

THE VOICES OF ADVENT

by Jeri L. Shumate



CHRISTIANPUBLISHERS

Copyright Notice

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Christian Publishers. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Christian Publishers. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Christian Publishers.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Christian Publishers.

The Voices of Advent

by JERI L. SHUMATE

Advent candle-lighting
biblical monologs

Verses marked [KJV] are taken from the King James Version. Verses marked [TLB] are based on Scripture from The Living Bible © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. All rights reserved.

CAST

ISALAH, THE PROPHET
ELIZABETH
TAMAR, THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
ITZHAK, THE YOUNG SHEPHERD
MARY, JOSEPH and BABY JESUS
(for the tableau)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Four monologs by biblical characters to light the candles on the Advent wreath, plus a Christmas Eve service to light the fifth candle.

On the first Sunday of Advent, prior to the church service, the Advent wreath is set up as part of the congregation's worship center in the sanctuary. Its five candles remain unlit. At an appropriate time during the service, the first monolog is presented. The speaker then lights a candle at the end of his monolog. On the second Sunday of Advent, the first candle is relit prior to the service, and the second actor lights the second candle at the end of her monolog. And so on, until Christmas Eve, when the four characters return, with Joseph and Mary in a Nativity tableau, to reprise their roles and jointly light the fifth candle.

There can be as little or as much other scenery as the church wishes to provide — a bare chancel area is adequate for the four Sundays and does not detract from the other elements of the worship service. For the Christmas Eve program, a more elaborate staging may be desired — perhaps a silhouette backdrop of the Bethlehem skyline, or of hills and trees. At that time an empty manger is placed on the stage, with two or three bales of hay surrounding it.

Age Level: Teens to adults.

Playing Time: About five to seven minutes each for monologs; about 15 minutes for Christmas Eve, plus optional music.

First Sunday of Advent
ISAIAH, THE PROPHET

(ISAIAH enters and moves to an open space in the front of the sanctuary, somewhat near the Advent wreath. He is dressed in a long biblical gown, belted loosely with the top over-bloused. He wears an open robe over the gown and carries a long staff which he uses as a walking stick, and on which he sometimes pauses and leans. He is an old man, with a full gray beard. [You may use crepe hair, which is available in theatrical supply shops and is attached with spirit gum, or you may purchase one of the ready-made beards.] He is not in his prophetic, "proclaiming" mode as he speaks to the audience; rather, his attitude is one of friendly camaraderie.)

ISAIAH: I must confess. There are times when I grow weary of being a prophet. It is a thankless job, and a lonely one. Day after day I wander up and down the streets, calling, crying, sometimes raving and screaming. "Isaiah the Crazy!" they call out, or, worse, "Isaiah the woeful!" I'm ready to quit! But . . . God has not yet accepted my letter of resignation.

Forgive me — I jest about matters too sobering for humor. To have a certainty within your very soul of God's will for your people, and to know that nobody else sees, or understands — or even cares — well, you would cry too. I can't help it that God shows me how far these people have wandered from the truth. And so I go on proclaiming, warning, and in general, being ignored.

I am not as gloomy as they would paint me. There is a simple, but joyful, message that God has also sent me, and in that alone I can find reason to hope and to carry on. In spite of the calamities and judgments to come, God has promised us a Messiah! Just listen to the words I would share: *(Begins quietly, but builds in enthusiasm and volume until he is at last proclaiming in vigor.)*

1 **"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: And**
 2 **the government shall be upon his shoulder: And his name**
 3 **shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the**
 4 **everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of**
 5 **his government and peace, there shall be no end."** (Isaiah
 6 9:6-7 [KJV]) *(Pauses, then returns to friendly conversation.)*

7 **Ah, that I should live long enough to see this blessed**
 8 **child! Perhaps I shall, perhaps not.**

9 **Maybe it doesn't matter whether I see the child,**
 10 **because I *know*. Where others simply have to believe me**
 11 **or the other prophets, I can *know* for certain. And that**
 12 **knowledge gives me such great hope for the redemption**
 13 **of God's people. Through hope, I can believe that God**
 14 **will overcome the evils of the world.** *(Moves to Advent*
 15 *wreath and lights the first candle as he says:)*

16 **Because I have hope, I light this candle of hope.**
 17 *(ISAIAH exits.)*

18 19 **Second Sunday of Advent**

20 **ELIZABETH**

21
22 *(ELIZABETH enters and moves to the same space which ISAIAH*
 23 *occupied for his monolog the previous week. She is not a young*
 24 *mother, particularly by biblical standards, but she is obviously*
 25 *in the throes of late pregnancy. She wears a loose-fitting, biblical*
 26 *gown, belted gently above her swollen middle, and a headdress*
 27 *that attempts to conceal her figure. Occasionally, she lightly and*
 28 *rather absently caresses her unborn child, as if still in wonder*
 29 *and amazement. She addresses the audience.)*

30 **ELIZABETH: It is no simple thing to raise a child. Many of**
 31 **you are parents — you know this. Those of you who are**
 32 **not may suspect as much.**

33 **Zechariah and I are not parents. We watched our**
 34 **friends, our sisters and brothers bear and raise children,**
 35 **and we understood, through our friendships with them,**

1 some of the struggles and fun, the grief and joy, and the
 2 all-giving required of parents. We observed parent-child
 3 relationships and experienced them vicariously. But they
 4 did not understand our pain, our grief, our ache. To be
 5 labeled “Elizabeth the Barren” in a community where
 6 children are so highly prized is no small sorrow. And
 7 they did not understand.

