

THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

by Daniel Wray



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SYNOPSIS: A look at Jesus' birth through the eyes of the innkeeper, who represents everyman. His rejection of Jesus is unintentional, as is ours, and his hardened heart, due to things that become obvious, opens at the birth, as should ours at the recognition of the sacrifice.

DURATION: 45 minutes.

TIME: 0 B.C.

SETTING: Bethlehem.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 females, 3 males, 4 either; 4-5 extras, plus angel singers if desired)

DEMETRIUS (m).....	The innkeeper. A good man with the right intentions, but preoccupied with his day-to-day life and haunted by his past. <i>(229 lines)</i>
JESSIE (f)	The innkeeper's daughter. Pure of heart, a young lady of 13-15 years old. <i>(86 lines)</i>
RACHEL (f).....	The innkeeper's wife. Also preoccupied with running the inn and the losses of the past. <i>(35 lines)</i>
SARAH (f).....	The Housekeeper. Typical hired help, only semi-invested and sarcastic. <i>(31 lines)</i>
PHOEBE OF GILEAD (f)	A guest. Very high maintenance and very self-absorbed. <i>(59 lines)</i>
MR. DARIUS (m).....	Another guest. Long-suffering but good-natured guest of the hotel. <i>(33 lines)</i>
MRS. DARIUS (f)	His wife. His not so long-suffering and sometimes ill-humored wife. <i>(20 lines)</i>
HANNAH (f).....	Jessie's sick friend who is kind and poor. <i>(7 lines)</i>
MARY (f).....	Expectant mother of the Baby Jesus. <i>(27 lines)</i>

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES: This is a play that is really fun for the kids to put on as it combines some physical comedy and sarcasm for big audience reactions; at the same time the play is very moving at the end and if you have a couple of kiddos with nice voices to sing the simple angel chorus, it can really drive the Christmas message home. The chorus can also be substituted if you find a song that highlights the Luke 2:10-11 account of the angels' proclamation, preferably the NIV, where the lyrics were derived. Don't be intimidated by the music—it can be so sweet and simple, and the kids will love it. Most of all, encourage your kids to just get into the roles and really have fun—the audience will love it!

SCENE 1

AT START: *The inn. It should look like a hotel lobby as much as possible. There should be a sign that says "Bethlehem West Inn" hanging above the lobby desk. There are two to four guests milling about, possibly chatting to each other. DEMETRIUS is occupied with a particularly high-maintenance guest.*

DEMETRIUS: Well, I trust that you will enjoy your stay here at the Bethlehem West Inn, Ms. Phoebe Of Gilead. I'll make certain that all of your accommodations are satisfactory.

PHOEBE: Well, I'm certain everything better be, Mr. Demetrius! I have not always been very satisfied with your establishment, as you know.

DEMETRIUS: And yet you keep coming back. Let me have your bags taken to your room. *(Ringing a bell and hollering upstairs.)* Sarah!

PHOEBE: Very well. But please have that dreadful housekeeper of yours take more care this time! I don't need to remind you of what happened last time, do I?

DEMETRIUS: Oh, heavens no, Ms. Of Gilead, you needn't. But something tells me...

PHOEBE: The last time I was here...

DEMETRIUS: ...that you'll remind me anyway...

PHOEBE: I had a brand-new Artesian vase in my bag...

DEMETRIUS: Yes ma'am... *(Looking desperate and ringing the bell again.)* Oh, Sarah!

PHOEBE: Smashed to bits, still in my bag.

DEMETRIUS: Now Phoebe, we never established that we were responsible for that...

PHOEBE: Well, who else would it have been?

DEMETRIUS: I'm certain I don't know, ma'am, but...

PHOEBE: Are you suggesting that it just exploded in my bag with no assistance?

DEMETRIUS: No Ma'am, I'm merely saying that...

PHOEBE: Well, surely you're not saying that I would have been so careless!

DEMETRIUS: Sarah! (*Back to PHOEBE.*) Of course not, Ma'am. But as the sign clearly indicates, we are not responsible for damage to personal property...

PHOEBE: Oh, rubbish! Just because you put up a sign doesn't mean you aren't responsible.

DEMETRIUS: Well ma'am, under current Bethlehem law, that's exactly what it...

PHOEBE: I mean, I could put a sign up saying that I am the sweetest person in the world, and it wouldn't make it so, now would it?

DEMETRIUS: (*Pausing for effect, as long as he can—he may even open his mouth to start to talk a couple of times, but waits.*) Nnnnnnooo, I guess not... (*Pause.*) Sarah?!!!

PHOEBE: Look, all I am saying is that you need to be more careful, that's all. (*Pause.*) What do you mean, no?! Are you making a comment on my disposition, Mr. Demetrius?

DEMETRIUS: Yes Ma'am. I mean, No, Ma'am! What I was saying "yes ma'am" to was the being careful part... absolutely.

SARAH appears, but DEMETRIUS doesn't see her. She saunters up very casually, chewing gum. She should be right behind him, looking at her fingernails, looking very bored.

PHOEBE: Well, I should hope so! The future of our relationship as proprietor and client is on very shaky ground, Mr. Demetrius. Very shaky ground indeed!

