

THE CHARACTERS OF CHRISTMAS

by Lois Sink



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The Characters of Christmas

A monolog program about Christ's birth

by Lois Sink

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Verses marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

ISAIAH

GABRIEL

MARY

JOSEPH

ELISABETH

SHEPHERD(S)

INNKEEPER

MAGI

SIMEON

ANNA

INTRODUCTION

The Characters of Christmas was born out of desperation when the pastor's wife of our small church was faced with open-heart surgery two months prior to the Christmas season. As she had always been in charge of our Christmas programs, just two short weeks before Christmas we were suddenly faced with the fact that there was not time enough to prepare and train the children for the usual performance of recitations and songs.

What could we do? It was unthinkable to let the season slip by without something special to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Then inspiration struck and *The Characters of Christmas* was born. Why not "turn the tables" and let the adults and older youth be involved? People said later that it was one of the most sacred presentations they had ever witnessed and made their Christmas more meaningful than ever before.

This versatile drama may be used in both large and small congregations and may be performed in its entirety or only in part. As few as five or six people can present the drama, or as many as twenty or more may be utilized, depending upon the number of musicians and readers available. Props and costumes may be very simple or as elaborate as desired. The length of time of the performance will, of course, be based upon the number of characters used and the amount of music employed.

Tidbits of interesting historical information about customs and practices of the time of Christ have been woven into the narration. The Scriptures used have been taken either from the King James Version or The Living Bible paraphrase, thereby using language that is more familiar to our daily speech.

My prayer is that this presentation will be a blessing not only to those who present this drama but also to all who will see and hear the Christmas story in a new and different way.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Originally this drama was prepared within two weeks; however, we recommend that you allow more time than that — preferably a minimum of at least one month. Although we only had two rehearsals, we all felt we would have been more comfortable with at least one more.

We would suggest that you initially call your actors together, explain the drama, and let them give their input regarding props, costumes, etc. We found that the more the cast became involved, the more they felt it was their production as they threw themselves wholeheartedly into making it a first-rate presentation.

ACTORS: Although you may use as many of the ten characters as you wish, the basic characters would be Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, the Innkeeper and the Magi. My next choice would be Elisabeth. If your congregation is small and you are limited because of those who are hesitant to assume a speaking role, it might be advantageous to have one or two people read the lines while the participants only have to act their parts. In this way you may be able to use people who otherwise would never consent to appear in such a production. We did, and they later told us it was such a blessing to know they could be so used.

You may wish to use several people for shepherds; you're really not limited by number here, and this would be a good place to use some of the youth. If possible, use three men for the Magi. Although Scripture does not specify there were three, that number is associated with the number of gifts presented.

Have your actors make appropriate gestures in order to make the script come alive. For example, when Joseph talks about how disappointed he was when he thought Mary betrayed him, have him shake his head from side to side and frown, and even raise his hands heavenward in a helpless gesture. When Mary visits Elisabeth, have the two actors meet and embrace. We found that to be a most touching scene. When Joseph mentions the midwife, we had someone step forward, lay her hand on Mary's shoulder, then place the baby in Mary's hands.

As each character is finished, have him or her step to the side of the platform during the rest of the performance.

For variety have some of your characters, such as the Shepherds and the Magi, come down the aisle from the vestibule of the church. We had our Shepherds walk around the church some. When Elisabeth walked around, she even smiled and laid a hand on the shoulders of some of the people sitting in aisle seats. This was most effective. Isaiah came from a side room at the front of the church and paced back and forth. Gabriel came from another side room at the front of the church and, once or twice throughout the drama, stepped forward and stretched out her hand. (Yes, we used a woman, as we couldn't find a man willing to put on wings [cardboard wings covered with an old lace curtain] and a halo [a piece of gold tinsel]!)

