

## Joyful Animal Nativity

Adapted, with permission, by Ana Gobledale from 'The Cat's Cradle' by Brian Mountford, Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford. The original version appears in Brian Moutford's book, *Stars of Wonder: Five Christmas Plays for Children*, Tufton Books.

### Characters/readers:

Storyteller, Cat, Rat, Mouse, Spider, Innkeeper, Shepherds, Angel, Magi, Mary

**Knock-knock jokes:** suggestion -- create new knock-knock jokes using names from your congregation.

### *Complete script*

#### Storyteller:

Greetings old and young!  
Welcome to our show,  
About a Once-upon-a-time,  
two thousand years ago,

Some friendly beasts reside here.  
Bethlehem's the town.  
One cat, one rat, one spider,  
And one mouse who clowns around.

Mouse So that's me! That's who I am,  
Mathew the mighty Mouse,  
I live here in Bethlehem,  
This stable is my house.

I earn my cheese by making jokes  
And juggling with perception.  
I'm good at making babies laugh  
When they've got indigestion.

**Mouse:** Knock Knock!

All: Who's there?

Mouse: Mavis.

All: Mavis who?

Mouse : May-vis be a tale you won't forget!

All: Ahhhhhhh.

**Cat:** I'm Simon Stupendous, the Bethlehem cat,  
I pad from door to door,  
know each shadow of the town,  
And go to bed at four.

**Spider:** I've got eight legs, and like to spin;  
I'm Sister Dorcas Spider.  
I weave the most amazing cloth  
From thin to much much wider.

**Storyteller:** They manage to co-habitate  
the stable very well.  
A friendly group behind the gate,  
All tolerate the smell.

**Mouse :** We mice and rats, sleep under the straw,  
where it is snugly warm.

**Spider :** And I, the spider, sleep in cracks,  
Wherever I can squirm.  
Spider: Knock knock  
All: Who's there?  
Spider: George  
All: George who?  
Spider: George not, or ye shall be judged.

**Cat:** And I, the cat, meow!

I'm usually out at night!  
And in the day while others wake,  
I sleep curled nice and tight.

The cows, the sheep, the donkey, too,  
They sleep inside their stalls.  
No problem sharing with our furry friends.  
There's plenty of room for all.

**Rat :** They eat their yellow hay.  
While we rodents snatch the seeds.  
Here inside the barnyard  
Each and all have what we need.

**Spider :** When God created spiders,  
God was very wise.  
For it is I who deftly keep  
the stable free of flies.

**Mouse :** Knock knock!  
All: Who's there?  
Mouse : Marian  
All: Marian who?  
Mouse : Merry-an' grateful are we!

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first verse of: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

**SONG** *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

**Rat:** The town where we live, dear Bethlehem,  
Is really rather dreary.  
Nothing too exciting happens.

It makes me rather weary.

**Cat:** Indeed it can get boring  
Way out here in the sticks.  
I think I'm more a town cat.  
Jerusalem's where life kicks...  
and clicks! (click fingers, and act jazzy)

**Storyteller:** Each of the barnyard friends  
A special talent has.  
Some weave, some sing, some dance.  
Each makes some raz-ma-taz!

**Mouse:** I, the mouse, like to juggle.  
At least I like to try.  
I earn some extra shekels  
entertaining passers-by.

**Spider :** Articles of softest silk  
we spiders like to spin.  
Here's one I'm making for my aunty.  
Oh, how she'll smile and grin!

**Rat:** We, the rats, great dancers are.  
Our audience we capture.  
My brilliance is like the stars,  
I'm a Middle Eastern treasure.

I do a bit of break-dancing  
And then some Kossack-kicking.  
Some leaping, jumping prancing, too,  
And then some tail-flicking!

**Cat :** Cuddly warm, I like to stay  
I'm just a kitten , truly.  
Wool's the thing with which I play.  
But never too unruly.  
Cat : Knock knock  
All: Who's there?  
Cat : Tom.  
All: Tom who?  
Cat : Tom to put the kettle on, it's cold in here!

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first verse of:

**SONG** *It came upon a midnight clear*

**Storyteller:** One day my friendly Mideast beasts  
something strange perceive.  
There in Bethlehem's deep sleep  
Amazing news receive.

**Cat :** Nothing goes unnoticed here;  
I are the stable's ears and eyes;  
I watch the turning of the year,  
And see the movements in the skies.

Last week I saw a golden star,  
Appearing in the east.  
It burned and sparkled like a fire,  
And frightened all the beasts.

**Spider :** In the blackness of the night  
Last night I saw a vision;  
Reflected in my web strings tight,  
A donkey on a mission.

