

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS:
A CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT
by Louise Egan

A One-Act Play

(In the center of the stage is a stable, open on all sides, its four supports and roof beams covered with straw. A palm tree stands to one side of stage. Three small boxes for standing upon rest in front of the manger in centerstage. ANGELS sit to the left and right of the stage. The NARRATOR reads from behind a podium stage left.)

NARRATOR

This is the story of the first Christmas – the night Jesus Christ was born. We celebrate this to remember the hope and joy that this tiny baby brought to the world on that extraordinary night in Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago.

For Jesus' birth did bring hope and joy to the world. Hope because at that time there was much wrongdoing and fighting on the earth and the people were looking for a sign from God that he would always be there to look after them – and joy, because, after many years of waiting, God had finally fulfilled his promise to send a man -- a savior, or messiah -- to Earth to go among the people and teach everybody his peaceful and loving ways. That man would be God's greatest gift to mankind -- his son Jesus Christ.

(Enter THREE PROPHETS from right. They step up on boxes as SEVERAL TOWNSPEOPLE enter from left and sit beneath them.)

NARRATOR

To prepare the world for this man, God asked different men and women to prophesy, or foretell, that Jesus was coming. These people were called "The prophets." This is what they said:

PROPHET #1

Behold, a virgin shall bring forth a son and his name will mean "God is with us."

PROPHET #2

Out of Bethlehem...one will go forth to be the King of Israel.

PROPHET #3

For unto us a child will be born, unto us a son shall be given. And his name shall be called...Wonderful...the Prince of Peace...and there shall be no end to his kingdom.

TOWNSPERSON #1

The prophets foretell of a wonderful savior!

TOWNSPERSON #2

Yes, a baby who will grow up to lead us in God's ways!

TOWNSPERSON #3

And he will be with us forever!

ALL TOWNSPEOPLE

Hallelujia!

(Exit PROPHETS right, TOWNSPEOPLE left. In the background, MARY can now be seen in the house sweeping. GABRIEL enters from right, stands on middle box centerstage. JOSEPH enters from right, sits on a padded chair and sleeps.)

NARRATOR

Now when God was ready to give Jesus to the world, He chose a good and pure woman named Mary to be his mother. Mary lived in the little village of Nazareth and was engaged to be married to Joseph, a humble carpenter, who lived nearby.

(MARY comes forward to left of GABRIEL and looks up at him.)

NARRATOR

One day, when Mary was alone, God sent his messenger, the angel Gabriel, to appear before her.

GABRIEL

Hail, Mary. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women.

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NARRATOR

Mary was at first frightened and confused by this greeting of the Angel of God. But then Gabriel told her that God had chosen her to give birth to Jesus.

GABRIEL

Fear not Mary, for you are special in God's eyes. And behold, he has chosen you to bring forth a son. And you shall call him Jesus. And he will be called the Son of God. And his Kingdom shall have no end.

NARRATOR

Mary now understood everything she had been told. And it filled her with great joy and happiness. She replied to Gabriel saying..."

MARY

I will happily carry out God's will.

(MARY looks toward heaven, a smile on her face. Gabrielle turns to stage right and looks down to Joseph.)

NARRATOR

Not long after he had spoken to Mary, the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph one night as he slept. In Joseph's dream, the Angel of the Lord told him of God's plan.

GABRIEL

Joseph, God has chosen you to be the father of his son, Jesus. And Mary will be his mother.

(JOSEPH rises, clasps his hands, and looks up to the heavens. Then he and MARY walk to center stage and hold each other's hands, looking into each other's eyes.)

NARRATOR

When Joseph awoke, he went to Mary with joy in his heart. Both Mary and Joseph had heard that God's son would be coming and they were overjoyed to be chosen by God to be his parents.

(MARY and JOSEPH exit into the house and out as GABRIEL exits stage right.)

NARRATOR

And so Mary and Joseph went back to living their quiet lives, keeping God's secret only between themselves.

(Enter CAESAR AUGUSTUS, grandly, from left, followed by a ROMAN SOLDIER who stands next to him, guarding him. CAESAR stands on a box in centerstage, holding a proclamation before him.)

NARRATOR

Now, at that time, the land they lived in was ruled by the Romans, who were mighty, but wicked rulers of an enormous empire. The chief ruler, a man named Caesar Augustus, was mean and greedy. He wanted to tax everyone in the land to raise money for himself and the Romans. So he issued a decree.

CAESAR AUGUSTUS

Every man shall return to the place of his birth.

NARRATOR

That way, Caesar would know every person who lived in his country, so he could be taxed.

(Exit CAESAR and SOLDIER, with exaggerated importance, left. As they reach the side of the stage, MARY and JOSEPH enter, right. JOSEPH pulls MARY on a wagon decorated as a donkey. As the NARRATOR speaks, they slowly cross to the other side of stage, with other TOWNSPEOPLE passing them in the other direction.)