Scripture references in parentheses are *not* to be read aloud. They are simply for the readers and actors to look up and read ahead of time, thereby giving them an even better grasp of the character they are portraying. We gave each of our actors a copy of the script for their character so they could study it and learn the best actions to make their portrayal come alive.

LIGHTING: The main lights in the auditorium should be off. A spotlight on the action at the front of the church is good if you have one. If not, use whatever lighting is available for the platform.

PROPS: This is where you need to involve your cast. You'll be amazed at their ideas. By this time they will be so excited that someone will probably volunteer to bring a bale of straw or hay. Someone else will have an idea for a manger. Someone will supply either a live baby or a large doll for the Christ child. Others will have stuffed animals to place around. We even had someone come up with a dark sky and lights showing through for the stars. The props need not be elaborate.

COSTUMES: Involve the cast and others in making costumes. There may be those in the church who would never participate in such a drama but who are skilled in sewing. The costumes our cast produced, including those of the three Magi, were as realistic as any we could have purchased. Mothers and wives

were delighted to help in this area.

MUSIC: The amount of music will be determined not only by the talent available but also by the length of time you wish to devote to the entire production. You can use both vocal and instrumental soloists and ensembles and/or as much congregational singing of carols as you wish interspersed among the appearance of the characters as appropriate. And if you simply do not have music, the drama will still be most effective.

God bless you. It's up to you from this point on!

NARRATOR: The story of Christmas is one of mystery and intrigue. Although a deliverer was first promised in the early chapters of Genesis, the theme of a Savior and Redeemer continued to unfold throughout the Old Testament before it reached fruition with the birth of Christ.

Characters such as Isaiah, Gabriel, Elisabeth, Mary, Joseph, the Innkeeper, the Shepherds, the Magi and others bring reality to the Christmas story.

Tonight we would like to portray ten (*or appropriate number*) of these characters with the hope that the “old, old story of Jesus and his love” will come alive for you in a new and different way than ever before. May your Christmas be a memorable one because of what you see and hear this evening. (*Optional carol*)

ISAIAH SPEAKS

(*ISAIAH enters from Stage Left and paces back and forth on the platform as he speaks.*)

ISAIAH: I am Isaiah.

The key to all messianic prophecy is found hanging at the front door of the Bible, in the book of Genesis. And strange though it may seem, this key was given by God to that “old serpent, the Devil.” Yes, Satan was the first to learn of a Deliverer who would come to destroy his devilish works. To Satan was given the initial promise and prophecy of redemption from the sin he had brought into God’s fair universe.

We read in Genesis 3:15 (KJV) that the Lord God said unto the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Yes, it was “the woman ... and *her* seed.” Although there are well over one hundred references to “the

seed” and “seeds,” this phrase, “*her* seed,” is not found elsewhere in the Bible. The seed of a woman is a unique concept and can be interpreted only as a foreshadowing of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although I did not fully understand what I was saying, in confirmation of that promise first given to Satan, the power of the holy God of Israel came upon me and caused me to speak the glorious words recorded in Isaiah 7:14 (KJV): “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

“A virgin?” I thought to myself. “A young, unmarried woman who has preserved the purity of her body? How can such a thing be?” But it was not mine to question or reason, only believe.

Again did the power of the Most Holy One overshadow me and speak. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isaiah 9:2, KJV).

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6, 7a KJV).

It took some seven hundred years for the world to see the fulfillment of these prophecies, but in the fullness of time, they came to pass just as predicted. *(Optional carol. ISAIAH steps to the side of the platform.)*

THE ANGEL GABRIEL SPEAKS

(GABRIEL enters from Stage Right.)

1 GABRIEL: I am the angel Gabriel, special messenger of
2 God. Three times have I delivered messages of
3 momentous import to people on earth. I appeared first
4 to the prophet Daniel to explain the meaning of a vision
5 he had had which troubled him greatly. The second
6 time I appeared on earth was to Zechariah the priest.

