

ADVENT NOW & THEN

by Linda Allen



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ADVENT NOW AND THEN

A candle-lighting collection

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Sometimes the words of the Christmas story become too familiar and predictable. We've heard them all before, and rather than truly listen, our minds fill with thoughts of the present — not the past. We may feel removed from the real people and events of two thousand years ago.

In *Advent Now and Then*, scenes take us from modern folks who ponder the contemporary challenges of their lives to men, women, and one teen who *lived* the Christmas story.

Actors in the “present” use one side of the stage and are separated only by space from the shepherds, Joseph, Magi, and Mary. Props and costumes are simple.

Remember to place a lighter by the Advent wreath each Sunday for the lighting of the candles.

— Linda Allen

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Do We Hope on Horses?

First Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Psalm 33 and Jeremiah: 29:11-13

Cast: Husband WAYNE, his WIFE, and her SISTER, and SHEPHERDS 1 and 2.

Costumes: SHEPHERDS wear biblical robes and headpieces and carry staffs.

Props: Nativity set or part of one.

(SHEPHERDS take place Stage Left, FAMILY Stage Right. A space between them indicates a difference in time and place. When FAMILY speaks, SHEPHERDS freeze — and vice versa.)

WIFE: Sis, it's so good to have you here with us for Christmas! Isn't it great, Wayne?

WAYNE: *(Not enthusiastic about his sister-in-law's visit)* Great.

SISTER: You know you love me, Wayne. Remember the old saying, "You get to pick your friends, but God gives you your relatives." Think of me as a gift from God!

WAYNE: Too bad there isn't a return policy.

WIFE: *(To WAYNE)* Shush! *(To SISTER)* I love setting up Mom's Nativity set every year.

SISTER: When we were kids, it meant Christmas was getting close!

WAYNE: Christmas — it's a lot of extra to-do, if you ask me.

WIFE: No one's asking you.

SISTER: Oh, look — here's the shepherd. He's my favorite.

WIFE: Why's that?

WAYNE: The shepherds stayed up all night talking, just like you two.

WIFE: So sorry if we disturbed your sleep last night. Now back to the question ... why the shepherd?

SISTER: There's something about him — about *them* — in the Christmas story. Simple people doing their jobs. Like us. Hopeful for a better life ... a better future ... and then — surprise!

WAYNE: Everybody got a surprise in the Christmas story: Mary, Joseph, the Magi.

1 SISTER: You're right. They got the unexpected. The
 2 shepherds were hoping for one thing, and God gave
 3 them something better. (*Modern-day CHARACTERS freeze*
 4 *as attention shifts to the SHEPHERDS. SHEPHERD 1 is*
 5 *humming.*)

6 SHEPHERD 2: What are you singing? That song's not
 7 familiar.

8 SHEPHERD 1: (*Continues humming a bit, then stops.*) Just
 9 thinking of the psalmist writing "Sing to him a new
 10 song." I was trying to compose something new.
 11 (*Humming again*)

12 SHEPHERD 2: Well, don't give up your night job. Leave
 13 composing to psalm writers. Do you think you can do
 14 better than David? Look at the stars tonight — the vast
 15 sweep of them. He wrote, (*With drama*) "By the word of
 16 the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the
 17 breath of his mouth." (*Normal voice again*) Can you do
 18 better than that?

19 SHEPHERD 1: I was trying to write something about *hope*.

20 SHEPHERD 2: (*A little angry*) Well, put a verse in there about
 21 the Romans. I can tell you what I hope for them! I have
 22 to wonder — *when* will our Messiah come?

23 SHEPHERD 1: David was a shepherd. Do you think God will
 24 use another shepherd warrior?

25 SHEPHERD 2: Maybe! And I'll be ready for his army! All I
 26 need are weapons. Or at least one weapon. And strength.
 27 I've been working out. And a horse would be nice. Maybe
 28 two. One for backup. And a chariot with a spare wheel.

29 SHEPHERD 1: (*Hums a different tune.*) "No king is saved by ...
 30 (*Hums.*)

31 SHEPHERD 2: OK. That psalm I know. "No king is saved by
 32 the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great
 33 strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite
 34 all its great strength it cannot save."

