

IN BETHLEHEM INN

by John Carter



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By John Carter

DEDICATED

To Karen, my wife, whose loving support and patience enabled me to spend hours in the office doing "that creative stuff." Thanks to Westfield Friends Meeting's Christian Education Committee for encouraging me to undertake this writing, to the members of Westfield Friends Meeting for their tremendous support of its first performance, to Frances and Gladys, who patiently struggled to read my handwriting, and typed, retyped, and re-retyped the first several drafts, and to my parents, Wayne and Betsy, who patiently (and persistently) corrected my grammar as a child, and "learned me how to write good." Thank you all; you are a blessing!

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is set in the dining room of the Bethlehem Inn on the night Jesus was born, and should be presented during a church supper (potluck, served, or whatever your congregation is used to). This makes the audience not only observers, but *participants* in the play as well. They are the guests at the Bethlehem Inn. There will be times when they are called upon to respond, and the cast should do their best to encourage them to respond heartily!

The innkeeper and his family sit and eat at the head table, preferably raised, and the servants should sit and eat at a table by the exit door, preferably at the opposite end of the room. This places the audience in the middle of the action, and forces the cast to project to the opposite ends of the room so that all can hear.

In addition, there should be a place nearby, either inside or outside, where a live nativity scene can be set up. A bale of straw and a sheep or a goat adds a nice touch, and the light in the nativity should be dim. An outside location is preferable, but if there are mostly elderly persons in attendance or many stairs to climb, an indoor location might be more practical.

Most of the characters are males, but if you wish, and we did this for the premier performance at Westfield Friends Meeting in Westfield, Ind., shepherds Nathan and Michael can be changed to Esther and Rachael without having to make many changes in their lines. Also, one of our servants, Ben, was a "Beth," and it worked quite well.

Props and costumes can be as authentically detailed or as sparse as desired. A sign reading "BETHLEHEM INN — No Vacancy" over the entrance door adds to the spirit of the evening. The main objective is for everyone to feel as if they are present as something very special is happening.

The play may take anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half to present, depending on how quickly people eat, and how rapidly you move from scene to scene. Remember, the fellowship between the scenes is an important part of the evening, so don't rush. On the other hand, don't stretch it out too long either! A good relaxed pace is important!

Be creative. What might the inn have looked like? What would people see coming in? How might it have been decorated? You might want to have appropriate music played between the scenes as people are eating, or perhaps a choir or instrumental ensemble. Use your imagination. The more you creatively tailor this to your own situation and congregation, the more delightful and meaningful the evening will be for everyone involved. I hope you enjoy it as much as our church did.

— *John W. Carter*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

GUESTS — the audience

ELI MERRIMAN — the innkeeper

SARAH MERRIMAN — his wife

JONATHAN,* RUTH* and HANNAH — their children

JOSH, AMOS, BEN, and ZACK** — servants

NATHAN and MICHAEL**** — shepherds

JOSEPH, MARY,* and baby JESUS*

Additional Shepherds* (optional)

*Non-speaking part

**To provide for more speaking female roles, the characters Ben, Nathan and Michael could be changed to Beth, Esther and Rachael.

SCENE 1

The dinner should begin with whatever is usual for your church: a prayer, singing, announcements, whatever. But shortly after everyone knows the dinner has "officially" started, the curtain should open on the head table and/or the innkeeper and his family should take their places there. The servants should be seated at *their* table at this time as well. Once his family is seated, Eli should greet his guests.

ELI: Welcome! Welcome, one and all! Friends and strangers, families and guests, welcome to the Bethlehem Inn! I am Eli Merriman, owner and proprietor. This is my wife, Sarah, (*Motions to SARAH, who smiles and nods*) my daughter Ruth. (*Motion to RUTH, who smiles and nods*) This is Hannah, my baby. (*Motion to HANNAH*)

HANNAH: (*Exasperated*) Oh, daddy . . .

ELI: Well, you *are*. (*Turns to JONATHAN.*) And this is Jonathan. (*JONATHAN waves.*) The Bethlehem Inn has been in my family now for three generations, and one day Jonathan here will carry on the tradition. Right, Jonathan? (*He slaps JONATHAN on the back just as JONATHAN takes a drink. He coughs and sputters, and dries himself with a napkin.*) Oh . . . uh . . . sorry, Jonathan. (*To GUESTS*) At any rate, we are glad to welcome you all here. To those of you at the end of your travels — I trust you had a safe journey, and that your sore feet and aching muscles have arrived unmolested by thieves and robbers. Unfortunately, as anyone in Bethlehem who took care of business today can tell you, tomorrow you *will* meet thieves and robbers! The thieves and robbers of the Roman *tax* office!

