

Christmas Eve Service

By David Radcliff

Gathering Music

Litany

(Two readers take their place at the front of the sanctuary)

One: We have this good news, but whom
should we tell?

Two: The heavens are bursting! but whom
should we tell?

One: A child soon is born,
a mother gives birth,
a boy who will be
good news for the earth!

Two: But whom should we tell?

One: But whom should we tell?

Two: We might tell the printers,
the makers of news.
This would be news
they surely could use.

One: Or we might tell the monarch, the queen or the king—even for them,
t'would be a wonderful thing.

Two: Or the World-wide web
would be a very good way? except that
it's not yet fully in play

One: Whom should we tell??

Two: Whom should we tell??

ANGEL: (the angel, perhaps dressed in a white gown, could enter from the rear, making her/his way to the front while talking)

We were anxious—we kept asking if this was the time. The answer always seemed to be "not yet", so we kept watching with anticipation as the young girl's stomach swelled—her time couldn't be that far off; our Sovereign would someday soon take on human form. We didn't really understand why—why God would choose to come to the world in this way. However, it wasn't for us to question why, but to be ready to serve as heralds of this momentous event.

We looked on as they left their town of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph heading for Bethlehem. Sixty miles and several days later, they arrived. As there were many people in the small town due to the census, there was no place for them to stay.

I was quite concerned and asked if perhaps a host of angels might be dispatched to make a palace ready for his arrival: you know, a home fit for the king he was—servants at hand, the finest clothing, plenty of food for the special family, a few stuffed animals for the child. Not the perfection of heaven to be sure, but the best accommodations we could think of—given the circumstances.

“That won’t be necessary,” we were told. I guess there was another plan in place.

Then we found out what it was—a stable—can you believe it! Sure, it was stuffed with animals—real ones! God, you certainly do work in mysterious ways... !

CAROL: *Away in a Manger v. 1&2*

ANGEL: We watched as Mary labored and Joseph looked on, both waiting for the wail of new life.

No sooner had we heard the cries from inside the stable than our orders arrived. Finally we get to sing!

Our concert hall? A nearby hillside covered by sheep and a few lonely shepherds guarding the flock.

Looking down, we could tell they were afraid—who wouldn’t have been?! I remember calling out, "Do not be afraid, for I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be for all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." And it turns out they weren’t the only ones with an interest in the birth of this child... .

The King and I

(two figures on opposite sides of the stage, one dressed in simple garb, the other on a “throne” of some kind, with a crown and some coins)

Shepherd: It’s a bit nippy out here tonight... and only my dog Spot to keep me warm...

Herod: Slave! The fire is burning low—see to it!

S: Counting sheep—the highlight of my night... 88, 89, 90, 91, 92... yoo-hoo, sheeeep! How am I supposed to count you when you’re moving around like that—and if some of you would dress a little

differently, it would make my job a lot easier—but noooo, everyone’s in their white wool outfit again tonight...

H: (counting out coins) 88, 89, 90... some things the King of Judea can never have too much of—money, servants, power...

S: That’s why Spot and I are here, in case you hadn’t figured it out—to keep you safe. One of you wanders off, a wolf wanders by... and let’s just say it would be baaaaaadddd... .

H: There have been predictions that One is coming—a prophet to usher in a “new day.” Even now, many try to figure out who and when and from where such a prophet will come. Do the rumors of “the birth of a king” frighten me? Hardly, but let’s say I listen with interest...

S: Am I crazy?! Talking to a bunch of sheep. This has got to be the loneliest job in the world—watching a flock of sheep on a hillside outside the town of Bethlehem—or, as me and my friends call it, Boringhem. The only action is when the Romans come through—then we hide and see if we can ding a couple of ‘em with our slingshots. Slingshots versus mounted cavalry—not much of a match...

H: Of course he’d be no match for me—some little folk hero, peasant conspirator. I know these Jewish dreamers—I am one myself—a Jew, that is. All they have are dreams—nothing more—and they never will—so long as I’ve got Rome on my side.

S: But it’s just a matter of time. And we’ve been waiting for nearly a thousand years for things to be right again—like they were under King David. We don’t want much, really. A decent life, a place where we can live without fear—sheep that come in different colors... I’ve spoken with God about these things many times...

