

Christmas play 2010

Scene I. Herod

*Herod is sitting on his seat with head down so as not to draw attention.
Narrator stands in the pulpit.*

Narrator 1 A long time ago, just over 2000 years ago in fact, in a small town called Bethlehem that lay just South of the city of Jerusalem, a baby was born.

Narrator 2 At that time Israel was occupied by the Roman armies. The Romans had elected Herod as King of the Jews and delegated ruling powers to him. But Herod was a bad king.

Herod stands up

Herod Are you calling me bad? I am not bad, I am efficient. You need to understand this well, under Roman rule *good* men make *bad* leaders. It is about survival, you have to be tough to survive. And understand this too, the fate of the nation of Israel depends on me surviving.

Narrator 1 So what would you do if you had a rival?

Herod What do you think? For the sake of the nation, the rival must be got rid of. And by any means. It isn't about being good, it's about being efficient.

Narrator 2 That's not very nice.

Herod [*Impatiently*] Do you *really* not get the point. We have no control. Take a current example. The Romans want to know everything about their empire. So what do they do? They are demanding a census, and I have to get my administration to organise this. We don't have time, and we have much better things to do, but when Caesar Augustus wants something, we have to jump.

So you ask about rivals. I have no choice but to just get rid of them: quickly, efficiently, no fuss, just get it done. Same with this census. It's a waste of our time, so we will be efficient. Everyone to go to their place of origin to register. No questions, no ifs or buts, just do it.

Narrator 1 But what about, say, if you have a young husband and wife expecting a baby any minute?

Herod So what? You heard me. No questions, no ifs, no buts, just do it. We haven't got time for excuses. Just go. And if we lose a few en route, tough. Living under the Romans is tough, and caring is a luxury we just can't afford.

Narrator 2 But what about compassion?

Herod [*With even more impatience*] And you *still* don't understand? You are like all the people who live around here. Never happy. Always complaining, and never grateful for all I have done for them.

Narrator 1 I am sure people do appreciate the good things you do.

- Herod Ha! Take the temple... Cost me a lot of money, and it's much better than the heap of stones they had before. But what happens? The priests sit inside their wonderful rooms plotting against me. And peace; this country hasn't had such peace for a long time. But what happens? You get the shepherds up in the hills, it's the first time they can look after their sheep safely, but all they do is plot against me and against the Romans. Even my wife and sons want to overthrow me. If only people were grateful for what I have given them, instead of always wanting what they can't have.
- Narrator 2 So what can you do about them?
- Herod Simple, you have to crush them. Whether they are shepherds, priests or even my own family, the only way is to be ruthless and efficient.
- And you know what my next problem is? Some nutcase astrologers claiming to be 'wise men' have turned up looking for a new king. Typical.
- Narrator 1 What will you do with them.
- Herod I don't suppose I can lock them up. We will get rid of them as quickly as possible, but first we will find out whether there is something more behind it, and if there is ... [*sign a slit throat and walk off*]
- Carol *See amid the winter snow*

Scene 2. **Anna and Simeon**

Anna and Simeon are sitting on a seat with head down so as not to draw attention. Narrator stands in the pulpit.

- Narrator 3 In the temple in Jerusalem we find a priest called Simeon and a prophetess called Anna. Simeon has been promised by the Holy Spirit that he will not die before he had seen the Messiah. Simeon and Anna are now old people.
- Simeon stands up*
- Simeon Have some respect, we are not that old!
- Anna stands up*
- Anna Come, come, we are getting on a bit. We are not going to live forever.
- Simeon But we haven't yet seen the Messiah, and it isn't looking likely just yet. Look at the times we live in – crushed under the weight of Roman rule and that traitor King Herod.
- Narrator 4 But surely some things are good. Look at the wonderful temple you are in, and you do have peace in the streets.
- Simeon Hardly peace. Our high priest was drowned by Herod, yes, drowned; his own brother-in-law. Then forty six of our rabbis were executed.
- Anna But you are right, we do have a beautiful temple, and it has been my home for the past fifty years. It is also true that the Romans let us worship God in our own way. I am able to pray and fast every day.

- Narrator 3 So what do you think about the Romans then? Do you want to replace them?
- Simeon We are not interested in a new ruler or a new kingdom. A new kingdom will only last as long as any other. That is what the rebels in the hills don't understand. If we get rid of the Romans, someone else will come along.
- Anna Instead we are looking for the Lord's Messiah. He will give us more than peace from the Romans. He will give us peace with God that will last forever. His kingdom will be based on justice and righteousness. The Messiah will be the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.
- Narrator 4 How do you know this?
- Simeon God has spoken to us.
- Anna *And* it is written in our scriptures.
- Narrator 3 Does God speak to many people about these things?
- Simeon I don't know, but you can imagine that the Holy Spirit will at least tell the Messiah's parents.
- Anna We believe that the Messiah will be born to a virgin mother. That is what the prophets tell us. We expect that the mother will have been told something.
- Simeon As for us, we are waiting here in Jerusalem, and we know that we won't be waiting long now.
- Narrator 7 We have heard of Simeon and Anna's anticipation of the coming Messiah. Our next song echoes the message of the Gospel that Jesus is the Word of God the Father, and the author of creation, but that he came to Earth as a baby for our salvation.
- Song* *You're the Word of God the Father*

Scene 3. Mary and Joseph

The scene begins with Mary sitting down alone.

