

# Bethlehem

By Jane Nickerson

**T**here's a hush in the air as you walk down the path. It feels as though something wonderful is about to happen. Your breath puffs out white. It's hard to walk in the deep snow, so you step in other people's footprints.

Now you see the village of Bethlehem down in the hollow. You climb up on the bleachers to watch the scene unfold.

## A Nativity Scene

Down in the hollow, robed villagers shuffle about. A boy leads a llama (pretending to be a camel) down the street. A man steps into the crowd, leading a donkey carrying a lady. An innkeeper leads them to a shed holding a manger. The lights go out.

When a spotlight shines on the manger, a baby lies within.

Suddenly a bright light glows on the hill above the shepherds. A host of angels bursts into song. The music swells, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"

## A Christmas Tradition

This is the annual Newmarket Ward nativity pageant in Ontario, Canada. For 23 years it has been held nightly from December 20 through Christmas Eve.

Primary children play angels, shepherds, and villagers. All agree that it's always cold, cold, cold. They wear so many clothes under their costumes they feel like they have to waddle when they walk! Brooke S. says that it's a challenge being an angel because they must keep their white costumes spotless and jump up instantly after the angel Gabriel speaks, even though they're stiff from huddling in the snow.



*Erika W. plays Mary riding a donkey.*

*Members of all ages play the villagers who come to worship the baby Jesus.*



# Canadian Style

Jordan K. says he enjoys being a villager because you don't have to learn lines. You get to walk around in costume and pretend you really were a child in Bethlehem.

The pageant uses live animals, and they are always unpredictable! The audience and cast members all enjoy it when the animals make funny noises. Celeste S. says her favorite part of the pageant is feeding the animals carrots. Once, a baby lamb was born just before the pageant began.

## A Missionary Opportunity

The pageant gives the Primary children an opportunity to be missionaries. Rachel M. and Natalie C. of the Newmarket Primary both invited nonmember friends to participate in the pageant with them.

Rachel says, "I feel good doing it. It's serving others,

preaching the gospel, and being in a play at the same time."

Her nonmember friend, Danielle G., says, "I loved kneeling by the baby Jesus."

The mayor of Newmarket and members of the town council take part in the pageant every year. The pageant committee gave the mayor a picture of the Savior to hang in his office.

## Worth the Effort

It's a tremendous effort to produce the pageant, but Sister JoAnne Anderson, who directs the pageant, says, "For many in our ward, being in the nativity pageant each year is *the* family Christmas tradition." What a wonderful way for a whole community to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas! ♦



Jason W. likes working with the animals in the pageant.

Spotlights shine on Mary and Joseph and the Wise Men as they present their gifts to the baby Jesus.