naomi enter happily.)

Naomi & Aaron:

Join we now in this happy dance,
Praising the Name of the Lord,
Who has blessed this couple's romance:
Now is their troth full restored!
Now they share their faith and their love,
Waiting the birth of the Child.
Thus with God in heaven above
Shall we all be reconciled!

(Chorus enters.)

Tutti: Only with the help of the Lord
Will we be able to love;
We must now embrace this reward,
Granted by heaven above.
We will strive together to be
Guardians to this holy Child,
Who from sin shall set us all free—
To be with God reconciled!

Chorus: Let us God's blessings enjoy!
Praise we our God in our joy!

(Chorus exits. Naomi and Aaron linger but exit shortly, leaving Mary and Joseph center stage. Mary and Joseph, holding hands, gaze at each other with quiet smiles, then exit.)

Scene Two: the gates of Bethlehem

No. 11: Prelude, Dialogue and Trio: Entry of the Seeress (6:31) [33:03]

(The city gates of Bethlehem are center stage. Cornelius and Marcus stand in conversation outside a Roman Legion post which flanks the gates, stage left.)

Cornelius: The hour grows late; less than an hour of daylight remains.

Marcus: The magistrate should be returning soon. Best to avoid him if possible.

Cornelius: And why do you say that?

Marcus: You know that he has gone to visit his daughter?

Cornelius: Yes, to attend the birth of a child, it was hoped.

Marcus: Sad news— he returns in mourning. Mother and child have perished.

Cornelius: By the gods, that is awful news.

Marcus: We must tread softly when he returns.

Cornelius: But here is the fortune-teller. Perhaps she will reveal better tidings for us...

(Enter the Seeress, accompanied by two acolytes.)

Seeress: Come to me, you who would know your true fate;
I have the power to discern what shall be.
Come now, discover, before it's too late,
What lies in store for you, your destiny.
Every man's future lies plain to my sight;
I can reveal what the gods have decreed.
Truth that was hidden will be brought to light;
You shall be wise if my vision you heed.

Know this dire warning before you come here:
All of the portents are shrouded in gloom.
Even the powers of darkness now fear;
They sense the world may be facing its doom.
Now has a new star appeared in the sky;
What does it mean? None can say or tell why.
Still, I am gripped with this vision so wild:
All may be saved by the birth of a child.

So come to me now, if you dare...

Seeress with acolytes:

Come to me, you who would know your true fate;
I have the power to discern what shall be.
Come now, discover, before it's too late,
What lies in store for you, your destiny.

No. 12: Dialogue and Quintet: The Centurion's Fortune (3:57) [39:34]

(During the seeress's solo, Marcus has been flirting with one of the acolytes. Now the seeress comes over to him and addresses him playfully.)

Seeress: I think that you are no ordinary soldier.
Are you perhaps a poet, a dreamer of dreams—
who has lost all touch with reality?
(Ushering him away from the acolyte.)
This one is not for you, my child.
(Ominously.) Do not offend the gods by pursuing her.

(Marcus backs away in chagrin.)

Cornelius: Here is coin for you, sibyl. Tell me what lies ahead for me.

(Seeress ignores the proffered money.)

Seeress: You do not fear what I might reveal?

Cornelius: What shall be, shall be no matter how I feel.

Seeress: Foolish man, you think to cloak your fear in indifference.
Very well, let us see what awaits you.

(The first acolyte hands her a cloth containing the fortune-telling bones.)

With the aid of these bones we shall find what we seek:
Through the pattern of their falling shall the gods now speak.

(She casts the bones, studies them for several seconds, then jumps back in alarm.)

There is no mistake, only one meaning is possible:
You shall look upon the face of all that is holy!

(She backs away from the centurion in awe.)

Who would have thought that this skeptical man
Might be the choice of the powers that be?
Thus do the fates craft their mystical plan—
Far beyond all that we mortals can see.

Cornelius: Clearly this fortune is nonsense to me.
I am a soldier, a wager of war.
What do I know of the powers that be?
I follow orders and seek nothing more.

[quintet on this text with Cornelius, Marcus, seeress and acolytes. Marcus and acolytes sing slowly “You shall look...”]

(Seeress and acolytes, after collecting the bones, remain on stage.)

(Enter Mary, Naomi, Aaron, and Joseph on the opposite side of the stage.)

Seeress: Now does your fate come to you with these who visit:
 You will be changed forever.

No. 13: Quartet: Bethlehem at Last (2:36) [43:31]

Aaron: At long last, we are here!

Quartet: Bethlehem, O City of David,
 Welcome sight to weary travelers:
 Now at last we come to your gates,
 Giving thanks to God for His blessings,
 Hoping for a place for us all to rest,
 Praying for the fate of the Child.

