

Something Like a Christmas Play

Created for Christies Beach Baptist Church by Morton Benning

Dramatis Personae: 6 actors needed

(4 shepherds and 4 magi could be the same actors. Aldentay and Frank could double other roles)

Ps Aldentay - a know-it-all who really doesn't

Frank - his much put-upon (and somewhat cleverer) friend

Gyb - a newbie shepherd

Daw - a bossy shepherd

Gill - an earnest shepherd

Coll - a dim shepherd

Mak - another shepherd

Angel - a laid-back and under-rehearsed angel

Melchior - a magi in search of a king

Balthazar - a magi in search of a revolutionary

Caspar - a magi in search of a religious leader

Bruce - a magi in search of a newborn baby

Everyman - literally everyone else. (could be broken up into various bit-parts)

this script is written for amateurs and is designed to be personalised with modifications to the text as written to suit personal style and for comedic effect - particularly anachronistic line drops and fourth wall breaks.

Around About Christmas

(Pastor Aldentay and Frank enter from offstage and address the congregation.)

Ps Aldentay: Greetings everyone, My name's Pastor Aldentay and this is my friend Frank.

Frank: Hi.

Ps Aldentay: Since it's Christmas, we decided it would be a good idea to-

Frank: You decided.

Ps Aldentay: sorry?

Frank: You decided. You didn't even ask my opinion. First I heard about it was out there, just now.

Ps Aldentay: Do you not think it's a good idea?

Frank: I didn't say that.

Ps Aldentay: So you agree with me.

Frank: That's not the point...

Ps Aldentay: Alright, it's settled then. WE decided that we should tell you all the Christmas story. Our story starts in a hotel stable with a donkey, camels, oxen, sheep and a tiny newborn baby named Jesus.

Frank: You do realise that nearly every word you said then was wrong?

Ps Aldentay: But that's how the story goes. Everyone knows it. We tell it the same every year.

Frank: Uhuh. Did you actually look at a bible before you started talking?

Ps Aldentay: I am a pastor, I've read the bible.

Frank: Recently?

Ps Aldentay: Well...

Frank: Let's have a look at what it actually says, and then we can go from there.

Ps Aldentay: Alright. I'll just read from Luke Ch 2. About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

Frank: Right, and history tells us that Caesar Augustus was called the saviour of the Roman Empire, the one who brought peace and justice. And that he was called the son of a God because he had made his dad, Julius Caesar, a God. He's the one that the world has faith in, their Lord and their king and its him who starts a chain of events leading to his own demise with this census.

Ps Aldentay: Oh yeah, because the Jewish prophets said that a woman from Nazareth would have a baby in Bethlehem to be the saviour of the world whose followers would call him "Emmanuel; son of the living God". And Augustus just made it happen by accident.

Frank: Yep. There's the start of a great story, The birth of this little boy is the beginning of a confrontation between the kingdom of God—in all its apparent weakness, insignificance and vulnerability—and the kingdoms of the world.

Ps Aldentay: Do you mind if I... ?

Frank: I'm just saying.

Ps Aldentay: Okay then. We'll continue. There was no room for them in the inn so Jesus was born in a stable.

Frank: Yeah, no! it doesn't actually say there was a stable. Actually, the people of Bethlehem were largely also descendants of David, so Mary and Joseph were knocking on the doors of their extended family to ask if they could stay in the guest room.

Ps Aldentay: So not a hotel?

Frank: No - and most jewish families would have kept their working animals (like donkeys) inside the house (think of an enclosed carport) and they usually had an upstairs room reserved for visitors. But with all the people coming into town for the census, everyone's guest rooms were full.

Ps Aldentay: We do at least get a baby in a manger, that part's okay?

Frank: the manger is pretty important, or else the shepherds would have gotten lost.

Ps Aldentay: Surely they would have just looked for the big shaft of light from the sky.

Frank: Nah, artists just put that in the pictures as a dramatic lighting effect, also so you can see what's happening, after all, it was the middle of the night.

Ps Aldentay: I don't even get my pretty shaft of light?

Frank: Nope, the angel told the shepherds to look for a baby in a manger, and then they would know they had found the place. That suggests there was no other obvious way to know.