NARRATOR

And so Joseph and Mary left Nazareth to return to the small village of Bethlehem, about 90 miles away, where Joseph had been born. It was a difficult journey across the hot land, but after six long days and nights, they finally reached Bethlehem. By then Mary was very tired and about to give birth.

(INNKEEPER #1 enters from backstage and places the lower half of a door in front of the stable. Then INNKEEPER #1 stands in back of the "door" with INNKEEPER #2 and INNKEEPER #3 in line behind him. MARY and JOSEPH enter from left and stand before the door.)

NARRATOR

But when they arrived, the city was already very crowded with other people who had come back to be registered, and all of the inns were full. But Joseph sought shelter at several inns anyway, in the hope that someone might spare a room for Mary.

JOSEPH

We have traveled a long way and my wife is very tired. Is there any room at your inn?

INNKEEPER #1

I'm sorry. I have no room.

(INNKEEPER #1 exits, INNKEEPER #2 comes forward behind door.)

NARRATOR

And so it went at every inn.

INNKEEPER #2

Sorry, my inn is full!

(Exit INNKEEPER #2. INNKEEPER #3 comes forward.)

NARRATOR

But one innkeeper looked at Mary, who was great with child, and felt sorry for her. He said:

INNKEEPER #3

I have no room in my inn. But you may stay in my stable out in the back.

JOSEPH

We thank you very much for your kindness, sir.

(INNKEEPER #3 exits, carrying the "door." MARY and JOSEPH enter the stable, spread a blanket, and lie down on the floor to sleep.)

NARRATOR

The stable was for animals – for the donkeys, cows and sheep that people had brought with them. But Mary and Joseph were grateful for any shelter they could get that night in the little town of Bethlehem.

(Some ANGELS walk in front of the stable to provide scene-change “cover.”)

The ANGELS and CONGREGATION sing “Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem.”

ANGELS and CONGREGATION

“OH, LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM”

Oh, little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above them deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by.
Yet in the dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

(Meanwhile, in the stable, STAGEHANDS arrange artwork to suggest animals – a sheep, an ox, a lamb, a cow, a donkey, a camel, a goat, chickens, two doves. In addition, a black drape that has been covering a manger filled with hay is pulled off.)

(When the song is finished, the ANGELS walk off stage to reveal the “crèche” scene. MARY walks to front, holding the baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes JOSEPH stands next to her.)

NARRATOR

That night, Mary gave birth. Jesus was born!

(MARY gives the baby to JOSEPH, who holds him high above his head for all to see.)

THE CAST

Hallelujah!

(JOSEPH hands the baby back to MARY, who gently lays him down in the manger.)

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NARRATOR

The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the Everlasting Prince of Peace – for he is called all these things – was born to a simple carpenter and his wife. And to make the baby Jesus comfortable, Mary wrapped him in swaddling – clean strips of white cloth – and laid him down gently in the soft hay in the manger, the animals' feeding box.

(Several ANGELS come center stage to lead the CONGREGATION in singing the first stanza of "AWAY IN A MANGER.")

ANGELS AND CONGREGATION

"AWAY IN A MANGER"

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

(Exit ANGELS. The THREE SHEPHERDS enter from left and stand center stage.)

NARRATOR

That same night there were shepherds watching their flocks of sheep on the steep hills surrounding Bethlehem. The shepherds were poor men who wore rough, simple clothing. For them, nights were usually dark, cold and lonely.

(Enter GABRIEL from left. He stands on a box, center.)

NARRATOR

But the night that Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared above them in the sky.

(The THREE SHEPHERDS point up at GABRIEL, then back up, frightened, and hold their crooks in front of them for protection.)

NARRATOR

The shepherds had never seen an angel, and they were frightened. But the Angel of God soon comforted them, saying ...

GABRIEL

Fear not, good shepherds, for I have wonderful news! Today, in the city of Bethlehem, a child was born. This child shall grow up to be our king – not just any king, but the KING of ALL kings – the world’s savior!

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SHEPHERD #1

Please tell us where we can find him!

GABRIEL

You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

(SEVERAL ANGELS enter from right; two stand on boxes. They face the SHEPHERDS.)

NARRATOR

Then suddenly a whole host – a multitude – of heavenly angels appeared in the sky! And they heralded, or announced, the news of the baby Jesus. “Glory to the newborn king!” they exclaimed. “He shall bring peace and goodwill to all men!”

(The ANGELS and the CONGREGATION sing “HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING,” 1st verse.)

ANGELS AND CONGREGATION

“HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING”

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn king!”
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful all he nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark, the herald angels sing.
“Glory to the newborn king.”

(GABRIEL and the ANGELS exit, right, as the SHEPHERDS talk excitedly among themselves.)

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NARRATOR

When the angels had departed, the shepherds decided that they should go see the baby Jesus right away.

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SHEPHERD #2

Let us go to Bethlehem!

SHEPHERD #3

Yes! Let us see this wondrous child that God has told us about!

(Exit SHEPHERDS left. They walk around the stable and enter it from the back, and stand to the left of Jesus, looking down at him. MARY and JOSEPH are on Jesus' right.)

