

O DINKY TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

by Harry Parker



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An Adventure in Missing the Point

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SYNOPSIS: Young Miriam is stuck in a one-horse hamlet where nothing ever happens—or so she thinks. Yet every time she mechanically goes about her chores, she misses a phenomenal event of the first Christmas. Too distracted by bread baking and laundry, she fails to notice the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men—until an angel whispers to her of the wonder in the stable. Oh, how the daily grind can blind us to “God with us”! Humorous verses to the tune of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” are interspersed. The lead is a great role for a teen or young adult female soloist.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 1 male, 1 either)

NARRATOR (f/m)(11 lines)

MIRIAM (f)(6 lines)

MARY (f).....(Non-speaking)

JOSEPH (m).....(Non-speaking)

EXTRAS:

SHEPHERDS.....Any number

SHEEPAny Number

3 MAGI.....

ANGELS.....Any Number

(ALL LINE COUNTS ARE APPROXIMATE)

DURATION: 15 minutes

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PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING:

The setting is Bethlehem, with a split stage separated by Christmas trees. Stage Right is the courtyard of a home. This may be as simple as a table for kneading and an “oven,” perhaps made of bricks, or simply a likeness painted on cardboard. A clothesline should hang nearby, with clothespins attaching biblical robes. Stage Left is the stable, with a manger, straw, tools, etc.

COSTUMES:

The Narrator wears current attire. The Sheep should wear all white and perhaps some face makeup. The Angels wear white robes and wings and tinsel haloes on their heads. The Magi dress in fancy attire. Their robes should be richly colored, and they wear jewelry and turbans. Miriam, Mary, and Joseph wear simple biblical robes, headpieces, and sandals. Miriam also wears an apron.

SOUND EFFECT:

Crashing and tinkling coins.

NOTES:

This script requires very little memorization. The Narrator has the only speaking role, and his or her part may be read. Miriam only sings, and memorization is always easier when music is involved. All her verses are set to the familiar tune of “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Use a pianist to accompany Miriam if possible, and also to play some music softly in Part 4. The other characters merely pantomime, then freeze, holding their pose around the manger. This would be a great script for teenagers, but children could be involved as sheep or angels.

You will need to practice the timing of the actions, as Miriam, while she complains about her boring town, consistently just misses the parade of characters who visit her sleepy little town at Jesus’ birth, turning away at the last second to attend to some household chore and thereby missing all the excitement.

PROPS

- ☐ broom
- ☐ bread dough
- ☐ jar with flour
- ☐ doll wrapped in a blanket
- ☐ plain dish towel or other cloth
- ☐ large basket
- ☐ three gifts including one filled with coins (may be bottles, carved wooden boxes, small trunks, etc.)

SCRIPTURE:

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NARRATOR: Come with me on a journey back in time—back, back, back, over two thousand years ago, to a small town in what is known as Palestine. The name of the village is Bethlehem. It means “place of bread.” It is hardly more than a dot on the map. It has no wealth, no commerce to speak of, and very few people. It is a quiet little town— too quiet for some people, like the young maiden who is called Miriam. Now, if you look closely, you just might be able to pick her out.

MIRIAM enters with a frown on her face and a broom in her hand and begins to sweep.

Ah, there she is—and she does not look very pleased. For Miriam, you see, is unhappy living in such a little town. Like many young people, she longs for adventure and excitement.

MIRIAM: *(Singing.)*

O dinky town of Bethlehem, to me you're such a bore.
Seems nothing ever happens here, my life is such a chore.
I'd like some more excitement, is that too much to ask?
But Father said to clean this place, so I must stay on task.
(MIRIAM sweeps for a few moments and then begins to knead bread dough.)

PART 1

JOSEPH

NARRATOR: Poor Miriam. Such a dreamer! From her home in Bethlehem, she can just make out the city of Jerusalem, a scant six miles to the north. Jerusalem! On a dark night she can see the glow from the fire of a thousand street lanterns and, more importantly, from the sacrificial flames in the temple. The temple! Herod's magnificent masterpiece. People have told her that from a distance it looks like a snow white mountain, and that on sunny days your eyes cannot bear to look at it for all the shiny gold. And the glory of the place is only enhanced by the priests that serve there. Their white linen robes and high peaked hats are a sight to behold! But for Miriam, Jerusalem might as well be a

1 million miles away. She had never been there, and it seemed
2 unlikely that she ever would.

3 **MIRIAM:** *(Stands up and looks off to “Jerusalem” at Stage Right,*
4 *singing.)*

5 O holy place, Jerusalem, how much I wish to see.

6 Your walls and streets and shops and such t’would mean so
7 much to me.

8 But here I’m stuck in “bread town,” I never will get out.

9 So I will knead this lump of dough, and moan and grouse and
10 pout. *(MIRIAM returns to kneading dough.)*

11 **NARRATOR:** Unbeknownst to Miriam, something exciting was
12 about to happen—the most exciting thing in the world! A child
13 was about to be born. A very special child.