On the donkey rode a girl,  
And 'round her saintly head,  
A ring of light shone like the moon.  
From which all darkness fled.

And then I heard a voice sing out,  
'The Prince of Peace is coming!'  
So what's the vision all about?  
I hear the harp strings strumming.

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first verse of :

**SONG** Hark the Herald Angels Sing

**Rat :** Something's up. There's something wrong.  
I've listened to the chatter.  
The shepherds heard a heavenly song.  
I wonder what's the matter.

A prophet, with a hairy chin,  
Has said the time draws near  
For God to put an end to sin,  
And God's son to appear.

**Storyteller:** So, what do you think of that?  
Do you trust this message from a rat?

St. Luke My name is Luke,  
And trust me you may.  
For I have written it all down.  
There's truth in what I say.

About the year 'nought'  
the Roman Emperor decides  
to make a list of all the folk  
who in his land reside.

Everyone must return  
to the city of their birth.  
To place their name upon the roll  
of citizens of worth.

Joseph and Mary travelled  
A hundred miles or so  
from Nazareth to Bethlehem,  
a long, long way to go.

**Cat:** It was a long and dangerous journey  
many days of travel.  
Through hard and hilly countryside.  
O'er rocky ground and gravel.

**Joseph:** Really, I don't want to go.  
For Mary is with child.  
And travel means weeks out of work,  
No income for the while.

Who do these Romans think they are?!  
They care not of my need.  
No thought for all the little folk.  
Of us they take no heed.

The law's the law, and I must go.  
Or prison's door will greet me.

Upon my donkey she will ride.  
And as for the baby, we'll see.

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first two verses of:

**SONG** Once in Royal David's City

**Rat:** When they arrive, the market throng  
Clatters noisily as they walk along.  
Exhausted, hungry, nearly due,  
Grateful that their journey's through.

**Mary:** Where shall we stay? The baby's near.  
Such a crowd. Oh, Joe, steer clear.

**Storyteller:** People here, and people there,  
talking, shouting, selling beer,  
herding sheep through dusty streets,  
changing money, on the cheap.

**Mouse:** Mary, anxious and a bit queasy,  
Wishing that the journey was easy,  
Worries over Joe's sore feet,  
And wonders...  
Mary: Where are we to sleep?

**Cat:** I know a place. Just follow me.  
It's my master's guesthouse. Come and see.  
Round a corner, to the right,  
through an archway . See the light?

**Innkeeper:** Ah, my dear, I'm terribly sorry.  
The inn is full, but not to worry.  
The beds are taken, we're out of bread,  
But I have a place out back, like a shed.

You and your husband can sleep in the stable,  
Join the stock, if you don't mind the smell.  
The sounds are soft, the cattle are lowing  
But morning light will soon be glowing.

Innkeeper: Knock knock!  
All: Who's there?  
Innkeeper: Wendy  
All: Wendy who?  
Innkeeper When-dey tell me a baby is coming,  
I'm so excited!

**Storyteller:** During the night the babe is born,  
Joe, while proud, looks weary and worn.  
Dad washes babe in the water trough,  
wraps him in a towel, not too rough.

And lays him in the straw-filled manger.  
There he lies, no more a stranger.

**Rat:** Knock, knock!  
All: Who's there?  
Rat: Joyce?  
All: Joyce who?  
Rat: Joy...ce to the world!  
All: Groan.  
Rat: Ah, c'mon. Let's sing it! Joy to the world!

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first and last verses of:

### SONG JOY TO THE WORLD

**Cat:** It is an amazing wonder--filled night,  
with the moon shining so bright.  
And all of us furry stable residents,  
honoured to be in the new baby's presence.

**Spider 1:** On the hills outside the city  
the shepherds are acting a choir,  
Singing loudly their little ditty,  
having a singsong 'round the fire.

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first four verses of:

### SONG: WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS

**Storyteller:** As they sing, they think they hear  
other voices, bidding good cheer!  
At first afraid, for none they see,  
The shepherds ask, "Who can it be?"

**Shepherd:** That star shines bright!  
The skies afire!  
I think I hear an angel choir!

**Angel:** 'Fear not: for, behold,  
I bring you good tidings of great joy,  
which shall be to all people.  
For unto you is born this day,  
in the City of David,  
a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

You shall find the babe  
wrapped in swaddling clothes,  
lying in a manger.'

**Cat:** Knock! Knock!

All: Who's there?

Cat: Anna

All: Anna who?

Cat: Anna baby will be a sign to you!

