

a script from

231 WORSHIP

PURCHASE

SCRIPT

TO

REMOVE

"Christmas Intervention"

By

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WATERMARK

AT

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PURCHASE

What Grandma’s been praying that the family will get together for what’s likely her last Christmas. With some divine intervention - through the help of famous Bible characters - her prayers come to life. The surprising encounters each family member has when they’re dropped into the timelines of beloved Bible characters, brings humor and the true meaning of Christmas to life.

Themes: Christmas, Restoration, Prayer, Humor, Bible Characters, Family, Advent, Hope, Forgiveness, Love, Relationships, Ensemble, Grace

Who

- Rapha**, an angel
- Elizabeth**, the mother of John the Baptist
- John**, the disciple Jesus loved
- Joseph**, the husband of Mary
- Balthasar**, a Wiseman
- Prodigal**, the son who returned home
- Kendra**, a homemaker and matriarch
- Jim**, a youth pastor
- Angela**, an up-and-coming influencer
- Archie**, an up-and-coming business man
- Amanda**, a daughter who misses home
- Grandma**, the woman praying for her whole family (non-speaking part)

When The present, in the days before Christmas, and throughout biblical history at key moments in each Bible characters’ timeline.

Costumes Period clothing for the Bible characters. On-trend clothing for the characters who live in the present. **Tromos** can wear all white (shirt and pants or a robe). **See props list** for costume specifics for each story.

Props

Opening Scene: A **table** and **chairs** (the same one that will be used in Kendra’s scene and the closing scene). **Six Clip boards** (or bundles of papers to serve as the briefing notes) and **six pens**.

Elizabeth/Kendra: Elizabeth is **visibly pregnant** and wears a clean robe, with a modest **head scarf**. Kendra is dressed in comfortable clothes and wears an **apron**. She has a **recipe book** and a **mixing bowl**. Her hair is unkempt and she has flour on her face; she wears a nice Christmas sweater in the final scene. **Kitchen table** (same as in opening and closing scene) and **chairs**. **Crunchy chips** that serve as locust.

John/Jim: Pastor Jim looks trendy. He may even wear skinny jeans. (For laughs, style him in the type of clothes the youth pastor at your church wears). John wears a simple robe. Jim needs a **smart phone**.

Joseph/Angela: Joseph wears a clean robe, the picture of simplicity; Angela’s foil. He carries a few **pieces of wood** (2x4s will do). Angela is dressed up as a Wiseman—colorful robes and a **cape** as well as a **crown**. She wears a lot of makeup. She has a **smartphone**, a **selfie stick** and a bright **ring light** on a **tripod** so she can record a live stream. Everything about her is over the top.

Balthasar/Archie: Balthasar wears a simple but nice robe, he is well kept and confident. He can also wear a turban. Archie is dressed up in really nice clothes, almost too nice, as though he’s trying to look more professional and wealthy than he really is. He also has a **phone** and **shiny cufflinks**.

Prodigal/Amanda: Amanda wears jeans and a sweater (stylish and comfortable). Prodigal is in a dirty robe. He has dirt on his face and his hair is messy. He looks like he hasn’t showered in weeks. Their scene needs a **smartphone**; **dirty bucket** or pail with **fruit rinds**.

Closing scene: The **kitchen table** at Kendra’s with **chairs**. **Dishes** for setting the table for a Christmas dinner (as simple or elaborate as you like). **Wrapped Christmas gifts**.

Why

Luke 1:5-25, John 17:20-23, Matthew 1:20-25; 2:13-18, Matthew 2:1-12, 6:19-20, Luke 1:11- 32

How

There is a lot of joy and humor in this play. Think of the famous Bible characters as three dimensional – real people who are re-visiting the role that they played in history–for people in the present who need to learn key truths in their own lives. They are like mentors or trusted friends.

Have fun with **“the drop”** – the moment when present day characters land within the timeline of the Bible characters. In the script it’s written as though the characters suddenly jump and land in the crouching stance like The Black Widow in the Marvel films. But you can play with it and invite your actors to find something signature that works for them. It should become an obvious and fun cue for the audience to visually understand they’ve landed in the Bible timeline.