7 All the messages I have been privileged to bring to
8 earth have been connected with promises of the coming
9 of the Messiah. Even then, no news could compare with
10 the wonderful tidings I was entrusted to bring to the
11 Virgin Mary.

12 It happened six months after I had been sent to
13 Zechariah. This time God sent me to a Galilean town,
14 Nazareth by name, to a young woman who was
15 engaged to a man called Joseph. I entered her room
16 and spoke:

17 "Congratulations, favored lady! The Lord is with
18 you!"

19 Mary was deeply perturbed at these words and
20 wondered what such a greeting could possibly mean.
21 But I put her at ease by saying, "Don't be frightened,
22 Mary, for God has decided to wonderfully bless you!
23 Very soon now, you will become pregnant and have a
24 baby boy, and you are to name him 'Jesus.' He shall be
25 very great and shall be called the Son of God. And the
26 Lord God shall give him the throne of his ancestor
27 David. And he shall reign over Israel forever; his
28 Kingdom shall never end!"

29 Astonished at this news, Mary asked, "But how can
30 I have a baby? I am a virgin."

31 "Mary," I gently replied, "the Holy Spirit shall come
32 upon you, and the power of God shall overshadow you;
33 so the baby born to you will be utterly holy — the Son
34 of God. Furthermore," I encouraged, "six months ago
35 your Aunt Elisabeth — 'the barren one,' they called her

— became pregnant in her old age! For every promise from God shall surely come true.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” replied Mary, “and I am willing to do whatever he wants. May everything you said come true.”

Never have I witnessed more beautiful submission among mortals than this, I thought, as I withdrew my presence and winged my flight back to the eternal heavens, there to await my next assignment. (*Optional carol. GABRIEL steps to the side of the platform.*)

Note: All Scripture for Gabriel taken from Luke 1, TLB.

MARY SPEAKS

(*MARY enters from Stage Left.*)

MARY: I am Mary.

I’ll never forget that night as I knelt for my evening prayer when an angel appeared to me and told me I was to be the mother of the Messiah. My heart was in a tumult. I trembled as I voiced my first astonished thought to the bright heavenly being.

“I am a virgin still living in my father’s house,” I pleaded; “it cannot be.”

“There is no cannot with God,” replied the angel, as he quietly vanished, leaving me alone.

As I mused upon the words of my heavenly visitor, my heart burned within me. Suddenly my soul was filled with joy! Can it really be true? I wondered. Surely it must be a dream! Such honor could not come to one in my humble station. Why, to be the mother of the Messiah was an honor for only the rich and the great!

Then I remembered my pledge to Gabriel. “I am the Lord’s servant,” I had boldly declared, “and I am willing to do whatever he wants” (Luke 1:38, TLB). The hope, the desire, the dream of all Jewish maidens was

1 a reality to be fulfilled through me.

2 What should I do? This marvelous knowledge was as
3 yet a secret between no one else but God and me.
4 Should I go up to Jerusalem, to the High Priest? Never!
5 I would be laughed to scorn. Joseph, my betrothed —
6 would he understand? So presumptuous, so unbelievable,
7 yes, so impossible did it all seem, that I could not even
8 bring myself to tell Mother, although I yearned to do
9 so.

10 Then it was that I recalled what Gabriel had said
11 about my Aunt Elisabeth also being pregnant, and in
12 my spirit I knew she was the one to whom I should go
13 with my astounding news.

14 I hurried to Hebron, in the highlands of Judea,
15 where Elisabeth and her husband Zechariah lived. I
16 knew I could pour out my soul to her.

17 Imagine my surprise when Elisabeth met me at the
18 door, and without giving me an opportunity to say a
19 word called me the mother of the Messiah and
20 pronounced blessings upon me. What confirmation it
21 was to know that my precious secret had been divinely
22 revealed to her.

23 My soul responded with happiness such as I had
24 never before experienced. From the depths of my
25 innermost being burst forth a song of praise from a
26 heart filled with gratitude.