DEMETRIUS: Yes Ma'am. (*Turns to yell and before he sees her, yells out SARAH'S name and is startled when she is right there.*) Sarah! (*Jumps.*) Oh, my!

SARAH: (*Chewing gum, is undaunted by his anxiety.*) Yeah?

DEMETRIUS: For heaven's sake! How long have you been there?

SARAH: (*Still looking at her hand; shrugs her shoulders.*) Dunno.

DEMETRIUS: Could you please take Ms. Of Gilead's bags to room 217?

SARAH: (*Still bored, looks at her hand some more, then glances at him.*) What?

DEMETRIUS: Her bags. Could you please take them to room 217.

SARAH: *(Stares at him, then looks past him to the bags, then back at him.)* Whatever.

DEMETRIUS: You remember Ms. Of Gilead, don't you? She stayed with us before and had a delicate vase in her bag broken. Please be extremely careful with her bags, ok? *(SARAH rolls her eyes and heads for her bags.)*

PHOEBE: Is it my imagination, or is it a bit more crowded than usual this weekend?

DEMETRIUS: Not your imagination this time ma'am. Everyone and their mother is in town for the census that's been decreed. I have been booked for days!

SARAH has lazily gone over to one of her bags and picked it up, carrying it toward the staircase. She tosses it very high and far, and it lands with a loud clatter, perhaps of breaking glass. PHOEBE does not notice, but DEMETRIUS does and gasps.

DEMETRIUS: Oh, my!

PHOEBE: Oh, that's right! The census! Oh, my what?

DEMETRIUS: Uh... oh, my, the census is in town! *(He makes certain that PHOEBE is positioned so that she can't see SARAH coming over to pick up the other bag.)* It's exciting!

PHOEBE: Oh, I don't know, I find it to be rather a bother! All the donkey traffic and the sidewalk vendors... *(SARAH tosses the other bag in the direction of the first. It too lands with a clatter.)* What was that?

DEMETRIUS: *(Pretending to sneeze.)* Oh my! I guess it was me! Allergies, you know...

PHOEBE: Yes, well... I'll be in my room, waiting for my things. Good day, Mr. Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS: Yes ma'am, Ms. Of Gilead. I hope you enjoy your stay! *(Pause.)* Ooh my—Sarah....! *(He is interrupted by another guest before he can chastise her further.)*

MR. DARIUS: I say, my good man, may I have a word?

DEMETRIUS: Uh... why, of course, Mr. Darius—what can I do for you?

MR. DARIUS: Well, I'm not one to complain, you see, but my wife and I were wondering about the noises coming from under our room last night...

DEMETRIUS: Noises?

MRS. DARIUS: Snoring.

DEMETRIUS: Snoring?

MR. DARIUS: Snoring. Well, if you could even call it snoring—it was more like a braying, if you must know...

MRS. DARIUS: Snoring.

DEMETRIUS: Oh my! Really?

MR. DARIUS: Yes, I know. So, we were wondering if we could possibly get a different room—one that might be a little bit more quiet, you see.

DEMETRIUS: Well, let me look—what room number did you say you were in?

MRS. DARIUS: Room 102. Snoring.

DEMETRIUS: Room 102—oh. OH! Of course!

MR. DARIUS: Oh? Oh what?

DEMETRIUS: Well, two things. One, I'm afraid that there isn't anything I can do about the room—we have no more rooms at all, so I wouldn't be able to offer you a different room...

MR. DARIUS: Well, that's unfortunate. What's the second thing?

DEMETRIUS: Well, I'm afraid that wasn't snoring that you heard.

MRS. DARIUS: Snoring. Dreadful snoring.

DEMETRIUS: Yes, you see that room is right above the stable. We've been bringing the animals in there at night because of the colder temperatures, and they are right beneath room 102.

MR. DARIUS: Animals?

DEMETRIUS: Yes sir, you see the snoring you heard was probably really braying—the donkey was probably trying to settle down.

MRS. DARIUS: Snoring.

DEMETRIUS: No, braying, I'm afraid. You see, I think it can sound like snoring at first, but...

MR. DARIUS: Well, that explains a couple of things, really.

DEMETRIUS: Oh?

MR. DARIUS: Yes. Well, that odor, for one thing. I was thinking it was Mrs. Darius and the effects of her artichoke casserole, if you catch my meaning...

MRS. DARIUS: What?

DEMETRIUS: Oh my! Well, I wish there was something that I could do at this point—if another room opens up, I will certainly see what I can do about moving you.

MR. DARIUS: That's a good man! Thank you very much!

MRS. DARIUS: You thought that was me?

DEMETRIUS: However, I don't really anticipate anything changing—every room is full as it is and with the census. I don't anticipate that it will get any better.

MRS. DARIUS: I suppose you thought the snoring was me as well?!

MR. DARIUS: Oh, don't be silly, my love.

MRS. DARIUS: Well...

MR. DARIUS: You are much more of a baritone when you snore...

MRS. DARIUS: Well, I never!!!

MR. DARIUS: Oh, I beg to differ—you most certainly do...