35 SHEPHERD 1: "But the eyes of the Lord are on those who
 36 fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love."
 37 (*SHEPHERDS freeze as modern CHARACTERS resume*
 38 *talking.*)

- 1 WIFE: I wonder if what happened to the shepherds also
 2 happens with us.
- 3 SISTER: We hope for one thing, and God gives us something
 4 better.
- 5 WAYNE: I'm hoping for pecan pie at dinner that's not
 6 burned on top ... *again*.
- 7 WIFE: We're serious.
- 8 WAYNE: So am I!
- 9 SISTER: (*Picks up Nativity shepherd.*) When I hold this
 10 shepherd, I feel close to the shepherds from that first
 11 Christmas night. They hoped. We hope. They didn't see
 12 what was ahead, but —
- 13 WIFE: But they trusted God's promise for good. They rested
 14 in God's love.
- 15 SISTER: Do you think those poor shepherds knew the
 16 wonderful passage from Jeremiah?
- 17 WIFE: I would imagine they had it memorized. "For I know
 18 the plans I have for you ... "
- 19 SHEPHERD 1: "Plans to prosper you and not to harm
 20 you ... "
- 21 SISTER: "Plans to give you hope and a future."
- 22 SHEPHERD 2: "Then you will call upon me and come and
 23 pray to me ... "
- 24 WAYNE: "And I will listen to you." (*Looks at WOMEN who are*
 25 *surprised he knows the verse.*) What? You don't think I
 26 know my Bible?
- 27 SHEPHERDS: "You will seek me and find me ... "
- 28 WAYNE, WIFE, and SISTER: (*Together*) "When you seek me
 29 with all your heart."
- 30 WIFE: As we light the first candle of Advent — hope — let us
 31 remember ...
- 32 SISTER: We hope in the Lord. (*WAYNE lights first candle on the*
 33 *Advent wreath.*)
- 34 SHEPHERD 1: Let us pray. O God of love, we rest in your
 35 promises, your plans for us. Our hope is in you, Lord. In
 36 an uncertain world, we are sure of your love. Help us to
 37 live confident lives in you — not depending on the
 38 strength of horses, but in your unfailing love. Amen.

Peace within the Storm

Second Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Jeremiah 8:11b, Philippians 4:7

Cast: THREE MEN on retreat and JOSEPH.

Costumes: MEN in casual clothing and JOSEPH in biblical attire.

(MEN gather Stage Right. JOSEPH enters Stage Left. A large space between MEN and JOSEPH indicate a different time and place. When MEN speak, JOSEPH freezes and MEN freeze when JOSEPH speaks. All speak with false bravado in these first lines. Lots of overacting here.)

JOSEPH: *(Speaking to someone Off-Stage.)* Yes, I'm fine! Good! Nah! Never been better. You think I look a little worried? Uh, nothing to speak of ... Really. Carpentry orders are down ... Just a business slump. Happens every year about this time ... *(JOSEPH freezes.)*

MAN 1: So, here we are! December Men's Retreat time! Gather 'round. Time for soul-searching!

MAN 2: Hey! How 'bout those _____, *(Insert local professional sports team)* huh?

MAN 3: Went fishing last week. Rented a boat. Got this lure —

MAN 1: Fire ants! We have this problem with fire ants — really a bummer. All I can think about is those dratted fire ants —

MAN 3: So I took the boat and we went out to —

MAN 2: But the _____ *(Insert another local professional sports team)* — what another story!

MAN 1: And then Jill got stung by an ant — made this big fuss and —

MAN 2: Maybe the coach needs to rethink his strategy. Can't keep doing the same thing and getting different results, right?

MAN 3: Would you believe the pole broke with the biggest marlin I ever —

MAN 1: Wait a minute! We're not talking to each other. We're not listening to each other.

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1 MAN 3: Sure we are.

2 MAN 1: *(At this point there is a big switch in delivery. All slow their*
 3 *lines down and hesitate. The stories are painful to tell.)* No, we
 4 aren't. At least ... I'm not. Look. I'm going to be honest
 5 here. I'm having trouble at work. I'm not sure they're
 6 going to keep me on.

