



# Happy Birthday, Infant King

A Play for Christmas  
with  
New Songs  
from  
Around the World

by

Michael Grimmitt and Astrid Jeske



# FOREWORD

This is a light-hearted Christmas play which introduces songs and customs from different parts of the world. It is especially suitable for use as part of an end of term celebration in schools for children aged eight to thirteen or as part of a Christmas service in a church setting.

It is not our intention to replace the traditional Nativity play which continues to have a special place in any Christmas celebration. Rather our concern is to introduce a lively, contemporary look at how Christmas is celebrated in a number of cultures, so contributing to children's awareness and appreciation of other cultures and enabling them to recognise diversity as a rich and desirable feature of the Christian tradition. The play in its present form, including the songs, takes approximately thirty minutes to perform. However, its structure is entirely flexible and permits the introduction of whatever customs are felt to be interesting or appropriate within different contexts. Some details of the cultures chosen for this publication are provided in this booklet and these may be incorporated in the play. Additionally, the play could become a focus of cross curricular work which might include further research into Christmas customs in cultures not included. .

Each of the songs which this play contains has a distinctive style which is intended to convey the character and atmosphere of a particular culture.

Similarly, most introduce one or two words in the original language in order to enhance awareness of being involved in another culture's Christmas celebrations. The songs are easily learnt and all contain attractive refrains enabling audience participation. The midi-files of the six songs can be copied onto a disc and played on a GS Standard keyboard as a backing for the performance, although some may prefer to create their own accompaniments from the scores.

While the play, the words of the songs and the music remain copyright, providing notification is given to the authors, schools and churches are given permission to duplicate the work for use on their premises.

As a result of careful trialing, we are confident that children and adults alike will enjoy this new combination of word and song. We would very much like to hear from anyone using this publication with suggestions for revision or development.

Michael Grimmitt and Astrid Jeske June 1996

# THE PLAYERS

(in order of appearance)

A Girl A Boy

A Group of Caribbean Singers

Mother

Daughter

A Group of Mexican Singers

Sasha

Sasha's Father

A Group of French Singers

The French Conductor

Wendy

Daniel

## SCENE I

*Girl and boy at the front of the stage dressed in warm winter clothes. The spotlight is on them. Typical Christmas decorations in the background. Also in the background: the tune of "Jingle Bells".*

- GIRL: Listen! It's Jingle Bells time again!
- BOY: Yes, but there's nothing wrong with Jingle Bells!
- GIRL: That's not what I meant! It's Christmas again, and we'll do what we always do at Christmas: eating Christmas turkey, Christmas cake ...
- BOY: ... Christmas pudding and lots of chocolate! -It's great!
- GIRL: Yes, but it's always the same! Always the same food ..
- BOY: yea, and always the same songs!
- GIRL: Exactly! *(pauses)* Don't you sometimes wonder how children in other countries celebrate Christmas?
- BOY: Yes! I'd love to know what they eat! Do you think they eat lots of chocolate too?
- GIRL: Yea, probably. I couldn't imagine a Christmas without chocolate!
- BOY: Uuuh! That would be terrible! Or imagine Christmas without Christmas carols. *(By now Jingle Bells has faded away and the Caribbean Calypso Carol can be heard in the background. )*
- GIRL: No, you can't have Christmas without Christmas carols! -But listen! I can hear a song and it's not Jingle Bells!
- BOY: Yes, I can hear it too! It sounds great! Let's go and see where it is coming from !

*Girl and boy go to the Caribbean group. The spotlight is now on the group. They could be dressed in bright colours. One or two hold a drum.*

- GIRL: Hi!
- GROUP: Hi there! Come and join us! We are just practising our Christmas carol.
- BOY: This is a Christmas carol? It sounds so ...well, so different and so ...great! !
- GIRL: Yea, it sounds fantastic! Could you teach us the song?
- ONE: Sure! Listen and join in when you are ready! *(The Caribbean group sings their song and the girl and the boy join in. )*

*As the group is singing, a mother and daughter are approaching, obviously drawn to the group by the beautiful sound of the music. They watch from a slight distance.*

## SCENE II

*At the end of the Caribbean Calypso Carol everybody cheers and expresses their appreciation. After everybody has quietened down, the mother and daughter approach the girl and boy.*

DAUGHTER: That was great, wasn't it?