NARRATOR

The shepherds were the first to see and worship the baby Jesus. They searched their pockets for some gift they could give him.

SHEPHERD #1

What have I to give this King? I am just a poor shepherd.

SHEPHERD #2

If only we had riches to honor him by.

SHEPHERD #3

Brothers, we can offer him our faith.

(The SHEPHERDS fall to their knees, raise their arms and press their palms together in prayer.)

NARRATOR

Faith and trust in Jesus were all that mattered to God. And for the shepherds, just seeing Jesus filled them with hope for all people. "Joy to the world!" they cried, "The Lord our Savior has come!"

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(MUSIC CUE: CONGREGATION sings “JOY TO THE WORLD,” 1st verse.)

CONGREGATION

“JOY TO THE WORLD”

Joy to the world, the Lord has come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and heaven and nature sing.

(Enter MORE TOWNSPEOPLE and CHILDREN from behind stable. They stand behind MARY and JOSEPH and the SHEPHERDS.)

NARRATOR

The word about Jesus’ birth began to spread. And little by little the stable filled with men and women from near and far. Children came too – but they were shy at first, until Mary beckoned them to come forward.

MARY

(MARY sings “O COME LITTLE CHILDREN”)

“O COME LITTLE CHILDREN”

O, come, little children
O come, one and all.
O, come to the manger
In Bethlehem’s stall.
And see Baby Jesus
Asleep on the hay –
He came to bring joy
To all children today!

(Enter THREE WISE MEN from right, in front of stable: and enter STAR OF BETHLEHEM, holding an illuminated star high on a pole, from left. The THREE WISE MEN point up at the star.)

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, in a land far to the east of Bethlehem, three wise men of great knowledge noticed an unusually bright star in the sky.

WISE MAN #1

That star is amazing! It's so bright!

WISE MAN #2

Yes, it's as if it's trying to tell us something.

WISE MAN #3

Maybe it is! Could it be a sign that the Savior has come? The one that the prophets wrote of so long ago?

WISE MEN # 1

Yes! That's it!

WISE MAN #2

Let's follow it!

(The THREE WISE MEN exit stage right, walk around the stable and enter in the back, right. As they enter they pick up their "props" (a golden treasure chest, an urn of frankincense, and a vase of myrrh.) Then they fall to their knees beside Jesus, holding their gifts in front of themselves. Meanwhile, the STAR OF BETHLEHEM crosses to stage left and remains there, at the side of the stable.)

NARRATOR

Upon their camels, the three Wise Men, or magi*, as they are now known, journeyed for several weeks, faithfully following the star shining brightly in the sky, until it stood over the little stable in Bethlehem where the holy infant lay. (*pronounced: madge-eye)

(MUSIC CUE: CONGREGATION SINGS "WE THREE KINGS")

CONGREGATION:

"WE THREE KINGS"

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar;
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star ...

CHORUS

O-o, Star of wonder, Star of night,
Star of royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to Thy perfect light.

(As they are mentioned by the NARRATOR, the THREE WISE MEN place their gifts in the front of Jesus' manger, then return to a kneeling position.)

NARRATOR

When they saw the baby Jesus, the Three Wise Men fell on their knees in humble worship. They lay at the feet of baby Jesus the valuable treasures they had brought with which to honor Him.

The FIRST KING gave him gold. The SECOND KING gave Him sweet-smelling frankincense. And the THIRD KING gave Him perfume-like myrrh. For they knew they had at last found their Savior, God's son, who had come to bring peace on earth on that silent and holy night.

(MUSIC CUE: The CONGREGATION sings, "SILENT NIGHT," 1st verse, as the tableau freezes.)

CONGREGATION

"SILENT NIGHT"

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright;
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child;
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace;
Sleep in heavenly peace.

NARRATOR

And that is the story of the first Christmas.

(As the audience applauds, the ENTIRE CAST comes forward to face the audience, and on cue, takes a bow. Then the MINISTER steps up to the stage, thanks the cast and crew and says the cast "would like to leave you with one last message:")

(The CAST then starts to sing "WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS" and the CONGREGATION joins in. When it's over the CAST waves bye to the audience.)

CAST AND CONGREGATION

"WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS"

We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
And a Happy New Year.

CHORUS

Good tidings to you, wherever you are;
Good tidings for Christmas and a Happy New Year.

THE END

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

ANGELS

NARRATOR

PROPHET #1

PROPHET #2

PROPHET #3

TOWNSPERSON #1

TOWNSPERSON #2

TOWNSPERSON #3

OTHER TOWNSPEOPLE AND CHILDREN (POSSIBLY)

GABRIEL

MARY

JOSEPH

CAESAR AUGUSTUS

ROMAN SOLDIER

INNKEEPER #1

INNKEEPER #2

INNKEEPER #3

SHEPHERD #1

SHEPHERD #2

SHEPHERD #3

WISE MAN #1

WISE MAN #2

WISE MAN #3

STAR OF BETHLEHEM