SERVANTS: (*Boo loudly and hiss.*)

ELI: (*Angrily*) Caesar has spoken! And we . . . (*Despairing*) we have no choice but to jump. (*Shakes head.*) God help us. But . . . that is tomorrow, and this is tonight. I only hope you all have money enough left after taxes to pay your bills

1 when you check out! Now, the stables are clean and dry,
 2 so you needn't worry about your beasts of burden; and,
 3 as you can see, (*Motions to the food table*) the board is well
 4 stocked with delicious delights so you needn't worry
 5 about going hungry. We have taken great pains to assure
 6 you a pleasant stay at what, in my *humble* opinion, is the
 7 finest inn in Bethlehem.

8 ZACK: It's the *only* inn in Bethlehem!

9 ELI: Bite your tongue, you —

10 SARAH: (*Interrupts*) Eli!

11 ELI: (*Looks irritatedly at SARAH for a moment, then turns to*
 12 *GUESTS.*) Forgive me; there is nothing like a good crew
 13 of servants.

14 SERVANTS: (*Cheer and pat selves on back.*)

15 ELI: And that bunch *is nothing* like a good crew of servants.
 16 (*SERVANTS wither.*) The one with the mouth there is Zack.
 17 Say "hello," Zack.

18 ZACK: (*Mimicking*) Hello, Zack.

19 ELI: Then there is Josh . . .

20 JOSH: (*Waves.*) Howdy!

21 ELI: Ben . . . (*Or Beth, if female part*)

22 BEN: (*Stands.*) I'd like to thank everyone here for this award,
 23 and I especially want —

24 ELI: Thank you, Ben. (*BEN shrugs and sits.*) And finally, Amos.

25 AMOS: (*Asleep at table, snores loudly.*)

26 ELI: (*Shouting*) Amos!

27 AMOS: (*Snorts.*) Not now, Mom . . . later.

28 ELI: (*Thinks a minute*) Good guests . . . If I might trouble you
 29 for a moment . . . Amos is a hard sleeper, and I'm afraid
 30 it will take all of us to wake him. So if, on the count of
 31 three, you would all call his name, maybe that would do
 32 it. Ready? One . . . two . . . three!

33 GUESTS & CAST: *Amos!*

34 AMOS: (*Jumps up in a panic.*) What? Present! Here! Oh! Uh . . .
 35 oh . . .

1 **ELI:** Amos —

2 **AMOS:** *(Snaps to attention.)* Yes Sir!

3 **ELI:** What's the matter?

4 **AMOS:** Just catching forty winks, sir.

5 **ELI:** I see. And, what does one wink with?

6 **AMOS:** Sir?

7 **ELI:** What does one wink with?

8 **AMOS:** An eye, sir, I guess.

9 **ELI:** And eyes have lashes, do they not?

10 **AMOS:** I suppose they do, sir.

11 **ELI:** Well then, how would you like one lash for every wink?

12 **AMOS:** Well, let's see . . . that would be forty . . . *(Stops and realizes what's happening)* . . . uh . . . forty lashes . . . sir.

13 **ELI:** Very good, Amos!

14 **AMOS:** Uh . . . I don't think I'd like that, sir.

15 **ELI:** Then I suggest you stay awake to take care of our guests.

16 **AMOS:** Yes sir. Thank you, sir. *(Sits down quickly.)*

17 **ELI:** *(Sighs and shakes his head.)* It's so hard to get good help
18 these days. *(To GUESTS)* But now dear friends, to the
19 business at hand! Namely, a good supper! Rest your feet,
20 tell your tales, eat your fill, and relax and enjoy your
21 meal. *(Sits and eats with his family.)*
22
23

24 SCENE 2

25

26 *(After a few minutes, a loud pounding is heard at the Exit door.)*

27 **ELI:** Zack! Josh! See who it is and find out what they want!

28 **ZACK & JOSH:** Yes sir! *(They leave through Exit doors.)*

29 **ELI:** *(Awkward pause. To GUESTS)* Probably just some
30 beggars. We always get them this time of year. *(Awkward*
31 *pause. Shouts.)* Well? What's taking so long? *(ZACK & JOSH*
32 *reenter.)*

33 **ZACK:** It's a couple of travelers from Nazareth, sir.

34 **ELI:** And do these travelers have names?

35 **ZACK:** Oh, yes sir! Uh . . . Joseph and Mary.

