

2009 Nativity play

Carol: *It came upon the midnight clear*

Scene 1: In the temple

Narrator When something of historical importance happens, we ask the question “where were you when you heard it?”. We now get news from so many different places (*pause whilst the a range of news outlets is shown in the screen*).

The Christmas story has to be the most monumental event in history; it was the time when God stepped into the world as a human, born as a baby, with the purpose of bringing us all into His family. We think of the baby Jesus being born in a cold quiet night in a small town that did not have enough space to provide a bed. Hardly anyone knew what was happening that night, but this morning we are going to look at the few people who were told – and believed. We start a few years before, in the Temple with two devout people: Simeon the priest and Anna.

Anna and Simeon are sitting at a table in the temple reading. The angel is off-stage. Anna closes her book.

Anna I think I will call it a day now. I have just about finished.

Simeon Yes, you should go now. I would like to finish my favourite passage in Isaiah and then I will turn in as well.

Anna Sleep well. See you in the morning.

Simeon Will do.

Anna walks off, Simeon remains reading. There is a call from the side.

Angel Simeon, Simeon

Simeon (*Looks up anxious*) Anna, is that you? Where are you? (*Walks to one side to take a look, the opposite side to where the angel will appear. Then speaks to himself*) I thought everyone had left before we locked up. I must be hearing things.

Angel #2 Simeon, Simeon.

Simeon (*Noticeably startled*) Who’s there?

Whilst Simeon looks in the wrong direction, the angel steps onto the stage.

Angel #2 Simeon, don’t be afraid, I am over here. I come from God to bring you a message. *Simeon turns around, sees the Angel, and kneels down.*

Simeon Lord, is it you?

Angel #2 I come from God. He has seen how faithful and devoted you are, and how you have been hoping to see the Messiah. I have come to tell you that you shall not die before you have seen the Christ with your own eyes.

Simeon Will this be soon?

Angel #2 That I cannot say, but remain faithful and true, and believe what I have told you.

Simeon I will. I will. Praise be to God.

Angel moves away, leaving Simeon on his knees. Anna appears from the other side.

Anna Simeon, Simeon.

Simeon (*who thinks he is still talking to the Angel*) Lord, I am still here.

Anna Of course you are. What are you doing down there?

Simeon Oh Anna, it is you. (*Stands up*)

Anna Who else did you think it was? Who were you talking to?

Simeon Anna, something amazing has just happened. You must believe what I am going to tell you...

Simeon and Anna walk off talking.

Scene 2: Kings discussing the star in the East

Narrator Next we want to introduce you to some people who were given a sign, but then had to work out what the sign meant for themselves. We find ourselves in something that looks a bit like a classroom.

Leader *Leader comes in, everyone stands*
 Good morning everyone. Please sit down.
Everyone sits down
 You are probably wondering why I have called you to this briefing. Well, there have been some interesting developments that I need to tell you about. (*Turns to clip chart and points as he talks*) Here is an image of the night sky. We see all the major constellations here. But look at this one; it seems that we have a completely new star, and it is travelling westwards from where we are.

Wise man #1 So what is so special about this. It wouldn't be the first moving star we have ever seen?

Leader Good question. This star is getting brighter all the time, and it is moving quite fast and in rather an unusual direction. We have been following it for longer than usually we find.

Wise man #2 So where is it moving to?

Leader Okay, so let us look at this map (*turns to the next page on the clip chart*). We are here near the coast. The first sightings saw it in the East, over India, a few months ago. Now it is almost overhead. We reckon it is heading for Israel and then possibly further into the Roman empire.

Wise man #1 So does this have any meaning?

Leader I am going to let Melchior take over here. He has been looking into this.
Leader steps to one side. Melchior comes up from the team to the clip board.

Melchior So we have had a team of experts investigating this point, and they have come up with something. They seem to think it might mean there is a new king about to be born to the Jews.

Wise man #2 What sort of king? Aren't the Jews under Roman rule?

Melchior Indeed they are, which is interesting. We first studied the possibility that this would be a king who would lead a revolt and throw off the Roman rule. But we don't think this is the case.

Wise man #1 What other sort of king would the Jews want then?

Melchior We now think that his kingdom will be of a spiritual type.

Wise man #2 What sort of kingdom is that?

Melchior Not one that we know much about. On one hand this king will be bringing peace with God, but on the other hand there will be suffering and conflict. That is as much as we know at present. However, we do believe that this will be a significant, even world changing, event. (*Sits down*)

Leader (*stands up again*). Thank you Melchior. So the next question is what do we do? We are proposing that Melchior should lead a small party to look for this king.