DEMETRIUS: Thank you so much for choosing the Bethlehem West Inn—if there is anything else I can do to make your stay more pleasant, please don't hesitate to let me know...

MRS. DARIUS: Yes. Uh, now that you mention it, we'll be needing a rollaway in our room, please.

MR. DARIUS: What? Why would we need a roll... oh, come on!

MRS. DARIUS: I obviously need to give you every opportunity to get as far away from the noise as possible. *(Starts walking away.)*

DEMETRIUS: I'll have one sent right up...

MR. DARIUS: I'm sorry, dear! I didn't mean that I didn't enjoy it! *(Follows MRS. DARIUS.)* It's like music!

DEMETRIUS: *(Trailing off after MRS. DARIUS. MR. DARIUS and MRS. DARIUS exit.)* Enjoy your stay...

RACHEL enters as MR. and MRS. DARIUS are leaving.

RACHEL: *(Slapping down a few slips of paper in front of him on the desk.)* Here are a few things that need attention as quickly as possible...

DEMETRIUS: Good morning to you too, dear...

RACHEL: Sorry—good morning. There are bedbugs in 304, the linens in 114, 226 and 308 are still not changed, and apparently the water in 121 froze in the basin overnight. From the look on the lady's face, she needed a splash. Badly.

DEMETRIUS: Good grief. Does Sarah know about these things?

RACHEL: *(Giving him a look.)* What do you think?

DEMETRIUS: Well, make her another list. It's so hard to get good help these days...

RACHEL: I'm heading to the market to purchase more food for the next few meals—there are so many folks here that we're running out of everything...

DEMETRIUS: I know—I've been turning folks away in droves...

RACHEL: Did you settle up with Thomas at the market? Last time he told me that he couldn't extend our credit much more before he would have to ask us to go elsewhere...

DEMETRIUS: Oh! I haven't had time this week! Can you please just tell him that we will make good on everything after this weekend? The business will catch us up, but I just don't have it all yet. Here. *(Hands her a bag of gold from under the counter.)* Give him this and tell him the rest will be coming on Monday.

RACHEL: *(Sighs.)* Ok, but I doubt that he will be happy. *(Grabs her bag and heads out.)* I'll be back in a couple of hours... *(Exits, and DEMETRIUS puts his hands over his face as JESSIE approaches quietly from the side.)*

JESSIE: *(Sweetly.)* Hello father!

DEMETRIUS: *(Startled.)* Oh my! You startled me!

JESSIE: I always startle you! What's wrong? You look sad...

DEMETRIUS: Oh, Jessie. It's the same old stuff. People drive me crazy!

JESSIE: Now father, we've been through this...

DEMETRIUS: I'm not like you, Jessie. I haven't the patience that you obviously have for the kind of nonsense that people tend to promote...

JESSIE: I know, Father. You've always had patience with me, but for the rest of the world...

DEMETRIUS: You're not like the rest of the world, Jessie. You have always been very special.

JESSIE: And that may be why you really need to have more patience, Daddy.

DEMETRIUS: Bah. There is too much foolishness to abide in this world, little girl.

JESSIE: Have I taught you nothing, Father? You insist on seeing the world as inherently evil...

DEMETRIUS: Isn't it?! Take a look around you, Jessie. Brother killing brother, famine after famine, and now the government feels like we need to pay more in taxes as if we don't already pay nearly half of what we make anyway...

JESSIE: Oh, Daddy! Will you never learn?

DEMETRIUS: Learn what?

JESSIE: That this isn't the way it was meant to be. Or the way it always will be.

DEMETRIUS: I know you've said that before, darling. I guess you may just have more hope than I do.

JESSIE: Now, perhaps. But things will change. You'll see. God has a plan.

DEMETRIUS: Jessie. What have I told you about how little I believe in God or his plan?!

JESSIE: Don't say that, Father!

DEMETRIUS: Look. I used to have hope, Jessie. But now...

JESSIE: Wait for it, Father. You'll see. Soon, in fact.

DEMETRIUS: Sweet girl. I'd like to believe you, but...

JESSIE: I know you, Father. You need to see to believe.

DEMETRIUS: I don't know if I will ever see enough to believe as you do, honey.

JESSIE: I have to go now, Father, but let me tell you this one thing...

DEMETRIUS: Jessie, don't go. You never stay long!

JESSIE: I need to go, Father, I have important things to do. But remember this. Soon you will know the why's behind the what's. Soon, Father.

DEMETRIUS: Jessie....

JESSIE: Have faith in mankind, Father. You know I do. Have faith just because you love me, and I have faith. OK?

DEMETRIUS: I'll try, Jessie. But...

JESSIE exits, disappearing silently as DEMETRIUS looks away.

DEMETRIUS: ...there's so little to have faith in, you know? (*Looks up to see JESSIE has gone.*) Jessie? Jessie, come back! Please? Oh Jessie. (*Pauses as he reflects on the past.*) I'll try....

Fade.

SCENE 2

AT START: *Three years earlier. A ppt slide or poster should denote this and be left up an appropriate amount of time. The hotel lobby is still the same with few changes, if any.*

RACHEL: Yes, ma'am—we can certainly switch rooms—we have several to choose from this weekend.