27 “Oh, how I praise the Lord,” I sang. “How I rejoice
28 in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly
29 servant girl, and now generation after generation
30 forever shall call me blest of God. For he, the mighty
31 Holy One, has done great things to me. His mercy goes
32 on from generation to generation, to all who reverence
33 him. How powerful is his mighty arm! How he scatters
34 the proud and haughty ones! He has torn princes from
35 their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the

1 hungry hearts and sent the rich away with empty
 2 hands. And how he has helped his servant Israel! He
 3 has not forgotten his promise to be merciful. For he
 4 promised our fathers — Abraham and his children —
 5 to be merciful to them forever” (Luke 1:46-55 TLB).

6 After three blessed months of fellowship with my
 7 Aunt Elisabeth, I returned home. There was still my
 8 family and my beloved Joseph to face. Would they, like
 9 Elisabeth, understand? Or would Joseph perhaps ...
 10 but I quickly pushed the dark thought aside. (*Optional*
 11 *carol. MARY steps to the side of the platform.*)

12 JOSEPH SPEAKS

13 (*JOSEPH enters from Stage Right.*)

14 JOSEPH: I am Joseph.

15 After a great many years of bachelorhood, I fell
 16 deeply in love with Mary, a gentle young woman many
 17 years my junior. We were betrothed for the customary
 18 one-year period, after which my precious Mary was to
 19 become my wife. Betrothal, of course, was as binding
 20 upon us as marriage. Naught but death or divorce,
 21 which was most distasteful to me, could separate us.

22 If only I could blot from my memory that fateful
 23 night my beloved returned from a three-month visit to
 24 her Aunt Elisabeth. I never fully understood why Mary
 25 suddenly insisted upon making the visit in the first
 26 place. The first night upon her return, she fled to her
 27 room and wept tears of anguish and even refused to
 28 see me. I was more puzzled than ever. Her mother tried
 29 to explain that Mary was carrying a baby — a baby
 30 conceived by the Holy Spirit, she said.

31 I was devastated by the news, and bitterly
 32 disappointed that my beautiful sweetheart had
 33 betrayed me. As a young child I had learned to pray to
 34
 35

1 God Almighty in all situations, and I had also learned
2 that God never fails those who carry their anxieties to
3 him. If ever I needed divine wisdom, it was now. Nor
4 was I disappointed.

5 Being a man of stern principle, at first I decided to
6 break the engagement but to do it quietly, as I didn't
7 want to publicly disgrace Mary. But after prayer that
8 night, as I lay awake considering this, I fell into a
9 dream and saw an angel standing beside me.

10 "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "don't hesitate
11 to take Mary as your wife! For the child within her has
12 been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a
13 Son, and you shall name him Jesus (meaning 'Savior'),
14 for he will save his people from their sins. This will
15 fulfill God's message through his prophets" (Matthew
16 1:20-22, TLB).

17 Suddenly where suspicion regarding Mary's purity
18 had lurked, strong faith now reigned. To think that my
19 beloved would be the mother of the Messiah whom I,
20 as a devout Jew, had eagerly anticipated, filled my
21 being with ecstasy.

22 I went to Mary, bowed low, and implored her
23 forgiveness, declaring my unworthiness of being the
24 husband of the mother of the long-awaited Messiah.
25 Together we prayed, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul;
26 for thou, Lord, hast dealt bountifully with us, and we
27 shall walk uprightly before thee all our days."

28 Tenderly I vowed I would superintend every detail of
29 the birth most carefully, and care for my dear one as if
30 the child she was bearing were my very own. I was
31 overcome by the mystery of it all.

32 Mary's submission was a lovely thing to behold. She
33 never wavered from her commitment of "whatever God
34 says, I accept." For Mary had gone beyond the world's
35 most common prayer — "Thy will be changed" — to

1 pray the greatest prayer of all — “Thy will be done.”

