

A Grandfather's First Christmas

A Candle Star Christmas Production

by
Shell Isenhoff

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A Note to Directors:

Thank you for choosing to use a Candle Star Christmas Production in your church or school. My purpose in writing each play was to create a pageant that even small groups could produce simply. (They have all been produced in my own church of 200 people.) But stronger still was my desire to immerse viewers in a powerful story that left no question about the true meaning of Christmas. Christ's coming to dwell with man is only part of a whole gospel message, which is clearly presented in each script. My hope is that this play will help you spread that message in your community this holiday season.

Merry Christmas and break a leg! And to Jesus Christ be all the glory.

Shell Isenhoff

Find additional
Candle Star Christmas Productions
on my website:

www.michelleisenhoff.com

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Author's Note: There are those among Messianic Jewish scholars who believe Jesus may have been born during the autumn Feast of Tabernacles. This feast commemorated God's dwelling among his people during the 40 years in the wilderness and foreshadowed Christ's coming to live with mankind. Such overlap would be in keeping with the dual fulfillment of other Jewish holidays, such as Passover commemorating the Exodus and foreshadowing the crucifixion. And it is entirely possible—some say probable—that Caesar would have ordered the census taken at a time convenient for the local people, in this case, when they were traveling for the feast's required male pilgrimage to the Temple anyway and during the interval between harvest and winter rains. Such a theory would also account for the crowds in Bethlehem. This play assumes it was so in its final scene. It may be appropriate to briefly make this possibility and reasoning known to the audience just prior to the play's performance.

Summary

In a very traditional take on the Christmas story, Mary's father struggles to believe his grandson is the Son of God.

Length

Candle Star Christmas Productions are designed to run between 45 minutes to an hour when music is included at scene breaks.

Cast of Characters

Mary—teenage mother of Jesus

Saul—Mary's father

Lydia—Mary's mother

Joseph—Mary's fiancé

Angel

Rabbi

Narrator to read Luke 2

Stage Setup

The stage is set with a kitchen table and chairs. Adorned with the appropriate props, this will represent Mary's parents' house in scenes two and three, and the rabbi's study area in scene four. Scene five requires a manger scene. (Alternately, the table could be used for scene five, as it is reasonable to assume Mary and Joseph would have eventually moved into a house or inn. As no time frame is specifically mentioned in the play, they could be in either.) Reserve an empty area on stage to represent the wheat field in scene one.

Prop List

Table
Chairs
Hoe or other tool
Small basket
File
Tea kettle
Tea cup
Suitcase
Apple and knife
Plates and silverware
Bread
Grape juice
Baby or doll wrapped in blankets
Manger and hay bales/chairs

Music Recommendations

At the end of most scenes, an optional break for music is inserted. This is left wide open on purpose, because the organizations that produce this play will have vastly different musical talents available. They may even choose to skip some or all of these opportunities. However, music offers a great distraction while switching scenes, and it provides a whole additional platform for worship. Here is a list of suggestions to fill these opportunities:

Songs sung by children's Sunday school classes or school classrooms

Vocal solos or groups performed by children or adults

Instrumental solos performed by school children or adults

Brief piano interludes

Traditional carols provide simple, recognizable tunes for instrumentals. Vocal arrangements might consist of carols as well, or be drawn from the variety of contemporary music available.

Specific recommendations:

After scene 2, perform *Breath of Heaven*, by Amy Grant.

After scene 3, perform *Joseph's Song*, by Michael Card with these lyrics modified slightly to fit the play:

Verse 1

*How could it be this baby in her womb
Growing now, so peacefully
The Son of God, the angel said
How could it be*

Lord I know He's not my own

*Not of my flesh, not of my bone
Still Father let this baby be
The son of my love*

Chorus

*Father show me where I fit into this plan of yours
How can a man be father to the Son of God
Lord for all my life I've been a simple carpenter
How can I raise a king, How can I raise a king*

Verse 2

*His form so small, Creator of the earth
Come as a babe to live with men so graciously
The Son of God, a virgin's child
How could it be?*

Repeat Chorus

Repeat first half of Verse 1

As a final song, perform *A Child of Bethlehem*, by Wayne Watson.

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Scene One

Saul is planting winter wheat in the field with a hoe. Mary carries a small basket.

Mary: Papa! I have brought your lunch.

Saul: Ah, Mary. You are a welcome sight.

Mary: How is the planting coming, Papa?

Saul: Very well. The wheat is ready for the winter rains. Jehovah is kind and wise, no? To provide all we need in every season.

Mary: He is indeed, Papa.

Saul: Mary, my dear girl, you are a joy to my heart. I pity men who have only sons. Your young carpenter is a very lucky man. How long is it, now, before I lose you to him?

Mary: Joseph and I will be married after the spring festivals. You know this.

Saul: Of course I do. I just try my best to forget. He is a good man. I believe you will be happy.

Mary: I know I will be, Papa. I love him very much. But he will never take your place.

Saul: (He hugs her in a one-arm squeeze.) See that he doesn't. Run along now and tell your mother I shouldn't be late for supper.