8 But Zechariah and I have found a home at the
 9 synagogue. All these years he has served faithfully as a
 10 priest, offering direction and guidance to those lost from
 11 God. I, too, have found ways to touch lives, to help mend
 12 wounds and uplift the stricken. If there have been no
 13 children for us, there has been peace available to our
 14 sometimes battered spirits through the service we’ve
 15 given to others.

16 We have grown old knowing that God loves us. In
 17 that knowledge there is a peace that transcends our
 18 sorrows. So how can we explain the mystery of the gift
 19 God has given us — a child, a child of our own, to bear,
 20 and raise, and train up to follow our God. Is this babe a
 21 reward for our faithfulness? I think not. Why us over
 22 others?

23 There was a moment when I understood — a mere
 24 twinkling in a life full of trusting without answers. My
 25 young cousin, Mary, had been the dearest of all the
 26 children we’d help raise. Unexpectedly, she came to visit,
 27 and, almost before I recognized her young face, the sweet
 28 babe within me wriggled with anticipation and joy. For
 29 an instant, all confusion was swept from me, and I knew
 30 and understood the depths of God’s love for this earth,
 31 these people. If the child of my womb was shaken in
 32 comprehension of God’s grace, then the mother bearing
 33 the child was no less caught up in the splendor.

34 Our doorway has become my Ebenezer, my place of
 35 confirmation. The peace in which I moved and lived a

1 year ago was rich with the security of a God who loved
 2 me. But the peace, and calm, and new strength that has
 3 dwelled in me since Mary's visit assures me that God will
 4 never let me go. In the coming of Mary's child, so closely
 5 to my own, we shall be assured that our God is a God of
 6 hope, and love, and joy — and a God of peace. (*Moves to*
 7 *the wreath, lights the second candle and says:*)

8 I light the candle of peace. (*She exits.*)
 9

10 Third Sunday of Advent
 11 TAMAR, INNKEEPER'S WIFE
 12

13 (*TAMAR enters and moves to the same space the previous two*
 14 *actors occupied earlier. She is a comfortable woman in her*
 15 *midthirties, somewhat disheveled and harried by her busy life*
 16 *with the inn. She wears a biblical gown with a loose waist belt*
 17 *and a casual head covering. Occasionally she has to adjust this*
 18 *headdress or push a wisp of hair back out of her face. She carries*
 19 *a small hand towel as she enters and is wiping her hands, as if*
 20 *she has just left a baking job in her kitchen.*)

21 TAMAR: I'm Tamar, wife of Aram. We keep a small inn on the
 22 outskirts of Bethlehem — nothing fancy, mind you, just
 23 a clean room and a warm supper for the road-weary.
 24 (*Shrugs*) But it's a living. We have a dozen sheep as well.
 25 My son, Itzhak, spends his days in the fields with them —
 26 sometimes nights, too. He's a good boy.

27 And we have two cows, a few chickens, and a horse.
 28 The animals provide some food for our guests, and
 29 transportation when my husband goes to Jerusalem for
 30 the holy days.

31 I've never been religious myself. The inn keeps me
 32 busy, and when Aram and Itzhak are gone, well, I've got
 33 the animals to look after as well. We keep a kosher
 34 kitchen, of course, for our guests. And why not? It's a
 35 simple thing.

1 We're busy this year. Those greedy overlords in
2 Rome are holding a census so they can count all their
3 little minions here in Israel. But why should I complain?
4 It's good for business. (*Pause — change of mood*)

5 There are times, in the confusion and disorder of
6 daily life, that something grabs you, and *shakes* you, and
7 cries out, "Take notice! Life is more than just your own
8 four walls!" Maybe you're serving a meal, or cleaning a
9 room for a guest — at any rate, you're not looking for a
10 jolt.

11 The inn was full as usual the other night when Aram
12 answered the knock at our door. By chance, really, I
13 passed by and glanced at the young man and his very
14 pregnant wife just as Aram turned them away. And I was
15 "grabbed" by that intangible urgency. I saw the pain in
16 the girl's eyes, for one thing. Any woman knows that
17 expression if she has carried children in her womb. I
18 knew we could not turn away a woman ready to birth
19 her child.

20 But where could she go? We were more than full —
21 we'd given up our own beds to weary travelers. Every
22 inn in Bethlehem would be the same.

23 Well, you just don't turn people like that away. As
24 Aram closed the door, I caught his sleeve and said, "What
25 about the stable, Aram? Couldn't they stay there? She
26 needs shelter and she needs it now." As he opened the
27 door to catch them, I hurried to ready a lamp and find
28 some clothes, blankets, anything she might use to
29 swaddle the babe that would soon be born.