2 Mary’s aunt came to our wedding. I talked to
3 Elisabeth often and looked long into the face of her
4 child John who, she said, was to be the forerunner of
5 the Messiah. Afterward Mary and I spent much time
6 searching the Scriptures, trying to understand the
7 prophecies concerning the Messiah. Over and over we
8 pondered the Scripture that told of a virgin who would
9 conceive a son whose name would be called Immanuel,
10 meaning “God is with us.”

11 Mary insisted on accompanying me on the ninety-
12 mile trip to Bethlehem for the census, even though the
13 time of her delivery was near. I’ll never forget that five-
14 day journey and the intimacy of our fellowship as we
15 discussed the messianic Scriptures once again.

16 Bethlehem was where our forefather, King David,
17 had been born and reared. Located five miles south of
18 Jerusalem, it was no different from dozens of other
19 small towns in the stony hillside country — just a
20 cluster of boxlike, whitewashed houses on the top of a
21 steep ridge. Maybe three hundred people lived there.

22 Then calamity struck! Mary went into labor just as
23 we approached the small village; and to my dismay, I
24 was unable to find a room at the inn. It was already
25 full to overflowing.

26 A helpful villager suggested I might find shelter in a
27 cave behind the inn. Another accommodating peasant
28 gave me a bundle of straw for bedding and even a
29 lighted clay lamp filled with olive oil.

30 From the straw I made as comfortable a bed for
31 Mary as I knew how and gave her my woolen cloak for
32 a blanket. Near the back of the cave was a feeding
33 trough which had been hollowed out from the wall. I
34 filled that with clean straw, too, so we would have a
35 cradle for the baby, and then went out to find a

1 midwife.

2 As soon as the wailing infant was born, the midwife
3 gently bathed him and rubbed salt over his body to
4 guard against infection. Mary lovingly wrapped him in
5 swaddling clothes, binding the long strips of linen so
6 tightly that he could not move his arms or legs. Our
7 people had done this for years, for we believed that a
8 child's limbs would not grow straight and strong unless
9 they were bound so they could not move freely for at
10 least six months.

11 I watched Mary as she tenderly nursed her first-born
12 child and laid him gently in the manger I had prepared.
13 The midwife had left, and we were just settling down
14 for the night when to our great astonishment we had
15 visitors — shepherds who said an angel had appeared
16 in the heavens and announced the birth of our Son!

17 If I had the time, I could tell you of many other
18 strange happenings — the blessings and prophecies of
19 Simeon and Anna when we took the little one to the
20 temple for his dedication; the Magi who appeared with
21 expensive gifts some time later; the frightening edict of
22 the wicked King Herod to kill all the baby boys in the
23 land; the hurried flight to Egypt under cover of
24 darkness. We didn't even have an opportunity to send
25 word to our parents.

26 But I must get my sleep, (*Yawns*) for early tomorrow
27 I must take care of registering for all three of us. After
28 all, that is why we came to Bethlehem. (*Optional carol.*
29 *JOSEPH steps to the side of the platform.*)

30 *ELISABETH SPEAKS*

31
32
33 (*ELISABETH enters from the rear of the sanctuary. She*
34 *greet people along the way, laying her hand on their*
35 *shoulders, smiling, etc.)*

1 **ELISABETH:** I am Elisabeth, the wife of Zechariah, a
2 Jewish priest and member of the temple service corps.
3 We lived during the time of Herod, King of Judea. Both
4 of us were descendants of Aaron, a double honor for
5 the priestly family. Yet this great honor was marred by
6 the shame of our childlessness, for although both
7 Zechariah and I tried to obey all of God's laws and
8 commandments, the Lord had never seen fit to bless us
9 with a child. Behind my back my neighbors spoke of
10 me as "she who is called barren."