Mary: See you tonight, Papa.

As Mary walks home, an angel appears before her. She falls on her knees and face, terrified.

Angel: Mary, most favored among women, do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. You will be with child, and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

Mary: (Looking up, stunned) A baby? But—but how can this be? I have never known a man.

Angel: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

Mary: The "Holy One?" He speaks of Messiah!

Angel: Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.

Mary: (She bows.) I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.

Optional break for music.

Scene Two

In Mary's parents' house.

Saul: Look at it come down out there. Ah, winter is a fine time of year. The grain grows, and a man has time to sit down and tend to other business. (He sits and begins sharpening a hoe with a file.)

Lydia: (Pours him tea.) But it is a damp time of year. I never can quite rid myself of the chill.

Saul: (Grabs her by the wrist and stands to embrace her.) Perhaps I can help warm you up, my dear.

Lydia: Saul, it's the middle of the afternoon! What if someone stops by and sees us?

Saul: After twenty-three years of marriage, my bride is still afraid of what others might think. I assure you, Lydia, everyone in town knows we have five children.

Lydia: Oh, stop it, Saul.

Mary enters the room looking hesitant and uncomfortable.

Mary: Mama? Papa? Can I talk to you?

Saul: And here's the last of them now. Come in, daughter. What can we do for you? But if it's more wedding plans, I beg leave to seek out more manly company.

Mary: It's not about the wedding. (To herself.) I hope there's still going to be a wedding.

Lydia: What do you mean, child? Did you and Joseph have a fight?

Mary: Not yet.

Saul: You're speaking in riddles, child. State your business plainly.

Mary: (Takes a deep breath.) A few weeks ago, when I was walking home from the fields, I had a visitor. An—an angel.

Lydia: (Skeptically) An angel? Oh, Mary, you are too old to tell such stories. It must have been heatstroke, or a trick of the light.

Mary: It was an angel, Mama. It spoke to me.

Saul: This is not unheard of among our people, Lydia. It is rare, but perhaps she speaks the truth. What did the angel say, daughter?

Mary: It—it said I was going to bear a son.

Lydia: Well that is not alarming. You will be a married woman in a few short weeks. Why, I could be a grandmother again by this time next year!

Mary: (Wryly) You could.

Saul: You haven't yet told us what ails you, daughter.

Mary: The angel told me that the child I bore would be the Messiah, the Deliverer promised to our people. The Son of God.

Saul and Lydia stare at her, speechless, then glance at each other in disbelief. Lydia grabs her hand and leads her to a chair.

Lydia: Perhaps the wedding is getting to you, my dear. Stress and nerves can do funny things to a person's mind.

Mary: (Pulls away.) I wasn't dreaming, Mama. What the angel said has already come true. I am pregnant.

Lydia and Saul stare at her in shock.

Saul: (Roaring) What!?! (He paces, clenching and unclenching his fists while Lydia begins softly crying.) I'll kill him! I'll kill him! When I get my hands on that man...

Mary: It wasn't Joseph, Papa.

A pause, then Lydia weeps harder and Saul glares at Mary.

Saul: What do you mean, it wasn't Joseph? Who was it?

Mary: It wasn't any man. It was the work of Jehovah.

Saul: (Skeptically) Jehovah! (Paces again then stops to glare at her again.) Do you recall what we Jews do with women like you? The law is very clear. An adulteress is to be stoned!

Mary: No, Papa. I am not! You mustn't!

Saul: Then what *am* I to do with you? Joseph won't want you now. Nor will any other man. You have left yourself very few options, my dear. Did you think of that in your wicked passion? Thank the Lord my other children were all sons! (Pauses.) I know. I will send you away to my cousin Elizabeth, up in the hills. No one knows you there, and it will buy us time. Time to think what must be done.

Mary: Yes, Papa. Please send me to Elizabeth. She will understand.

Saul: An old, barren woman? Don't count on it, my dear.

Optional break for music.

Scene Three

Mary enters the room with a suitcase. Her belly is beginning to show. There is a table set with bread and grape juice. Then Lydia enters with a tray of plates and silver ware.

Lydia: Mary! You are home! Oh I've missed you! (She hugs Mary and holds her out at arm's length.) Look at you, child! My baby is having a baby!

Mary: Mama! You are not angry with me, then?

Lydia: No child. Disappointed, yes. I fear you have chosen a difficult road. But you will always be my daughter, and I will always love you.

Mary: My father does not feel as you do. He did not speak to me the whole trip.

Lydia: No. He will need more time. But he loves you, child. Come. Help me set the table. The Sabbath begins at sundown.

They work. Saul enters holding a knife and an apple.

Saul: Ahem. While you were away, daughter, I came a decision. You will have to face the consequences of your own actions. I have invited Joseph to join us for the Sabbath meal. (He sits down to cut his apple.)

Mary: Does he know?

Saul: About the baby? No. (Smiles bitterly.) I thought you might like to tell him yourself.

Lydia: How are Elizabeth and Zechariah? Are they well?