PHOEBE: Well, I should hope so! You know I'm not one to complain—

RACHEL: Oh, of course not...

PHOEBE: —but this is just too much.

RACHEL: I understand completely, Ms. Of Gilead. Now, would you like a room on the main floor or upstairs?

PHOEBE: The main floor is fine but make certain that it's nice and clean. If I hear so much as a squeak, I'm going to scream like you've never heard!

RACHEL: Oh, I believe I heard the scream, Ms. Of Gilead. Just a few minutes ago, as a matter of fact.

PHOEBE: I assure you that was just a warm-up to what you will hear if I see another mouse.

At this, SARAH enters, carrying the bags from PHOEBE'S old room. With PHOEBE'S back turned, SARAH lets them fall with a thud to the ground.

PHOEBE: What was that?

RACHEL: (*Noticing that she has dropped the bags and broken something, gasps.*) What was what?

PHOEBE: I heard a clatter...

RACHEL: Yes, well, I'm certain that you will be satisfied with your new accommodations, Ms. Of Gilead.

PHOEBE: Well, I hope so! I've never been so disgusted in my whole life! I mean, do you always allow vermin to have free access to your hotel?

SARAH: Obviously...

PHOEBE: What?

RACHEL: Uh... I think she said possibly... they start to come in when the weather turns colder. We try our best to keep them out...

SARAH: Yeah. Especially the bad tippers...

RACHEL: (*Cutting her off.*) Anyway, I'm sure there won't be any in room 114. Sarah, could you QUIETLY take Ms. Of Gilead's bags to room 114, please?

PHOEBE: And please be careful—I have some very fragile things in my bags...

SARAH: Oh, of course. I will treat your bags as if they were my very own. (*Smiles sweetly.*)

RACHEL: Oh my... Anyway, I hope you enjoy the remainder of your stay, Ms. Phoebe.

PHOEBE: Oh, you will be the first to know if I don't.

SARAH: (*Walking by RACHEL, then sarcastically.*) Yay! You win!

RACHEL: (*To SARAH.*) Shhhh! (*Then back to PHOEBE.*) Very well, then. Enjoy your stay!

PHOEBE: Thank you! To room 114, then. (*Walks away, with SARAH starting behind her with her bags.*)

SARAH squeaks like a mouse, one time. PHOEBE jumps.)

PHOEBE: What was that!?

SARAH: What was what?

PHOEBE and SARAH exit, and DEMETRIUS enters.

DEMETRIUS: How are things, dear?

RACHEL: Dear, we **MUST** do something about Sarah.

DEMETRIUS: I know, I know. Soon Jessie will be old enough to take over for her, but for now, we just have to be patient.

RACHEL: She's getting more and more rebellious. I just don't know....

JESSIE: (*Bounding in, with HANNAH following more quietly behind her.*) Hi Mom! Hi Daddy!

DEMETRIUS: Well, hello Jessie! What are you up to now?

JESSIE: I just came from in front of the temple. I found Hannah and came back here to see if we could take some food back to her family.

DEMETRIUS: Food? What kind of food?

JESSIE: Bread, fruit—anything, really. Do we have any?

DEMETRIUS: Doesn't Hannah's family have food of their own?

HANNAH: We have a little. But not enough.

JESSIE: That's why they were in front of the Temple, Daddy. Hannah has been really sick, and so was her Daddy before he died. They were asking people for food, so I brought her here to help me carry some back. (*As she has described being sick, DEMETRIUS has stepped back a bit from the little girl, fearful.*)

DEMETRIUS: Uh, I see.

HANNAH: We would be so grateful, mister. There are six of us—well, five now, and we're really hungry.

DEMETRIUS: I'm sure you are, Hannah. (*To RACHEL.*) Do we have any to spare?

RACHEL: Let me go look in the storeroom. (*Exits.*)

JESSIE: Please, Daddy? I'll give up my portion for a few meals...

DEMETRIUS: Hannah? Could you excuse us for a little?

HANNAH: Of course, sir. (*Backs off into a corner.*)

DEMETRIUS: (*Quietly, aside to JESSIE.*) Jessie, honey—you know how I feel about you going down to the temple to be around... those people.

JESSIE: You don't think that Hannah is nice?

DEMETRIUS: No, Jessie—she seems like a really sweet little girl.

JESSIE: Then why would you not want me around her?

DEMETRIUS: It's not that simple, honey. There's no medicine for some of these diseases. It's too dangerous!

JESSIE: Daddy, Hannah needs to eat. She doesn't have enough food, and she doesn't have a Daddy to help her anymore.

DEMETRIUS: Jessie, she's sick. Her father died from the sickness—what if you get it too?

JESSIE: (*Looking down and thinking.*) If I got it, I would want someone to care enough about me to want to come down to the temple and bring me food, Daddy.

DEMETRIUS: But Jessie...

JESSIE: Daddy, we learned at the Temple that God wants us to share our food with the poor. To care for the fatherless, to bestow kindness on those less fortunate.

DEMETRIUS: Yes, but I just don't think... (*RACHEL appears with basket of food.*)

RACHEL: We don't have much, I'm afraid. A few loaves of bread and some pieces of fruit.