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first two verses of:

**SONG:** Angels from the realms of glory!

**Shepherd:** Is it real? Is it true?

What to think? What to do?

Let us down to Bethlehem travel.

Go and see, this mystery to unravel.

If this child is so important,  
why put them in a manger?

What puzzles me is that it seems  
they really are in danger.

King Herod's in an awful stew

About the rumours spread.

He thinks there'll be a palace coup -

His face is raging red.

**Shepherd:** As shepherds we're poor but generous,

Creative with our gifts.

We have no jewels or brocade cloth,

But knowledge of our craft.

We've collected honey from wild bees,  
humble, sweet and good.

And carved some wooden baby's toy  
From local olive wood.

We bring as gifts a bit of wool,  
coarse and warm, three bags full.

**Mouse:** We watch them bring their humble gifts

The stable gets quite packed.

They stand like sentries beside the babe.

For nothing does he lack.

**Spider:** The star continues shining bright,

All basking in the beaming light.

Mother Mary, Joe, the Dad,

And in between the little lad.

**Cat 1:** And then arrives a caravan

three wise folk from the East.

Led by the star, they've travelled far  
by foot and on their beasts.

**Magi:** We come upon the family scene.

Hello to Mum and Dad.

Our gifts we share, with joy and praise

As if a king, that lad.

Both shiny gold, and incense pure

we place beside their bed.

Then kneel in adoration,

nothing needing to be said.

**Magi:** Knock Knock!

All: Who's there?

Magi: Frank

All: Frank who?

**Magi :** (singing) Frankincense to offer have I.

**Storyteller:** Join us singing the first verse of

**SONG** *We three Kings of Orient are*

**Cat:** All the gifts brought to the babe!

We want to join in.

We animals have our humble wealth,

Our love to usher in.

**Spider :** I've woven him a special gift,

Of cloth made with the finest thread,

And beaded it with morning mist,

To hang beside his humble bed.

**Storyteller:** Join us singing:

**SONG:** JESUS MY BROTHER, KIND AND GOOD

**Rat :** Friends, it's cool to be here,

To witness God's great love.

God is really with us,

Emmanuel from above.

**Cat :** But then we start to wonder,

Is that the end, the all?

Or is there more for each of us,

Great beast or mouse so small?

**Mouse:** We know, we see, and we believe,

But more is yet to come.

For each of us there is the call

To catch the tune and beat the drum.

**Spider:** Wait wait!

Knock! Knock!

All: Who's there?

Spider: Pam

All: Pam who?

Spider: [sing] Pa-m ram-pam pam pam, me and my  
dram...Drum!

No, no, no. Let's try again.

Knock, knock!

All: Who's there?

Spider: Ron

All: Ron who?

Spider: Ron, ton, ton, ton, me and my dron...Drum!

Oh, I give up!

Blame [Ana], she wrote these silly jokes!

Back to the story!

**Mouse:** Christ the child of Bethlehem

The babe is just the start.

Each of us is called to do

Our fair and loving part.

**Cat:** This story Once-upon-a-time,

two thousand years ago,

Is ours to share with others,  
So all God's love will know!

**Storyteller:** For on this day a babe was born  
A ruler who yearns for peace.  
To follow, may we be sworn,  
To serve just like these beasts.

These friendly beasts of Bethlehem  
Remind us of God's call.  
A cat, a rat, a spider,  
And a mouse, God bless them all.

I hope you are inspired  
By our tale in the stable  
I hope your hearts are fired  
To do what you are able!

Join us singing the first and last verse of:

**SONG:** *O Come all ye faithful*

**Storyteller:** I thank you for your listening ears.  
And now for all,  
(gesture toward the actors)  
give a great cheer! [YEAH!]

And to our congregation,  
Now that our show is done,  
Thank you for your faithfulness,  
God bless you everyone!

Cat, Rat, Spider, Mouse: God bless you everyone!

**Spider:** Last one, I promise. Knock, knock!

All: Who's there.

Spider: Peter

All: Peter who?

Spider: I'm peter-ing out on these knock-knock jokes!

But the good news lives on!

Christ is born!

Please hop up and share the good news  
with everyone around you saying, Christ is born!

And responding "Christ is born today!"

Everyone, greet one another.

**Mouse:** I've got one! I've got one! Knock! Knock!

All: Who's there?

Mouse: Lettuce

All: Lettuce who?

Mouse: Lettuce sing another carol!

**Spider:** Carol who? (falls about laughing)

**Storyteller:** Carol, please Maestro! (*Nod to musician.*)

Lettuce start with the chorus of 'Go tell it on the mountain'.

Then sing verse 3 followed by the chorus one final time!