- 1 JOSH: It was a rough trip, and they had to travel slowly.
 2 That's why they're so late getting here.
- 3 SARAH: (*Jumping up*) Oh dear, what happened? Are they
 4 hurt? Did they get attacked?
- 5 ZACK: Oh, no Ma'am, it's just that the lady is . . . um . . . well
 6 . . . she's . . . uh . . . (*Putting hands out over stomach*) you
 7 know . . . uh . . .
- 8 SARAH: (*Puzzled*) Fat?
- 9 ZACK: Well, not really . . . she's . . . uh . . . (*Softly*) pregnant.
- 10 SARAH: She's *what*? Speak up!
- 11 ZACK: (*Shouts.*) *Pregnant!* (*Calming down*) . . . Ma'am.
- 12 JOSH: Zack!
- 13 ZACK: Well, she *is*!
- 14 JOSH: (*To SARAH*) She's, uh, "with child," Ma'am.
- 15 ZACK: Boy, is she *ever*! She is as big as a . . .
- 16 SARAH: I *get* the picture.
- 17 JOSH: Anyway Ma'am, it's been a long, hard trip for them.
 18 They hope to be able to pay their taxes in the morning
 19 and start home again, but the lady really needs a place
 20 to rest.
- 21 ELI: I assume you told them we're all filled up for the night.
- 22 JOSH: Well . . . uh . . . not *exactly*, sir.
- 23 ELI: (*Rising*) What do you mean, "not exactly"?
- 24 ZACK: It's just that they . . . I mean, she . . . I . . . well . . . they
 25 both . . .
- 26 JOSH: They *are* exhausted, sir. Couldn't we just stick them
 27 in a corner somewhere?
- 28 SARAH: Yes Eli, surely there's *some* place we can put them?
- 29 JOSH: It's only two people, sir.
- 30 ZACK: Two and a *half*. (*JOSH gives him an elbow in the ribs.*) Ow!
- 31 ELI: Put them in a *corner* somewhere!? And, pray tell, what
 32 *corner* would you have me put them in? (*Begins to count.*)
 33 *Our* room is full, the *guest* rooms are full, the *halls* are
 34 full, the *dining* room is full — even the *kitchen* is full — so
 35 just where do you suggest that I find this magic, expandable

1 corner?

2 SARAH: Well you can't just turn them away, poor things. The
3 whole city is crammed full. They'd *never* find a place to
4 stay *this* late at night.

5 ELI: Don't you think I know that? (*To himself*) Of course I
6 know that! (*To JOSH*) Josh, give this Joseph and Mary
7 my apologies . . . Tell them we have no more room . . .

8 SARAH: Eli!

9 ELI: (*Ignoring her*) Then send them up the street to my cousin
10 Aaron's house. (*SARAH sits.*) Have them tell Aaron I sent
11 them. If Aaron can't take them in, have them try the
12 widow Solomon's place. I know she sometimes takes in
13 travelers. Tell them I make no guarantees, but it's the
14 best I can do.

15 JOSH: (*Sadly*) Yes sir. (*He and ZACK leave through Exit doors.*)

16 ELI: (*To GUESTS*) I apologize for the interruption, but it's
17 been like this for the past *month*! The city overflowing
18 with people — late comers looking for a place to stay. I
19 wish I *could* accommodate everyone, but . . . I can't. (*He*
20 *sighs. JOSH and ZACK return.*) Well . . . please . . . continue
21 your meal, and pray that God will lead this unfortunate
22 couple to shelter.

23

24 SCENE 3

25

26 (*After a few minutes, a loud pounding is again heard at the Exit*
27 *door.*)

28 ELI: What, again? Josh! Zack! See who it is and tell them to
29 go away.

30 JOSH & ZACK: Yes sir. (*They leave.*)

31 ELI: (*To GUESTS*) I tell you, if it isn't one thing it's another.
32 The whole city's gone crazy, thanks to imperial Roman
33 "wisdom"! I may go crazy next, with all this pounding at
34 my door. That's what doors are for, to keep people out!
35 (*Shouting to the door*) Hey! Hurry it up out there; we don't