30 I'd never midwived before that night, and I didn't
31 do much then. But a woman needs another woman close
32 at those times. So I stayed, made her comfortable — and
33 helped deliver her son.

34 The birth of a child is always a precious moment,
35 but there was magic in our stable that evening. The smile

of the new mother as she nursed her child brought tears to my eyes. I found myself washed over by a sensation too powerful to contain. It was as if the mystery of God's love for this world, for Bethlehem, for this mother, this child, and even for me consumed all of us inside that little building.

In that moment, I knew — no, even more. I *felt* to the roots of my soul — that God still loves me. Simple, heathen little me. I was allowed to share in the birth of a new baby. This was more than just the act of life renewing itself in my stable. Here, somehow, was the presence of God, reminding me that love never escapes us, never leaves us alone.

There's a new star in the sky — well, new to me. I'm no astronomer. I first noticed it the night the baby was born in our stable. It was just overhead and was magnificent. Wonder why I never saw it before? *(She moves to the Advent wreath and lights the third candle as she says:)*

As that star gives us light, so I now light the candle of love. *(She exits.)*

Fourth Sunday of Advent ITZHAK, THE YOUNG SHEPHERD

(ITZHAK enters and moves to the expected location on stage. He is young — maybe twelve at the most — and dressed in a short biblical gown, just below the knees and belted at the waist. Over his shoulders is draped a sheepskin which he wears for warmth. He can carry a short shepherd's crook — something suited to his size and much smaller than ISAIAH's staff.)

ITZHAK: I have a lot of friends in town who think being a shepherd is a terrible job. "Itzhak," they laugh, "come in from the cold!" They don't understand how great it is out here.

I'm the youngest shepherd in the fields. I guess my

1 father would be out here, but he has to take care of our
2 family's inn in Bethlehem. We only have a few sheep, and
3 my uncle has always watched them along with his own.
4 But my parents said I'm old enough to be responsible for
5 our sheep this year.

6 My friends don't know about our cave. On really
7 cold nights we shepherds gather inside and build a fire
8 to keep warm. We bring all our flocks together and then
9 we take turns watching them. Inside we tell stories, and
10 drink hot broth, and rest. At times like that, I wouldn't
11 trade places with anyone.

12 My friends are never going to believe what
13 happened the other night. It was a crisp, clear night.
14 Every star in the sky could be seen — even that stretch
15 that looks all creamy and white behind the bright ones.
16 Of course, when it's that clear, it's really, really cold.
17 Even the sheep were huddling close to stay warm. There
18 was a toasty fire inside the cave. But this happened when
19 it was my turn outside.

20 It was so quiet. My parents' inn was full of guests
21 because of the census, but the fields were perfectly still.
22 And then I thought I heard some singing. It was so soft
23 at first that I couldn't be sure. But it got louder and
24 louder. I looked all around me to find out where it was
25 coming from.

26 Over the hill, toward town, I saw a light. That's
27 where the voices were coming from. The shepherds in
28 the cave soon heard the singing and stepped out of the
29 cave to listen with me.

30 I ran up the hill to see who was there. When I got
31 to the top, I nearly fell over in surprise! There were
32 hundreds of them! All white, and smiling, and full of
33 happiness and joy. They were all singing, and one of them
34 said to us, "Don't be afraid! I bring you the most joyful
35 news ever announced! The Savior — yes, the Messiah, the

Lord — has been born tonight in Bethlehem.” (Luke 2:10-11 [TLB])

The singing went on and on. Some of the other shepherds fell down on their knees. Some were even crying, but I could tell they were happy.

And I was happy, too. Though I didn’t understand everything that was going on, I knew that the most wonderful thing in the world had happened. The Messiah had come! I started to laugh and run all over the hill because I felt so good. (*Moves to the Advent wreath and lights the fourth candle as he says:*)

A King has been born in a stable! Because of this King, I light the candle of joy. (*He exits.*)

A Service for Christmas Eve

(An empty manger has been placed on the stage, off center to the left; around it stand two or three bales of hay. The Advent wreath is positioned Downstage Left, on a lower level so as not to block the Nativity scene. Its four candles should be lit prior to the service. As the congregation gathers, traditional Christmas music is playing. This continues for several moments and can be followed by singing a Christmas carol. As the music ends, ISAIAH enters and moves to Center Stage. He is dressed in the same costume as before and carries his staff. He initially addresses God.)

ISAIAH: Sometimes, God, you really are not fair to an old man like me. After all these years of faithful service, you could have me die before the blessed child comes. He is the one, O God, for whom I have been willing to suffer all this time! Ah, well, you only promised that Isaiah the Prophet should be blessed to know the message, not the Incarnation. I must thank you for that much.

(*To the audience*) It doesn’t really matter whether I see the child, does it? Where others simply have had to



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

VOICES OF ADVENT

by Jeri Shumate.

*For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script,
please contact us at:*

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-844-841-6387 - Fax (319) 368-8011

customerservice@christianpub.com