

Christmas play 1999

The Vicar welcomes everyone and introduces the first carol

Carol: *See Him lying on a bed of straw (Calypso Carol)*

Offering of gifts under the tree.

The theme of the Christmas presentation this year is to explore Christmas back in time, starting with 1999 and working back through the 18th and 17th centuries and before, ending up at the stable where Jesus was born. We pick on the celebration theme, beginning in a party held somewhere in Cambridge last night.

Narrator: Welcome to the last Christmas of the second millennium. We are going to take you back in time to explore what we celebrate at Christmas. But we start from last night, in a house not too far away from here.

Scene 1: The party

Scene begins with people getting ready for a party, with simple comments like the following:

Host: I really like Christmas, lots of parties, long holidays...

Host: Do you realise that this is the last Christmas of the millennium?

Host: Apparently there have been 2000 Christmas's since Christmas was first invented.

Host: How does anyone know? Who invented Christmas anyway?

Door bell rings.

Host: Our guests are arriving. I'll go and let them in.

Host: Okay, I'll put on some music.

Host: Nothing religious I hope. After all, it is Christmas.

The host goes across to answer the door, and lets in some party people. Music starts playing. Guests join in with simple chat like

Guests: Great party, where are the drinks...

The door bell rings again.

Host: Okay, I'll get it

The host opens the door and finds some people dressed as angels. He lets them in.

Host: Who are those people?

Host: I don't know. I thought they were friends of you.

Host: Well I don't know them.

Host: They have great fancy dress. What do you think they are dressed as?

Host: I am going to ask who they are.

Host goes across to the angels. Music begins to fade during following dialogue.

- Host: Welcome to our party. I am afraid that I don't know who you are.
- Angel: No, you wouldn't know us. We are angels.
- Host: Huhhh?
- Angel: That's right, we have come to show you what Christmas is all about.
- Host: That's great. Come over and get yourself a drink, and we'll have a great Christmas party.
- Host: Welcome to our party. Great outfit.
- Host: They've come to show us a great time.
- Angel: Not quite. We have actually come to show you the true meaning of Christmas.
- Angel: We would like you to come on a little trip with us. Back in time, to see what Christmas parties were like years ago.
- Angel: Then we are going to end up at the very first Christmas party, and you are invited.
- Host: Are you guys for real?
- Angel: Try us. Everyone hold hands, and let's go.
- Guest: Do you mind if I get changed first?

Angels and people hold hands, and rush down the aisle to the back of the church.

Carol: *Angels from the realms of glory*

Scene 2: Victorian Christmas

Angels and people reappear from the back. The scene on the stage has a family sitting around the Christmas tree passing around and opening presents. Elsewhere on the stage is a small choir.

- Person: Where are we?
- Angel: In the 19th century.
- Angel: This is the beginning of Christmas as you know it at the end of the 20th century. It isn't how Christmas really started, but that is another story.
- Person: Look, they have a Christmas tree.
- Angel: That's right. Prince Albert, the Queen's husband, made them popular

Family members pull crackers

- Person: Look, Christmas crackers, and Christmas cards.
- Angel: The crackers are from France. They came to England in 1860.

Angel: Do you know who sent the first Christmas card?

People: No (*shake heads*)

Angel: In 1843 John Horsley got his friend Henry Cole to make some Christmas cards for him to send to people. He had too many people to write to, and it saved him a lot of trouble.

Angel: The idea didn't catch on for a few years. But now you people spend fortunes on them.

Person: I don't – I buy mine in the sales after Christmas. They are cheap then!

Person: I never got round to writing my cards this year.

Angel: Come over here and listen

Small choir of children sing a traditional carol (Away in a manger)

Person: Christmas carols. I remember singing them as a child. My parents used to take us to church at Christmas time.

Person: What did you want to go to church for at Christmas? Isn't that for Easter?

Angel: You have a lot to learn. Come, the night is still young.

Angels and people leave the stage from the back. Music accompanies change of scene.

Scene 3: 17th Century

People working, watched over by a loud pompous man.

Person: Where are we now?

Angel: We have arrived in the 17th century.

Person: Why are all these people working?

Angel: Because it's Christmas day. In 1652 Parliament abolished Christmas Day.

Person: What? Hey you.

Man: Hey, do you mean me Sir? What business do you have shouting on a day like today?

Person: But it is Christmas Day. Why is everyone working?

Man: Christmas Day. Bahh! Let me introduce myself. I am Hezekiah Woodward, a good upstanding man, Sir. You won't catch me being idle on Christmas Day.

Person: But Christmas Day is for partying.

Man: Partying! Bahh! Sir, Christmas Day is nothing but a feasting day for the heathen, a ranting day for the profane man, an idol day for the superstitious, an idle day for the multitude, Satan's working day, and the true Christian's fasting day. And too many days of cursed observation go along with the observation of that idol day.

Person: I guess you don't like Christmas.

Angel: No-one likes Christmas in these times. Look over there and listen.

Crier: Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. Listen to what the courts have ruled. Anyone who is found observing, by abstinence from labour, feasting, or in any other way, and such days as Christmas Day, shall pay for every such offence five shillings. Be warned all ye who can hear.

Person: Christmas isn't much fun here.