- Narrator 5 Far away from Jerusalem in the North of the country is a small town called Nazareth. Not much happens in Nazareth. It is just a small market town in the hills, where people mind their own business.
- Narrator 6 One of the residents is a carpenter called Joseph. He is engaged to marry Mary, but Mary has told him something he cannot understand. She claims to have been visited by an angel, who has told her that she is to bear a child from God.
- Narrator 5 True enough, she is pregnant, but Joseph is not able to understand this as anything other than a total embarrassment and disaster. He is very much in love with Mary, and doesn't yet know what to do.

Mary stands. Knock on the door, and Joseph comes in

- Mary So Joseph, what have you come to say for yourself? You may well look bashful. I have hardly seen you since I spoke to you about the angel telling me about our baby.
- Joseph I know. I haven't known what to do. I love you very much, but what you told me about the angel and the baby was unbelievable. But I had a dream last night. It was so real that it seems much more than a dream.
- Mary So what was your dream about.
- Joseph It was about us and the baby. An angel spoke to me and told me not to be afraid to marry you. He said that all you have told me is true, that your baby has been conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- Mary Terrific! So now you do believe me. I knew that at some point you had to believe me.
- Mary and Joseph embrace, then sit down holding hands*
- Mary Tell me more.
- Joseph One very important thing. We are to call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.
- Mary And so what's next?
- Joseph [*on knees*] Will you still marry me?
- Mary Of course!
- Cheers all round! Mary and Joseph sit down again during the next narration,*
- Narrator 6 After a few months it was announced in Nazareth that the Romans had called a census, and the plan was for everyone to go to their city of origin to be registered.
- Narrator 5 For Joseph, this meant a journey to Bethlehem, and exactly at the time their baby was due to be born. For a person in good health, the journey to Bethlehem would take the better part of a week.
- Mary No chance to book a hotel in Bethlehem before we leave, no-one to accompany us, only one mule between us to carry our tent, our bedding, our food, *and me*. Just days away from when Jesus is to be born. This is going to be a terrible journey.
- Joseph I'm afraid there isn't much we can do about it.
- Mary Can't we just ignore it. I hear that plenty of others intend to not take part.
- Joseph Yes, but not us. We have to go. It doesn't matter whether our reasons are good, the Romans will not take account of them.
- Narrator 6 Joseph and Mary, you will be fine. God will take care of you.
- Joseph Mary, it is written in the prophecy of Micah that Bethlehem will be the place where the Saviour will be born. This is all God's plan. We will be fine, I am sure of that. Micah was writing about us. We can trust in God.

During the following narration Mary and Joseph walk off and back onto the stage and sit down in a corner beside the manger, and take the baby.

- Narrator 5 So Mary and Joseph arrived safely in Bethlehem. However, they found that all the hotel rooms were fully booked. One worried innkeeper, aware that Mary was about to give birth, and knowing that there was little accommodation in the town, allowed them to stay in the animal shelter in the back.
- Narrator 6 That night Jesus was born. He was laid down to sleep in the manger that the cows and horses eat from. The innkeeper's family did all they could to help, but were not at all aware that the baby asleep in the straw was the Saviour of mankind.
- Narrator 7 We have travelled with Mary and Joseph from the first visit of the angel to the stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Our next song reflects on the joy, the hope, the peace and the love that comes with the birth of Jesus. Just as Jesus was born in an intimate personal moment, for us the birth of Jesus is also a personal celebration, because He is *our* saviour.
- Song* *When love came down to Earth*

Scene 4. Shepherds

Shepherds in the field

- Narrator 1 We now meet some of King Herod's least favourite people. Shepherds in the fields surrounding Bethlehem, ostensibly watching their flocks, but then again possibly plotting rebellion.
- Shepherd 1 Not us. We don't want to be part of a rebellion.
- Shepherd 2 We might not like the Romans, but we aren't heroes.
- Shepherd 3 We are just simple people, trying to do our job and keep out of trouble.
- Narrator 2 So none of you are plotting a revolution?
- Shepherd 4 Not us 'guv'.
- Shepherd 1 And you mustn't give anyone the idea that we are.
- Shepherd 2 Just a hint of trouble and we are all 'gonnas'.
- Narrator 1 Okay, your secret is safe with us.
- Shepherd 3 Look matey boy, there is no secret.
- Shepherd 4 And you mustn't give anyone the idea that there is.
- Shepherd 1 Or else we are all 'gonnas'.
- Narrator 2 All right, we get the point. But there must be some people around here who are planning the revolution.
- Shepherd 2 These are dark and lonely places. Who knows who else is in these hills?

Shepherd 3 All sorts of people pass by. Earlier this evening we caught sight of a procession of what looked like kings, riding on camels ...

Shepherd 4 ... with servants, and obviously carrying many gifts. Now that is what I would call subversive.

