

FACES AROUND THE MANGER

by Kenneth E. Nolin



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MANGER**

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CAST

(In order of appearance)

Gabriel

A woman of any age

Mary

A young girl of 15 or thereabouts

Joseph

A mature man, fairly big and strong if possible

Innkeeper's Wife

A woman of any age

Shepherds 1 and 2

Men or women of any age

Wise Men 1, 2 and 3

Men or women of any age

PRODUCTION NOTES

This presentation is a "living Nativity scene" for Christmas Eve. It should take place about a half hour into the service. Each character introduces himself or herself in a short monolog, then moves up to join the scene forming around the manger. There is no particular order to the scene, except that Mary should be seated on the stool and Joseph should stand behind her. The rest of the cast may simply group themselves around Mary and Joseph (standing or kneeling), filling the chancel area in evenly, with Gabriel being the tallest figure in the scene.

The congregation should be given small candles with shields as they enter the sanctuary for the service. After the Nativity scene is formed, they will file up to the front and light their candles, then encircle the sanctuary and sing a closing song or hymn by candlelight.

Some of the parts which would normally be for men could just as well be played by women (the shepherds or wise men, for example). If possible, include all ages in the play. Only a minimum of rehearsal is required — probably no more than once through if the parts are given out a week ahead of time.

Although this live Nativity scene was written for chancel use, it is adaptable for the popular outdoor live Nativity scenes complete with "stable," bales of hay, and live sheep and donkeys.

Costumes

The costumes need not be very complicated or authentic, but should merely suggest the character and the biblical time. At the very least, all the characters should wear the long robes.

Gabriel — A white robe with a circle of tinsel on her head.

Mary — A simple long robe (blue) and a long piece of fabric draped over her head.

Joseph — A simple long robe (brown) and fabric for his head, tied with a cord.

Innkeeper's Wife — A simple long robe (tan) and fabric draped over her head.

Shepherds 1 and 2 — Rough, homespun robes (made of burlap or some other coarse material). Add a bit of lamb's wool over one shoulder. Staffs are optional.

Wise Men 1, 2 and 3 — Rich-colored robes, perhaps choir robes, with a large present for each.

Set

Remove the communion table or any other obstructions to leave an open chancel, with nothing but a manger and stool in the center and a single tall candle (lit) on a stand.

(The single tall candle in the chancel area should be lit at the beginning of the service. The costumed players remain seated in the congregation for the entire service until the appropriate time. One by one, each will rise and join GABRIEL for his or her monolog before moving into the Nativity scene as indicated in the script.)

GABRIEL: *(Rises from her seat in the congregation and walks forward to stand just in front of the pews on one side of the sanctuary to speak.)* Hello! I'm the angel Gabriel. Yes, I know it's a man's name and we angels are always male in the Bible. But you humans always think of us as women. So as not to confuse you, we usually appear that way in your Christmas pageants. God uses many different types to be his messengers — but the important thing is the message.

You wouldn't actually have seen me at the manger. But I was there, all right. In fact, I was there when it all started — when this baby's life was just beginning.

Can you imagine my excitement when God called me to his throne and told me his errand? We'd been watching and waiting for ever so long as he carefully, patiently worked out his way of salvation. And now it was time!

I didn't waste a moment, but went straight to Mary at Nazareth. And oh, what a beauty she was! You'll see for yourself in a minute when we add her face to our scene.

But the best thing was her spirit. So trusting, willing, accepting — even when I shocked her with the news of how the Savior would come. She'd be pregnant without being married! That really worried her because she's a good girl, and it would look so bad for her, and her family, and Joseph.

I'll never forget her last words: "I'll do it. Let it be as you say." Such a lovely child, for she really wasn't much more than one. Her face was so expressive — of

awe and wonder when I came, then joy and excitement as she sang her song of praise to her cousin, Elizabeth, then patiently enduring before the vicious slander of the village gossips for those long months. But you judge for yourself. Here's Mary, the Mother of the Savior.

MARY: (*Rises and stands by GABRIEL.*) I really think they make too much of me. I didn't do more than any devout Jewish girl would have. We'd been oppressed and burdened for so long that we all wanted the Messiah to come. And any one of us would have done anything — just anything — to help it happen.

But who could ever guess it would be *this* way? I was absolutely horrified at first. Why, the village gossip would be simply impossible. My family would be disgraced, and poor, sweet Joseph, my husband-to-be would be so embarrassed!

That was my first reaction. But then, when Gabriel (*Pointing to the angel*) told me I was part of God's plan for salvation, what could I say? Of course I was willing. And oh, what delight I felt as the Savior grew to term within me. I knew I was privileged — little insignificant me — to share in his coming! It was worth the shame! (*Moves to her place, sitting on the stool.*)

GABRIEL: See what I mean? How perfect, to see her face at the manger! But of course it took another beautiful person — Joseph. What a solid, wholesome, gentle, kindly, working-man's face he had. He had shoulders of steel, and hard, calloused hands from a life of work with a crude saw and plane and chisel. Carpentry was hard, manual labor in those days!

Well, his shock was perhaps even worse than Mary's because at first he didn't know. And her pregnancy before their marriage, well . . . it could only mean . . . But let him tell about it himself. Come on in, Joseph.