14
15 *MARY and JOSEPH enter from far Stage Right as soon as the*
16 *Scripture begins. They pass in front of MIRIAM’s home. But MIRIAM*
17 *does not see them as she turns to the left and goes to the back of*
18 *her house to get some more flour out of a jar. Her back is to MARY*
19 *and JOSEPH as they pass. When they do, she returns to kneading.*
20 *MARY and JOSEPH make their way to the stable.*

21
22 **NARRATOR:** *(Reading Scripture.)* “In those days a decree went
23 out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled.
24 This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of
25 Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And
26 Joseph also went up from... Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of
27 David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house
28 and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed,
29 who was with child.

30
31 *MARY picks up a blanket-wrapped doll representing Jesus which is*
32 *stowed out of sight. MARY holds Jesus as she and JOSEPH strike*
33 *a pose.*

34
35 And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered.
36 And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in
37 swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was
38 no place for them in the inn” *(Luke 2:1-7, RSV).*

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PART 2**SHEPHERDS**

MIRIAM: (*Sings.*)

Alas for those in dinky towns, their lives will be humdrum

With no excitement anywhere, and never will it come.

We are the Lord's forgotten, the ones of no account.

I guess I should accept the fact, I never will amount. (*MIRIAM continues kneading.*)

NARRATOR: If only Miriam knew! The Child that had been born was not just any child—he was none other than the Savior of the world! Such a wondrous event calls for a celebration. But who to invite? Royalty? The wise and learned? The rich and powerful? The holy and pure? One would think so, but the ways of the Lord are mysterious. God's welcoming party was a strange lot indeed.

As soon as Scripture begins, SHEPHERDS and SHEEP, who are crawling on all fours, enter from Stage Right door, and an ANGEL enters Stage Left in choir loft, or some other higher point. ANGEL makes his way toward the center and raises arms. One of the SHEPHERDS notices the ANGEL and points.

NARRATOR: (*Reading Scripture.*) "And there were in that same region, shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone all around them, and they were filled with fear.

The SHEPHERDS react.

And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold I bring to you good news of a great joy which shall be to all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you.

The ANGEL points them to the stable.

You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (*Luke 2: 8-12, RSV*).

1

2 *As Scripture continues, the rest of the ANGELS, if any, enter from*
3 *left and right and make their way to overlook the stable. ANGELS*
4 *should be on different levels with their arms outstretched.*

5

6 "And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the
7 heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the
8 Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to all people.'

9

10 *ANGELS exit. One ANGEL takes place at MIRIAM's back door to*
11 *wait for entrance in Part 4.*

12

13 When the angels had returned into heaven, the shepherds said
14 to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing
15 which has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'

16

17 *Just as the SHEPHERDS and SHEEP are about to pass in front of*
18 *MIRIAM, she covers the dough with a cloth, wipes her hands, and*
19 *dusts off her apron. She turns her back to the audience and takes*
20 *clothes down from the clothesline as the SHEPHERDS and SHEEP*
21 *pass in front on their way to the stable, where they take their places.*
22 *After they pass, she turns around and kneels, folding clothes and*
23 *putting them in the basket.*

24

25 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the
26 baby, who was lying in a manger. When they saw it they made
27 know the saying which had been told them concerning the child,
28 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to
29 them. But Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her
30 heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God
31 for all that they had seen and heard, for it was just as they had
32 been told" (Luke 2:13-20, RSV).

PART 3*MAGI*

MIRIAM: *(Stands and sings.)*

O dinky town of Bethlehem, where things are oh-so-static,
If someone strange should enter here, the whole darn place
would panic.

I'd love to see a new face, someone from far away,
But that will never happen here, there is no earthly way.
(MIRIAM returns to the dough, flattening it out for pita.)

NARRATOR: Poor Miriam! She is so busy and preoccupied that she is unaware of the peculiar and wondrous events taking place right under her nose. But even stranger things are about to happen. Mysterious figures known as Magi were seen that night, wandering the streets of Bethlehem. Like the shepherds, they were searching for the Christ child. They had been led to this place by a bright and glorious star. They had followed it for hundreds of miles across harsh desert lands. Their dress was magnificent in splendor. They wore turbans on their heads, gold chains around their necks, and bejeweled rings on their fingers. In their hands they carried precious gifts, the likes of which had never been seen. Never, ever had there been such a sight, but it went unnoticed by Miriam's myopia.

As soon as Scripture starts, MAGI enter and pass in front of MIRIAM's house. As MIRIAM sees them out of the corner of her eye, she takes the bread dough to the oven, her back to the audience. When the MAGI are right in front of the house, one of them bumps into the back of another, causing him to stumble and drop his case full of coins. Sound effect of crashing and tinkling of coins. All the MAGI get down on the ground to pick up the coins. At the sound of the crash, MIRIAM is startled, gets up, looks out toward the sound, then shrugs her shoulders because the MAGI are on the floor and she doesn't see them. She returns to her oven.

NARRATOR: *(Reading Scripture)* "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who



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