Christmas is a loaded time for people, filled with hope, expectation, faith, family challenges, disappointment, and loneliness. The characters in this story, even though we just get a snapshot of their lives, are like the people in your church: complex, three-dimensional, with so much more going on under the surface than just the “I’m fine” sound bite we often hear. Explore the layers of what people show on the surface and what they have in their depth. That could be shown in body language, mannerisms, and breathing. And use the Bible characters as foils or mirrors where it makes sense to. For example, how Jim holds his phone and carries himself (tense shoulders, body wound up like a spring) could be contrasted by John’s relaxed or open stance. Elizabeth nurturing and hugging her baby bump, peacefully sitting in the kitchen can contrast Kendra’s unkempt, exhausted appearance as she nervously clutches the mixing bowl, and so on.

Use **lighting**, where possible, to add expectation or suspense. Highlighting characters in light and shadow can add drama and excitement for the audience as the characters enter and exit the Biblical timeline.

Time

45 to 60 mins

Rapha, an angel, enters the stage. He holds clip boards and a handful of pens. He walks over to a rectangular table, like something you'd see in a board room. He carefully places the clip boards at each seat and one pen beside each. He checks to make sure everything is in place then nods, pleased with himself.

Rapha: Best time of the year.

Elizabeth, visibly pregnant, enters the room. She waddles.

Rapha: Ms. Elizabeth, you're here!

Elizabeth: I'm early. But these days I like to make sure I have a seat. Standing is tough on these swollen ankles.

Rapha: Please, please sit down! You're already into character. Great to see.

He helps her into a seat.

Elizabeth: Method acting. I'm giving it a try.

Rapha: Ah, good! Here are the others.

A cast of four other unique characters enter: **John**, the Apostle, **The Prodigal Son**, **Balthasar**, one of the three famous Wise Men, and **Joseph**, the husband of Mary.

Prodigal: It's that time again!

Joseph sees **Elizabeth** and runs to greet her.

Joseph: Auntie Elizabeth. I'm so happy to see you!

Elizabeth: The band is back together!

John: I'm excited to see what we've got cooking this year, I'm usually used at Easter.

Balthasar: It's the best time of the year, it really is John!

Prodigal: I was surprised when I got the call. Christmas and my story don't always align.

Rapha: I was just saying to Ms. Elizabeth how wonderful this time of year is for the people of earth. Please, take your seats. Time is of the essence.

Prodigal: I was taught to never rush a Wise man.

The group chuckles.

Balthasar: Even Wisemen need deadlines and direction.

*All but **Rapha** take a seat. **Joseph** sits beside **Elizabeth**.*

Joseph: (to **Elizabeth**) Is that a prosthetic?

Elizabeth: It's one of the ceramic urns I found in the Archive. Used by that sweet widow who collected all the jars to fill with oil during Elisha's ministry, if you can believe it.

Joseph: No way!

***Rapha** stands, upstage, at the head of the table.*

Rapha: Thank you, each of you for being here, and on such short notice. For those of you who I haven't met yet, I'm Rapha, and I normally serve and support the archangels. But I got pulled into this because Christmas is all hands on deck.

I've gotta get this out of the way: I'm a big fan of each of your work. And, hopefully this will be a surprise to you and an indication at my discretion: Ms. Elizabeth, I was on assignment when your husband met Gabriel in the temple.

Elizabeth: Oh, so I have you to thank for those nine months of sweet silence.

The group chuckles.

Rapha: I can't take the credit for that. And Balthasar, I was part of the unit on protective duty as you made your way to the hill country in Bethlehem with your gifts.

Balthasar: How wonderful. I always sensed there was a special presence in the dunes as we made our way under that star. Thank you, dear one.

Rapha: But this isn't about me. It's not even about you. It's not even about the people that you're about to meet for a few unexpected, miraculous moments of disruption in the space-time continuum. (*pointing above*) It's about Him.

Prodigal raises his hand.

Rapha: Yes, Prodigal.

Prodigal: Actually, I have a question about that.

Rapha: Go ahead.

Prodigal: How does it... work?

John: I was wondering the same thing.

Prodigal: We all just get dropped in Earth time?

John: Is it at the same time?

Elizabeth: The briefing, or the pre-read, whatever you call it, said this was a family?