- 1 **have all night!** (*To GUESTS*) You'd think the Messiah and
 2 **his angels** were out there or something!
- 3 **ZACK & JOSH:** (*Bursting in excitedly*) **It's them!**
- 4 **ELI:** (*Jumping up*) **What??**
- 5 **JOSH:** The couple from Nazareth . . .
- 6 **ZACK:** They're *back*!
- 7 **ELI:** Oh . . . Well, what do they want? They *know* we're all
 8 filled up here. (*Pause*) You *did* tell them, didn't you?
- 9 **JOSH:** Oh, yes sir! But nobody was home at your cousin
 10 Aaron's house . . .
- 11 **ZACK:** And the widow Solomon's place was taken over by
 12 Roman soldiers this afternoon.
- 13 **ELI:** (*Thinking*) Hmm . . . (*Pause*) Well, I'm sorry but there's
 14 nothing I can do. You'll just have to tell them . . .
- 15 **SARAH:** (*Rising*) Eli! Isn't there *some* place we could put
 16 them? I mean, after all she *is* with child and —
- 17 **ELI:** (*Interrupts angrily*) Confound it woman, have your eyes
 18 left your head? Can't you *see*? Look around here! There's
 19 *no more room*! Didn't you hear what I said earlier? (*Begins*
 20 *the count.*) The —
- 21 **SARAH:** (*Interrupts.*) Yes, I know (*Mimicking*) — the guest
 22 room's full, the dining room's full, the store room's full,
 23 even the kitchen's full, (*Pleading*) but, Eli, it's late and
 24 they're exhausted. And who knows, she could have her
 25 baby any *time* now! You know if it was your cousin Zelda,
 26 you'd find room for *her*!
- 27 **ELI:** But it's *not* Zelda — it's not even *family*. (*Softening*) Sarah,
 28 look. We're packed in here like cattle. *Worse* than cattle!
 29 The animals *out back* have more room than we do!
- 30 **SARAH:** (*Cuddling up to him*) Eli, *please* . . . for me? You know
 31 I'd be grateful.
- 32 **ELI:** (*He sighs.*) Yes, Sarah, I know. (*Motions to children.*)
 33 Everyone can *see* how grateful you can be. But where . . .
- 34 **SARAH:** (*Suddenly excited*) Eli!
- 35 **ELI:** (*Startled*) **What!**

- 1 SARAH: What about the stables — out back?
- 2 ELI: The sta — ?
- 3 SARAH: (*Interrupts.*) You said there was room, didn't you?
- 4 ELI: I said there was more room than *here*, but —
- 5 SARAH: And it's clean, you just cleaned it this morning.
- 6 ELI: Well, yes, but —
- 7 SARAH: And it's dry and out of the weather.
- 8 ELI: But, Sarah, I don't think —
- 9 SARAH: Oh, Eli, *please??* (*Grabs him in a bear hug and looks up*
10 *at him.*)
- 11 ELI: Well . . . I . . . (*Looks at SARAH, then out at guests.*) How can
12 I refuse such a face? (*To SARAH*) OK Sarah, you win. They
13 can stay in the stable.
- 14 SARAH: (*Hugs him hard.*) Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!
- 15 ELI: (*Grunts as she hugs too hard.*) But it's only for this *one*
16 *night and then . . .*
- 17 SARAH: (*Turning to make plans. ELI rubs his sore ribs.*) Oh, I'm
18 *sure* by tomorrow we'll have plenty of room in *here*. Zack!
19 Josh! Show the young couple to the stables out back. You
20 can move things around a bit if you have to. Be sure
21 they're comfortable, and tell them if there's anything they
22 need, just to let me know. (*Realizing*) Oh! . . . I almost
23 forgot. (*To GUESTS*) Dear friends, would you mind
24 terribly if a couple of weary travelers from Nazareth
25 shared the stable with your animals? She's with child,
26 and I'm sure they won't be any trouble at all. You don't
27 mind, do you? (*Encourages response from guests.*)
- 28 GUESTS: No.
- 29 SARAH: Are you sure? (*Ad-lib for an enthusiastic response.*)
- 30 GUESTS: Yeah, sure, it's fine, OK, whatever . . .
- 31 SARAH: Oh, *thank* you. I could hug you all!
- 32 ELI: Better not, dear, (*Feeling his ribs*) the doctor's out of town.
- 33 SARAH: Oh, you . . . (*To ZACK & JOSH*) Well, what are you
34 waiting for? Show our guests to the stable!
- 35 ZACK & JOSH: Yes Ma'am. (*They exit, SARAH sits.*)

ELI: *(To GUESTS)* My deepest thanks, dear friends, for your patience and understanding in this matter. You have not only saved a couple from a night on the streets, a dangerous prospect in these times, but also saved me from the wrath of an angry woman, an equally dangerous prospect. Again, my humble thanks for your indulgence. Now, please, continue your meal.

SCENE 4

(After a short time, BEN and AMOS slip out the Exit doors. Suddenly loud screams are heard outside the doors. BEN, AMOS, and JOSH tumble, panic stricken, through the doors and hold them closed. ZACK, on the other side, pounds wildly on the door and screams:)

ZACK: Let me in! Let me in! Help! *(BEN reaches through the door, hauls ZACK inside, and all four now hold the door closed in a panic.)*

ELI: *(Stands.)* What in thunder's going on here? Zack, Amos, Ben, Josh! *(Each turns around as his name is called.)* What's the meaning of all this racket?

