

Unsung Heroes

By David Radcliff

*A Christmas skit on the underappreciated role of the shepherds in the Christmas drama
For 11 older children or youth (roles can be reassigned for more or fewer characters)*

Leader: Okay people. Time to get started with our rehearsal of the Christmas pageant. As you know, this is the biggest event of the year for our congregation. Well, except for the ice cream social. But since most of you have been in the pageant every year since you were children, you know what a big deal it is. We're doing things a little bit differently this year. In the past we've done a play that involved all the characters from the story of Jesus' birth in the Bible—shepherds and sheep, wise men and their gifts, singing angels, Mary and Joseph, the innkeeper, and of course baby Jesus (cast: "awwww") and mean old King Herod (cast: "boooo!").

This year, we're going to single out one group of characters for special attention, and try to imagine what it would have been like to be in their shoes—or "sandals", as the case may be, at the time of Jesus' birth.

1) The wise men! Make it the wise men!

2) I get gold!

3) I get frankincense!

4) I get mirth!

5) It's not "mirth"—it's myrrh!

4) Oh, it will be "mirth" if I get that role—I'll have everyone rolling in the aisles.

3) ummmm, I don't think people do that in our church...

4) It's a figure of speech...oh, never mind!

L: Sorry to disappoint, but we aren't doing the wise men....

2) then make it King Herod—imagine the uproar in the palace over the birth of this "king of the Jews"

5) Call in the FBI, call in the CIA, call in the PB&J!

3) PB&J??

5) The "Pounce on Baby Jesus" squad.

L: No, we're not doing King Herod either.

4) Who's left?

2) The shepherds...?

3) Say it's not the shepherds—shepherds are soooo un-exciting!

L) I'm sure shepherds can be exciting—maybe just as exciting as the wise men.

5) No way! Shepherds hang around sheep—the least exciting creatures on earth

3) And think about what shepherds do with their sheep—they don't ride them, they don't rope them, they don't really even “herd” them—they “watch” them. Booring!

2) And at least we get to wear crowns and bathrobes to play the Wise Men—and carry pricey gifts. Shepherds—they just wear...clothes. And they only carry...sticks.

L: I think you're selling the shepherds way too short. Think about it: shepherds were the first people to visit the stable where Jesus was born—the first to see him and worship him—the first to go and tell others what they had seen—God must have sent the angelic choir to them on the night of Jesus' birth for a reason

3) Yeah, nobody else is awake at that time of night

1) Maybe God sent the angels to them because they were “outstanding in their field”...

L) Let's give the shepherds a try—it can't be any worse than our humor. And besides, maybe you'll come to appreciate them in ways you haven't before. Okay—I need a reader, several shepherds, a couple angels, and some sheep.

2) Some of us have to play sheep?

4) It's not that ba-a-a-a-ad—at least the sheep don't have to memorize lines.

L) Who's going to be the reader—I need a volunteer.

Reader) I will.

L) Shepherds?

Shepherd 1 & 2-3) We will.

L) We need a couple angels.

Angel 1 & 2-3) That's us.

L) Sheep? Don't be sheepish...

Sheep 1 and 2-3) Oh, alright.

L) Here are your parts [hands out scripts]. Let's just read through it, and see how it goes. [hands halos to angels, staffs to shepherds, something wool-like to sheep to put on their heads] Okay—Reader, you start.

R) Welcome, everyone, to our annual Christmas pageant. In other years our pageant has included all the characters mentioned in the Christmas story as told by Matthew and Luke. Tonight, however, we're going to

take a different approach. We will look at the events of that first Christmas night from the point of view of the shepherds. A strange choice, some of you may be thinking. But consider this—the job of a shepherd in Bible times was at once very important—and very underappreciated.

Shepherd 1: (to other shepherds) Oh really? So we shepherds were kind of important—cool.

R: The important part of their work, of course, was to protect the sheep from marauders—either human or animal. In that part of the world, there were wolves, foxes, eagles—and even the occasional leopard.

Shepherd 2: (to people in the other roles) Hear that? We had to fight off wolves—and leopards. That’s a pretty big job. Takes a brave person to confront a hungry wolf.