Rapha: Great questions. The short of it is, I'm not quite sure. It might help to think of these "drops" as we like to call them as open visions. These people are all living out their lives in Ordinary Time with all its humanity and challenges. Just like you did when you walked the earth in your eras.

Prodigal: And we just drop in on them?

Rapha: Sort of. I should note, this is my first Christmas intervention, so I appreciate your grace as I support this assignment. I can find out answers to the questions I don't have a handle on myself. But my understanding, on the logistics side, is that it's more like they're dropped into a key moment from your story in your biblical timeline. So, Elizabeth, you'll be in your kitchen in Bethany.

Elizabeth: Oh, I loved that place! The morning light through the window... all my potted herbs and flowers.

She breathes deeply with the lovely memory.

Rapha: Balthasar, you'll be in the Judean desert, on approach to Bethlehem.

Balthasar: Wonderful.

Rapha: John. *(consulting his clip board)* You'll be in the Garden of Gethsemane. And Prodigal. *(scanning the clipboard he stops)*

Prodigal: What? Let me guess.

Rapha: I'm sorry, but you'll be in a pig pen.

Prodigal: It's always the pig pen.

Rapha: It's part of the script.

Prodigal: We're good.

John slaps him on the back.

John: Enjoy those rinds.

Prodigal: Why don't we tag-team?

John: No thanks!

Rapha: So, as you’ve seen in the briefing –

Joseph: Excuse me.

Rapha looks up.

Joseph: Sorry to interrupt. What about me?

Rapha: Joseph, I’m so sorry. I forgot you were here.

Joseph: Sort of how it goes.

Rapha: Yes. *(scanning the sheet)* You’ll be in Alexandria.

Joseph: You mean, I won’t be in Bethlehem or Nazareth?

Rapha: I guess not. You’ll be meeting a very lively young woman....
An “Influencer.”

Joseph: What’s that?

Rapha: I’m not quite sure.

Prodigal: I think the exact opposite of you.

Joseph: Oh?

Prodigal: Which I mean as a complete compliment.

Rapha: As you read in the briefing, this group of people who are about to have their Christmas forever changed, are in a family network. Their grandmother, the widowed matriarch, has been praying.

Elizabeth: It’s always the sweet, faithful old ladies, I’m telling you.

Rapha: Her prayers have filled up an enormous vat in heaven and have spilled over. The Lord is answering her in a very real way this Christmas.

Balthasar: Wonderful, wonderful.

Rapha: It will be her last Christmas.

Balthasar: Oh no!

Joseph: May the Lord bless her and keep her.

Rapha: So, this really matters.

Balthasar: Will we meet her?

Rapha: Not on their side. But you will each meet one of the people so dear to her whose lives she has brought before the throne room through prayers and petitions as fragrant incense. So, we’re going to get moving soon. Take a bit of time to review the notes about your person, and get ready for the drop.

Elizabeth is first to pick up her clipboard. The others take up theirs as well and scan the documents.

Rapha: I’m here if you have any questions. We’ll drop you one by one, as the Spirit leads.

John: Who’s first?

Rapha: I have a note here, just wait. Oh, right! We’re trying something new. Any of you ever heard of Rock, Paper, Scissors?

Lights fade to end the scene.

Lights up on **Kendra**, who has an apron on. She is rifling through a cookbook looking at recipes. She has flour in her hair and on her cheeks and brow. She drops the book onto the floor in a huff.

Kendra: Why didn't I just say we'd order pizza and be done with it? A greasy, cheesy, pepperoni pizza for the Christmas meal. Get some sodas. Eat ice cream from the pail. What have I got myself into?

As she says “got myself into” **Kendra** jumps and lets out a loud whoop, the sound she'd make if she were on a fast and death-defying roller coaster ride. She lands in a crouched position (think the Black Widow crouch stance in the Marvel movies). She slowly stands up and looks around.

(If you can use stage lighting, **Elizabeth** can fade in from a spotlight, or, otherwise unfreeze from her position and step into the scene.)

Elizabeth appears behind **Kendra**. She stands holding her hand in a fist like she's just selected “Rock” in Rock, Paper, Scissors.

Elizabeth: Always go with scissors.

Kendra lets out a gasp of surprise.

Kendra: Who are you and why do you want my scissors?

Elizabeth: Don't be alarmed.

Kendra: Where did you come from?