HANNAH: They look wonderful to me...

JESSIE: Please, Daddy!

DEMETRIUS: (*Struggling with the fear he has for his own daughter.*) Oh, alright. Of course she can have them.

HANNAH: Oh, thank you!

JESSIE: Yay! Thank you, Daddy! (*To HANNAH.*) Let's go take them to your mother!

HANNAH: She'll be so excited! So will my brothers...

DEMETRIUS: Jessie, why don't you just let her take them—you stay here.

JESSIE: Father, please let me help her! I'll be just fine...

DEMETRIUS: (*Again, struggling.*) But I don't want anything to happen to...

JESSIE: I just want to see her mom's face. Then I promise I'll come right back.

DEMETRIUS: Well....

RACHEL: Come right back here, and dinner will be ready for you, Jessie.

JESSIE: Thanks, Mom! Come on, Hannah!

HANNAH: Oh, it's so kind—thank you again, Jessie's father! And mother!

JESSIE: Yes, thank you! Let's go! (*JESSIE and HANNAH exit with the food.*)

RACHEL: She's a good girl.

DEMETRIUS: Yes, she is. A very good girl. But then again, you girls always are the more compassionate gender. (*SARAH enters again, smiling deviously.*) Of course, there are exceptions...

SARAH leans against the counter, staring at her fingernails, still smiling.

RACHEL: Did you get Ms. Phoebe settled in?

SARAH: (*Pauses, still smiling.*) For now.

DEMETRIUS: What do you mean for now?

SARAH: She's in her room. With her bags.

RACHEL: That's good. Thank you.

SARAH: And a piece of moldy cheese.

DEMETRIUS: What? Where?

SARAH: Under her bed.

RACHEL: Sarah! You didn't! (*From offstage, a blood-curdling scream is heard.*)

DEMETRIUS: She did.

SARAH: Wow. That was fast.

RACHEL: Oh, dear! (*Shouting offstage.*) I'm coming, Ms. Of Gilead! (*Exits, running offstage.*)

DEMETRIUS: Sarah...

SARAH: Yeah?

DEMETRIUS: (*Pauses, shaking his head.*) Oh, never mind.

Fade.

SCENE 3

AT START: *The arrival. The Inn lobby is bustling as usual and DEMETRIUS is behind the counter, dealing with MR. DARIUS. The sign from Scene 2 (Three years earlier) has been removed.*

DEMETRIUS: Sir, I'm just not sure I can help you.

MR. DARIUS: Look, all I am saying is that towels are stolen from hotels all the time, right?

DEMETRIUS: Yes, we have lost a few towels over the years, yes. But you're not asking for a towel, or...

MR. DARIUS: Listen, my point is that things disappear from hotels all the time.

DEMETRIUS: Towels, yes...

MR. DARIUS: Is it so inconceivable that a rollaway bed could disappear? I mean, perhaps a guest could sneak it out the back when the housekeeper wasn't looking.... Lord knows, she's not that attentive...

SARAH: Uh, I heard *that*.

DEMETRIUS: Mr. Darius, your wife specifically requested....

MR. DARIUS: Yes, but I'm the one who had to sleep on it last night! My back is a wreck! I may not be able to walk straight again!

DEMETRIUS: I can see that. But...

MR. DARIUS: Listen. I'm the one that will be settling the bill with this hotel. I assure you I can be quite generous when I feel like I have been taken care of...

DEMETRIUS: Uh... I see. (*Looking around.*) Look. Perhaps we could move it when the housekeeper does the linen. (*To SARAH.*) Sarah. Can you please make certain that the rollaway bed is removed from room 102 when you do the linen? (*Pause, as SARAH is looking particularly bored and uncaring.*) Sarah? (*Pause.*) Sarah, did you hear me?

SARAH: Oh, I'm sorry. (*Walking over to MR. DARIUS; she snarls at DEMETRIUS.*) I guess I was being terribly "inattentive" ... (*Exits.*)

DEMETRIUS: Uh, we'll see what we can do...

MR. DARIUS: Thank you, Sir. My back thanks you!

MRS. DARIUS enters.

MRS. DARIUS: Thanks you for what?

MR. DARIUS: *(Startled.)* Oh, hi dear! What? Uh, I was just thanking Mr. Demetrius here for the lovely view we have from our window...

MRS. DARIUS: Lovely view? Our room overlooks the Bethlehem landfill.

MR. DARIUS: And a lovely landfill it is! Thank you again, Mr. Demetrius!

DEMETRIUS: Uh, you're quite welcome. If there is anything I can do to make your stay more pleasant, please don't hesitate to ask!

MRS. DARIUS: *(As they are walking away.)* How'd you sleep? Quietly, I hope?!?

MR. DARIUS: Dear, I'm trying to tell you, I LOVE your snoring...!!!

JOSEPH and MARY approach the desk, just as PHOEBE is walking up.

PHOEBE: Excuse me?

DEMETRIUS: *(Looks up, tries not to look crestfallen when he sees her there, but fails. He smiles insincerely.)* Yes, Ms. Of Gilead?

PHOEBE: I have a complaint.