BOY: It sure was! I loved the rhythm!

GIRL: Yea You are not from here, are you?

DAUGHTER: No, we are from Germany. We are here to visit my mum's sister.  
Oh! This is my mum!

MOTHER: Guten Tag! I am Sabine and this is my daughter Anna. *(All shake hands. )*

BOY: You are from Germany?! I wonder ...well, could I ask you something?

MOTHER: Of course!

BOY: Well, my friend and I were wondering what Germans do at Christmas and especially. ..what they eat!

MOTHER: Okay. Let's see ...Like you we eat Christmas turkey ...

DAUGHTER: ... and Lebkuchen and Stollen!

GIRL: What are Lebkuchen and Stollen?

DAUGHTER: Lebkuchen are ginger biscuits. They are very yummy.

MOTHER: And Stollen is a bit like your Christmas cake -but different. I tell you what ...Why don't you come and try some? And if you like, we can play some German Christmas music for you !

BOY: That sounds good! Okay, let's go!

*The four move to a table which is now in the spotlight. On the table are plates with Lebkuchen and Stollen. With a gesture the mother tells the girl and the boy to sit down and to help themselves. They do so and obviously are enjoying the taste of the food. Then the music, the Bavarian carol called Lasst uns singen starts and mother and daughter begin to sing. The girl and boy join in the chorus and encourage the audience to do the same. At the end of the carol both say bye-bye to the mother and daughter and thank them for the food.*

### SCENE III

*For a moment the girl and boy are alone on the stage. Then they hear the Mexican song Feliz Cumpleafieos, first quietly and then, as the Mexican group enters, loudly. Some hold a guitar and pretend to play it. The spotlight is on the group while the girl and boy are standing outside the spotlight, watching the group attentively and moving slightly to the rhythm of the music; they do not join in the singing. When the song is finished the girl and boy applaud and one member of the group comes forward with an old hat to collect money.*

- GIRL:           What a beautiful Christmas carol!
- BOY:            Yes! And a great rhythm too! But who are you? Where are you from?
- ONE:            Well, we are from here but the music isn't! It's from Mexico.
- GIRL:            I should have guessed it from that brilliant sound! *(The one with the hat holds it in front of her, shaking it so that the sound of coins can be heard.)* But why are you collecting money?
- ONE:            We are collecting money for charity, to help our poor friends and relatives in Mexico.
- GIRL:            Here you are. Fifty pence. I hope it will help your friends.
- BOY:            Just a sec! *( Checks his pockets for money and finally finds some).*  
                  There! I knew I had some somewhere!
- ONE:            Thank you very much! Sorry, but we have to go! We've got to go to the town centre to do some more singing. Bye!

*The Mexican group leaves and the girl and boy wave good-bye as they disappear into the dark.*

## SCENE IV

*The spotlight is on the boy and the girl who are walking slowly across the stage. A boy, Sasha, holding a Babushka (a Russian doll) is walking towards them from the opposite direction. But he seems to be so fascinated with the Babushka that he almost bumps into them in the middle of the stage. He looks up and finally notices them.*

BOY: Wups! You nearly ran us over!  
SASHA: I'm sorry, I didn't see you!  
GIRL: Yes, because you were looking at that wooden figure. What is that?  
SASHA: It's a Babushka from Russia. My uncle sent it to me for Christmas.  
BOY: What is a Babushka?  
SASHA: It's a wooden figure. Well, actually it is not just one, there are many smaller ones inside this big one.  
GIRL: Can we have a look?  
SASHA: Sure. But you've got to come with me. I have to be home in five minutes. My father wants to practise a Russian Christmas carol with me. It's a surprise for my mum.

