

## St John's Christmas Play 2001

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### Welcome and introduction

Carol: Hark the Herald Angels Sing

*Presents brought to the tree at this point*

### Scene 1

*The scene is a bedroom. The period of time is deliberately ambiguous at the start, but will become clear. The children walk to the front in their pyjamas laughing and chatting, clean their teeth, and get into bed with their books. They call out for their Grandfather.*

*Grandfather* (Enters as if climbing stairs) Where are my favourite grandchildren? It's Grandad here come to tell you a bedtime story

*Children* Grandad, goodie

*Child 1* We love you grandad

*Grandfather* And I love you both very much

*Child 2* Come and sit with us

*Grandfather* Okay, move over a bit. Are we all comfortable? What sort of story do you want?

*Child 1* Grandad, can we ask you a question?

*Grandfather* Sure, go ahead.

*Child 1* Daddy said that you used to be a soldier.

*Grandfather* Yes I was, for most of my life.

*Child 2* Daddy said that you used to work in a palace, and that you used to meet very important people.

*Grandfather* Yes, that's right.

*Child 1* What was it like?

*Child 2* Yes, tell us. Who was the most important person you met? Was it the king?

*Grandfather* In a way, but not in the way you think?

*Child 1* What do you mean?

*Child 2* Tell us more

*Grandfather* Okay. This is a long story, are you ready?

*Children* Yes.

*Grandfather* Late one night I was on duty at Herod's palace in Jerusalem. I was really like a personal assistant.

*YG/G* I stood on duty,

*YG* and helped when I could. One night we suddenly had some very important visitors.

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### Scene 2

*Two attendants (1 & 2) come up aisle fast to meet other people on stage. (YG = grandfather as young man)*

*Attendant 1* We have a problem.

*Attendant 2* And we want you to help.

*YG* What's the matter?

*Attendant 1* We have a group of visitors.

*Attendant 2* By the look of them, they are rich and probably important.

*Attendant 3* Who are they?

*Attendant 1* We don't know. They have papers from outside the empire.

*Attendant 2* They may be ambassadors.

*Attendant 1* They have come to worship a new king.

*YG* Do they mean Herod?

*Attendant 1* We don't think so. They are talking about a king who has just been born.

*Attendant 2* It certainly didn't sound like Herod.

*Attendant 3* Why not?

*Attendant 1* They have come following a star.

*Attendant 3* What? Surely anyone who follows a star should have been sent away before they got inside our gate.

*Attendant 1* Exactly, but you should see them.

*Attendant 2* They are not your usual crazy people. They are so rich, and they seem to be well-informed.

*YG* Okay then, what are they saying.

*Attendant 1* That there is a new king due to be born, not a prince, but a king.

*Attendant 2* This is the point, he is being born as a king.

YG So?  
Attendant 1 We don't know. We just think that you ought to see them.  
Attendant 3 Okay, bring them in.  
Attendants 1 & 2 go off to collect kings. YG and Attendant 3 discuss.  
Grandfather We didn't really know what to do. We thought that we should send the visitors away, but somehow that didn't seem right. Then we thought that if there was really a king, we ought to tell Herod. So we decided to wait and see what they had to say,  
Carol As with gladness men of old

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### Scene 3

Attendants 1 & 2 return with the kings

Attendant 1 Let me introduce our visitors  
YG Welcome. We have heard that you have travelled from far away following a star, and have come to worship a new-born king. What is your side of the story?  
King 1 Exactly as you have said. We study the stars and the writings. We understood that a special star rose in the East and was moving towards Israel. We believe that this is a true sign from God.  
Attendant 3 Are you sure that you are not confusing this new king with our great king Herod.  
King 2 Absolutely not. We know about Herod. We are not coming to worship Herod.  
Attendant 1 Be careful what you say. This is his palace.  
YG Come over here and let's think.  
*The kings withdraw*  
YG First of all, we don't have anything to do with the stars.  
Attendant 3 But that is only official policy. We know that Herod follows the stars.  
Attendant 1 And so do many in the court.  
Attendant 2 Yes, but we can't admit it.  
Attendant 3 I think Herod would take this seriously.  
YG So do I. I think we have to go to see him.