11 But in our old age a miracle occurred that changed
12 our lives forever. It happened during Zechariah's turn
13 for a two-week period of temple duty. While he was in
14 the inner sanctuary burning incense before the Lord,
15 an angel suddenly appeared on the right side of the
16 altar. Zechariah was startled and terrified!

17 But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! For I
18 have come to tell you that God has heard your prayer,
19 and your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son! And you
20 are to name him John. You will both have great joy and
21 gladness at his birth, and many will rejoice with you.
22 For he will be one of the Lord's great men. He must
23 never touch wine or hard liquor — and he will be filled
24 with the Holy Spirit, even from before his birth! And he
25 will persuade many a Jew to turn to the Lord his God.
26 He will be a man of rugged spirit and power like Elijah,
27 the prophet of old; and he will precede the coming of
28 the Messiah, preparing the people for his arrival. He
29 will soften adult hearts to become like little children's
30 and will change disobedient minds to the wisdom of
31 faith."

32 Zechariah said to the angel, "But this is impossible!
33 I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in
34 years."

35 Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the

1 very presence of God. It was he who sent me to you
 2 with this good news! And now, because you haven't
 3 believed me, you are to be stricken silent, unable to
 4 speak until the child is born. For my words will
 5 certainly come true at the proper time." (Luke 1:13-20,
 6 TLB).

7 Sure enough, soon afterward I became pregnant.
 8 "How kind the Lord is," I exclaimed, "to take away my
 9 disgrace of having no children!" (Luke 1:25, TLB). But
 10 during my entire pregnancy, my husband, Zechariah,
 11 was unable to speak.

12 I thought much in those days about Gabriel's
 13 statement that my child would precede the coming of
 14 the Messiah, that he would prepare the people for his
 15 arrival. Who was this Messiah? Who would his mother
 16 be?

17 It was a little over six months later when my niece
 18 from Nazareth, Mary, came to visit me unexpectedly.
 19 Again, the strangest thing happened.

20 At the sound of Mary's greeting, my unborn child
 21 leaped within me and I was filled with the Holy Spirit.
 22 Suddenly I knew, although I couldn't explain how, that
 23 Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah. With a glad
 24 cry I exclaimed to her, "You are favored by God above
 25 all other women, and your child is destined for God's
 26 mightiest praise. What an honor this is, that the mother
 27 of my Lord should visit me! When you came in and
 28 greeted me, the instant I heard your voice, my baby
 29 moved in me for joy! You believed that God would do
 30 what he said; that is why he has given you this
 31 wonderful blessing" (Luke 1:42-45, TLB).

32 Mary stayed with me for three months before she
 33 returned to her home.

34 By now my waiting was over, for the time had come
 35 for the baby to be born — and it *was* a boy. In

accordance with the angel's instructions, we named him John.

Yes, my husband regained his power of speech; and at his son's circumcision gave a marvelous prophecy: "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to visit his people and has redeemed them. He is sending us a Mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago" (Luke 1:68-70, TLB).

How honored and blessed I have been to be the mother of a most special child — a child who became the forerunner of the Messiah. *(Optional carol. ELISABETH steps to the side of the platform.)*

THE SHEPHERDS SPEAK

(One SHEPHERD may handle this monolog, or it may be divided among several SHEPHERDS. They enter from the rear of the sanctuary and proceed down the center aisle to the front. They walk around as they speak.)

SHEPHERD: How can we ever forget that night of all nights when we were the first human mortals to be told of the birth of the King?

As was the custom in Palestine, we had taken our sheep and goats to pasture that summer far from our small village of Bethzur, which means "house of a rock." Now that the winter rains were approaching, we were moving from the mountains back to areas where the warmer weather produced green pastures more quickly. One memorable night we stopped outside the small village of Bethlehem. On the morrow we would move on slowly until we returned to our own sheepfolds and more permanent home quarters.