*They move to the right hand side of the stage where they meet Sasha's father. They shake hands with him and the father asks them to sit down on the floor while he and Sasha remain standing and start singing the Russian carol, Slava Bogu. While they are singing the boy and girl have a closer look at the Babushka and play with it for a while. They then join in the chorus, clap and encourage the audience to join in too. When the song is finished Sasha and his father shake hands and leave.*

## SCENE V

*The girl and boy are in the spotlight on their own again. They are talking about the great music they have heard so far when a group of children dressed in typical French clothes (eg. berets) comes onto the stage.*

BOY: Look at them! They are all dressed the same! Just look at those caps!

GIRL: Actually, these are called berets. I think they are French. Shall we ask them?

BOY: Okay, let's go!

GIRL: Hi! Who are you?

ONE: We are French but we live here.

BOY: Why are you all dressed so ...eh ...funny? (*Girl pushes him slightly with her elbow.*) I mean ...why are you all so dressed up?

ONE: We are on our way to church. We have to sing a French Christmas carol on Christmas Eve. It is called Joyeux Noel. So today is our dress rehearsal.

GIRL: Can we come too? We'd love to hear your song!

ONE: Yes, of course! But we have to hurry! We are already late!

*They all move to the side of the stage where the boy and girl sit down on a bench while the French children remain standing. A choir conductor, who was sitting on that bench before the group arrived, greets everybody and leads them in their singing. When the song is finished the French children sit down on the floor and talk about French Christmas customs.*



## SCENE VI

*Toward the end of the discussion another girl and boy, Wendy and Daniel, run onto the stage toward the others. They are out of breath when they reach them.*

- WENDY: There you are! We've been looking for you everywhere!  
BOY: Sorry, but we met so many interesting people ...  
GIRL: yes, and we had some yummy German Christmas biscuits and cake!  
BOY: And we heard Christmas songs from all over the world! You should have heard them!  
GIRL: Yea! The rhythms were fantastic! Nothing like Jingle Bells!  
BOY: Imagine! We even sang a song in Russian and one in Spanish! (*Girl pushes him slightly to stop him from exaggerating.*) Well, we sang at least a few words in Russian and Spanish!  
DANIEL: Well, we had a great time too! We just learned a new English Christmas carol.  
GIRL: Really? A new English carol?  
WENDY: Yes, and I am sure it sounds just as great as the ones that you have heard.  
BOY: Well, let's hear it then! (*The French children cheer and express that they too would like to hear it.*)  
DANIEL: Wait! There's no way we are going to sing this on our own!  
WENDY: Yes, we need more people!  
GIRL: I have an idea! Let's get all these people whom we met earlier! They can all sing and this time they can learn a song from us!

*The boy and girl go and fetch all the different groups in order of appearance and with the help of the conductor they all start singing Happy Birthday, Infant King. The conductor also encourages the audience to join in. At the end they all shake hands, wishing each other a Merry Christmas and -finally -the audience (in unison).*

## THE SONGS

Caribbean Calypso Carol (2mins. 07 secs)

Lasst uns singen! (German Carol) ( 2 mins. 48 secs)

Feliz Cumpleanos (Mexican Carol) ( 3 mins. 00secs)

Slava Bogu! (Russian Carol) (2 mins. 26 secs)

Joyeux Noel (French Carol) (3 mins. 09 secs)

Happy Birthday, Infant King! (3 mins. 30 secs)

# CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

## 1. THE CARIBBEAN (JAMAICA)

**MAIN DAY:** December 25th: (December 24th is known as the Day of Preparation.)

### **SPECIAL TRADITION:**

Upper and middle-class people season goat meat for the Christmas dinner, which is curried goat. They also season the goat head and offal to make soup (with mannish water). Ham and turkey are also prepared, but few people would have turkey. Lower class people season chicken, often late in the night or early on Christmas morning. Most people bake some kind of cake for Christmas, such as a Christmas fruit cake or a potato pudding. The cake is prepared weeks before and soaked in rum and wine. There is sorrel drink which is made from a special berry which blooms at Christmas time.