Elizabeth: Listen, I get the pizza thing. I've been craving locust for the last seven months. I don't understand it, but the pregnant female body is a mystery.

Kendra: How did you get into my kitchen?

Elizabeth: Look around. I think you dropped into my kitchen.

Kendra: That's not possible.

Elizabeth: The pizza or your translocation across space and time? Here. Sit down.

***Kendra** sits on the chair **Elizabeth** offers and puts her head between her knees, trying to breathe.*

Elizabeth: Deep breaths now. That’s right. I hear they help for when the baby comes, too.

*After a few Lamaze-style breaths, **Kendra** recovers and sits back up.*

Kendra: Thank you. How far along are you?

Elizabeth: Seventy years and seven months.

Kendra: Did you say you were craving locust?

Elizabeth: What I wouldn’t do for a big bowl of grasshoppers. Garnished in honey. Mmmm

Kendra: Is that... um... typical cuisine here in...

Elizabeth: Bethany.

Kendra: Do you eat a lot of grasshoppers in Bethany?

Elizabeth: No. The thought would normally be disgusting to me, but the pregnant female body is –

Kendra: – a mystery. Yes. Wait! You said you’ve been pregnant for 70 years?

Elizabeth: Waiting to get pregnant for 70 years. Give or take.

Kendra: And you’re craving locust and honey?

Elizabeth: Like my life depended on it.

Kendra: So you must be...

Elizabeth: Yes dear. Elizabeth, wife of the priest Zechariah. He’s in the other room. I’d introduce you but he’s lost his voice.

Kendra: On account of the angel.

Elizabeth: You know the story.

Kendra: I do. We talk about it a lot at this time of year.

Elizabeth: So you also must know some of the details around my life.

Kendra: The jist.

Elizabeth: We waited so long for a child. It was like God put the desire for one in my heart, and there was just nothing I could do to realize the dream, other than pray. *(beat)* So what is it you’ve been waiting and praying for? What’s all this about pizza?

Kendra: You’ll laugh at me.

Elizabeth: No I won’t.

Kendra: You will. It’s so minor compared to your story.

Elizabeth: Listen, friend. The people that drop in here and encounter my story first-hand have a whole range of challenges and concerns. There’s no situation too big or too small that isn’t under God’s loving care.

Kendra: It’s Christmas dinner. I said I’d host this year hoping to finally see all the family. But now everyone’s coming over. The aunts. The uncles. The cousins.

Elizabeth: That sounds lovely.

Kendra: Yeah. It’s been a hard few years where I’m from and I wanted us all to be together. And I want to do it for my mom. I don’t think she’ll be around much longer.

Elizabeth: To feast!

Kendra: Yes, to fellowship.

Elizabeth takes Kendra’s hands.

Elizabeth: You’d make a good Israelite. You have to treasure the time with your loved ones when you can. They won’t always be with you, you know?

Kendra: I know. But now I’m just *stressed*. It’s too much work. I’m so busy making shortbread and pies and using an app my son sent that’s supposed to ensure I have a perfectly moist turkey (*She wipes her brown in distress then retakes Elizabeth’s hand*) and –

Elizabeth: And you’re miserable and worried and losing your joy.

Kendra: Exactly!

Kendra pulls her hands away.

Elizabeth: I wish Zech could speak and share. He could write it on a tablet but that’d take all day and we don’t have much time together. We know exactly how you feel.

Kendra: You do?

Elizabeth: Of course! We waited so long, prayed so hard, that when the prayer was finally answered he got in the way. He added trouble to the blessing.

Kendra: I see.

Elizabeth: Instead of rejoicing, he doubted. Complicated it!

Kendra: Instead of looking forward to this special day, I’m dreading it.

Elizabeth: That doesn’t seem right.

Kendra: So what do I do?

Elizabeth: Make a choice.

Kendra: A choice? But this is all about my *feelings*!

Elizabeth: Exactly. Zech had to change his *mind*. Realign.

Kendra: Oh.

Elizabeth: There’s a lot of ways to feast, too, you know. And there’s a lot of ways to fellowship. What a shame if you miss out on your heart’s desire because you spend so much time putting food on the table, that you don’t enjoy the people sitting around it.

Kendra: That would be a shame.

Elizabeth: You better stand up now.