Mary: Destiny waits for us here;
Naomi: And for all people on earth.
Aaron: Angels of God shall appear,
Joseph: Hailing the Son of God's birth.

Quartet: Bethlehem, O City of David,
 Welcome sight to weary travelers:
 Now at last we come to your gates,
 Giving thanks to God for His blessings,
 Hoping for a place for us all to rest,
 Praying for the fate of the Child.

Joseph: But who is this who comes to greet us?

(If the optional children's chorus is used, a child enters and runs toward Mary, stopping and staring, then running back offstage.)

(The Seeress and acolytes step forward and bow to Mary before singing.)

No. 14: Trio: The Blessing of Mary (2:40) [46:07]

Seeress: Behold, the hope of us all!
 You are Mary of Nazareth, whose child comes to save a dying world.
With acolytes: Receive our blessing.

(If the optional children's chorus is used, the children enter during the first verse and

join in the chorus. They circle Mary during the second verse and stop to sing the second and final choruses.)

Blessed are you, O Mary of Nazareth,
Blessed are you who carry this Child.
Blessed are you whose cousin Elizabeth
Brings us the prophet who lives in the wild.
Blessed are you, O Mary of Nazareth,
Blessed are you who carry this Child.
Blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you.

Blessed are you, O Mary of Nazareth,
Blessed are you who carry this Child.
Blessed the One who in dying shall conquer death,
Blessed shall we be, with God reconciled!
Blessed are you, O Mary of Nazareth,
Blessed are you who carry this Child.
Blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you.

Blessed are you, O Mary of Nazareth,
Blessed are you who carry this Child.
Blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you.
Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed are you!

(Seeress, acolytes, and children exit.)

No. 15: Dialogue and Solo: The Magistrate's Clemency (6:05) [48:47]

(Cornelius gestures to Marcus and points offstage, then turns to the others.)

Cornelius: Make way for the magistrate Quintus Publius. Stand aside!

(Enter the magistrate, walking slowly and heavily. He sees Mary and stops.)

Mary: *(stepping forward)* I see that you are overcome by grief;
I know not what misfortune came your way.
I pray that you will somehow find relief,
And walk the path to joy again one day.

Magistrate: *(turning away)* What is the meaning of this? Who is this woman?

Joseph: Master, she is my wife.

Magistrate: And why have you brought her in this condition?
Clearly she is ready to give birth at any time.

Joseph: Master, though I dwell now at Nazareth, I am of this city,
and so I came for the census.

Magistrate: But there was no need for you to bring your wife.
I should have you flogged for this— or worse!

Joseph: It was wrong of me, I see that now. I asked my
companions to travel with us so that I might not miss the
the birth of the Child... For the Child will be holy.

Magistrate: And how do you know this? I suppose you had a vision from your
God of the Jews?

Joseph: Yes— an Angel of the Lord came to me in a dream.

(The magistrate stares at him for a moment, then turns away.)

Magistrate: Ev'ry child is holy and innocent
Though this harsh world seeks to lead each astray.
Filled with fond hopes, I to my daughter went—
Only to have every hope swept away.
Mother and child, though I both do you mourn,
Who am I now this man's wife to condemn?
Holy or not, for this child to be born,
Let me show mercy in memory of them.

(The magistrate gestures to Cornelius.)

See that the woman is taken to a place
where she may give birth in safety.

Ev'ry child is holy and innocent
Though this harsh world seeks to lead each astray.
Can it be that this man's wife has been sent
To bring me comfort on this, my sad day?
Now as the love for my own I recall,
This stranger's message my grief will relieve.
So may her Child be a gift for us all:
Symbol of Life for all those who now grieve.

(The magistrate turns and walks through the gates without another word, exiting.)

Joseph: *(calling after him)* My thanks to you, gracious master...

(Cornelius waits until he is gone, then turns to Marcus.)

Cornelius: Take her to the stable at “The Way of the Cedars.”

Aaron: A stable? Surely there is lodging at an inn, perhaps?

Marcus: With the census, there is nothing to be found.
This stable is the best place you will find.

*(Marcus gestures to Mary and the others to precede him offstage.
As Joseph tries to follow them, he is stopped by Cornelius.)*

No. 16: Dialogue and Quartet: Mary's Farewell (3:30) [54:52]

Cornelius: Where do you think you are going?
The magistrate said nothing about you.

(The others stop and turn toward Joseph, who looks at Cornelius, and then turns to the others.)

Joseph: Please go with the soldier, all of you. I will meet you later.