Ps Aldentay: Okay, so shall we tell the story?

Frank: Just a moment. What most people don't know is that this was in late December when most sheep in that region have their newborn lambs. Bethlehem was less than 5 miles from Jerusalem, and Passover that would take place in a few months would require hundreds of thousands of lambs less than a year old for sacrifice. A newborn potential sacrificial lamb would be wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger for inspection to ensure it would be a worthy sacrifice. The shepherds would certainly have understood the meaning of treating baby jesus like this.

Ps Aldentay: Hang on, late December? didn't I hear somewhere that was not accurate?

Frank: Actually, scripture tells us that Jesus' uncle Zechariah was serving in the temple six months before Mary received her visit from the angel. Since Zechariah's time to serve in the temple was the second week of the Jewish month of Tishri (which is between 22 and 30 September on our calendar) we can add six months to get Jesus' conception at the end of March and then nine more for his gestation will take us to the end of December.

Ps Aldentay: Can we get on with the story now?

Frank: Sure, let's tell the story of the shepherds.

Just a Bunch of Shepherds

(Gyb is attempting to count the sheep, Daw crosses from the campfire to check up. Gill and Coll are still sitting at the fire, and Mak -having failed to count the sheep earlier- is asleep, snoring sporadically)

Gyb: 83, 84, 85... aargh!

Daw: Haven't you finished yet?

Gyb: How can I count them properly if the little toadstools won't stand still?

Gill: *(shouting from a little distance away)* its easy, just count the legs and divide by four.

Daw: *(shouting back)* That takes too long. *(talking to Gyb)* Much quicker to count the ones along two sides and then multiply.

Coll: *(also shouting from a little distance away)* Nah, it's the square of the hypotenuse.

Daw: *(calling back)* That only works for triangles, ya nong!

Coll: *(to Gill)* Sheep are pretty much the same as triangles, if you think about it.

Daw: *(to Gyb)* Call yourself a professional? C'mon, get organised!

Gyb: Hang on, was I up to 86 or 87?

Daw: "Ample experience of shepherding" you said on your application...

Gyb: At least I'm not asleep. *(motions toward Mak, who snores loudly, then turns back to try counting again)* Will you stop milling about! I don't know what's the matter with this lot tonight, they're so restless.

Daw: *(sighs deeply in frustration)* Let me do it! 1, 2, 3, 4, 5....

(Angel arrives, shepherds fall to their knees, turning away and covering their faces in fear. Daw's reaction is delayed because he's busy counting sheep.)

Shepherds: Aaah!!!

Angel: W'sup?

Gyb: What are you?

Angel: I'm an angel, a messenger from God. Who did you expect? Father Christmas? Hang on. I've got lines. *(Clears throat and unfolds paper to read from - reading woodenly)* "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Yes! All people, even you." *(stops reading)* Hang on, 'all people even you?' Who writes this stuff?

Gill: *(putting hand up cautiously)* Um, excuse me your bright shineyness...

Angel: Hang on, i'm not finished the first bit... "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!" Right, what was your question?

Gill: *(still holding hand up)* Are you sure you've got the right address? It's just that we're um... we're just a bunch of shepherds.

Daw: *(pointing to Gyb)* he's not even a very good shepherd.

Gyb: hey!

Gill: We're not important. No one really likes us.

Gyb: Mostly they shout rude jokes at us.

Gill: It wouldn't be the first time we've been delivered someone else's message by mistake...

Angel: *(checking back of paper)* "To the shepherds watching their flock by night, first hill east of Bethlehem..." *(looks around for another hill with shepherds on it)* That's you isn't it?

Gyb: Er, yes...

Angel: Right-e-o then! *(sniffs and continues reading)* "...God has chosen you to be among the first to see the newborn king. Go see him for yourselves. He's your Saviour. And this will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

(Sudden burst of Chorus 17, Handel's Messiah. Mak wakes up with a start).

Angel: *(talking to other angels)* Okay, cool it guys, they get the point. *(he leaves)*

Mak: *(to Gill)* What's going on? What'd I miss?

Daw: *(jumps up, looks at Gyb still on his knees in a dazed state)* Come on! We gotta' go check this out!