ZACK: *(Breathless)* It's . . . uh . . . and . . . it's *(Measuring size with his hands)*

AMOS: *(In a panic)* It's . . . it's . . . huge!

BEN: Yea, and . . . and . . . it's all fiery!

JOSH: And . . . it's . . . it's got a tail, sir!

ZACK: *(Screams in anguish.)* Aaah! We're doomed! *(ALL four begin to wail and worry.)*

ELI: Silence! *(They straighten up.)* Now . . . do you expect me to believe that there is actually a dragon out there? A huge, fire-breathing dragon, with a tail?

ZACK: *(Stuttering)* N-n-n-n-no, sir.

AMOS: It's more like a . . .

BEN: . . . a . . .

JOSH: . . . a star, sir.

- 1 **ELI:** (*Incredulously*) **A star!?**
- 2 **ALL FOUR:** Yes sir.
- 3 **ELI:** (*Indignant*) You interrupted our dinner to tell us there
- 4 are stars in the sky? (*Mocking*) At night? How unusual!
- 5 **ZACK:** Not just any star, sir. It's ... It's ...
- 6 **AMOS:** ... huge, sir!
- 7 **BEN:** ... and all fiery!
- 8 **JOSH:** ... and it's got —
- 9 **ELI:** (*Interrupting*) ... it's got a tail. Yes, I heard you the first
- 10 time. Well, exactly where is this star? (*ALL four look up.*)
- 11 I know it's in the sky, you idiots. Where in the sky? Is it
- 12 towards the East? (*They shake heads "no" together.*) Then,
- 13 perhaps, it's in the North — there are a lot of stars to the
- 14 North, you know, and sometimes ... (*They shake heads*
- 15 *together.*) Oh, then how about the West? (*Shake heads.*) The
- 16 South? (*Again shake heads.*) Confound it, men, if it's not in
- 17 the East or the West or the North or the South, there's
- 18 only one other place it could be, (*All look up slowly*) and
- 19 that's ...
- 20 **ZACK:** Right overhead, sir.
- 21 **ELI:** (*Incredulously*) Are you sure?
- 22 **AMOS:** I'm afraid so, sir.
- 23 **ELI:** You mean ... (*Gulp*) ... right over the Bethlehem Inn?
- 24 **ALL FOUR:** Yes, sir.
- 25 **ELI:** (*Hurries to window, looks out, and gasps.*) It's ... It's ...
- 26 **AMOS:** Huge, isn't it, sir?
- 27 **BEN:** ... and all fiery ...
- 28 **JOSH:** ... with a tail!
- 29 **ELI:** (*Returning to table, trying to be calm*) It's only a dream! It's
- 30 only a dream! It's only a dream!
- 31 **SARAH:** (*To herself*) How odd!
- 32 **ELI:** (*Smacking himself in the face*) It's not a dream.
- 33 **SARAH:** Eli, what do you suppose it means?
- 34 **ELI:** What does it mean? (*More agitated*) What does it mean?
- 35 How often does a star just pop out of the sky and hang over

1 someone's house, hmmm? Not every day, I can tell you
 2 that! I mean . . . what will the neighbors think?
 3 (*Mimicking*) "Oh, look, dear. The Merriman's have a huge
 4 star hanging over their house. Isn't that quaint?" I hardly
 5 think so!

6 SARAH: Oh, don't be silly. Martha would never —

7 ELI: Martha! That busybody would go complaining straight
 8 to her poor husband, screaming, "Howard! Howard! The
 9 Merriman's have a star over *their* house; I want one, too!"

10 SARAH: Oh, for Pete's sake. Why such a big fuss over a star?
 11 I kind of *like* the idea myself!

12 ELI: Why such a big fuss? Wh . . . ? I'll *tell* you why such a big
 13 fuss. Do you know what that star is? Huh? Do you? That
 14 star is . . . the finger of God. That's right, Sarah, the finger
 15 of God. And do you know where the finger of God is
 16 pointing at this very moment? Right again, Sarah! It's
 17 pointing right at the Bethlehem Inn. Now, do you still
 18 "kind of like" the idea?

19 SARAH: Oh, I don't know. It's not as if —

20 ELI: Do you understand, Sarah, *God* is *pointing* at us! We're
 21 doomed, lost, ruined, poof! Oh . . . I *knew* I should have
 22 sacrificed another sheep; I just *knew* it. We're gonners
 23 for sure.