Kendra: Why?

Elizabeth: You’re about to return.

Kendra: How do you know?

Elizabeth: The baby leapt inside of me. He has a sense for stuff like this.

Kendra stands. She stiffens, bracing for the jump.

Elizabeth: Don’t take for granted the time God gives you to be with the ones you love.

Kendra: I won’t. Thank you for that little reality check. I needed it.

Elizabeth: Don't mention it. Bend at the knees.

Kendra: Oh.

Elizabeth: You'll thank me.

***Kendra** bends at the knees. Suddenly she jumps into the air, giving that rollercoaster-style scream and lands in a crouch. When she lands she freezes in place. (If you are lighting each actor in a spotlight, you can black out on **Kendra**. Otherwise she can quietly exit).*

Elizabeth: That never gets old.

***Elizabeth** stands up and gently rubs her stomach. She looks around the kitchen.*

Elizabeth: There were so many sweet memories in this place.

***Rapha** enters with a bowl. **John** trails him.*

John: Efficient, heartfelt, real. No notes.

Rapha: Here.

He hands her the bowl.

Elizabeth: What's this?

Rapha: A little reward.

She takes the bowl.

Elizabeth: You're a godsend!

John: Literally, he is.

Elizabeth: Locust and honey.

John: You're a pro.

Elizabeth: I’ve had the opportunity to practice. This time of year it’s a go-to Christmas story. I’ve lost count of how many busy, holiday-crazed women I’ve given the same pep talk to over the centuries.

She starts snacking, crunching on the crispy locust.

John: You’re eating those in front of me?

Elizabeth: Want some?

John: I’m about to time travel.

Rapha: You’re about to meet the brother.

Elizabeth: Of that sweet woman?

Rapha: Yes. A youth pastor at a small church in the Bible belt.

John: Wow, this is a real intervention then. I get why we’re going to Gethsemane.

Rapha claps John on the back.

Rapha: He’s on the phone, but the call is about to end.

Rapha holds out his hand to Elizabeth.

Rapha: *(to Elizabeth)* Let’s get out of here so the set angels can switch out the historical backdrops.

Elizabeth: Oh, of course.

They start to exit.

Rapha: Last year a Seraphim-in-training didn’t move Elijah out fast enough and he appeared in a drop with the Apostle Paul.

Elizabeth: Oh my. I'd pay to see that encounter.

Rapha: The poor frat boy who was being called into missions got stuck in a drop for more than two hours as those two heavyweights traded war stories.

Elizabeth and Rapha have exited. John remains alone on the stage. He starts to shake his body and stretch his neck and arms like he's getting ready for strenuous exercise. He does a few jumps on the spot as Jim enters the stage, on his cell phone, totally unaware of John.

Jim: Yes, I hear you Mrs. Z, but I just think that Christmas is too commercial and too, well, let's just put it this way – too *sentimental*.

John stops his warm up and listens intently.

Jim: No this isn't a bah-humbug to the youth in the church. It's meant to show that there's more to Christmas than this out-of-control pageantry that in my view is on steroids. Hello? (*exasperated*) She hung up on me again.

John: I don't know that I'd blame her?

Jim: (*crouching into a protective posture*) Hey! Who are you?

John: I'm John.

Jim: You scared me! I'm closing up the Youth building now and we have a sign on the door that says no solicitors.

John: I'm with Jesus.

Jim: Are you from the Ladder Day Saints?

John: (*loudly whispering*) I'm with Jesus. He's over there.

John points to a place offstage.

Jim: What?

John: And he’s praying... so if you could be quieter... this is the important part.

Jim grabs his head as if in pain and sways from side to side, as if dizzy, to indicate that he’s transported from his time into John’s.

Jim: Where am I? How did all these trees get in here?

John: We’re in the Garden.

Jim: Of Eden?

John: No, Gethsemane.

Jim: I’m confused.

John: Look, Jesus just prayed the most famous prayer.

Jim: The Lord’s Prayer?

John: Well, technically all his prayers are the Lord’s prayers, but no. The one in the garden, before he goes to the cross. Blood forming on his forehead like so much sweat? Take this cup from me? You know...
Not my will but thine be done?

Jim: Oh wow – and you’re the John that wrote it all down in John seventeen? I know the passage well!