Shepherd 1 And look over there. [*points to the back*]

Shepherd 2 Something really bright is coming that really doesn't look regular.

Shepherd 3 What is it?

Shepherd 4 We all could be gonnas!

Sounds of angels coming, with angels running up the aisle together. Shepherds fall to the floor.

Angel 1 Do not be afraid. We bring you good news of great joy for all people.

Angel 2 Today in Bethlehem a saviour has been born; he is Christ the Lord.

Angel 3 And this will be the sign: you will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Angel 4 Come on, don't be afraid. Come and join us to sign together

Angles help the shepherds to their feet

Song *Lord, we lift your name on high*

Angel 5 Hurry to Bethlehem, to worship the new born king.

Angels and shepherds leave the stage at the end.

Narrator 7 The Shepherds hurry towards Bethlehem to see the sight the angels have told them about. They are not the only ones on a journey. A group of wise men have also seen a sign, and are anticipating the birth of a new king. They have come to worship.

Scene 5. Wise men

Narrator 3 We return now to Herod's palace, where his guards are questioning three wise men who claim to be looking for a new king. Having met King Herod, you will appreciate how well this is likely to go down!

Guard 1 Tell us who are you and what you want.

Wise man 1 We are looking for the ruler.

Guard 2 Yes, this is King Herod's palace. But you must state your business.

Guard 3 And don't move any closer.

Wise man 2 Steady on, we come in peace.

Wise man 3 We are looking for a new-born king.

- Guard 1 There's no new-born king here. Be off with you before we call for you to be locked up.
- Wise man 1 Look, we have been following that star up in the skies.
- Wise man 2 It is a star that means that a new King has been born, and we have come to worship him.
- Wise man 3 And the star has come to rest right here.
- Guard 2 I don't think so. Looks more like it is over Bethlehem. Isn't that where you should be going?
- Guard 3 Do yourselves and us a favour and go to look in Bethlehem first. And leave us alone. No-one here wants to hear about a so-called new king, not least from a bunch of strangers.
- Wise man 1 We must insist. This is a palace, right? And we are looking for a King, so this is the place to start.
- Wise man 2 And even if it is Bethlehem we need, surely someone in the palace must know about it.
- Wise man 3 So go along good man and get someone to talk with us. I am sure you wouldn't want to be seen to ignore such important news.
- Narrator 4 Feeling afraid, the guards called for help, and were told to invite the wise men into the palace. They are brought into a large room where they are met by Herod's officials. The news had also reached King Herod.
- Official 1 So who are these people?
- Guard 1 They claim that a new king has been born.
- Official 2 Didn't you tell them that there is no new king.
- Guard 2 Of course, but they don't want to listen. So we thought it best to bring them to you.
- Official 1 [*To the kings*] So what have you got to say for yourself?
- Wise man 1 As we told them [*points to guards*] we have been following a star that we first saw in the East.
- Wise man 2 It is a star that foretells the birth of a new king.
- Wise man 3 And it has come to rest over here, so we have come to the palace to find out more.
- Guard 3 Seemed to us that it was closer to Bethlehem than here.
- Guard 1 But we couldn't persuade them to look there first.
- Official 2 Wait here. King Herod is on his way down.
- Trumpet sound. In bursts Herod.*

- Herod Okay. It's not been a good day and I am too tired to stand around talking. I have discussed this with my advisors and this is what they say. If there is a new king to be born, it will be in Bethlehem, isn't that right?
- Official 1 So it says in the prophet Micah.
- Herod I think this is nonsense, but it is the best I can do. And if you do find a new-born king, come back to tell me so that we can go to worship too. I don't have time or energy to chase after nonsense, but if there is any truth in this, you have better come back here right away. [*With menace*] Do you understand?
- Wise men [*Nod heads*] Yes King Herod
- Herod If there is a king, and you don't do what I ask, I will find out, and I will want to know why. [*With menace*] You had better understand, and understand well. [*change of tone – trying to be polite*] I am concerned, because, of course, if there is a new king, I too would like to worship him.
- [*Beckons to the guards*] Right, show these people out,
- The guards escort the wise men off the stage. Herod storms out followed by his officials.*
- Pause as we move to the nativity scene.*
- Narrator 7 As the wise men travel to Bethlehem to worship the new-born king, with the shepherds before them, now we travel to the stable to worship together.
- Song *Here I am to worship*
- We set up the nativity scene accompanied by the song. First with Mary and Joseph, then in order angels, shepherds, wise men, Anna and Simeon, and Herod's guards and officials.*
- Narrator 5 We have moved through the Christmas story and met the central characters: Mary and Joseph, the angels, shepherds and wise men, Anna and Simeon, and Herod with his court officials. We have reached the point where all have come to worship the baby Jesus lying in the manger.
- Narrator 6 The good news of the Christmas story is set in a time where people were looking for salvation from oppression, cruelty, fear, injustice and poverty. This setting is not very different from many places in the world today.
- Narrator 5 We have all come to worship the baby Jesus. His birth does not just offer a fresh start, or a new kingdom, but that we can all become children of God. Let us celebrate and share that good news.