Wise man #1 What will this party do if they find the king?

Leader Two things. First, present some gifts, secondly worship him.

Wise man #2 What sort of gifts?

Leader We think that three gifts are appropriate: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold because he is a king, frankincense because he will also be a priest, and myrrh because we believe he will die.

Wise man #1 So who will be in this party?

Leader I want to ask for volunteers. You are going into Roman territory so it could be dangerous, and you are going to worship a new king, which may be a problem for the authorities. So we need people who really believe and are committed to finding this king. Melchior, how many were you thinking of?

Melchior I would think three people minimum, maybe a few more, various servants to help carry stuff.

Leader So, any volunteers?

Wise man #1 Count me in.

Wise man #2 And me.

Others *(disordered unison)* We'll come to help.

Leader Great. Melchior, they are all yours.

Melchior Ok chaps, no time to waste. Let's go!
All get up quickly and leave.

Carol *Infant holy, infant lowly*

Scene 3: Library in Jerusalem

Narrator We take you to a room deep inside the palace in Jerusalem, to the Palace library. You need to be quiet here. Ssshhhh, there are people working here.

Two scholars are working at a table with big books. Another scholar, #1, comes down from the pulpit with another big book and plonks it down loudly on the table where someone else is sitting.

Scholar #1 Sorry about that. These books are just so heavy.

Scholar #2 No problem. You have been working very hard in here these last few days. What are you looking at?

Scholar #1 I'm not sure yet, but I want to show you this to see what you think. But it has to be a secret because the implications would be enormous.
Goes across and taps scholar #3 on the shoulder before speaking to him.
Can I show you this too.

Scholar #3 Sure.
Scholar #1 sits down at his books and the other two stand looking over his shoulders.

Scholar #1 Two things have come to my notice recently. First is that there are people talking about a Messiah. According to my sources, there is a priest in the temple who believes he will see the Messiah in his lifetime, but he is getting old. So maybe he is wrong, as these people often are.

Scholar #2 And what was the other thing?

Scholar #1 Apparently there is a new star in the sky, and another group of people I look after, so to speak, have told me that their preliminary understanding is that this points to a new king being born.

Scholar #3 So you are putting these two together to suggest a new king is imminent?

Scholar #2 Wow, that is dynamite.

Scholar #1 Exactly.

Scholar #2 I can see why you want to keep this quiet.

Scholar #3 And what would King Herod say?
Scholar #1 and Scholar #2 look at Scholar #3 shaking their heads.

Scholar #3 Sorry – silly question

Scholar #1 So I have been looking at the prophets in our sacred writing, and I think I can piece some things together. Look here *(they all look at the page)* in the book of the prophet Micah.

- Scholar #2 (reading) "But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come one who will be ruler over Israel."
- Scholar #1 So I reckon that if there is a new king, he will be born in Bethlehem.
- Scholar #3 And you think soon?
- Scholar #1 Exactly.
- Scholar #2 What else have you been finding?
- Scholar #1 This next bit is quite hard, but I reckon that if we look at this other book, namely from the prophet Isaiah, there is more (*drags another book over*). Look at this.
- Scholar #2 (reading) "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.
- Scholar #1 There's loads like this. It is clear that this king will be a direct descendant of King David, which again points to Bethlehem. And all this peace stuff, it seems to me that it isn't talking about just fighting off the Romans but is about peace with God. It seems to me that Isaiah believed that this new king would somehow be put to death so that everyone can be forgiven of their sins.
- Scholar #3 Are you sure about this? If this leaks out it could be very dangerous for many people – including us.
- Scholar #1 I am sure. That's why we have to keep this to ourselves, but be prepared. At any point we may need to act on this knowledge.
Thunder crack sound to add to the suspense.
- Carol See, amid the winter snow

