

See the Nativity through the eyes of 'The Chosen' this Advent

"People must know." Those iconic words spoken in the pilot episode of the worldwide streaming giant "The Chosen" are revisited with power and meaning in the show's upcoming Christmas special. In advance of its yet-to-be filmed third season, series creator, writer and director Dallas Jenkins surprised devoted fans of the show with the news that the special will not only appear live in theaters as a Fathom event but that the special will feature an all new, full-length episode of the series.

Announced via a much-anticipated live streaming event, the show's second Christmas special exceeded all expectations. "Christmas with The Chosen: The Messengers" broke Fathom Events' record with \$1.5 million in sales in the first 12 hours," said Ray Nutt, CEO of Fathom Events. "Originally slated to premiere in 1,079 theaters, we've already added 450-plus locations and thousands of screens to satisfy demand, and [I] anticipate these numbers will continue to grow." To date, the special will now air for 10 consecutive nights beginning Dec. 1.

Families who head out to theaters to be a part of this one-of-a-kind Christmas event will partake in a two-hour extravaganza featuring musical acts, dramatic monologues by cast members of "The Chosen," and an episode that Jenkins calls "part of 'The Chosen' canon."

"This is a special episode that we're putting into theaters that's intertwined with musical guests and also monologues," said Derral Eves, executive producer of "The Chosen." "We also have an episode where you're able to see the birth of Jesus

Christ through the eyes of Mary and Joseph and their struggles leading up to that moment when Jesus is born.”

When asked about the decision to surprise their community with not only a holiday celebration, but also an all-new episode, Eves pointed to the fans’ involvement as a major motivation for the decision to film in secret.

“‘The Chosen’ is about building a community that’s interested in the content and getting that content out to a billion people. And we have a large number of active fans, and we wanted to keep it a secret and it was really tough to do that,” said Eves. “We had a lot of nondisclosure agreements that were signed and a lot of, ‘Hey, you can’t take any pictures on set,’ but it was to create a moment that would surprise and delight our fans of why we’re actually going into theaters. And I’ll tell you, the response of people finding out at that moment led to breaking the record, and it led to opening up more theaters, which was the goal.”

While the millions who have binged every episode of “The Chosen” and supported the series with financial contributions will certainly be captivated, it’s not necessary to have seen and enjoyed the show to walk away blessed by this special.

“This is a standalone, so you don’t necessarily need to be up on ‘The Chosen’ to experience the authenticity and the depth of this episode,” said Eves. “Also, if you’re a part and you’ve been all the way caught up to ‘The Chosen,’ you’re going to be able to see people that you recognize that have been in season one, season two of ‘The Chosen.’ And it gives a lot of the context of what’s actually happening as well, and then also we’re introducing some new characters that will be in season three. So, it’s going to be a beautiful night, but also there’s a lot of standalone music videos that are bringing old and new classics and new renditions of Christmas songs that are praising Jesus Christ. And it’s just going to be a beautiful night of worship through song, through

monologue, and then also that presentation of the episode that you're seeing through Mary and Joseph's eyes."

Theatergoers will be treated to beautifully performed carols old and new performed by a diverse team of musicians, including Matt Maher, One Voice Children's Choir, For King and Country, The Bonner Family, Bryan and Katie Torwalt, We The Kingdom and many others.

For those looking to share the "reason for the season" with family and friends who may not actively be going to Church, Derral Eves calls "Christmas with The Chosen" a perfect tool for evangelization.

"I believe that this is a great moment that we can invite our friends and family into the theaters; it's really non-threatening, it's not in a church, it's actually in the movie theaters and they can explore something that they are accustomed to know about," said Eves. "It's going to be a beautiful night of gathering, but a beautiful night of presentation of the importance of Christmas."

In the pilot episode of "The Chosen," filmed by Dallas Jenkins for a Christmas Eve service at his home church in Elgin, Illinois, a simple shepherd proclaims to Mary and Joseph, "People must know." This same sense of wonder and awe at the birth of the Christ child is not only revisited in "The Messengers."

There is a reason that we pause annually to relive the Nativity of Christ and to tell this story in our parishes and homes. Those workings of the Holy Spirit, which call us to not only "know" the Good News of the Gospel but to share it, will undoubtedly be kindled in the hearts and souls of throngs of theatergoers who have already lined up to be a part of this record-breaking Christmas event.

Tickets are on sale at TheChosen.tv/Christmas.

Lisa Hendey writes from California.