Mak: what's happening?

Gill: I'll tell you on the way.

(Shepherds leave.)

(Gill enters with Mary and Joseph. Taking up positions for nativity scene, other shepherds enter shortly after.)

Mak: *(to the others)* ...and he couldn't even be bothered to give us a street name?

Gill: *(comes away to bring the others)* Oi! Here he is, baby in a manger just like the angel said!

Coll: See, I told you we'd find it.

Mak: All I'm saying is an angel could have given us a great big shaft of moonlight, or something, instead of having us knocking on all the doors in town, *(acting knocking on a door)* "G'day. Do you happen to have a baby that likes to sleep in the animal food here? ... Oh, Okay, sorry to bother you. Yes I will take a bath. Thanks again."

Daw: shush.

Shepherds fall on their knees to worship at manger.

Gill: *(praying)* Thank you Lord for sending our saviour, thank you Lord for being our hope, thank you Lord, thank you!

Mak: *[jumping up]* We've gotta tell everyone!

*(The others all agree and leave the stage telling the following directly to individuals seated nearby as they leave: Christ the Lord is born! An angel came to us and said we would find baby Christ in a manger in Bethlehem and we did! I mean who puts a baby in a manger? It's weird right but there is he was! Good news for everyone! The Messiah is born! He is here with us now! The Messiah is here! **Male** ends at a place chosen for later interaction with the magi)*

Ps Aldentay: Hey, you shepherds! Come back! You're supposed to be here when the three wise kings arrive.

Frank: Nope.

Ps Aldentay: What? I'm pretty sure the bible says about them coming.

Frank: (counting on fingers) [1] the only reason we usually imagine there are three of them is because there are three recorded gifts. [2] The bible never calls them kings, but rather magi - star gazers from another culture and another country. Magi is where we get our word magician. [3] It would have taken them a long time to arrive, and unlike the shepherds who were just outside town, it is unlikely the magi were there on the same day as the actual birth. They probably arrived months or even as much as a year or two after the birth.

Ps Aldentay: okay. Shepherds, you can stay where you are.

Frank: Maybe it was like this.

The More-Than-Three Wise Magi

(**Melchior** is peering into the sky. **Balthazar**, **Caspar** and **Bruce** are following as they make a circuit of the circumference of the room. **Everyman** is ready out of view to meet them at the first stop. this character will change into many other roles by switching hats.)

Melchior: This has gotta be it. The palace is just ahead.

Balthazar: Yeah whatever. The sooner we talk to them the sooner we can prove that it isn't a king we're looking for.

Caspar: Has the star stopped moving?

Melchior: it'll stop when we get to the palace.
(They approach an imaginary door and knock twice)

Everyman: *(as a snooty butler)* Who's there?

Bruce: Interrupting Cow.

Melchior: Shut up Bruce! We don't-

Bruce: Moo.

Melchior: Just ignore him. We've been watching the stars and the stars have told us there is a new king recently born around here. We've come from a very long way away to bring this gift of gold to honour the new king.

Everyman: Very well. Wait here. *(he leaves calling out to the king)* Majesty, it's a bunch of foreign star-gazing, fortune-telling, royal-baby-groupies.

Caspar: They could at least let us in. You did say we've come a long way and we have expensive gifts.

Balthazar: We're foreigners here. Maybe they have different customs.

Caspar: It's still rude.

Bruce: Society makes itself permeable to strange customs, but opposes the real customs.

Caspar: Shut up, Bruce.

Everyman: *(returning as the king)* What's all this about a recently born king?

Melchior: We saw the star that signifies a new king would be born, and followed it here. We've brought gifts for him.

Everyman: Really? A new king you say? And no one told me. Can't have that sort of thing going on. Alright. I'll tell you what, if you find him, come back and tell me where he is so I can... um... go and visit him too."

Balthazar: *(to Melchior)* told you we wouldn't find him here. *(to the king)* Thanks a lot, we'll just keep looking... in a foreign country... on our own... without any help.

(the magi continue their journey.)

Caspar: I told you we weren't looking for a king. The texts of the local religion say that we should be looking for a religious figure, a prophet and a priest. We should have gone to the temple first, like I said.