H: So I have my ears open for any news of such a thing. If there were a birth like this, I’m sure my people would let me know—nothing happens in this kingdom that Herod doesn’t soon find out about...

S: Well, my sheepish friends—I see you have not suddenly changed your colors—so it seems that God is not listening to me when I pray. So with God on vacation—I’ll just take a short nap—wake me if a wolf

comes near... or God has something to say... (starts to lie down, then is startled) Sheep... do you hear what I hear... ? “A child? A stable? in Boring—er, Bethlehem?!”

H: Were I to hear of an auspicious birth, I would like to welcome him into this world in my own special way...

S: Sheep—sounds like God is back on the job—you stay put—I’ll be back—Spot’s in charge—there’s someone I need to meet...

H: (yawns) I may as well turn in... looks like everything is under control...

ANGEL: We told the shepherds where and how they would find this child—this holy child born in a stable.

Then we sang. Long glorious notes rippled over the crisp night air. Thousands upon thousands of us singing as one, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill to all."

CAROL: Angels We Have Heard on High v. 1-4

ANGEL: We watched as the shepherds left their flock and hastened to Bethlehem—the first witnesses to the newborn king. Looking back on it, I guess it was all quite fitting—and showed at the very start what kind of a “king” this would be. I have to admit some satisfaction, however, at what happened next. The birth was not entirely without pomp and circumstance. Look! Riding in from the East, dressed in finery, bearing gifts rich and rare for this child king... the two wise men!

Wise Man 1: Yeah, there we were—a bit overdressed for the occasion.

Wise Man 2: What were we supposed to wear? All the signs were pointing to the birth of a king—

- 1: Still, we stood out just a bit—everyone else in earthtones—the shepherds, the cattle—there we are in purple.
- 2: Yeah, our outfits worked a lot better over in Syria. Remember that palace with the marble floors and the four-donkey garage? Now that's living like a king!
- 1: But there was still something... royal... about this little dude. Maybe it was his mother—she was just a teenager, but so calm. It was almost like she knew something the rest of us didn't. And the place itself—Bethlehem—just a little village in the middle of nowhere, but the way the star rested right over that little shed where they were staying...
- 2: Speaking of which, I thought you were never going to ask for directions. I mean we come all the way from Persia, across Iraq, into Judea—all places we've never been before—hoping to find a little baby with our only clue being the bright star we had seen on the horizon. And Triple A was no help at all. It was like they'd never mapped a route following a star before.
- 1: Hey, I did finally stop and ask someone, didn't I?
- 2: Yeah. Great choice too. You ask the very person who wants to hunt the kid down.
- 1: How was I to know Herod would be so upset about the birth of one little baby! ? What did he have to worry about? In this corner, Herod and the Roman Empire—in the other corner, a baby, his mama and a bunch of shepherds. Not exactly an even match.
- 2: You're right--why should someone like this be a threat to someone like that?
- 1: We should be able to figure this out. After all, we're wise men.
- 2: Hmmm. Herod has the military power, right? No one can deny that. But what if that's all he has?
- 1: Are you suggesting, oh wise guy, that there are things more powerful in this world than having the biggest weapons or largest army? That even Humpty Dumpty way up high on that wall might not be entirely in charge?

- 2: And all the king's horses and all the king's men—are no match for an idea whose time has come?
Or for a baby born of humble surroundings—but with great promise?
- 1: Now we're getting somewhere! So if this kid grew up to be a leader who cared about the people,
and who stood up for the little guy—unlike your average monarch—then things might start
coming apart for ole King Herod.
- 2: And once Humpty Dumpty has a great fall...
- 1: Start shredding the cheese, cause we're gonna have one big omelette.
- 2: So I guess our job here is finished. We found the stable, left our gifts, paid our respects...
- 1: Makes you wonder, though...
- 2: Wonder what?
- 1: Whether he'll be able to live up to expectations. I mean, not every baby has their own star to
announce their birth.
- 2: Or gets gold, frankincense and myrrh at their baby shower.
- 1: Or manages to be a threat to the King of Judea. Yeah, he's off to quite a start.
- 2: But I'll tell you one thing—we gave King Herod the slip. Homeland Security was no match for the
two wise guys. Makes me think as long as that kid has friends like us, his future is bright.
- 1: You are so right, brother Wise Man. You know, all we need now is a theme song. Every dynamic
duo has one. How about "We Two Kings of Orient Are... "?
- 2: I don't know... doesn't sound quite right.
- 1: Why? What's wrong with it?
- 2: We two kings of orient "are"*what?*