People clean their houses -windows, floor, furniture, etc. They put up new curtains and put special bed linen on the beds. Some people decorate a Christmas tree on December 1st; others wait until Christmas Eve.

At midnight there are shouts of 'Merry Christmas' throughout the villages or in bars or in the streets where people congregate.

Noise makers, called "clappers" are sounded and a few churches, mainly in the city, have Midnight Mass.

### **CELEBRATION:**

On December 25th, Christmas Day, there is informal carol singing in the streets by young people from the churches as early as 4.00 a.m. until 6.00 a.m. Formal services in the churches begin at 5.00 a.m. or 6.00 a.m. Churches tend to be full; some people who do not usually go to church make a special effort to be there.

At Christmas relatives travel long distances to be together. In the rural areas people feel free to drop in at any house for a meal - there is usually plenty! A lot of games are played, especially dominoes, which are played mainly by men. Women spend a lot of time in the kitchen preparing different dishes; rice, peas, plain rice, boiled green bananas and other vegetables are prepared. People enjoy sharing each other's company, talking, singing, dancing and sharing presents.

## 2. GERMANY

**MAIN DAY:** December 24th

### **CELEBRATION:**

Protestant Germans usually attend a traditional Christmas service at about four o'clock in the afternoon with the whole family. During the service favourite Christmas Carols are sung, including the beautiful "Stille Nacht ("Silent Night).

There is simple food (soup) for lunch and potato salad and sausages for the evening meal. The reason for plain food on Christmas Eve is to avoid a lot of washing up! However, some Germans have a large evening meal of stuffed goose or turkey.

Presents are exchanged under the Christmas tree after the evening meal.

### **SPECIAL TRADITION:**

Christmas wreaths with four candles are very popular in Germany. They appear on the first Sunday of Advent when the first candle is lit, the other candles being lit on the second, third and fourth Sundays. Also, traditional Christmas sweets like Lebkuchen and Stollen can be bought and eaten from the first day of Advent. Lebkuchen is a spicy I ginger biscuit coated in icing and chocolate, and Stollen is rich cake containing raisins and glace fruits and sprinkled with icing sugar.

### 3. MEXICO

**MAIN DAY:** December 24th.

**SPECIAL TRADITION:**

"The posados". Seven days before Christmas people start celebrating each night at about 7.00 p.m. or 7.30 p.m. This represents the period when Mary and Joseph had journeyed to Bethlehem and were seeking shelter before the birth of Jesus. In commemoration of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem people 'journey' to each other's houses singing Christmas carols and a litany to the Virgin Mary. Each night a different family hosts the traditional Christmas party. Sugar cane drinks and other fruit drinks are offered as well as maize cakes. Each child is given a little basket of sweets. Before the food is eaten, however, the people form two groups, one group is inside the house and the other group is outside the house. Those outside -children and adults alike, carry candles and representations of Joseph, Mary, the angel and even the little donkey; they ask those inside the house for "posada" (shelter). The traditional Christmas song asks the question, "Is there room in the inn? In the first few verses the answer is "No! but later the answer is "Yes! The song tells the whole Christmas story and when it is finished everyone enters the house and celebrates together.

As part of the celebrations special large pots made of clay or papier mache are stuffed with candy and fruit. These are called "piriata". They are placed within different shapes, such as stars and animals, made of coloured paper and suspended on a line between the houses. The children are then blindfolded and try to hit the pots with sticks. When they break open a pot they can share the contents between them. The tradition reflects the struggle of good over evil.

The Poinsettia (named after Joel R.Poinset, a former US ambassador to Mexico) comes from Mexico and is known as the "Flor de Nochebuena" or the "Christmas flower" because of its beautiful red colour and because it blooms in December. These are given as presents or used to decorate the houses.