DEMETRIUS: *(Sarcastically.)* No! You couldn't possibly!

PHOEBE: Yes, well, I do.

DEMETRIUS: Could you be a bit more specific?

PHOEBE: *(Pause.)* I'm thinking...

JOSEPH: Excuse me?

DEMETRIUS: If you'll excuse me, Ms., I need to talk with this gentleman.

PHOEBE: What? But I was here first!

DEMETRIUS: And I'm sure you'll be here long after all the others have gone, Ms. Phoebe.

PHOEBE: But what about my complaint?

DEMETRIUS: As soon as it is invented, I can assure you we will respond immediately.

PHOEBE: *(Outraged.)* Well, I never!

DEMETRIUS: Oh, if that were only the case... *(Turning to JOSEPH.)*

May I help you, Sir?

JOSEPH: Yes, Sir. My name is Joseph, Joseph of Nazareth, and this is my wife, Mary.

DEMETRIUS: Nice to meet you both. What can I help you with?

PHOEBE: I remember what it was!

DEMETRIUS: Yes, ma'am. I'll be with you shortly.

PHOEBE: But it was my bath towel...

DEMETRIUS: *(To JOSEPH.)* You were saying?

JOSEPH: Yes, sir. You see, we're here for the census, and Mary is heavy with child.

DEMETRIUS: Yes, I can see that.

MARY: Ouch.

DEMETRIUS: No, ma'am, I didn't mean that! I just meant that I noticed.

PHOEBE: It has a spot on it.

MARY: No, I meant ouch. I think I may be going into labor...

DEMETRIUS: Oh dear!

PHOEBE: I know! It was very unsettling!

JOSEPH: Really dear?

PHOEBE: Yes really! *(Pause.)* And thank you! At least somebody cares!

MARY: Yes, Joseph. It's about time...

PHOEBE: Yes, it is about time. *(To DEMETRIUS.)* Now, what are YOU going to do about it?

DEMETRIUS: Uh, if you are ready, you need to find someplace to settle down.

PHOEBE: Oh, don't tell me to settle down! This is unacceptable!

JOSEPH: That's why we're here. We need a room for the night.

MARY: And quickly, if possible...

DEMETRIUS: I'm afraid that's not possible.

JOSEPH: Well, how long will it be?

PHOEBE: Yes, how long? *(To JOSEPH.)* Again, you are such a dear to care! *(JOSEPH looks confused.)*

DEMETRIUS: *(Staring at PHOEBE.)* Sarah!

MARY: I don't think I can wait very long, Joseph...

DEMETRIUS: No, you see, when I said it wasn't possible, I wasn't talking about the quickly part.

JOSEPH: Meaning....

PHOEBE: Meaning that I am probably going to have to drip dry after my bath!

MARY: (*Hunched over.*) Oh, can we talk about something besides water?

DEMETRIUS: (*To PHOEBE.*) I will get you your precious towel! (*To SARAH.*) Sarah!

SARAH enters and stands right beside him.

DEMETRIUS: (*Cont.*) Now, about that room...

PHOEBE: You know, I really don't appreciate your attitude.

JOSEPH: Yes, if you were not talking about how quickly you could get us a room, then what are you saying?

DEMETRIUS: What I'm saying is that it is impossible.

MARY: What's impossible?

PHOEBE: Apparently, getting a clean towel!

DEMETRIUS: Oh, for heaven's sake! (*Turns to call SARAH again, not knowing she is right beside him and startles himself as he yells.*) Sar...! Good grief! How long have you been here?!?

SARAH: I started working here when I was seventeen.

DEMETRIUS: (*Pause for a beat as he stares at her.*) Never mind! Can you please get Ms. Of Gilead a clean towel for room 102?

PHOEBE: Finally!

SARAH: (*Sighs loudly.*) I guess.... Follow me....

SARAH and PHOEBE exit, with PHOEBE throwing her head into the air with a "hmpf!"

JOSEPH: What about the room?

DEMETRIUS: There is no room.

JOSEPH: What? You must have a room!

DEMETRIUS: OK. But we don't.

MARY: Joseph, I can't wait much longer...

JOSEPH: Please, sir. We're desperate. This is the last Inn in town—everyone has been full.

DEMETRIUS: I know. It's because of this census...

JOSEPH: Can you not find it in your heart to find us a room—anywhere?

PHOEBE and SARAH enter.

DEMETRIUS: Look. All of our rooms are taken. I can't just kick someone out...

Just then, PHOEBE walks by, yelling at SARAH, who is walking away in front of her with a towel in one hand and her hands over her ears.

PHOEBE: If it isn't one thing, it's another. First the room was too cold, then there wasn't any water, then the bed felt like a rock. A rock, I tell you. Then there was the towel thing, and I could swear I heard bats in my closet last night... *(PHOEBE and SARAH exit.)*

DEMETRIUS: Like I said, I can't kick anyone out. No matter how much I may want to...

MARY: But what am I to do? *(JOSEPH turns to comfort her.)*

DEMETRIUS: I really wish I could help you, ma'am, but...

JESSIE has entered quietly and is standing beside him.