Bethlehem lies on a limestone hill in which are cut terraces planted with splendid olive trees, fig and other

1 fruit trees, and vines. It lies in a stony country with a
2 background of bare hills. Its narrow streets boast
3 strongly built houses of stone, with thick walls and
4 ample doorways. It was their dome-shaped roofs, also
5 of stone, that made the builders of Bethlehem famous
6 throughout Palestine. It was here that David had been
7 born and as a shepherd boy had watched his father's
8 flocks.

9 On the night in question, we had joined with several
10 other shepherds and their flocks a few miles outside
11 Bethlehem in the same fields where David had sung his
12 immortal psalms as a lad while caring for his father's
13 sheep. As we conversed one with another, we discussed
14 the possibility that perhaps we were in the very field
15 that Ruth had gleaned so many years before — the
16 fields of Boaz. We learned from the local shepherds that
17 the sheep for the sacrifices in the temple had been kept
18 in these same fields.

19 Because the night air was cool, we wrapped
20 ourselves in heavy cloaks as we lay around the fire,
21 guarding our flocks against wild beasts and robbers
22 while at the same time preventing their straying away.
23 Stars sparkled like jewels in the inky black heavens
24 above. Gradually conversation ceased as one by one all
25 but the watchmen drifted into a comfortable sleep.

26 How startled we were when our peaceful slumber
27 was interrupted in a most unusual way! For suddenly
28 an angel appeared among us, and the landscape shone
29 bright with the glory of the Lord. We were badly
30 frightened, but the angel reassured us.

31 "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you the most
32 joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! The
33 Savior — yes, the Messiah, the Lord — has been born
34 tonight in Bethlehem! How will you recognize him? You
35 will find a baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a

1 manger!"

2 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of
3 others — the armies of heaven — praising God.

4 "Glory to God in the highest heaven," they sang, "and
5 peace on earth for all those pleasing him."

6 When this great army of angels had returned again
7 to heaven, we said to each other, "Come on! Let's go to
8 Bethlehem! Let's see this wonderful thing that has
9 happened, which the Lord has told us about."

10 We ran to the village and found our way to Mary and
11 Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.
12 We told everyone what had happened and what the
13 angel had said to us about this child. All who heard our
14 story expressed astonishment, but Mary, the baby's
15 mother, quietly treasured these things in her heart and
16 often thought about them.

17 Then we went back again to our fields and flocks,
18 praising God for the visit of the angels, and because we
19 had seen the child, just as the angel had told us (based
20 on Luke 2:9-20, TLB).

21 And so to us, humble shepherds though we be, was
22 given the great honor of being the first Christian
23 preachers as we excitedly communicated the wonderful
24 news to everyone who would listen.

25 Yes, we returned to our duty as shepherds, but with
26 a new life and blessing in all our daily work. Feeding
27 sheep could never again be commonplace toil to us
28 after what we witnessed on the most glorious night the
29 world has ever known. (*Optional carol. The SHEPHERDS*
30 *step to the side of the platform.*)

31

32 *THE INNKEEPER SPEAKS*

33

34 (*The INNKEEPER enters from Stage Left.*)

35 INNKEEPER: I am the Innkeeper of Bethlehem. Although I

1 am famous throughout the world (at least wherever the
2 Christmas story is told), I am anything but proud of the
3 incident that made me famous. But then, how was I to
4 know?

5 My inn was overcrowded that night, for families of
6 the lineage of David had been coming for days. You see,
7 the Roman Emperor Augustus had ordered a general
8 census of the empire. Enrollment, they called it.

9 Don't let that term "enrollment" fool you. That just
10 refers to writing off, copying, or entering the names,
11 professions, fortunes, and families of the citizens,
12 mainly for the purpose of taxation.

13 Now the Roman custom was for each person to be
14 enrolled in the place where he lived. The Jews,
15 however, were allowed to follow their ancient custom
16 which required each family to return to its ancestral
17 city where family records were kept.