Scene 4: Mary and Joseph

- Narrator Mary and Joseph were ordinary people looking forward to an ordinary life together. However, Mary then received news that their lives were going to be turned upside down. She decided to go away to the home of her cousin Elizabeth, who like Mary was expecting a baby that had been promised by an angel in extraordinary circumstances.
- Elizabeth is doing some jobs in the house. There is then a knock at the door, that is repeated whilst Elizabeth puts down her things.*
- Mary (from outside) Elizabeth, Elizabeth, it's Mary.
- Elizabeth Mary, Mary, I'm coming.
Elizabeth runs off and brings Mary back on. They embrace as befits cousins who haven't seen each other for a while, and who share a common experience.
- Elizabeth Sit down, sit down. You must be tired. This is wonderful having you here. You are truly blessed among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. As soon as I heard you knock, the baby inside me kicked as if he was leaping for joy.
- Mary Thank you. I have come here quickly because it is so difficult back home.
- Elizabeth I can imagine. No-one really believes that my baby is a gift from God. You must have the same problem.
- Mary Yes I do. And it is very hard for Joseph because he doesn't really understand. And he is such a good man.
- Elizabeth He probably just needs some time on his own to come to terms with it. Your letter said that you were told about your baby by an angel.

Mary Yes. I was on my own at home quietly getting on with something, when suddenly the angel appeared. I was very frightened, but the angel was very kind to me. He told me that I would have a baby boy, who is to be called Jesus, and that he will have the throne of David and rule over his kingdom forever more.

Elizabeth That is how it was for my dear husband Zechariah. The angel told him that my son will prepare the people for Jesus. It is amazing being told in such a special way with messengers from God. How do you feel about it all?

Mary I am rejoicing in God our saviour, because he has remembered a humble servant such as me. The mighty one has done great things for me.

Elizabeth Indeed I see the spirit lives! I'll show you to your room.
They stand up to leave and talk whilst walking away
How long do you think you will be staying?

Mary About three months if that is okay.

Elizabeth Of course it is.
Mary and Elizabeth walk off.

Joseph appears on the other side of the stage and sits down. An angel then comes and sits next to him.

Angel #1 You look a bit down.

Joseph I am.

Angel #1 What's up old chap? Affairs of the heart?

Joseph You could say that. I am engaged to a lovely girl, Mary by name. A lovely girl. But she is expecting a baby, and I am not the father. Now she has gone away to her cousins near Jerusalem and I don't know when she is coming back. To be honest, I don't know what to do.

Angel #1 What did she say?

Joseph This is the funny thing. She said that her baby comes from God. What's that all about?

Angel #1 Maybe it is the truth.

Joseph Whatever...

Angel #1 No listen. Maybe her child really is the Son of God, and maybe you have the privilege of acting as his father.

Joseph What do you actually mean by maybe?

Angel #1 Well, actually, I don't mean maybe at all. I am telling you that what Mary has told you is exactly how it is.

Joseph How would you know? And who are you?

Angel #1 I am an angel, sent by God to tell you that you should take Mary as your wife as you had planned.

Joseph Oh yes? How can you be an angel?

Angel #1 Look at me (*stands up, arms stretched out*). You don't think I would walk around dressed like this if I was a person like you?
Joseph touches the angel and tugs at his/her clothes.

Joseph I see your point.

Angel #1 Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Her baby has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. You are to call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Narrator Even now it was a lot for Joseph to take in. However, after a few days he began to understand that he and Mary had been chosen by God to be the parents of the Saviour of the World.

Some months later Joseph learned that he had to return to the home of his Ancestors to register for a special taxation. Joseph was descended from King

David, and thus he and Mary had to travel to the small town of Bethlehem in the South only days before their baby was due.

Song *Here I am to worship*

Scene 5: Herod's palace.

Narrator The Palace in Jerusalem was in turmoil. The home of the King was host to some strangers claiming that a new king had been born, and they were carrying some expensive gifts for him. Particularly the gold; King Herod would have loved some of that gold. But there was nothing for him other than the threat that he now had a rival.

Herod sitting on throne.

Herod *(Loudly)* Where is everyone, come on, where are you all?

Aide #1 They should be here soon your majesty. They have all been called.

Scholars come in hurriedly and kneel down.

Herod Okay, okay, get up and sit over there *(wiggles his hand in the direction of the seat)*. We don't have time for this. *(Scholars move over to the seat)* I gather there is a party of travellers from the East who have ended up at the palace. Where are they now?

Aide #2 They are waiting in the room across the courtyard. Would your majesty like to see them?

Herod Of course not. What do they want.

Aide #1 They claim to be looking for the King of the Jews.

Herod Well I am King of the Jews, and have been for some time. So they have come to the right place. But *(pause)*, I gather they are looking for a new-born King. *(In a demanding way)* Who are they really looking for?

Aide #2 *(hesitantly)* The palace scholars... Well they have a theory *(pauses)*

Herod Well get on with it.