24 SARAH: Now, Eli, I *really* don't think . . .

25 ELI: (*Paying no attention*) I wonder how it will happen? The
 26 star could fall on us and crush us and then burn us to
 27 cinders. Or . . . or a whirlwind! A whirlwind could fly
 28 down and suck us off the face of the earth forever! Or
 29 maybe . . . maybe there'll be a great earthquake, and the
 30 ground will crack open and swallow us up. (*He gulps.*)

31 SARAH: Oh *really* Eli, you're getting all worked up over
 32 nothing.

33 ELI: (*Still in his own world, moaning*) One sheep. One lousy
 34 *sheep!*

35 SARAH: Why does it have to mean something bad?

- 1 ELI: (*Coming to*) What?
 2 SARAH: Why does it have to mean something *bad*?
 3 ELI: Why? Because . . . because it *does*, that's why! When *God*
 4 points at you, you *know* you've been pointed at. He hangs.
 5 a star over your head and says, "This is it, pal."
 6 SARAH: Maybe, but couldn't he also hang a star overhead to
 7 say, "I've got something *special* for you"?
 8 ELI: Are you serious?
 9 SARAH: Of *course* I'm serious! Maybe he's going to do some
 10 kind of *miracle* here!
 11 ELI: Sarah, that star is hanging right over our heads . . .
 12 ZACK: Uh . . . not exactly, sir.
 13 ELI: What?
 14 ZACK: The star, sir. It's not *exactly* over our heads.
 15 ELI: It's not?
 16 ZACK: No, sir.
 17 ELI: Then where *is* it?
 18 AMOS: It's sort of . . . um . . .
 19 BEN: . . . over the *stable*, sir.
 20 ELI: The *stable*?
 21 ZACK, AMOS, BEN & JOSH: (*Nod.*) Yes sir.
 22 ELI: Hmmm . . . maybe God is going to take the sheep himself!
 23 SARAH: Oh, Eli . . .
 24 ELI: Well, he *is* pointing at the stable, and I'd much rather
 25 lose a sheep than my *life*! (*To GUESTS*) So . . . I guess we
 26 can all relax. We're not in any *immediate* danger. (*Pause*)
 27 Still . . . it *has* been a very unusual night, and even
 28 stranger things could happen before morning. (*He sits.*)

SCENE 5

- 31
 32 (*After a short time, SARAH stands and calls out.*)
 33 SARAH: Ben? Ben!
 34 BEN: Yes Ma'am.
 35 SARAH: Didn't you say that star was hanging right over the

- 1 stable?
- 2 BEN: As near as we can tell, Ma'am.
- 3 SARAH: Eli! That couple from Nazareth — Joseph and Mary!
- 4 ELI: What about them?
- 5 SARAH: Well, I hope they're OK. I mean, after all . . .
- 6 ELI: They'll be just fine dear. That is, as long as they're not
- 7 near my sheep when God takes it.
- 8 SARAH: Will you stop worrying about your sheep? Those
- 9 two must be scared half to death out there.
- 10 ELI: Oh, all right! If it will make you feel any better, I'll send
- 11 Ben and Amos around to see if they're OK. *(To the*
- 12 SERVANTS) Ben! Amos!
- 13 BEN & AMOS: Yes sir!
- 14 ELI: Run around back to the stable and see how our guests
- 15 are doing. Tell them there's nothing to worry about . . .
- 16 and to stay away from my sheep.
- 17 SARAH: Eli!
- 18 BEN & AMOS: Yes sir! *(They exit.)*
- 19 ELI: There now, Sarah, just relax. Everything's going to be
- 20 fine.
- 21 SARAH: Oh, I *hope* so.
- 22 ELI: Ben and Amos will be back any minute to tell us that
- 23 Mary's asleep in the straw, and that Joseph is stretched
- 24 out on the floor, snoring his nose off. You'll see.
- 25 SARAH: Maybe — I just hope they're not having any trouble.
- 26 ELI: What trouble? It's late. What could happen? *(BEN &*
- 27 AMOS burst in.) Well?
- 28 BEN: Trouble, sir.
- 29 ELI & SARAH: *(Standing)* What?
- 30 SARAH: Oh, I *knew* it. I knew there was something wrong.
- 31 ELI: Now Sarah, don't get hysterical. *(To BEN & AMOS)* What
- 32 kind of trouble?
- 33 AMOS: There's a whole bunch of men crowded around the
- 34 stable, sir.
- 35 ELI: Hmmm . . . What are they doing?