18 In a Roman census, women were not obliged to come
19 in person even though they had to pay the poll tax.
20 Why that woman ever came with her husband on a
21 journey like that when she was nine months pregnant,
22 I'll never know! Mary, I believe her name was.

23 Her husband was Joseph a carpenter, he told me,
24 from the obscure and despised village of Nazareth in
25 Galilee. "Could any good thing come out of Nazareth?"
26 I wondered to myself. Because he and his wife were
27 descendants of King David, they had had to travel five
28 days, so they said, to reach Bethlehem where they
29 would register. Their provisions were loaded on the
30 back of a bedraggled-looking donkey that also carried
31 Mary. Although she didn't complain, the time of her
32 delivery had come, and I could see that she was most
33 uncomfortable.

34 But which of the distinguished guests in my inn —
35 priests, rabbis, wealthy traders — could I displace to

1 make room for such a shabby couple, mere peasants?
 2 Of course, had I known the royalty of the One to be
 3 born, I most certainly would have made room for him,
 4 even though it would have meant surrendering my own
 5 plush quarters.

6 But no one told me that the One who would be born
 7 that night would change the history of the world.

8 All I could do was offer them shelter in the cave
 9 nearby. At least, I assured myself, that would be better
 10 than resting under the open sky. The cattle and beasts
 11 of burden there would offer some warmth; and besides,
 12 there was barley straw they could rest on. And the cave
 13 did offer shelter from the wind.

14 As I said, how could I have known I was turning
 15 away the Savior of the world? (*Optional carol. The*
 16 *INNKEEPER steps to the side of the platform.*)

17 18 THE MAGI SPEAK

19
20 (*The MAGI enter from the rear of the sanctuary. One MAGI*
 21 *may perform the monolog, or it may be divided between the*
 22 *three of them.*)

23 MAGI: We are the Magi, a class of priests among the
 24 Persians and Medes, men of learning and wealth. Our
 25 beliefs are similar to those of the Jews. We, too, believe
 26 in one supreme God. Many years ago some of the Jews
 27 had been carried captive into our region. As they
 28 established their synagogues, we gained knowledge of
 29 Hebrew Scripture and knew about their expected
 30 Messiah. We knew that when he came, he would be no
 31 ordinary king.

32 As we searched the Scriptures diligently, we learned
 33 from the Torah that a “star out of Jacob”¹ would arise.
 34 Carefully we read Daniel’s prophecies and studied his
 35 calculations which pointed to the very time when

1 Christ should be born.

2 And then — then we saw the star. The star that
3 increased with brightness ten thousandfold. Our hearts
4 vibrated with new hope, and we knew it was time to
5 begin our quest for the newborn King so that we, too,
6 could worship the Messiah.

7
8 ¹ Numbers 24:17
9

10 Our faith never wavered, for in our very heart of
11 hearts we had no doubt about the fulfillment of
12 prophecy. Consequently we traveled untold weary
13 miles over hot desert sands, never halting until we
14 reached our destination — Jerusalem.

15 We assumed that once we reached Jerusalem, the
16 capital of the Jewish nation, we would have no trouble
17 finding him whom we sought. Eagerly we went through
18 the streets asking, “Where is the newborn King of the
19 Jews? for we have seen his star in far-off eastern lands,
20 and have come to worship him.”

21 King Herod was deeply disturbed by our question,
22 and all Jerusalem was filled with rumors. He called a
23 meeting of the Jewish religious leaders.

24 “Did the prophets tell us where the Messiah would
25 be born?” he asked.

26 “Yes, in Bethlehem,” they said, “for this is what the
27 prophet Micah wrote:

28 ‘O little town of Bethlehem, you are not
29 just an unimportant Judean village, for
30 a Governor shall rise from you to rule
31 my people Israel.’”

32 Then Herod sent a private message to us, asking us
33 to come to see him; at this meeting, he found out from
34 us the exact time when we first saw the star. Then he
35 told us, “Go to Bethlehem and search for the child. And



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