JESSIE: Father, really? *(He is startled a bit.)*

Stage Direction note—JESSIE is only visible to her father—JOSEPH has turned to MARY and should act as though he is carrying on a conversation with her during this "monologue/dialogue." MARY is in obvious discomfort, hunched over as JOSEPH attends to her.

DEMETRIUS: Jessie, you don't understand! I have no more rooms at all! I must run a business here. I can't just go around giving rooms out to every Tom, Dick and Mary that might walk through those doors...

JESSIE: Father. Look at her! She's about to have a baby!

DEMETRIUS: Yes, yes. I know!

JESSIE: And you're about to turn them out into the street?

DEMETRIUS: Well? What else can I do?

JESSIE: I am ashamed, Father.

DEMETRIUS: Don't say that, Jessie. Not you. Please...

JESSIE: Then do something!

DEMETRIUS: What can I do? Every room is full!

JESSIE: Every room, Daddy?

DEMETRIUS: Yes, every room.

JESSIE: What about the room beneath 102?

DEMETRIUS: What? The stable?

JESSIE: Yes! It's warm, out of the weather, at least. I used to love sleeping there when I was little, remember?

DEMETRIUS: (*Smiling.*) I remember. You used to curl up with the little lambs and lay your head on them and nap...

JESSIE: So? Tell them they can stay there!

DEMETRIUS: Jessie! How could I tell them that? She's about to give birth!

JESSIE: And she has nowhere to do that!

DEMETRIUS: But the animals—the other guests—what if someone finds out?

JESSIE: Someone will find out, Daddy. They'll find out that you had the heart to give them room when nobody else would.

DEMETRIUS: But Jessie...

JOSEPH and MARY have turned to walk out of the Inn, JOSEPH with his arm around her, aiding her to walk.

JESSIE: Father—remember when I told you that God has a plan?

DEMETRIUS: I remember. I don't believe that anymore...

JESSIE: Daddy—they're leaving! Do the right thing and stop them!

DEMETRIUS: But Jessie—what about...

JESSIE: Come on! Don't miss this chance.

DEMETRIUS: (*Pauses, then.*) Oh, alright! (*To JOSEPH.*) Wait!

JOSEPH: (*Turning with MARY.*) Yes?

DEMETRIUS: Uh... I don't have any rooms...

MARY: We heard you say that...

DEMETRIUS: But I do have a stable downstairs. It's not much, but if you'd like...

JOSEPH: A stable? Like for animals?

MARY: We'll take it.

JOSEPH: Honey, I can't let you have our baby in a stable.

MARY: Well, I think it might be better than having it out in the cold.

DEMETRIUS: It's clean. And warm. (*Yelling offstage.*) Sarah?

JOSEPH: I don't know...

MARY: (*In pain.*) Oh Joseph! It's time!

JOSEPH: Oh my... ok where is this stable?

DEMETRIUS: (*As SARAH arrives.*) Sarah, please show this nice couple to the stable?

SARAH: What?

DEMETRIUS: Show them to the stable, please, and give them any linens they need. And check lost and found to see if there is anything to swaddle a baby in...

SARAH: Seriously? (*Pause.*) So gross. I hope you know I'm gonna need a raise if I have to clean the stable...

DEMETRIUS: Fine, fine. Just make them as comfortable as possible. (*They exit, led by SARAH.*)

JESSIE: I'm proud of you, Daddy.

DEMETRIUS: I hope I just did the right thing, sweetheart.

JESSIE: Trust me, Father. You did the right thing this time. You'll see.

Fade.

SCENE 4

AT START: *Two years earlier. A ppt slide or poster should denote this and be left up during this scene. The setting is the Inn, but inside the living quarters of PHOEBE and SARAH and RACHEL, where JESSIE lies very ill, with a cold compress on her head. The room should have a bed and perhaps a nightstand and chair—anything to make it look like a bedroom in 2 B.C. The doctor is there as well, taking her temperature.*

JESSIE: Daddy?

DEMETRIUS: Yes, sweetie? I'm here.

JESSIE: I'm very cold.

RACHEL: How can you be cold, child. You're burning up!

DEMETRIUS: I'll get another blanket. (*Motions for the DOCTOR to come over to him.*)

DOCTOR: Her fever is very high, Demetrius. I don't know how much longer she can go on like this.

DEMETRIUS: Surely there is something more that we can do...

DOCTOR: Just keep giving her water. And keep praying...

DEMETRIUS: But isn't there any medicine that would help? I'll pay anything!

DOCTOR: I've given her all I know to give her. I've seen this type of fever a lot over the last few years. Sometimes it goes away. Sometimes....

DEMETRIUS: Oh, it will go away, Doc. She's a fighter.

DOCTOR: Oh, I know. I don't think I've seen such a strong little girl.

DEMETRIUS: That's good then, right?

DOCTOR: Oh, it's very good. It's just...

DEMETRIUS: Just what?

DOCTOR: I hope it's enough, Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS: It will be. It has to be.

DOCTOR: Do you have any idea where she might have picked up the sickness?

DEMETRIUS: I don't know. She's always going down to the temple to give food to the sick that are down there...

DOCTOR: That's probably it, then.

