

## Christmas play 2003

Carol **O come all ye faithful**

*Welcome and opening prayer, led by David*

Carol **Silent night**

### Scene 1

*Empty stage with throne in centre*

Narrator 1: Welcome to Christmas 2003. For some of us, it is the most exciting time of the year. It started with decorating the Christmas tree, then buying presents, carol concerts and carol services, Christmas cards arriving in the post, and now Christmas Day. Giving and receiving presents, coming to church together, and later a special meal with the family. It is very exciting.

Narrator 2: Of course, it hasn't always been like this. Most of the modern trimmings of Christmas only came from the Victorian times. At its heart, Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus, which was around 2000 years ago.

Narrator 1: The Christian church did not always celebrate Christmas. In fact, the early church had too many problems to organise celebrations.

Narrator 2: The first Christmas festival was celebrated 300 years after the birth of Jesus. Let us introduce the man who ordered that a pagan festival should be converted into a celebration of the birth of Christ, the imperial emperor Constantine.

*Constantine appears on stage with fanfare, with his servants*

Constantine: Greetings all. I am the Emperor Constantine, the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire. My great mission has been to help the Church, and to defend it against pagans, heathens and heretics. There are many pagan festivals that the people enjoy, so I decided the best plan was to convert some of the pagan festivals into Christian celebrations. Our biggest success was Christmas. We turned this from a worship of the winter season into the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

But dealing with the problems of pagans and heathens is not my only problem. The Church is now so big that different parts easily end up arguing. They argue over customs and how to do things. But the biggest problem is that they argue over what they believe. Witness this...

*Noisy crowd marches up from the back, carrying banners and shouting slogans related to the slogans on their banners*

Constantine: What is this noise all about?

Protestor 1: I believe that Jesus was divine, but these people ...

Protestor 2: What nonsense. How could a perfect being also be a man, when we know that people are not perfect?

Protestor 3: I believe that Jesus was a man, but the divinity came upon him and left when he died.

Protestor 4: I don't believe in the Trinity. God is God and the only God, and Jesus is His prophet.

Constantine: You can see what trouble there is over understanding something as simple as Christmas. My friends tell me that we are celebrating the birth of Jesus as the Son of God, but suddenly all I hear are opinion after opinion about what this means. And people get really worked up over this. So I have to do something about it.

Narrator 1: So the Emperor Constantine called a special conference in the city of Nicea in the year 325. Three hundred Christian leaders came from all over the empire, from East and West, North and South.

Narrator 2: One of these leaders was a man called Athanasius, who came from Alexandria in Egypt. Let us introduce Athanasius.

*Athanasius comes up onto the stage and is greeted by Constantine*

Athanasius: Greetings all. I am the Bishop of Alexandria. I was the secretary at the council of Nicea. We had long discussions about our understanding of Jesus. Was he truly God? Had he existed from the beginning, or had He been created? Could a human body really contain the Son of God?

We concluded that Jesus was the same as God, not a separate person, and not created. We wrote that Jesus is the

only Son of God, of one being with the Father, begotten and not created; and that for us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and became man.

Narrator 1: In what Athanasius and the other members of the Council of Nicea wrote, they were following the apostle John who wrote of Jesus as the Word of God:

Narrator 2: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."

Carol      **Angels from the realms of glory**

## **Scene 2**

### *Laboratory scene with scientists*

Narrator 1: This may seem a strange place to visit on Christmas morning, but we are now in a science laboratory in the University of Cambridge. But hey, Christmas is a strange time anyways.

Scientist 1: Welcome to my laboratory. This is a special laboratory, because here we look at the stars.

Scientist 2: Here we look at the whole universe. We see planets, stars and galaxies.

Scientist 1: We see amazing things here. Galaxies smashing into each other, stars that have collapsed into tiny spheres that rotate at amazing speeds and send out flashes of radio waves, and massive explosions of old stars.

Scientist 2: We can now see back almost to the very beginning of the universe. According to our measurements the universe is 15 billion years old. That is 15 with 9 zeros behind it.

Scientist 1: And we can count the number of stars and the number of galaxies. We reckon that there are a hundred billion stars in the average galaxy, and roughly the same number of galaxies.

Scientist 2: That means that the total number of stars is 1 with 22 zeros behind it. Amazing!

Narrator 2: The Gospel of John tells us, "Through Jesus all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that was made".

Narrator 1: Now we visit some other scientists.

Scientist 3: My laboratory looks at what makes up life itself: DNA and genetic sequences. DNA is a beautiful twisted molecule, and the small groups of atoms between the helices give the genetic code of life.