JOSEPH: (*Joins GABRIEL.*) Was I ever glad that you came to

me in a dream! I was in a real panic over Mary! After all, I loved her dearly — yet here she was, pregnant! I knew what the gossip would be — that we hadn't been able to wait for marriage, even though that just wasn't done in good Jewish homes in those days. Well, I knew this wasn't true — we were both devout believers and would never have disobeyed. But the horror of it all was imagining what had happened. Had Mary been attacked by one of those rough Roman soldiers and was too ashamed to tell me? Or was there someone else she loved? Maybe she had tired of me because I was so much older than she. Maybe she had found a younger man?

What to do? I finally decided not to make a big scene of it, and I quietly broke off our engagement. I didn't want to because I still loved her. But there just wasn't any other way.

Then you came (*Looking at GABRIEL*), and suddenly it all made sense! We didn't care about the public shame now, because both of us knew she carried Jesus, the Savior — as you'd said in the dream. So we were married quietly, talk or no talk, and lived together like brother and sister until after her baby was born. Oh, we were so excited! Imagine, our baby, the Savior! (*Goes to his place behind MARY.*)

GABRIEL: Yes, there's another beautiful person to add to our faces around the manger. Joseph had true, manly courage to ignore the village talk and marry her, all because he believed, too.

Oh, they had a rugged time of it at the end — wandering around Bethlehem, with her contractions coming ever more closely together, and no place to go. But finally they were given this cave behind the inn. Here's the innkeeper's wife; let's let her tell about it.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (*Joining GABRIEL*) Believe me, it wasn't that we didn't want them; we just didn't have even

part of a room left! Everything was jammed because of the census. They all had to come, after all, and we'd put double or triple the number in each room already. But I'm a woman, and have had children, and I could see that this young girl was due any minute. And she was so afraid and lonely, far from home and her mother who would ordinarily have helped her with the birth.

Then suddenly I thought of the cave behind our inn. It's a rough place where our guests keep their animals with some of ours. It wasn't much, but I took them there, and hurried to get hot water and cloths for the birth.

At the time, I had no idea who they were. But oh, now that I've heard from the shepherds, I've come back again and again, to stand amazed at this baby who's to be the Savior. And well . . . even though the cave wasn't much, I'm so glad we helped them.

GABRIEL: And maybe it's all the more wonderful that you took them in *before* you knew that the baby to be born was the Messiah. Welcome to our living picture. Add your loving and hospitable face to those others around the manger. (*INNKEEPER'S WIFE goes to the scene.*)

You know, it was no accident that Jesus' birth took place in a stable-cave. It was part of that great, careful, amazing plan of God's that we angels have known about for so long. Jesus was born in a humble stable so you'd all know he was for *everyone*!

Look who's here already — a simple village girl from a poor home; a rough, rugged carpenter; a modest, caring innkeeper's wife. Add the shepherds now, and you see what I mean? (*SHEPHERDS 1 and 2 both join GABRIEL.*)

SHEPHERD 1: Oh, we were scared at first — anyone would be, seeing that sky full of light, and all the angels of heaven singing!

SHEPHERD 2: Scared, yes, but excited too! (*Looking at GABRIEL*) Because you'd already told us the good news.

1 **Imagine! Good news! The Savior had come!**

2 **SHEPHERD 1:** We'd waited so long, and wondered together
3 each night when it would happen. Surely the oppression
4 of God's people had to end sometime. Our eagerness for
5 the new King and Savior grew stronger all the time.

6 **SHEPHERD 2:** So now, finally, the time had come! We left
7 the sheep with one of the boys — and the dogs, of
8 course — and rushed off through the fields to Bethlehem.
9 We asked everywhere about a baby born in a stable.

10 **SHEPHERD 1:** We soon found him — so tiny, so sweet, right
11 there in the hay where our sheep might have been. And
12 we looked on in wonder. Could it be that this humble
13 family — so like us in our poverty — could birth a Savior?

14 **SHEPHERD: 2:** And yet, as we looked around at the beauty
15 of his mother, and the trusting assurance of the quiet,
16 loving father, we somehow felt it *was* for real. And it
17 meant he'd come for us — for the meek and lowly and
18 downtrodden. And we knelt and gave thanks. (*They go to*
19 *the scene and kneel.*)

20 **GABRIEL:** All humble people. Yes, so far. But let's add some
21 more, to represent others of the world — with wisdom,
22 wealth and scholarship. After all, they belong to the
23 Savior, too.

24 Chronologically, of course, the wise men *don't*
25 belong at the manger. They came much later, after Mary
26 and Joseph had moved to a house; Joseph had begun to
27 do a bit of carpenter work until Mary and the baby could
28 travel back to Nazareth. So the wise men really don't fit
29 in here.

30 But in another sense, they *do* belong. They're part
31 of what the event *means*, which is really more important.
32 So let's hear from them now. (*WISE MEN 1, 2 and 3 join*
33 *GABRIEL.*)

34 **WISE MAN 1:** You're right, it *did* take us a long time to find
35 the Christ Child. Once we'd seen the new star, it took



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