

Left to right: Jonathan Aragon, Kathryn Aragon and Amber



NO ORDINARY CHRISTMAS

— By Antoinette Nevils



“THE FOCUS OF THE PLAY HAS BEEN TO POINT PEOPLE TO JESUS IN A TANGIBLE WAY.”

An expression of love, commitment and sacrifice is what audiences will experience from this year's Christmas production at the Duncanville First Baptist Church. Let There Be Light is a Christmas musical, which not only shares the birth of Jesus Christ, but reveals the loving and unique relationship between Joseph and Mary. This Christmas musical is not your typical live nativity scene and show. With talented vocal solos, ballerina angels and live animals, this play is filled with talent, entertainment and more than one heavenly message. “More than it being a play or a form of entertainment, people feel they have been drawn closer to Jesus,” said Jonathan Aragon, the church's minister of music and producer of the holiday drama. “The focus of the play has been to point people to Jesus in a tangible way.”

The Duncanville First Baptist Church Christmas production is a love story about how Joseph and Mary chose each other, but also how God chose them to bring His Son to earth. Jonathan began working on this unique story 11 years ago with just ideas of scenes and costumes. He chose to do a Christmas musical because the holiday season is the “most open to the Gospel” and believes it is the most accepted story by many during this time of year. After eight years of historical and traditional research, he was able to produce this play. His research resurrected Jewish betrothal practices and ancient rabbinical blessings used in Jewish weddings, which he introduces to audiences. “I interpreted a typical couple's relationship [back then], and what they went through,” he shared.

His wife, Kathryn, who is a professional writer, wrote the 70-page script based off his vision and scene ideas, as well as her research and observation of other biblical plays. Once she sat down, the words and lines came to her in just one weekend. She turned the well-known Christmas story into a Broadway-type musical production with a strong message. “God offered himself to us. We have the right to choose God, like Mary chose Joseph,” Jonathan explained.

Kathryn felt it was important to show God chose to love us, and we, too, have the choice to love Him. She wrote the story so it could be understood and relevant to



all backgrounds and ages. She also strengthened the climax by including other biblical characters within the story, such as the wise men, angels and Simeon at the temple. "It relates to how we are all searching for God," Jonathan added.

Jonathan believes drama and theater in church communicates the reality of biblical stories. "It can be effective in experiencing the emotion and thought process, while also relating to humanity. When people leave, they have a deeper understanding of what it took to step into God's will, which can help them do that in their own lives. If these real people stepped out on faith, so can we," Jonathan explained.

The sets in the play are authentic and originals, made by the Aragons and church members. They use their natural gifts yearly to produce and create the extravagant artwork, scenery, craftsmanship, costumes and musical talent. From the stage background designed by Broadway designer, Peter Wolf, to the kings' robes, sets and props — all were thoroughly researched by Jonathan, Kathryn and their drama director, Carolyn Tipton. The stage even includes a three-dimensional manger and a replica of an ancient sexton, which was used to view astronomy in biblical times; all were crafted by fellow church members.

The Aragons wanted to take this popular story to another level by catching people's attention, drawing them in and letting them feel the emotions Mary, Joseph and the others were experiencing. "It's a moving story," Kathryn added. "People walk out with tears in their eyes."

Jonathan and Kathryn also began visiting a messianic-Jewish congregation in Duncanville, Bat Zion, where they learned about Jewish worship practices. The Bat Zion dance ministry choreographed the Jewish dances, and they participate in the musical, portraying true, authentic Jewish customs and dances. Jonathan also consulted with the late Dr. Zola Levitt, founder of Zola Levitt Ministries, on an original song that was custom arranged for the play.

The musical is funded by the church along with love donations; however, coming into its third year, it becomes more difficult to support all of their desired works, animals and costuming on a budget. All

of the actors, directors, seamstresses and carpenters are volunteers. Rehearsals are grueling work as they meet twice a week starting in mid-October and every night two weeks before opening night. “Everyone is doing it as a commitment to the Lord,” Jonathan said.

One of the actors and dancers in the musical, Amber Otey, shared how rewarding the experience has been. “It’s a blessing to work with such great people and have the opportunity to use talents God has given you,” she explained. Doing what she loves, using her gifts for God and sharing them with others are blessings to Amber.

Amber loves musical theater and has been performing since she was 15 years old. She plays a dancing angel and sings in the chorus in the musical. She was excited to learn to perform ballet and Jewish dance, and feels that is one of the best parts of the show. “[Jonathan is] giving us an opportunity for artistic expression,” she stated. She believes adding dance and music to a play is more effective not only for the audience, but also for the actors and dancers.

Amber’s involvement with the musical came after chatting with Jonathan over the phone at her job; she volunteered to be an additional angel if needed. “What makes this play different from others is that it is told in a different light, has modern music, such as contemporary hymns, and it has over 150 cast members and live animals,” Amber explained. “We use a real baby [as Jesus]!” She added that there are many touching moments throughout the play. “It reaches into your heart because it’s real.”

Another fun aspect of the musical is allowing families and children to take photos with the live animals after the show. Jonathan is excited about this year’s production, as he has already had other churches calling him wanting to bring their congregations.

Kathryn happily revealed that everyone loves how the banners she has created add to the worship atmosphere. “The play shows the great lengths God went to in order to make salvation available to us,” Kathryn said. “John 3:16 is the greatest love story ever told, not referring to Mary and Joseph, but to God’s love for us.” **NOW**