Scientist 4: We now understand this code better than ever before. The human DNA sequence consists of around 3 billion base pairs, and the sequence is divided into around 30 thousand genes. We may soon understand how the gene sequence tells us about diseases.

Scientist 3: Our colleagues have classified over one and a half million species of animals and plants.

Scientist 4: And it is likely that there are many more waiting to be discovered. Life on earth is utterly amazing!

Narrator 2: John tells us, "In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of men".

Narrator 1: Our next song talks about the birth of Jesus, and reminds us that he who created all things, he who flung the stars into space, would later give himself up for us all and surrendered himself to death on the cross on our behalf.

Song      **The servant king**

## **Scene 3**

Narrator 1: There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.

Narrator 2: He came as a witness of Jesus as the light of God, so that through him all people might believe. The true light that gives light to every person was coming into the world.

*Elizabeth and Zechariah come onto the stage with baby John, and sit down. They talk to the congregation.*

Elizabeth: Hello everyone, would you like to see our young baby?

Zechariah: His name is John. [*Pause while looking at the congregation*] You didn't think this was Jesus did you? [*knocking and agreeing with Elizabeth*] I think they do!

Elizabeth: Let's tell everyone who we are. My name is Elizabeth.

Zechariah: And I am Zechariah. I am one of the priests.

Elizabeth: And our baby is called John. He is a special baby because we are so old that we never expected to have a baby, but an angel told my husband that we would have a very special child.

Zechariah: I was told that John would prepare the way for the Messiah. He would tell people about God and turn their hearts towards him, He would have the spirit and power of the great prophet Elijah.

Narrator 1: Indeed, the baby John grew up to be a mighty prophet, and taught the people to repent of their sins.

*John the Baptist comes onto the stage*

Narrator 2: John lived in the wilderness, and by the river Jordan. Many people came out to hear him speak, and many asked to be baptised.

*People line up to be baptised*

John: Do you repent of your sins?

Person 1: Yes, I repent of my sins.

John: I baptise you in the name of God our Father.

*John baptises Person 1, and then repeats with the other people saying "I baptise you" each time*

Narrator 1: But not everyone wanted to be baptised.

Narrator 2: Some priests were sent to find out what John was doing.

*Priests walk onto stage, past the people being baptised*

John: Do you also want to be baptised?

Priest 1: No. We have come to find out who you are.

John: I will tell you this much: I am not the Christ.

Priest 2: Then who are you? Are you Elijah returned to us?

John: I am not he.

Priest 1: Are you the prophet?

John: No.

Priest 2: Then tell us who you are, so that we can tell those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?

John: I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'.

Priest 1: Why do you baptise if you are not the Christ, Elihah or the prophet?

John: I baptise with water, but one is coming amongst us of whom I am not worthy to untie his shoes. He will be the Lamb of God, sent to take away the sin of the world.

Narrator 1: This John pointed the people towards Jesus living as man amongst them.

Narrator 2: And our journey now takes us to Bethlehem to find this Jesus of whom John speaks.

Carol **Once in Royal David's city**

#### **Scene 4**

*Mary and Joseph are sitting on stage*

Narrator 1: And so we come to the Christmas story. It began with a young girl and an angel. The young girl was called Mary. She was a cousin of Elizabeth.

Narrator 2: The angel told her that she would give birth to a son who was to be called Jesus, the Son of the Most High.

Narrator 1: Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, and the same angel told Joseph that Mary's baby was conceived from the Holy Spirit.

Narrator 2: At around the time that the baby Jesus was due to be born, Joseph and Mary had to travel from their home in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in the South in order to register for taxation.

Narrator 1: When they arrived, they found the town of Bethlehem was swarming with visitors. There was no room in any of the inns, and so they had to bed down for the night in a stable with the cows and sheep.

Narrator 1: And the baby Jesus was born right there, in the stable.

Narrator 2: And nobody noticed!

Narrator 1: Not quite nobody, for that night, out in the fields, were some shepherds looking after their sheep.

*Shepherds walk onto stage from the back*

Narrator 2: The angels appeared to the shepherds singing songs of praise  
*Angels run in from the back and onto the stage, and assemble to sing two songs*

Song **Jesus is the name we honour**  
Song **King of kings and lord of lords**

Gabriel: I bring you news of great joy. Today, in Bethlehem, a child has been born. He is Christ the Lord, and he is to be the saviour for all people. Glory to God in the Highest, and peace to all people on earth.

Narrator 1: The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see what the angels had told them. They found Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus lying in a manger in the stable.

*Shepherds kneel before Jesus*

Narrator 2: John wrote, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Narrator 1: Others also came to worship. Wise men came from far away to worship.