*Leave stage together*

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### Scene 4

King Herod on throne. People run back and forth with plans to show him. During the Grandfather's dialogue, the actions are mimed, eventually with the visitors setting off for Bethlehem.

Grandfather So it was off to King Herod. It was late at night, and we had to wake the King up. We also had to get all his advisors together. King Herod got very excited. He had people running backwards and forwards trying to find out where the new King might be born. He took it all very seriously. Eventually some of our advisors came up with some passages from the prophets, locating the birthplace of a new-born King in Bethlehem. The King told the wise men to go to Bethlehem. He also told them to report back after they had found the new-born king. After the wise men had left, some of us were worried.

YG I don't like this at all.  
Attendant 1 If a King is born, Herod won't just take it without doing something drastic.  
YG And if there is no new-born King, Herod won't believe it.  
Attendant 2 I think we have to check this out for ourselves.  
Attendant 3 One of us should follow the wise men.  
Attendant 1 In secret. I agree.  
Grandfather So I was given the job. Herod would not be told, and an excuse would be made for my absence. I would be a Roman in a strange land, so I needed a disguise and a story to hide behind.  
*Mime getting into disguise – make this amusing by having spy clothes first*  
Carol O Little Town of Bethlehem

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### Scene 5

Grandfather So off I went. I found out which direction the wise men had taken, and decided to take a shorter route so that I could get to Bethlehem first. What I have to tell you now was quite

amazing. As I travelled I met other people on the road. Eventually I came across a particularly group of shepherds. They weren't the first group I met, but what I have to tell you now was almost unbelievable.

*Shepherds sitting around a fire. Others join from around the church.*

*Shepherd 1* How are you doing?

*Shepherd 2* Not bad. The sheep seem okay.

*Shepherd 3* Not much to report.

*Shepherd 4* Come and warm yourself up by the fire.

*Shepherd 1* Look over there, someone's coming

*YG is sitting at the back. His mobile phone calls. YG answers.*

*YG* Hello, I'm in the hills, and I can see some people ahead. I told you not to call – I will let you know what's going on when something happens.

*Walks to front and calls out*

Hi there, can I come and join you.

*Shepherds* Sure

*YG joins the shepherds around the fire*

*Shepherd 2* Where are you heading?

*YG* Bethlehem.

*Shepherd 3* You look as if you need a rest. Stay here and warm yourself up.

*YG* Thanks. What sort of night are you having?

*Shepherd 4* Fairly uneventful. Nothing much ever happens. The sheep seem to take care of themselves, and the fire keeps the wild animals away.

*Shepherd 1* You're not from these parts are you?

*YG* Kind of. I have been travelling a lot lately

*Shepherd 2* We don't get many strangers around here.

*YG* I guess not. But I have to get to Bethlehem tonight. Is it far away?

*Shepherd 1* No, once you are round the next hill you will see its lights.

*YG* What's that light over there (*points down the church*)

*Shepherd 2* Don't know, its never been there before.

*Shepherd 3* It seems to be getting closer. What is it?

*Angels run to the front, shepherds fall to the ground.*

*Gabriel* Good shepherds, don't be afraid. We are bringing you good news of joy for all people.

*Angel* Tonight in Bethlehem, a child is born, who is Christ the Lord. He will be the saviour.

*Gabriel* You will find him wrapped in cloth lying in a manger.

*Angel* Glory to God in the Highest

*Gabriel/Angel* And peace to all people on Earth.

**Songs** King of Kings & Hosanna

*Gabriel* Go to Bethlehem, quickly.

*Angel* We leave you in peace. Go and find the child.

*Angels run away again*

*Shepherd 1* What was that?