Mary: Very well, Mama. Elizabeth has had a baby!

Lydia: A baby? At her age! When was this? Why didn't she send word?

Mary: It was just a few weeks ago. She and the baby are both fine. They all send you their love.

Lydia: Saul, did you know this?

Saul: I, uh, have spoken to Zechariah. (He looks away uncomfortably.)

Lydia: Well imagine that. I am so happy for them both!

Mary: Their baby is special, Mama. They, too, were visited by an angel. He told them their son would go before the Lord and draw many back to God.

Lydia exchanges a questioning look with Saul, who frowns and shakes his head. There is a knock at the door and Joseph enters.

Joseph: (Rushes to take her hands.) Mary! You are home! It is so good to—to— (He stares at her belly and drops her hands.) —see you.

Mary: Joseph, this is not what it looks like. Please let me explain.

Joseph: (Pauses.) All right, Mary. I will consider to what you have to say. (Addresses parents.) Please excuse us. (He leads her to the side of the stage.) I am listening.

Mary: Joseph, I have never been unfaithful to you. I had no part in this. You must believe me!

Joseph: (Misunderstanding, he draws her into a hug.) Oh, my poor, sweet Mary. I am so sorry this happened to you. We will work through it together.

Mary: (Pulls away.) Joseph, I was not raped.

Joseph: Then it *was* consensual.

Mary: No! It was not as you think!

Joseph: Then how was it, Mary? You must choose one or the other. There is no third way.

Mary: Yes, there is. I know it sounds crazy, but this is the hand of Jehovah. Before I left for my cousin's house, an angel appeared to me and told me what would happen. And it has. Joseph, this baby is the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

Joseph: (Pauses, jaw clenching, then speaks quietly.) Mary, I have loved you for many years. I have waited for you to grow up. I have anticipated our union with great joy. That you would think up such falsehoods to deceive me rips the heart from my chest.

Mary: (Grabs his arm.) Joseph! I am not lying to you!

Joseph: (Gently removes her.) But even now I still love you, and I cannot bring myself to drag you before a mob. I will go privately and seek a divorce.

Mary: No! Please, don't do this, Joseph! Please! You must believe me!

Joseph: I am sorry, Mary.

Joseph exits. Mary follows to the edge of the stage, calling out to him, and sinks to her knees. Her cries draw Saul's attention and he thoughtfully overhears the following prayer.

Mary: Oh, God, the angel never said it would be like this! I have lost my father, and now I have lost Joseph. What else will you take from me? My pride, my friends, my reputation, my wedding, my future—they are all gone! What else will you have? What will I do now? Why, oh why, have you chosen me to bear your Son?

Optional break for music.

Scene Four

There is a knock at the door. Saul enters the rabbi's quarters where he is studying scrolls.

Rabbi: Come in. (Saul enters.) Ah, Saul. What can I do for you?

Saul: I have some questions that perhaps you can answer. About the Messiah.

Rabbi: Then perhaps I *can* help you. I have made the study of Messiah my life's work. Even now you have caught me at it. Because, if my understanding of Daniel's reckoning is correct, his arrival could take place anytime.

Saul: What do you mean?

Rabbi: Why, just what I say. The prophet Daniel has written that, beginning with the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile—the time of Nehemiah, you know—until the time of Messiah, 69 weeks of years must pass. That would be 483 years. Do you follow me?

Saul: Yes.

Rabbi: Well, we've nearly hit that mark, haven't we? Would his arrival not be an exciting event to witness in our lifetimes?

Saul: (Thoughtfully) Indeed. But how will we know him if he comes?

Rabbi: Oh, the scriptures give us many clues. Isaiah and Malachi both say that God will send a forerunner, a messenger, someone likened to Elijah, to prepare the way before the glory of the Lord will be revealed.

Saul: Elizabeth!

Rabbi: What's that you say?

Saul: Ah, nothing. (Saul picks up a paperweight from Rabbi's desk.) Please go on.

Rabbi: Of course. There's also the prophecy of the virgin birth. (Saul fumbles the paperweight to the ground.) Oh, yes. Isaiah is quite clear about that one. "A virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son..." And the scriptures even give the lineage of the Messiah.

Saul: The—the lineage?

Rabbi: Yes indeed, beginning with Adam. Then Seth, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David, and Solomon. He will come from David's royal line, and he will be born in Bethlehem.

Saul: (Chuckles with relief.) Then that rules my family out. I am not of royalty. (Stands.) Thank you so much, Rabbi. You have been a tremendous help.

Rabbi: Anytime, Saul. (Saul offers him the paperweight.) Keep it. I have others.

Saul walks away with the weight and meets Joseph on the road.

Joseph: Saul, I have found you. I have spoken to your daughter, and we have decided to marry as planned.

Saul: Are you certain you want to do this, Joseph?

Joseph: More certain than I've been of anything. An angel appeared to me in a dream this week and confirmed everything Mary told us. Her child is of the Lord, as she said.

Saul: (Dryly) A lot of angels in these parts lately. You do know everyone will think you are the father.