DEMETRIUS: I keep telling her she needs to be more careful. But every chance she gets, she's down there, wrapping people's wounds, bringing them water...

DOCTOR: She is a great little girl, Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS: I know. But look at what it gets her.

DOCTOR: (*Moving toward the door.*) Well, send for me if things change.

DEMETRIUS: Thank you, Doc. Are you sure there's nothing more we can do?

DOCTOR: You're doing it. Just wait for the fever to break.

DEMETRIUS: Ok. We'll call for you when it does.

DOCTOR: Good day.

RACHEL: Is that any better, honey?

JESSIE: Yes, Mom. Thank you.

DEMETRIUS: Can I get you anything, sweetie?

JESSIE: Just one thing, Father.

DEMETRIUS: Anything.

JESSIE: I need to take some food down to Mr. Cohen down at the temple. He's expecting me...

DEMETRIUS: You're too sick to go anywhere, Jessie.

JESSIE: I know, Father. Can you please take him some?

DEMETRIUS: Jessie...

JESSIE: Please, Father. He's blind—he depends on me.

DEMETRIUS: Jessie, I just...(Pause.) of course I will.

JESSIE: Thank you, Daddy.

RACHEL: You need to get your sleep, dear. Close your eyes and rest for now.

JESSIE: Ok Mom.

RACHEL: (*Rising to go to DEMETRIUS' side.*) I'm so worried about her.

DEMETRIUS: Me too, Rachel. But we must have faith.

RACHEL: I have faith, Demetrius. But she is so sick...

DEMETRIUS: But she's His, Rachel. She's so different. Her whole commitment is to doing the work of God—surely He wouldn't punish her for that.

RACHEL: In my heart, I know you're right. I just wish she would get better now.

DEMETRIUS: *(Falling to his knees and praying.)* God, you know our little girl's heart. You know how much she longs to do your work. Please let your healing come so your will can be done. Amen.

RACHEL: Soon.

JESSIE: Daddy?

DEMETRIUS: *(Rushing to her bedside.)* Yes, Jessie?

JESSIE: Don't be worried.

DEMETRIUS: I'm not worried, sweetheart.

JESSIE: Yes, you are. I can see it in your eyes.

DEMETRIUS: I'm sorry honey. I don't mean to worry...

JESSIE: There is no need, Father. He has a plan.

DEMETRIUS: What do you mean, Jessie?

JESSIE: Last night, the fever was so bad. I had a dream.

DEMETRIUS: A dream?

JESSIE: I was helping a lady down by the healing pool with her bandages...

DEMETRIUS: Jessie, when you get better, I want to talk about you going down there so much...

JESSIE: Oh, Father. Don't you know that I have to?

DEMETRIUS: You don't have to, Jessie. You need to be more careful...

JESSIE: Anyway, in my dream, the lady looked up at me and smiled the sweetest smile I've ever seen.

DEMETRIUS: Awww. That's a nice dream.

JESSIE: That's not all. She said, "You know Jessie? God has big plans for you."

DEMETRIUS: She said that in your dream?

JESSIE: I think it was a dream. It seemed so real.

DEMETRIUS: It sounds wonderful, Jessie. Now you get some rest.

JESSIE: But don't you see? That's why you don't have to worry! She told me God has plans for me!

DEMETRIUS: That's right, Jessie. I know He does.

JESSIE: So, promise me you won't worry.

DEMETRIUS: I'll try, honey.

JESSIE: Promise.

DEMETRIUS: Ok, I won't worry. I promise. Now close your eyes and get some rest. *(Pats JESSIE on the head.)*

JESSIE: Thanks, Daddy. Night.

DEMETRIUS: Night, angel. *(Rises and returns to RACHEL.)*

RACHEL: What did she say?

DEMETRIUS: *(After a pause.)* She said everything is going to be ok.

RACHEL: *(Looking upward.)* Thank you.

Fade.

SCENE 5

AT START: *The stable. Setting should reflect a typical manger scene with a baby doll or a real infant if you are brave enough. If not, you may want to place a small light in the manger that gives the effect of radiating light. There should be straw scattered about on the floor, and the effect of a stall or a set drawn to look like a stable. MARY and JOSEPH are there with the baby. DEMETRIUS and RACHEL are there as well.*

JOSEPH: Thank you again for letting us stay here. I don't know what we would have done otherwise.

DEMETRIUS: I still feel badly that you are in my stable. I wish I had something more suitable...

JOSEPH: It's more than fine. It's warm, peaceful, quiet... *(At this, there is a knocking at the door.)*

DEMETRIUS: *(Opening the door and finding SARAH and PHOEBE there.)* Yes?

SARAH: Sorry. I tried to stop her, but...

PHOEBE: Oh, THERE you are! I've been looking all over for you!

DEMETRIUS: Ms. Of Gilead, this may not look like it, but it is supposed to be a private room...

PHOEBE: Yes, of course. *(Turning to SARAH.)* Go and make sure no one comes down here to bother these good folks...

SARAH: *(Turning to go.)* Whatever...

PHOEBE: Now, I'm not one to complain, but...

DEMETRIUS: Ms. Of Gilead, I meant that there are people staying here that need their privacy!



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