ANGEL:

A bit over-dressed, perhaps. But these emissaries from the East show that this birth was more than local news—it was Good News for the whole world, and is cause for people everywhere to give thanks for God’s great love for all of humankind. We angels—we didn’t feel like we were singing alone on that Judean hillside—it was like our voices were joined by thousands of other voices—people from every walk of life, from every corner of the earth, raising songs of praise and thanksgiving for what God had done, coming to us in this child in a manger, a child would soon grow to become our Lord.

CAROL: O Come, All Ye Faithful v. 1, 3, 4

Mary Calls Home

(Mary sits on high stool, pantomimes making a phone call) “Mom?” “Hi—yes, it’s me, Mary.” (short pause)

(Mary sits on stool and picks up imaginary phone) “Mom?” “Hi—yes, it’s me, Mary.” (short pause, listening

to what her mom has to say) “Yes, yes, we’re fine.” (pause) “Yes—just tonight! It’s a boy!” (pause) “Yes,

mom, just like I said—but I really did appreciate you sending that list of girl names just in case—very

thoughtful.” (pause) “The baby is fine—and so am I! And Joseph—he’s so excited too!” (pause) “Yes, we

did find a place. We didn’t have any reservations, but Joseph found us... a really nice little place. It’s got...

everything. Roof, walls, windows, cows and sheep...” (pause) “Did I say ‘cows and sheep’? I meant ‘a

place to sleep’—there’s *plenty* of very nice straw to make our beds—and a comfy little... crib... for the

baby.” (pause) “Yes, I know you wish you would have been here for the birth. But everyone here has been

very nice. The owner let us stay here for practically nothing, and we've even had some people stop by to see the baby." (pause) "Yes, I am very thankful for Joseph. He's been so good to me and the baby. He didn't have to, you know..." (pause) "Oh mom, it's alright to cry a little. We've all been through a lot." (pause) "Thanks, mom. I'm proud of you too. It hasn't been easy—your friends talking, your family wondering. Questions about what kind of girl I am, what kind of mother you are. This has been a struggle for both of us—and mom—I couldn't have made it without you." (pause) "Yes, all that's behind us—now is a time for rejoicing." (pause) "Tell papa hello too. I love both of you. We'll be home—all three of us—before you know it! Good-bye, mom."

Solo— “You're here” or some other fitting song

ANGEL: That's how it happened—a wonder of wonders on this night of nights. What a combination—a God whose love is so deep and wide for this world; a young couple willing to face the ridicule of their neighbors to fulfill God's promise; witnesses from near and far, the ragged and the regal—all welcome at Mary's side to celebrate the birth of this child. And even tonight—the blessings of that night cascade down through the ages into our world and into our lives; the light of that star also leading us to the manger and the young life that lies within it, so we can now share the light with our world.

[Angel motions congregation to circle to light candles; pianist plays Silent Night as people form circle]

CAROL: *Silent Night* v. 1-4

Two: Whom should we tell??

One: Whom should we tell??

[slight pause as they ponder]

Two: H-m-m-m . . . a child in a manger . . .
unusual place.

One: A child born of woman . . .
unusual grace.

Two: A child born of God for the whole
human race.

One: How should we let it be known?

[pace builds]

One: A surprise is in order in announcing
this birth.

Two: We must tell those among the poor
of the earth.

One: For they are most likely to be
filled with mirth

Two: . . . mirth that is worthy of this
special birth.

One: And spread it, we will, by way of that star

Two: To any who see it, be near or be far

One: For news such as this cannot be contained

Two: The love of our God—cannot be restrained

[pace quickens]

One: Then let it be done, let the angel
choir gather!

Two: And they'll spring from their slumber
to see what is the matter

One: . . . men, women, children; shepherds and sages . . .

Two: Any who listen, down through the ages

One: All of us, each of us, well-placed or forlorn

Two: To you and to all, the Christ Child is born!

CAROL: Joy to the World v. 1-4

Sending Music: Christmas music as people exit

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