Melchior: Okay so the palace was a bust. We'll go to the temple.

Balthazar: Fine, but after that proves to be a waste of time you'll all have no choice, but to see it my way.

Bruce: Nothing is a waste of time if you learned something from it.

Balthazar: Shut up, Bruce.

Caspar: Here it is. *(knocks on the door)* Hello! Wealthy foreigners with large and expensive gifts outside.

Bruce: The cost of a good is inversely correlated to its quantity demanded, according to the law of demand in microeconomic theory.

Caspar: shut up, Bruce.

Everyman: *(as a priest)* Gifts you say? Well I can humbly accept offerings to the Lord, God of Israel.

Caspar: I'm sorry, you don't understand. We read the ancient prophecies and have determined that a special prophet and priest has been born recently, and we came to honour him with gifts of incense.

Everyman: No. No new births in the priestly families that I know of. Are you sure you read it correctly, Hebrew can be tricky for foreigners. Can you say shibboleth? I'll be happy to fit you into a scripture teaching session for foreigners next Tuesday evening if you like.

Caspar: Thanks but no. We'd best be going.

(Everyman leaves and the magi continue on their journey.)

Balthazar: Told you so.

Caspar: I don't want to hear it.

Balthazar: Should have listened to me.

Bruce: Boasting doesn't attract real friends, but putting yourself on a pedestal makes you an easier target.

Caspar: *(to Bruce)* Shut up Bruce! *(to Balthazar)* Fine, tell me your theory then.

Balthazar: Have you paid any attention to the political climate around here? The Romans run everything. This place is like a dam ready to burst. These people aren't waiting for an aristocrat in gilded cage or a holy man in an ivory tower, the new leader that's gonna come will be a revolutionary. He's gonna challenge all the old ways of thinking and put his own life on the line to bring freedom for his people.

Melchior: So you brought embalming oil?

Balthazar: You both just don't get it. It's symbolic. Someone who's willing to die for their cause becomes free from fear when they count themselves as already dead. This new revolutionary will be inspired by this oil as a reminder that they are ready to die. All we have to do is find a protest rally or something...

Caspar: And what? Ask them if they've recently had any babies they'd like to sign up for martyrdom? Are you nuts?

Balthazar: Let's ask this guy.

Everyman: *(nervous)* ask me what?

Bruce: Never has a man more need of intelligence than when a fool asks him a question.

Balthazar: Shut up, Bruce.

Everyman: (*conspicuously*) Look I'm just sitting here and not doing anything conspicuous.

Balthazar: We're looking for the revolutionaries.

Everyman: Are you Roman soldiers, because you have to tell me the truth if I ask you directly.

Balthazar: I don't think that's right, but I can assure you we aren't Romans. We're looking for the People's Front of Judea.

Everyman: That's me.

Caspar: You? By yourself?

Everyman: I used to be part of a group, but we had a falling out. (*shouting to someone in the congregation*) You bunch of splitters!

Balthazar: We heard that a new leader had been born who would come to set the people free. We came a long way to bring a special gift.

Everyman: I did hear that Stan wanted the right to have a baby, but I don't think he's managed it yet.

Melchior: Look, this is pointless. We might as well ask this shepherd (*Mak*) whether he's seen any unusual births lately.

Mak: As a matter of fact, I have. Let me show you.

(*the magi begin to follow Mak away*)

Caspar: (*as they leave*) By the way Bruce, what gift did you bring?

Bruce: Wwell, he was just born, so I got him this bit of string with a shiny bell on the end. Babies like that sort of thing.

Caspar: Shut up, Bruce.

(*Pastor Aldentay and Frank return*)

Ps Aldentay: so they found Jesus.

Frank: Yep, and he was a king, a prophet and priest, and also a leader who taught new ways and actually died to bring freedom for his people. They were all right. Also after he died he came back to life again to show that his kingdom had victory even over death itself. But that's a story for another time.

(*they begin to leave*)

Ps Aldentay: When do we get to do that story?

Frank: Easter.

Ps Aldentay: What's that got to do with the Easter Bunny?

Frank: Are you serious?

Ps Aldentay: Just kidding. Merry Christmas everyone!

(they leave)