Angel: Come, times are hard for these people. We still have much to see.

Angels and people leave by the front.

Carol: *Good Christian men, rejoice*

Scene 4: Earlier times, and development of Christmas tree

Angels and people arrive on stage and are seated. St Boniface appears with some children.

Boniface: Greetings. My name is Boniface, but back home in Devon, where I was born, I used to be known as Winrith. I came here to Germany to tell people about Jesus. People here have had a festival at Christmas time for centuries. The Romans used to celebrate their god Saturn, with a week holiday, lots of feasting, and giving presents. Slaves and free men all celebrated together. Other people celebrated the Winter Solstice. They were never sure that the winter would end, so they had a festival because they thought that this would bring the sun back again. People would light bonfires to urge the sun to return. They would also keep green leaves in their homes to ensure that trees and plants would grow again.

I have come to show these people that there is one true God who loves them. One night I was walking through the wood, and I came across a group of excited people. It was horrible. They were going to sacrifice a young child, and had come to a special oak tree. I got so cross. I grabbed an axe and I chopped the oak tree down. I must have sounded cross because the people could only stand and watch. I told them that God offered eternal life because he gave Jesus for us. And do you know what? When I had chopped down the tree, I found a young fir tree growing at the same spot. I said to the people that this fir tree is a symbol of eternal life.

Children bring forward the Christmas tree.

Person: At these times people used to paint apples and hang them on the tree in honour of their god Woden. We changed this to hanging decorations on the fir tree as part of our celebration of the eternal life God gives.

Children hang baubles on tree. Martin Luther enters.

Luther: I am Martin Luther. I have also taught the people that God gives eternal life because of Jesus. We started putting candles on the tree to represent Jesus as the light of the world.

Lights are switched on.

Angel: People often place a doll or fairy on the top of the tree. This is supposed to be an angel, but people get us confused with fairies. Tell me, do I look like a fairy?

Angel puts angel onto tree.

Narrator: There is a story about a poor woman who worked hard for her family. One night some spiders spun webs on their family Christmas tree, and Jesus turned them into silver as a reward for woman's goodness. The tinsel represents the webs of silver.

Children dressed as spiders run onto the stage, and cover the tree in tinsel accompanied by some music. Then Pope Julius enters.

Julius I am Pope Julius. In the year 350 I declared that the 25th December would officially be celebrated as the birthday of Jesus. This was the start of the Christmas festival.

Person: So this is where it all started?

Angel: No. We have one more party to attend. This one will be the most special one.

St Francis enters and gathers the children on the stage around him

Francis: Good day to you. Welcome to Assisi in the 13th century. My name is Francis. All of us in the town are going to show you something about Christmas. We started the tradition of acting out the Christmas play, and now we are going to take you back to the very first Christmas.

Carol: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Scene 5: The real Christmas

Lots of people having a party.

Person: This sounds like a real party. What are you celebrating?

Party: Paying our taxes. We have all come here to Bethlehem to pay our taxes to the Romans. It is so depressing that we have to have a party to help us forget.

Person: It is really full here.

Party: Yes, so many of us have to pay these taxes, there is no more room in town. I hope no-one else turns up because the only place left to sleep is with the animals out the back.

Angel: Come outside. Someone is coming.

Joseph and Mary move up to the front and sit down. Party people move away.

Person: That's not fair. She looks as if she is about to have a baby, and she has to sleep where the cows and sheep sleep.

Angel: No, it isn't fair. Tonight Mary will have her baby. She will call him Jesus.

Angel: This is a very special baby. He is God's own son. When He is older He will teach people about how God loves everyone.

Angel: But in the end the people will kill him.

Person: Won't God save Him?

Angel: No, God will allow Him to die, because in so doing He will be able to forgive the sins of all people, and He will be able to give them eternal life.

Person: That's really not fair.

Angel: No, but it will happen because God loves you so much.

Angel: But now it is time for a party. Look at those shepherds over there. Come on. We are going to tell them about Jesus.

Angels lead the people to the shepherds.

Person: These are shepherds. Why have you brought us to see these people?

Angel: For a real party – just watch!

Angels now group by the shepherds. Everyone sings.

Song: *A band of angels*

Angel: Shepherds. Do not be afraid. I have very good news for you. The saviour of the world has been born. Hurry to Bethlehem and you will find him lying in a manger inside a stable.

Shepherds go to Mary and Joseph, who now have the baby Jesus. The shepherds kneel before Mary and Joseph.

Person: Why are they worshipping the baby?

Angel: Because the baby is Jesus. He is to be their saviour.

Angel: Look now. Here come some other people to worship him.

Kings come from the back with presents to give to Jesus.

Person: These people are so rich

Angel: Yes, Jesus has come to help both the rich and the poor. He has come to be the saviour for everyone.

Angel: And it is Jesus you really celebrate at Christmas, even though most people forget this.

Person: We weren't really thinking about Jesus when we started our party.

Angel: Christmas is really all about the love that God has for us all, rich or poor. Because of His love He gave His Son Jesus to be born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

Angel: And this is who we remember on Christmas Day.

Song: *For God so loved the world.*

Vicar: Final comments

Carol: *Hark! The herald angels sing*