Aaron: But Joseph—

Joseph: Please go. You and Naomi must take care of Mary.

(Mary steps forward and takes Joseph's hand.)

Mary: Farewell for now, O Joseph, my dear,
For all of us, there is nothing to fear.
Our fate now lies in the hands of the Lord,
All now shall be with His will in accord.
with Joseph: Though we now part, we will soon reunite;
This Holy Child will be born here tonight.
Bethlehem, now is your destiny here:
To shine in this darkest time of the year.
Farewell for now, O {Joseph/Mary}, my dear,
with N & A: For all of us, there is nothing to fear—
Nothing to fear.

Mary *(to Joseph)*: Months ago when we'd only just met,
I knew at once that you would be true.
All that you've done for me I'll not forget;
There was not anything you would not do
To make my life better, if only you knew it—
Farewell for now, O Joseph, my own;
Your love assures I am never alone.
As it seems that we must now part,

I will go quietly and hold your love for me in my heart.

(Exit Mary, Naomi, Aaron, and Marcus.)

No. 17: Dialogue and Solo: The Centurion's Boast (2:35) [58:22]

Cornelius: *(aside)* Can they be right? Do the gods protect them?
(turns to Joseph) As for you—have you any money?

Joseph: Only what we hoped might pay for lodging here.

Cornelius: As the soldier told you: there is nothing to be found;
you might have ended up in a stable anyway.
Where is your money?

Joseph: I left it in the keeping of my friends.

Centurion: It is no matter. I have no need of your money.

Joseph: Master, I beg you to let me go with them.
I wish to be with my wife for the birth of the Child.

Cornelius: Your wish does not matter to me or to the Roman state.
You and your tiny kingdom are powerless against us.
I represent the greatest empire in the history of the world.

Listen, Judea, and tremble in fear,
Powerful armies of Rome now are here.
Caesar Augustus extends his great power,
Empire that grows day by day, hour by hour.
We are the force that sweeps all in its path;
Mars is our leader; beware of our wrath!
All the known world we shall take to be ours,
Scaling all walls, tearing down all proud towers.
Listen, Judea, and tremble in fear,
Conquering armies of Rome now are here.
Though your poor realm may have once had its hour,
You are now subject to Caesar's great power.

No. 18: Dialogue and Solo with Chorus: Joseph's Profession of Faith (2:32) [60:57]

(Cornelius turns to Joseph, who has listened, unmoved.)

Do you still believe that your puny God can stand against us?

Joseph: My faith is unshakable, because I believe in the one True God!

I am the servant of the Lord Most High;
I sing His praises all the day.
I offer up this simple trade I ply,
And strive his precepts to obey.
I am the servant of the Lord Most High,
My people are the Chosen Race.
Our prayers now to the gracious Lord shall fly,
His Love all people shall embrace.

I am the servant of the Lord Most High,
Who seeks to always do His will.
With love I pledge that I shall ever try
His holy purpose to fulfill.
I am the servant of the Lord Most High.
With faith and hope I love the Lord;
Though nothing I can do will justify
His loving kindness, my reward.

I am the servant of the Lord Most High.
I am the servant of the Lord Most High.

Chorus of Narrators (offstage):

He is the servant of the Lord Most High.

No. 19: Dialogue, Passacaglia and Solo: Joseph's Prayer (5:23) [63:29]

[begin passacaglia]

Cornelius: So what can you offer for your freedom?
Will your Lord Most High help you with this?

(Joseph walks over to the entrance to the legion's post and casually wrenches a plank away from the visibly ramshackle construction.)

Joseph: So much for your Roman engineering.
But I am a carpenter— I can repair your soldiers' quarters.

Cornelius: These are only temporary quarters...

Joseph: So I see!

Cornelius: It is fitting that you should repair what might become your prison.

Joseph: If that is what I must do, then so be it. For the Child is to be Holy.

Cornelius: Do you think I believe that nonsense?

Joseph: Did you see how the prophetess greeted my wife just now?
What do you think that could mean?

Cornelius: I tell you, it means nothing.

(He turns and walks slowly away, moving with apparent effort.)

[passacaglia slowing, stage growing darker]

Why does the sky seem to darken so quickly?

Joseph: Surely, it is only nightfall.

Cornelius: And why does weariness seize my limbs?
I am struggling to breathe...

Joseph: Perhaps the world is winding down.

Cornelius: *(alarmed)* What makes you say that?

Joseph: I was only joking. I see that this is no joke to you.

Cornelius: The fortune-teller spoke of portents of doom.
Is this then the end of the world?

Joseph: It might be so— but remember the Child.
Perhaps His birth is our only hope.
What we must do now is to pray to the Lord Most High.