7 MAN 3: Things are bad at home. Sue — she's talking about a
 8 separation ... leaving ...

9 MAN 1: How can I look for another job in this market?

10 MAN 2: Will's principal called us in again.

11 JOSEPH: *(Unfreezes.)* Mary — my little Mary told me she's —
 12 *(Freezes again.)*

13 MAN 1: It's not just the job. The bills have piled up. I don't
 14 know how things got so out of control! The house
 15 payments are —

16 MAN 2: The principal talked about some kind of alternative
 17 placement for Will. He's been cutting class ... Not doing
 18 his work ... They think he may be on —

19 MAN 3: What if Sue leaves? What about the kids?

20 JOSEPH: *(Unfreezes.)* And I know the baby isn't mine. Oh,
 21 God. *(Freezes.)*

22 MAN 2: And last night, the police came —

23 MAN 3: We've been married twenty-eight years. Now what,
 24 God?

25 MAN 1: Oh God, where are you in all this?

26 JOSEPH: *(Unfreezes.)* We'll call off the marriage plans. Oh
 27 God, where are you in all this? *(Freezes.)*

28 MAN 1: When there's no way out ... no way up ...

29 MAN 2: Wash my hands of Will? Let the police and the school
 30 authorities —

31 MAN 3: I can't imagine my life without her.

32 JOSEPH: *(Unfreezes.)* Jeremiah wrote, “ ‘Peace, peace,’ they
 33 say, when there is no peace.” Oh God, where is your
 34 peace? *(Freezes.)*

35 MAN 2: I feel I'm being swallowed up —

36 MAN 3: By a hurricane.

37 JOSEPH: *(Unfreezes.)* I'm exhausted, Lord. Perhaps if I
 38 sleep ... *(Freezes.)*

MAN 1: In the Christmas story, Joseph came to peace with his situation when God came to him in a dream.

MAN 3: And you think we'll have a vision tonight?

MAN 1: Maybe not. But I recall a time when a storm raged about the disciples in their little boat ... and Jesus slept.

MAN 2: I remember that story. They were scared out of their wits. They woke him up in a panic.

MAN 1: And he calmed the storm.

MAN 2: Is it possible to find peace in the storm?

MAN 3: Paul wrote, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

MAN 1: We light the second candle of Advent, the peace candle, even as storms rage about us and through us. Let us rest in the peace of God. (*MAN 2 lights two candles on the Advent wreath.*)

MAN 3: Let us pray. O God, whose peace passes our understanding, calm our fears and bolster us with the strength born of your love and grace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Gift of Joy

Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture: John 8:12

Cast: MAGI 1-3 and PERSONS 1-4 (Optional number — lines may be combined)

Costumes: PERSONS in contemporary clothing and MAGI in biblical costumes.

(*PERSONS are Stage Right. MAGI are Stage Left. When PERSONS speak, MAGI freeze and vice versa. React only to the people in your group — not to the others.*)

PERSON 1: Joy.

PERSON 2: That's elusive.

PERSON 3: No, it's not. All you have to do is read the ads. It's right there. All the joy you can afford.

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- 1 PERSON 4: I want a Blu-Ray DVD player.
- 2 PERSON 1: I don't even know what that is.
- 3 PERSON 4: I don't either, but I want one.
- 4 PERSON 2: So the Christmas season is a big journey to joy?
- 5 PERSON 1: All wrapped up under the tree.
- 6 PERSON 4: And the star hangs over the mall.
- 7 PERSON 3: And there's a star over Wal-Mart if you can't
- 8 afford the joy at Dillard's.
- 9 PERSON 2: Are we *missing* something here? The Magi from
- 10 the East followed a star to Bethlehem. What's the
- 11 connection to Best Buy?
- 12 PERSON 4: What a silly question. The Magi gave gifts. We
- 13 give gifts. The baby got gifts. We get gifts. Simple. It's
- 14 the Christmas story's stamp of approval on holiday
- 15 commercialism.
- 16 PERSON 2: I'm not so sure ... (*PERSONS 1-4 freeze as attention*
- 17 *shifts to the MAGI.*)
- 18 MAGI 1: Look at that! Something special's going on in the
- 19 sky.
- 20 MAGI 2: Not an ordinary star at all.
- 21 MAGI 3: It's light for a king. Who would merit such a star?
- 22 MAGI 1: We can sit around here and wonder, or we can find
- 23 out. (*MAGI freeze as PERSONS 1-4 speak.*)
- 24 PERSON 2: I know enough of the wise men story to know
- 25 they were excited about a new king.
- 26 PERSON 1: So their big journey was to find a king — *the*
- 27 *King.*
- 28 PERSON 4: But we know Jesus already.
- 29 PERSON 2: Do we? Think of it. A king rules over a *kingdom.*
- 30 (*PERSONS 1-4 freeze as MAGI speak.*)
- 31 MAGI 2: What sort of a king will we find, do you suppose?
- 32 MAGI 1: (*Filled with awe!*) His own light in the sky. He must
- 33 be magnificent!
- 34 MAGI 3: To merely pay him homage will not be enough.
- 35 (*MAGI freeze as PERSONS 1-4 speak.*)
- 36 PERSON 2: And the wise men were so excited about the new
- 37 king, they left their homes and followed the light.
- 38 PERSON 3: That was a big commitment.