Scholar #1 Your majesty, we have been looking at the sacred scriptures and we think that there will be a new king, who will be born in Bethlehem.

Herod Bethlehem eh? That is not so far away. Maybe we can do something if we are quick. What else do you know?

Scholar #2 That he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Scholar #3 That he is from the House of David, and that he will rule for evermore.

Herod Silence, I have heard enough. Do you all believe this? Anyway we can't take the risk. We need a plan. Whoever and wherever this child king is, we must find him and destroy him.

Aide #1 How can this be done?

Herod You say that the travellers are waiting for us. Do they know where they are going?

Aide #2 Not really, they came to us for help.

Herod Then this is the plan: we will tell them to go to Bethlehem, and tell them to come back to tell us where the baby is.

Aide #3 Why would they want to come back?

Herod Good point *(pauses/thinks)* We will tell them that we want to worship the new king too. I am sure they will buy that sort of nonsense. You, you, you *(pointing to the three aides)*, send the travellers on their way, and stress they have to come back here immediately. *(Claps his hand once)*. Go on, get on with it.

Aides go off in one direction, scholars in another. Finally Herod leaves.

Song You're the word of God the Father

Scene 6: Angels visit the shepherds

Shepherds walk slowly from the back with sheep sounds, starting with a whistle and talking to each other as they walk. They go onto the stage and sit down.

Shepherd #1 A nice clear night tonight.

Shepherd #2 But a bit cold.

Shepherd #3 Let's warm ourselves by the fire.

Shepherds get close to the fire.

Shepherd #1 *(sounding alarmed, and pointing down the aisle)* What is that bright light over there?

Two angels run up from the back and stand before the shepherds to address them.

Angel #1 Don't worry, you look so afraid.

Angel #2 You didn't expect to see us, did you?

Angel #1 *(pause)* We have come to bring you good news of great joy that is for all people.

Angel #2 Tonight, in the town of David, a saviour has been born. He is Christ the Lord.

Angel #1 And this shall be the sign, if you go down to Bethlehem now, you will find a baby lying in a manger and wrapped in cloths.

Angel #2 But before you go, this is our moment.

Angel #1 Yes we have been waiting for ages for this. And we are all very excited.

Angel #2 So hold on to your hats, because we are going to praise God. *(calls out)* Come on everyone.

The angels rush up from the back and onto the stage with a loud whooshing sound.

Angel #1 You didn't expect this did you?

Angel #2 So before you go, join in praising God for the birth of His Son.

Song Lord we lift your name on high

Angels run off the stage to the back.

Shepherd #1 Amazing! Let us go to Bethlehem to see what the angels have told us.

Shepherd #2 But do we believe it's true?

Shepherd #3 pinches/hits Shepherd #2 on the shoulder

Shepherd #2 Ouch! What was that for?

Shepherd #3 Just to show you that you are not dreaming!

Shepherd #1 Let's run ...

Shepherds run off the stage together.

Scene 7: Nativity

The nativity is assembled by children walking up and taking their place on one side, accompanied by music, in order:

1. *Mary and Joseph with baby, sit down.*
2. *Angels come and stand behind Mary and Joseph.*
3. *Shepherds come and sit at the feet of Mary and Joseph.*
4. *Wise men come in and give their gifts.*

Anna moves onto the stage and Simeon moves into the pulpit. Mary and Joseph take their baby over to Anna who climbs into the pulpit and passes it to Simeon. Simeon and Anna speak from the pulpit.

Simeon Lord, my eyes have seen your salvation as you promised. A light of revelation for all nations, and for glory to your people Israel. Mary and Joseph, may God bless you.

Anna We have waited a long time for this moment. Now God has shown us His salvation.

Narrator *(from the lectern)* The Christmas story ends with Jesus being blessed by Simeon and Anna in the temple in Jerusalem. Simeon had lived the last few years of his life knowing that he would not die before seeing the Christ. After this Mary and Joseph took Jesus back to their home in the North of the country, where he grew as a child, developed into a man, and took on his father's profession, before beginning his work as a teacher 30 years later. Jerusalem hadn't seen the end of Jesus, because it was at Jerusalem where Jesus was arrested, tried and executed, and then came back to life at the first Easter. And out of Jerusalem grew the church that today across the world is celebrating together the gift of God in Jesus Christ. And this gives us all the opportunity to hear the good news and to believe.

Song *When love came down to Earth*

Word from the Vicar and closing prayer

Carol *Hark the herald angels sing*