(Joseph kneels as the passacaglia ends.)

Lord, take our lives and make them Thine.
Fill us all with Thy love divine;
Let ev'ry act be done for Thee.
From sin and woe, now set us free.
Turn back the tide of war and hate.
Grant us Thy peace while we await
Jesus, Thy Son, Who comes this night,
Bringing us hope and love and light.
When we awake, let all be changed:
Our lives with Thee, all rearranged.
Hear now my prayer, O Lord, to Thee.
Heed now Thy servant's humble plea.

(Joseph gets to his feet and looks to Cornelius.)

Please, may I go to attend the birth of the Child?

(Cornelius turns and gestures to the soldiers at the gates. They close and bar them.)

Cornelius: The gates of the city are closed for the night.

Joseph: Let us wait, then, for a sign that they should be reopened.

(Joseph faces Cornelius calmly. Cornelius turns away uneasily.)

No. 20: Narration and Chorus: The Turn of the Tide (4:28) [68:52]

(Narrators enter downstage in front of Joseph and Cornelius, in semidarkness.)

Narrators: O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie;
As day now ends and night descends, all hope has seemed to die.
Yet in your dark streets soon will shine an everlasting light:
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.

So time has paused, with its secret well-kept;
The Love of God came down while the world slept.
And now in response to a heavenly cue,
The stars have aligned in settings new
To offer a radiant pinnacle of light
Over the stable on this holy night.

(A light can suddenly be seen beyond the city gates.)

A magical silence now hangs in the air,
Over this world which lies still, unaware.

*(The music changes dramatically. The SA chorus of angels enters upstage.
The TB chorus of shepherds enters from stage right. Joseph and Cornelius
gaze in wonder at the light-filled sky.)*

Here in the night, nature suddenly wakes
And of a sweet ecstasy now partakes:
Life has returned and the world shall not die!
A chorus of angels appears in the sky.
Now do the shepherds come forth from the night,
Seeking the source of this glorious light!

Angels and shepherds:

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the Highest!

Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the Highest!
Let every creature give praise to the Lord.
Glory to God for the gift of His Son.
Glory to God in the highest!
Angel choirs fill up the sky!
Praise to the Lord, the Most High!
Glory to God, the Lord Most High!

No. 21: Trio with Narrators and Chorus: Scene Two Finale (5:16) [73:20]

Shepherds: Open the gates! Open the gates!
We wish to worship the Holy Child the angels praise.

(Cornelius gestures to the soldiers inside, and the gates are opened. Aaron, greatly excited, bursts forth from the gates.)

Aaron: Joseph, are you here?

Joseph: Aaron, please tell me the news that you bring—
Tell me the reason the angels now sing!

Aaron: O Joseph, come and see the blessed Child,
Whose presence in the world embodies love!
O come and see the virgin mother mild,
And hear the heav'nly choir that sings above!

Joseph: The angel's prophecy is now fulfilled:
This Child has come to save us from our sins.
All this has taken place as God has willed,
And thus new life for everyone begins.

(Aaron starts to lead Joseph away. The shepherds follow. Cornelius reaches out to Joseph as he passes.)

Cornelius: Surely, this Child is the Son of the Lord Most High!

(Joseph stops, turns, and clasps the shoulders of Cornelius.)

Joseph: Come, then, with me and we both shall now see
This Child who was born to save you and me!

(If the optional children's chorus is used, they spill out of the city gates and join the rest.)

Joseph, Aaron, and Cornelius, with shepherds: *(same music as No. 14)*

Let us go now to worship the Blessed One,

Let us go now to worship the Lord.
Glory to God for Jesus, His only Son,
This Holy Savior, our unearned reward!
Let us go now to worship the Blessed One,
Let us go now to worship the Lord.
Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God, glory to God.
Let us go now to worship the Blessed One,
Let us go now to worship the Lord.
Glory to God for Jesus, His Son.
Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God, glory to God.
Glory, glory, glory, glory to God!

(Children and shepherds exit in groups during the final chorus, leaving Joseph, Aaron, and Cornelius to sing the last line before they exit eagerly through the gates.)

Narrators (accompanied by wordless angel chorus):

In the sky above, the star now leads wise men from afar
 To the place where the Son of God shall be.
And this infant will one day walk a lonely, narrow way
 To perish on a cross on Calvary.
But all this lies far ahead; in that lowly cattle shed
 Is no hint of far-off storm:
Just the spark of Life begun, the cry of the new-born Son,
 And the struggle to stay warm.

(The opera ends quietly, with a brief violin solo over the wordless SA chorus.)

[78:36]