The Program

How easy it is in the busyness of everyday life to overlook the evidence of God among us. In The Wonder Ben, the dreamy son of a Bethlehem innkeeper, helps his mother—and us as well—see the wonder of the baby born in a manger.

The program may be adapted to fit large or small congregations. The script calls for up to 20 individual parts, of which the roles of Ben and Mama require the most memorization. Group scenes, a children's choir, and a youth choir offer opportunities to involve any number of children. A mix of new and familiar Christmas carols and the traditional nativity scene combine to make this part of an inspiring worship service.

The program as presented here will take a bit over 30 minutes. If it is presented within a service of Holy Communion, this may take the place of the gathering and word sections of the liturgy, and following "Joy to the World," the liturgy may continue with the prayers, followed by the peace and the offering. If presented in a service of the word, the program may be preceded by a gathering song, and followed by a sermon (if desired), offering, prayers, hymn, and blessing.
SCENE 1: Introduction (Option 1)

Stage is bare except for manger at center stage, and simple table and chair for tax collector at stage right. A stool is stage left front. Storyteller enters and takes a seat on the stool. Children of the preschool class gather around.

STORYTELLER: (to children) How many of you like stories? (waits for answers) ... I like stories too. What are your favorite kinds of stories? (waits for answers) ... Do you know what kind I like best? I like bedtime stories better than anything. I always liked it when my mom or dad tucked me into bed and read a happy story. That way I would always have happy dreams.

Tonight we're going to hear a different kind of story; this kind of story is called a play. Do you know what a play is? ... A play is a story that we can see. It is a story that is acted out so we can see with our own eyes just how the story happened.

I want you to close your eyes now and imagine that you are in a dusty little town called Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago. Here we will meet Benjamin, an artist and a dreamer. And we will meet his mama, an innkeeper—someone who runs a little hotel. (turns to congregation) Come with us now to share the wonder of that long-ago Christmas night.
Production Notes

PERSONNEL

The Wonder is a Christmas program that calls for the talents of all ages. It is also flexible. The songs indicated for children’s choir and youth choir may all be sung by a single choir, or by groups from within the Sunday school. The main cast might be played by high school students; although the parts of Mama and Storyteller could be played by adults. Some of the shepherd and angel lines may be reassigned and spoken by fewer actors.

The following speaking parts need to be assigned:
Storyteller
Mama—an innkeeper
Benjamin—her son
Ethan—a shepherd boy
Joseph
Mary (no spoken lines; one song that may be shared)
Shepherds 1-5
Angels 1-5
Wise Men 1, 2, 3 (or may be female)

There are also two Bible verses, in scenes 5 and 7, which may be spoken by Sunday school classes or by individual characters as indicated.

In addition, the nonspeaking parts of Tax Collector, Blind Boy, and Flower Girl must be assigned.

Additional shepherds and angels may be used in Scene 5, and additional magi (Wise Men or Women) in Scene 7. (The Bible doesn’t tell us how many there were.) Altogether, the angels and shepherds might make up the children’s choir. Members of the youth choir might also serve as the crowd in Scene 2.
COSTUMES
The actors may be dressed as follows:

Mama—tunic covered by apron, sandals
Benjamin—tunic, "beanie" type cap, sandals
Ethan—tunic, "beanie" type cap, sandals
Mary—long, white tunic; blue headpiece, sandals
Joseph—long, earthtone tunic, sandals; optional: beard
Tax Collector—long, colorful tunic, turban, sandals
Blind Boy—short tunic, sandals
Flower Girl—short tunic, sandals
Wise Men—long robes, jewelry, sandals; optional: beards
Shepherds—short tunics, sandals; optional: beards
Angels—white robes, wings, halos
Storyteller—modern street clothes

STAGING
Staging may be as elaborate as a congregation chooses. Or it may be as simple
as a manger, a table, a couple of chairs. The characters should be arranged so
that they are always speaking toward the congregation. In scenes involving the
manger, that should always be at the center of attention, never obscured. If
choirs sing from the stage, they may be arranged at the back of it.

PROPS
Manger
Crude table
Two stools
Tin cup for Blind Boy
Silk flowers and basket for Flower Girl
Sketch pad
Broom
Baby doll
Gifts for Wise Men
Ledger for Tax Collector
Instrument for Ethan (dulcimer, recorder, guitar, etc.)
MUSIC
The music may be assigned as follows. This outline may also be used for the service folder.

ORDER OF SERVICE
Scene 1: Introduction (Option 1)
Song, “Get Ready” preschool

Scene 1: Introduction (Option 2)

Scene 2: The Marketplace

Scene 3: Stable at the Inn
Song, “Away in a Manger” youth choir

Scene 4: Stable at the Inn
Song, “Mary Sang a Song” children’s choir

Scene 5: Field Outside Bethlehem
Song, “Stay Awake, Be Ready” shepherds 1-3
Song, “Gloria in excelsis Deo” angels
Song, “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” children’s choir
Song, “Angels We Have Heard on High” congregation

Scene 6: At the Manger
Song, “Oh, Sleep Now, Holy Baby” Mary (and others, optional)

Scene 7: At the Manger
Song, “We Three Kings” youth choir
Song, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” all choirs

Closing
Song, “Joy to the World” congregation

The congregational hymn “Angels We Have Heard on High” is printed on the following page. It, along with “Joy to the World” (page 26), may be reproduced freely in service folders.