*Shepherd 2* Who were they?

*Shepherd 3* Angels! I cannot believe that we have just met angels!

*Shepherd 4* They said to go to Bethlehem. Isn't that where you are heading?

*Shepherd 1* Yes, that's what you said. Do you know anything about this?

*YG* I have to say that I haven't the faintest idea who those angels were, but let me tell you this. I work at the palace in Jerusalem. Just recently we had some strange visitors who were looking for a new-born king. Herod's advisors reckoned that if there is a new-born king, he will be in Bethlehem. Exactly the same as those angels have just told us.

*Shepherd 2* So what are you doing then?

*YG* I need to find out what is going on. I can't tell you much more.

*Shepherd 3* I think we should do what the angels said, and go to Bethlehem.

*Shepherd 4* You stick close to us.

*Everyone assembles for song*

**Song** Band of Angels

## Scene 6

*Grandfather* So we all set off towards Bethlehem. We found a stable with a young mother and father and a baby boy. It was an incredible place to be born. Apparently they didn't come from Bethlehem, but their ancestors did, and they had to return to the home of their ancestors to register for taxation. When they arrived in Bethlehem there was no room in any of the hotels. We arrived first, but after us came the strangers I had been following. And the angels came too.

*Nativity scene.* *Shepherds arrive first, then kings come and offer gifts, and then the angels.*

Song            Tonight

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## Scene 7

*Back in the bedroom.*

*Child 1*            So what happened next?

*Grandfather*    Well, we just stood and worshipped the baby for a while. To be honest, I didn't really know what was going on. I was supposed to be finding out, and I should have asked more questions, but it didn't seem appropriate. In the end we all felt it was time to leave the family alone. I told the wise men that it might be better if they didn't go back to see Herod. They had all had dreams in which they were told the same thing, so they left in a different direction. And I went back to the palace, and pretended that I had seen nothing.

*Child 2*            That's an amazing story. But what happened next?

*Grandfather*    I lost touch. I got posted elsewhere, worked at my career in the army, and became a centurian in command of other soldiers. I wanted to get back to Israel to see if anything had come of that night.

*Child 1*            So did you get back?

*Grandfather*    Eventually.

*Child 2*            And did you managed to find anything more?

*Grandfather*    I managed to get a special job investigating any religious leaders. There were several popular teachers, but none of these seemed to fit in with the baby in Bethlehem. Then

there was a man called John. He was an amazing person. He lived in the desert and ate locusts.

*Children*            Yuk!

*Grandfather*    He taught the people to turn away from wrong-doing and to follow God. I thought he might be the baby, but he taught that there would come someone else who would be greater.

*Child 1*            So did that person come?

*Grandfather*    Yes he did, but I didn't know at first.

*Child 2*            How did you find out?

*Grandfather*    I was there when he died.

*Cross goes up, and mime the people at the foot of the cross (centurian, Mary, disciples)*

He was killed on a cross, and I was the soldier in charge. I recognised his mother from the stable in Bethlehem. When he died I realised that he was truly the Son of God. I never knew him while he was alive.

*Child 1*            That's really sad. Was that the end?

*Grandfather*    No. After he died, his body was taken away for burial. We had a couple of soldiers to guard the tomb. However, three days later his body went missing. The soldiers said that some angels had opened the tomb, and that Jesus came back to life. The soldiers were then bribed to say they had fallen asleep. After that I didn't hear any more for a few years.

*Child 2*            You must have been very curious.

*Grandfather*    Yes, I was. I did hear that there was a new religion that followed the risen Jesus, but I couldn't find out too much about it. However, I had a good friend called Cornelius. I called to see him one day and he told me that he was now a Christian. What Cornelius explained to me was that the baby Jesus I had seen in the stable had died on the cross for all people, that now we can all have eternal life. And this is the most important Christmas gift.

Song:            The Servant King

*Closing remarks by David*

Carol:            O come all ye faithful