*Kings come from back, and bring their gifts to Jesus*

Narrator 2: John tells us also that Jesus came to his own people, but his own people did not receive him. In the middle of the Christmas story we meet Herod, king of the Jews.

*Herod goes onto stage with his advisors, and sits on main seat*

Herod: Order, order, why has this meeting been called?

Advisor 1: Your Excellency, we have some important visitors from far away.

Herod: Well, call them in then!

Advisor 2: [*shouting to off stage*] Call in the visitors!

*Wise men come into the room and bow before Herod*

Herod: Tell me, why do you visit our land?

King 1: We have heard that a new king is born in this land.

King 2: And we have come to worship him.

King 3: See, we bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Herod: I know of no new king. Of whom do you speak?

King 1: We understand that he is to be the saviour of the whole world.

King 2: He is to be the light of the whole world, shining in the darkness for us all.

King 3: We have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.

Herod: This is not something that we know anything about. [*Turns to advisors*] What can you tell me about this?

Advisor 1: Your Excellency, the prophets do talk about a Messiah being born in Israel.

Advisor 2: Micah tells us that Bethlehem is where the Messiah will be born.

Herod: Then we must all go to Bethlehem to worship this new king. [*Speaks to kings*] When you find the new king, hurry back and tell us so that we also may go to worship. Now you are dismissed. Return to us quickly.

*Kings leave*

Advisor 1: Your Excellency, what are we to do?

Advisor 2: Are we really going to worship the new king?

Herod: Fools! Why would we want to worship a new king. No, we must destroy the child immediately. As soon as the travellers return, find out where the new king is, and send a small group of my finest soldiers to do what must be done.

Advisor 1: What do we do if the travellers do not return?

Herod: Then we kill all the babies in Bethlehem.

Advisor 2: All of them?

Herod: [*snaps*] All of them, all of them! We cannot have a new king. You know what to do; go and get on with it!

*Advisors depart, Herod lowers his head into his hand*

Narrator 1: As John told us in his gospel, "Jesus came to this world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

Narrator 2: As we know, an angel warned the wise men not to go back to Herod, and also warned Joseph to take Mary and the baby Jesus and flee down into Egypt.

Narrator 1: Herod went through with his threat to kill the infants in Bethlehem, but Jesus was spared.

Narrator 2: But what John said about Jesus being rejected by his own people was certainly true. Herod was afraid of his position as king, but later the authorities would be afraid of the true light that Jesus brought into the world.

Song **Tonight**

### **Scene 5**

*Stable scene reassembled*

Narrator 1: We come back to the first Christmas, in the stable in Bethlehem.

Narrator 2: We have heard about the baby Jesus, how he is God become man, the creator of the universe and of life, the light of God come into the world.

*King takes the baby in his arms*

King 1: We found the baby Jesus and worshipped him in the stable.

King 2: We gave him our gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

King 3: And we understood that he is truly a king.

*John takes the baby in his arms*

John: When Jesus grew up I had the joy of baptising him, although I was not worthy for this. I heard God's voice telling everyone that this is his beloved son.

*Scientist 1 takes the baby in his arms, other scientists gather round*

Scientist 1: When we study the universe, or life, we understand that this baby is the one who created everything. Yet for us he became a man.

*Athanasius takes the baby in his arms*

Athanasius: Three hundred years later we finally worked out how we should understand what John the Evangelist had written in his gospel, that Jesus came into the world being God himself, not a creation of God. This is now the understanding of the church.

*David comes onto stage and takes the baby in his arms*

David: And 2000 years later, we still worship the baby Jesus born as man and eventually to die for us. John told us, "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to

become children of God". Today, we come to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and to celebrate that this baby has now made us all the children of God. We give thanks to God for this.

*David thanks the children, gives the blessing, and announces the final carol.*

Carol **Hark the herald angels sing**

Songs **Tonight & We wish you a merry Christmas**

### **Speaking parts:**

Two Narrators (all scenes)

Emperor Constantine (1)

Four protestors (1)

Athanasius (1,5)

Four scientists (2)

Elizabeth (3)

Zechariah (3)

John the Baptist (3,5)

Person being baptised (3)

Two priests (3)

Gabriel (4)

Herod (4)

Two advisors (4)

Three kings (4,5)

25 speaking parts in total, divided by scenes (excluding narrators) as

Scene 1: 6

Scene 2: 4

Scene 3: 6

Scene 4: 7

Scene 5: 6

**Non-speaking parts**

Members of the crowd of protestors

People to be baptised

Mary and Joseph

Shepherds