- 1 PERSON 4: Huge.
- 2 PERSON 1: All for the ruler of a new kingdom.
- 3 PERSON 4: I just had an epiphany! *We're the kingdom!*
- 4 PERSON 3: Duh.
- 5 PERSON 4: I mean it. He came to *govern* us — be *our* Savior,
- 6 protector, teacher, friend! To be *our* king! (*PERSONS*
- 7 *1-4 freeze as MAGI speak.*)
- 8 MAGI 1: Such a king deserves worship — adoration.
- 9 MAGI 3: Gifts.
- 10 MAGI 2: Of course, but what could possibly be enough for
- 11 him?
- 12 MAGI 3: I think whatever we offer won't compare to what he
- 13 will give to us. (*MAGI freeze as PERSONS 1-4 speak.*)
- 14 PERSON 2: Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."
- 15 PERSON 1: So talking about the star shining over a
- 16 department store seems ...
- 17 PERSONS 1-4: (*Together*) Tacky, tacky, tacky!
- 18 PERSON 3: He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever
- 19 follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have
- 20 the light of life."
- 21 PERSON 4: A kingdom of light and love.
- 22 PERSON 1: And when we follow his star,
- 23 PERSON 2: And walk in his light,
- 24 PERSON 3: And love with his love,
- 25 PERSON 1: We find that elusive joy.
- 26 PERSON 4: As we light the third candle of Advent — the joy
- 27 candle — we marvel at what wondrous thing happened
- 28 in Bethlehem. We should do no less than the Magi — fall
- 29 to our knees in awe, with worship and adoration.
- 30 (*PERSON 1 lights three candles on the Advent wreath.*)
- 31 PERSON 2: Let us pray. God of light and love, be with us on
- 32 our journey. We know you, Lord, but we long to know
- 33 you better. We offer you our praise and worship. Help
- 34 us grow in our faith. Enter into our hearts and fill them,
- 35 so that your grace spills over in extravagant joy and
- 36 love to all we meet. Amen.
- 37
- 38

A Brave Love**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Cast: MARY, SISTERS 1 and 2 (the same SISTERS from the first Sunday of Advent), and FRIEND

Costumes: MARY (a teenager) in simple biblical costume; WOMEN in modern dress.

(MARY enters and stands at Center Stage. WOMEN enter and stand at Stage Right.)

SISTER 1: Sarah, I know the shepherd is your favorite member of Mom's Nativity set, but my pick is Mary. What do you think, Anne?

FRIEND: I like Mary too. She's so sweet. Holy and pure.

SISTER 2: But that's the problem. I always feel ... funny around Mary. In so many of the pictures of her, there's a halo around her head ... and a big, beautiful, hovering angel. I identify more with a plain shepherd out doing his job than someone with a holy light around her.

SISTER 1: You're talking about *artwork*. Mary was a real person. Solid like us. Not a painting on the wall.

FRIEND: I wonder if she *felt* holy.

MARY: *(Unfreezes.)* I'm scared ... I'm going to have a baby, and I don't know what to do. *(Freezes.)*

SISTER 1: Maybe that's why I'm drawn to her. She was a real woman, like us.

FRIEND: Only lots younger! Too bad there's no old Elizabeth and her miracle baby John in the manger scene! She's someone *I* could relate to.

SISTER 2: The angel told Mary that she shouldn't be afraid. I imagine that was easier said than done.

MARY: *(Unfreezes.)* The angel said, "Don't be afraid." But I am! How can I tell my mother? How can I tell Joseph? I wish the angel would go with me. Let *him* explain it! *(Freezes.)*

FRIEND: Yeah, she was in a bad way. No husband yet, and society was fairly unforgiving when it came to baby surprises.



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