R: And other people might be tempted to steal a sheep or two if they weren’t closely guarded. So protecting the sheep was serious business, since sheep could be a family’s main source of income.

Sheep: Looks like we were pretty important too—a financial asset for 1st Century families—so precious they had to put guards out to protect us. [to rest of cast] Hey guys, sheep are special—and don’t you forget it!

R: And of course sheep have a reputation for being extraordinarily dumb...so the shepherd also had to keep them from wandering off and getting lost—or eaten.

Angel 1: Yeah, you’re special—the Blue Plate Special.

R: [to angel] That wasn’t very angelic. Back to our narrative: But even though the shepherds had an important job, the shepherds were underappreciated. Typically this job went to some of the least educated people in the community, and their pay was meager—often barely enough to feed their families.

Shepherd 2: Same old story isn’t it—the ones who do the toughest jobs get the lessest income.

Sheep 2: “lessest”?

Shepherd 2: Hey, you heard the narrator, we’re un-edumacated...

R: There was another factor at play on that starry night long ago—there was a certain King Herod who was very keen to stamp out any possible threats to his power in Judea—especially from the Jews. And if he found out that anyone had information about the whereabouts of such a king, he might just come looking for them. So the shepherds would face another potential danger once they heard the angels’ message and went to meet baby Jesus, the “king of the Jews” that Herod was so worried about. Because Herod had a reputation for being ruthless...

Sheep 3: [aside, to the other sheep] Hey, if Herod comes for these guys [pointing to shepherds], we pretend like we never met them, alright?

R: So this was a bit of the situation that night as the shepherds were out in the fields, keeping watch over the flocks by night. Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone ‘round about them, and they were sore afraid. But the angel said unto them:

Angel 1: Fear not, for behold! I bring you good tidings of great joy; for unto you is born in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you—you will find Mary & Joseph, and the baby, who will be wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Angel 2: You know, I think we did the right thing to bring this news to a bunch of shepherds. Look at them: they're humble, brave, not very well dressed—just the kind of people God prefers when it comes to making big announcements.

Angel 3: Yeah, now that you mention it, Moses was tending sheep when God called him, David was a shepherd boy before he became king.

Angel 2: God's always calling people like this to do important things. And it always turns out that they were just the right people for the job.

Angel 1: So are we saying we think God made a good decision?

Angel 3: Yeah! You go, God!

R: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying:

Angels 1, 2, 3: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to all

Angel 2: [to congregation] Since this part actually calls for a "heavenly host", we need your help. Will you join us in a fitting song for the occasion? Let's sing the first verse of *Angels, we have heard on high*.

[sing hymn]

R: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another:

Shepherd 3: Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us.

R: So they went with haste and found Mary & Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made know what had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it were amazed. The shepherds then returned, glorifying God for all they had heard and seen.

Shepherd 1: All this for us? Angels—birth announcements—the heavenly host bursting forth in song? Suddenly I'm not feeling so underappreciated.

Shepherd 2: Yeah, I guess shepherds played a pretty important role in the birth of Jesus.

Sheep 2: And don't forget us—after all: no sheep, no shepherds

Angel 1: God has a funny way of taking things we don't see as very important—and using these things to do really important things in our world.

Sheep 1: Do you mean like a baby born in a stable, wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger in an out-of-the-way town a couple thousand years ago—but who we're still talking about today?

Angel 1: Yeah, that's exactly what I mean. And just like then, we all have a part to play in that Christmas drama—

Angel 2: Angels still have a message for those who hear...

Shepherd 1: People we may least expect are still being called to do unexpected things...

Sheep 3: And a little child, grown to become our Lord and Savior, still invites us to proclaim him as the Prince of Peace to a world waiting for the peace, love and joy he brings.

Angel 1: That makes me want to sing again! Please stand as you are able and join us in the first verse of *Joy to the World*.

[sing hymn]

L: Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Amen.

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New Community Project

9036 W. Quail Track Drive, Peoria, AZ 85383

www.newcommunityproject.org; ncp@newcommunityproject.org

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