

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. I love all the traditions. However, there is one challenge every year that preachers face: how to make the familiar story of the baby in the manger, the shepherds, and the wise men fresh to folks who have heard it many times. How do you get people to listen again, as if they were hearing it for the first time?

One thing you learn pretty quickly about me is that I am a baseball fan. A couple of years ago, I created a fantasy baseball team centered on the Christmas story. Every player on the team had a name that was part of the story. Well, one is a stretch, but it was the best I could do! Yes, it is a little gimmicky, but it certainly is unexpected! I share it with you this week as we count down the days to December 25th. I hope it will make you smile, and remind you again of the reason we celebrate – the birth of a Savior.

We begin with the Holy Family. The human head of the family is Joseph, so the manager of our team is JOE Torre. We complete the family with Jesus MARIA Alou in left field and JESUS Sanchez, pitcher. Joseph was a humble man, a carpenter by trade. We remember this with pitcher Chris CARPENTER.

They journeyed to Bethlehem by order of Caesar Augustus, so our team includes CESAR Jimenez, pitcher, and GUS Triandos, who can catch and play first. They went to Bethlehem because they were descendents of David. Our team includes Andre DAVID, outfield, and Ted DAVIDSON, pitcher, who recalls the relationship.

While in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth in a stable because there was no room in the inn. The newborn is represented on our team by BABE Ruth.

In fields nearby there were shepherds feeding their flocks. Our shepherds are Ron SHEPHERD in the outfield and Keith SHEPHERD, pitcher, and the flock is represented by Mike LAMB. Suddenly, there were angels in the sky, announcing the good news of Jesus' birth and telling the shepherds they would find him in a manger. Our angels are ANGEL Berroa at short stop and Norm ANGELINI, pitcher, and the good news is proclaimed by NOEL Abad, outfield. These angels herald the great events of the night, so the team includes HAROLD Baines.

From the east came three kings, following the star to find the newborn king of the Jews. Our team includes Hugh EAST, pitcher, Bill STARR, catcher, and three pitchers, Eric KING, Clyde KING, and Ray KING. The kings brought gifts for the baby - gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Our best effort is Purnal GOLDIE, outfield, Jeff FRANCOUER, outfield, and Eddie MURRAY, first base.

Our team has some theological depth as well. Jesus is called "God with us" or Emmanuel, so our team includes EMMANUEL Burriss at second. And because Jesus is God incarnate, we finish with Edwin ENCARNACION.

Here is the complete roster:

MANAGER - Joe Torre

OUTFIELD

Jesus Maria Alou, Ron Shepherd, and Jeff Francouer

INFIELD

Bill Starr, catcher
Eddie Murray, 1B
Emmanuel Burriss, 2B
Edwin Encarnacion, 3B
Angel Berroa, SS

PITCHERS

Eric King, Clyde King, Ray King, Keith Shepherd, Babe Ruth, Jesus Sanchez, Chris Carpenter, Hugh East,
Norm Angelinin, Cesar Jimenez, Ted Davidson

BENCH

Gus Triandos, Mike Lamb, Noel Abad, Harold Baines, Purnal Goldie, Andre David