1 AMOS: I don't know; we couldn't tell.
 2 BEN: It looked like they were peeking in the windows or
 3 something.
 4 ELI: How many of them are there?
 5 AMOS: At least ten or a dozen.
 6 BEN: They *could* have weapons, but we didn't get close
 7 enough to find out.
 8 SARAH: Oh Eli, what if they're robbers, come to steal our
 9 animals?
 10 ELI: (*Looking to heaven*) God, if you want your sheep you better
 11 get it now.
 12 SARAH: (*Ignoring him, gasps.*) Eli! The travelers! If they find
 13 them in there they'll *kill* them!
 14 ELI: What? No one harms any guest of *mine*! Zack! Josh!
 15 Amos! Ben! Get your weapons and go protect the stables.
 16 BEN: But sir, we're way outnumbered and —
 17 ELI: You *heard* me! Now, get going!
 18 ALL FOUR: Yes sir. (*They stumble out.*)
 19 ELI: (*To GUESTS*) Dear friends, I apologize for the
 20 inconvenience, but it seems we have some prowlers on
 21 the property. I have just sent four of my finest security
 22 guards to take care of the situation. These men are brave
 23 and well trained, so I can assure you that you are in no
 24 danger whatsoever. If . . . however . . . by chance . . . they
 25 should break in here, it's . . . uh . . . every man for himself.
 26 Yes . . . well . . . I *do* hope you're all enjoying your meal.
 27 As you can see, there's plenty of desserts here to tickle
 28 your sweet tooth; so please, eat up and enjoy!

SCENE 5

31

32 (*A short time later — the four servants push two shepherds, whose*
 33 *hands are tied, in through the door.*)

34 ZACK: (*Swaggering*) There now. That will teach you to try to
 35 rob the Bethlehem Inn!

- 1 **ELI:** *(Standing)* So, back already, men? Well done, well done!
 2 Now, what have we here?
- 3 **NATHAN:** *(Or Esther, if female role)* We're shepherds, sir. We
 4 were just —
- 5 **ZACK:** You be quiet or I'll knock your teeth to Jerusalem!
- 6 **SARAH:** Zack! *(ELI motions SARAH to be still.)*
- 7 **ELI:** So, Zack, tell us all about it.
- 8 **ZACK:** Well sir, it was like this. These thieves were looking in
 9 the stable windows. They were *just ready* to break inside,
 10 so we snuck up on 'em real quick like and *surprised* 'em.
- 11 **AMOS:** Yea . . . They were fierce and hard fighters, but we
 12 were brave and, with our superior skill, we managed to
 13 capture their leaders. *(Others agree, "Yeah," "That's it," etc.)*
- 14 **ELI:** And what happened to the others?
- 15 **JOSH:** They're . . . uh . . . all knocked out in the barnyard, sir.
- 16 **ELI:** Oh. *(Nodding & thinking)* Ben, is this true?
- 17 **BEN:** Well . . . sir . . . it's like this . . . *(ZACK, AMOS, & JOSH*
 18 *glare at him.)* . . . uh . . . yes . . . sir.
- 19 **ELI:** I see . . . Gentlemen, do you think me a fool? The truth
 20 — I want the truth!
- 21 **ALL FOUR:** Sir?
- 22 **ELI:** Neither your clothes nor theirs are torn. I see no cuts or
 23 bruises or blood — no signs at all of a "fierce struggle,"
 24 as you say. I don't even see your weapons! Now tell me,
 25 who *are* these men, and what really happened?
- 26 **ZACK:** Well, sir, it's like this . . . You see —
- 27 **ELI:** Oh, never mind. You there . . . *(Motions to NATHAN)* . . .
 28 what's your name?
- 29 **NATHAN:** Nathan, sir. And I'm a shepherd, not a thief.
- 30 **ELI:** And who is this with you?
- 31 **NATHAN:** This is my brother, Michael. He's a shepherd, too.
- 32 **ELI:** Would you please tell me what's going on, and why
 33 you're snooping around our stables at this hour of the
 34 night?
- 35 **NATHAN:** Gladly, sir. But first, would you have your "brave