**CELEBRATION:**

On the 24th December families eat turkey, a leg of pork and seafood for dinner around midnight and go to Mass either before or after the meal. Presents are given and received when they return. However, as in Spain, January 6th (called "Dia de Reyes") is more important for receiving presents. During the Christmas period children write to the Three Magi and they are supposed to bring them presents on January 6th. There is a traditional Epiphany supper of "Rosca de Reyes", which is a ring-shaped cake decorated with sugar and dry fruit such as figs, quince, cherries, etc. Inside the cake is hidden a tiny figure representing the Christ Child. When, on the night of January 6th, the cake is cut, whoever gets the figure is required to take the family's Christ Child (which most Mexican families have) to the nearest church on February 2nd (Candlemas or the Feast of the Presentation) and to offer a "tamalas party" in his honour.

### 4. RUSSIA

**MAIN DAY:** January 7th.

**CELEBRATION:**

On the day before Christmas (6 January) the house is cleaned thoroughly and the meal is prepared. Russians eat goose for Christmas which they stuff with apples. Pies are also typical for Christmas and can be sweet or savoury.

At about ten o'clock in the evening people go to the Christmas service to celebrate Christmas. At the Russian Orthodox Church the service lasts about two hours during which the majority of the congregation stands up and only older people are allowed to sit on the few benches that are situated mainly at the side. People who attend the service bring food and place it on a table which is set aside for this purpose. The priest then blesses the food with prayers and Holy Water. Food which has been sprinkled with Holy Water is considered to be very special and people believe that it heals the sick and gives strength to the weak.

After the service everybody goes home to rest. As they wake up in the morning of the seventh of January they find their presents next to their bed or often under their pillow. The food which was prepared on the day before is then eaten for lunch and the food which was blessed is shared out as something very special and precious. Orthodox families spend Christmas Day praying and singing folk songs as Christmas Carols are not known in Russia.

## 5. FRANCE

**MAIN DAY:** December 24th.

### **CELEBRATION:**

The celebration starts with the decoration of the Christmas tree by the youngest member of the family, usually on December 24th which is called "Le Réveillon". In the evening families wait together for the arrival of "Le Pere Noël" (Father Christmas) who, during the night, leaves presents beneath the tree. While they wait they tell stories, watch television, eat nuts, savoury biscuits, macaroons, etc., and after a light supper go to Midnight Mass, which, traditionally starts at 11.00 p.m. or 11.30 p.m. with carol singing. (e.g. "Noël nouvelet", "il est né le divin enfant", "Les anges dans nos campagnes". An important feature of French churches at Christmas is the "creche" (the "crib"). In some churches they even have live "creches" with a real baby and many have life-sized cribs outside. After attending Midnight Mass families may eat a meal. In Provence, for example, the table is covered with three white cloths, each a little smaller than the previous one. It is decorated with lentil shoots which were left to germinate on a plate with water either on December 6th or on the first day of Advent.

### **SPECIAL TRADITION:**

It is customary for all members of the same family to gather at the largest house -usually that of the grand-parents -on Christmas Day for a special lunch of fresh oysters, lobsters, crabs, crayfish, "paté de foie gras", "boudin blanc", "quenelles de brochet" (very light dumplings made with pike), roasted turkey, goose, duck, capon or salmon and a special cake called "la buche de Noel". The shape of the Christmas cake is symbolic of the first large log that burns in the fireplace at the beginning of Christmas Eve ( and which, if it lasts until New Year's Day, is said to bring good fortune to the family), The cake is a log-shaped Swiss roll filled and covered with a rich butter cream and a powdering of icing sugar for snow, decorated with mushroom-shaped macaroons and subjects such as angels, birds, holly leaves, animals, woodcutters, and berries made with coloured almond paste. A great deal of white and red wine, champagne and liquers is consumed, and loads of chocolate!