- 1 **soldiers” untie us? I assure you, we are quite harmless.**
 2 **ELI:** *(Pause)* **Zack! Ben!** *(They untie their hands.)*
 3 **NATHAN & MICHAEL:** *(Or Esther and Rachael)* **Thank you!**
 4 **ELI:** Now then, you were saying . . . ?
 5 **NATHAN:** It’s going to sound kind of weird . . .
 6 **ELI:** I’m listening.
 7 **NATHAN:** OK . . . Do you know you have a *star* over your
 8 stable?
 9 **ELI:** *(Impatient)* Yes, I know! It’s huge and fiery and has a tail!
 10 What of it?!
- 11 **MICHAEL:** That’s how we knew, sir.
 12 **ELI:** Knew what?
 13 **MICHAEL:** Why, knew where to look, of course!
 14 **ELI:** Look for *what*?! Will someone *please* tell me what this is
 15 all about?!
- 16 **NATHAN:** We were on the hill, sir, just outside of town. Me
 17 and Michael here, our brothers and a few cousins. We
 18 had our sheep down for the night. A couple of us were
 19 on watch, and the rest of us were sitting around the fire.
 20 That’s when Michael and I got our blankets and stretched
 21 out.
- 22 **MICHAEL:** Yea, you should have seen the stars! Oh . . . uh
 23 . . . not *your* star, sir. The stars in general. The sky was
 24 real clear, and the stars were so big and bright, you could
 25 almost reach up and *touch* them.
- 26 **NATHAN:** It was beautiful! We see the night sky all the time
 27 . . . but *never* like this!
- 28 **MICHAEL:** All of a sudden, I notice the stars are moving.
 29 And . . . and . . . they’re getting bigger and bigger,
 30 and . . . soon the *whole sky* is covered with this bright,
 31 shimmering light!
- 32 **NATHAN:** It was unreal!
- 33 **MICHAEL:** Unreal? I was freaked out! But I couldn’t *move*,
 34 you know? I just sat there with my mouth open! And
 35 when I looked around, everyone else was doing the same:

1 just sitting there, looking at the lights with their mouths
2 open!

3 NATHAN: That's when we heard the voice.

4 ELI: The voice?

5 NATHAN & MICHAEL: The voice.

6 ELI: What did it say?

7 NATHAN: It said, "Don't be afraid. I've got some good news
8 for you, and for the whole world. Tonight a baby was
9 born in Bethlehem, and that baby is the Christ, the
10 Messiah.

11 MICHAEL: And this is how you'll recognize him. You'll find
12 the baby wrapped in an old piece of cloth and lying in a
13 feed-box."

14 NATHAN: That's when the singing started.

15 ELI: Singing?

16 MICHAEL: Yea, it was great! It kept getting louder and
17 louder and louder.

18 NATHAN: "Glory to God and peace on earth. Glory to God
19 and peace on earth." It was incredible!

20 MICHAEL: Then it began to fade, and the lights dimmed,
21 and soon there were the stars again, and the sky, and
22 the campfire, and the sheep . . .

23 NATHAN: . . .and ten people sitting around with their
24 mouths open.

25 MICHAEL: At first I thought it was just a dream, but as we
26 began to talk, I realized either we'd all been in the same
27 dream together, or what we had seen and heard was *real*!

28 NATHAN: That's when we saw your star.

29 ELI: My star?

30 NATHAN: The star over your stable.

31 MICHAEL: We figured that would be a good place to start
32 looking.

33 ELI: *(To himself)* Why not?

34 MICHAEL: So, we left the sheep and hurried into town. When
35 we got to your stable, the star was still there, shining in

1 the sky, brighter than ever.

2 NATHAN: And when we looked in through the window,
3 guess what we saw?

4 SARAH & ELI: What?

5 MICHAEL: A baby . . .

6 NATHAN: . . . wrapped in an old piece of cloth . . .

7 MICHAEL: . . . and lying in a feed-box. (*Silence*)

8 SARAH: (*Jumping up*) Eli! She had her baby! Mary had her
9 baby! (*To NATHAN*) Oh, tell me, are they all right?

10 NATHAN: Yes Ma'am, they're fine. We all crowded around
11 the window and watched for awhile. But it wasn't like
12 we were peeping Toms or anything; they knew we were
13 there.

14 MICHAEL: Yea, the guy even *waved* to us!

15 NATHAN: Well, me and Michael couldn't see too well, so we
16 walked around the corner to another window, to get a
17 better view.

18 MICHAEL: That's when *these* guys jumped out from behind
19 a pile of wood. They grabbed us, tied our hands, and
20 dragged us here.

21 ELI: Doesn't sound like you had much of a chance: two
22 unarmed shepherds ambushed by four "fierce warriors."

23 NATHAN: No sir.

24 ELI: I assume, then, that your friends are *not* all knocked
25 unconscious in the barnyard?

26 NATHAN: No sir, but they might get worried when they
27 notice we're gone.

28 SARAH: Eli, I have a *wonderful* idea. If what they say is true,
29 if they really *did* see angels, and if this baby really *is* the
30 Messiah, then this is a very special night indeed! Let's
31 all go back to the stable, and maybe we can *see* the baby!

32 ELI: What? You mean guests and everyone? Leave the inn,
33 walk outside, and look at a baby?

34 SARAH: Well, I just thought —

35 ELI: Now, now, don't get all upset. It *is* a wonderful idea. (*To*



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