John: You were just talking about the meaning of Christmas... so I think that’s why you’re here.

Jim: Don’t you mean Easter?

John: No, I don’t.

Jim: Jesus prayed this prayer before the Cross.

John: Yes.

Jim: Which was hours after the Passover meal. I know my Jewish calendar – I’m a youth pastor.

John: You’re also trained to view things in a very linear way. In fact, you should add “chronological tyranny” to that well-rehearsed rant of yours.

Jim: Were you eavesdropping on my whole phone call?

John: Who were you yelling at anyway?

Jim: I wasn’t yelling,

John: Who were you loudly directing your anger towards?

Jim: A youth mom. I get it, okay? This is her fourth and final child to go through the church’s youth group. She wants her to have an amazing experience. They want me to ease off, stop shaking everything up.

John: What’s the plan?

Jim: No candles, definitely no commercialized Christmas Carols, no gift exchanges and definitely no sweets! She said, “the parents love your passion, but can’t you just leave Christmas alone?” Can you believe the nerve?

John: You are quite nervy –

Jim: I meant her!

John: Dude! Take a breath. Most people, especially Christian leaders who pop in at this part of my timeline, need to take a deep breath.

Jim: What is this, a first-century scolding?

John: Call it what you want. I'd like to think of it as some loving advice from someone who went before you. A former hot head himself.

Jim: John, the disciple Jesus loved, a hot head?

John: The centuries have made people forget how competitive and self-righteous my brother James and I really were. We thought we could coerce people to follow God's way through our moral superiority and wanted to call down fire from heaven when they didn't see it our way. (*pointing to where Jesus prays*) Or his way.

Jim: I don't want to call down fire.

John: You just want to snuff out the joy people have to celebrate a beautiful tradition, however strange some of it has become.

Jim: Don't get me wrong – I love me a turkey dinner and some eggnog – but I want the kids I lead to think deeper about Christmas.

John: And that's probably why you transported back to this moment through the centuries, to this part of the story.

Jim: I'm not seeing the Christmas link here.

John: When you go back, which will be any moment, read the prayer in John seventeen. It's all about eternal life and why God sent Jesus into the world in the first place. Of all the things Christ prayed before he left the world, this is what he prayed for me and the other hot-headed disciples. For everyone who would believe after us. It's a prayer about *unity*. Without it, the world won't even believe God sent his Son. Jesus says that, you know?

Jim: That's a sobering thought.

John: Your unity with the tribe of believers God placed you with is the thing that will convince the world that God sent his beloved Son. That’s what will make Christmas real. Maybe that’s where you should focus your passion.

Jim: Can I go say hi?

John: Not tonight. He has a big day ahead of him.

Jim: But... he’s already gone to the cross. Because I’m a believer... in him. *(scratching his head)* And yet you’re here talking to me about a scripture you haven’t written down yet.

John: Yeah *(patting Jim on the back)* don’t try to figure out the Bible Drop Time Loop. Just focus on the lesson God wanted to teach you through this mysterious and miraculous moment of revelation, okay?

Jim: Gotcha. Good talk.

Jim steps past John toward where Jesus prays offstage as he shares his next lines. John now stands behind him and slowly disappears. (either the spotlight blacks out on John or he steps into the shadows and exits the stage)

Jim: I would so like to meet him in person. So, how do I get back? And before I do, can I ask you how you really feel about Peter?

Jim turns at the silence and realizes that John is gone. He looks around and realizes he’s back at the Youth building.

Jim: Oh. So that’s it, hey?

He exhales deeply. Then pulls out his phone and dials.

Jim: Hi, Mrs. Z? It’s Pastor Jim. Hey, listen. I just wanted to call you back and say sorry.

He starts to walk off the stage.

Jim: I’ve been a hothead and the kids can have a Christmas Party. But I may still deliver a short message...

*He exits. As he exits **Rapha** and **Joseph** step onto the stage. **Rapha** holds a bundle of wood which he places on the ground.*

Joseph: I’m so glad we never had those talking devices when I walked the earth.

Rapha: You mean cell phones?

Joseph: Sure.

Rapha: The people of earth seem to love them.

Joseph: You can’t find anyone without them.

Rapha: You’re about to find that out in a very real way. (*conspiratorially*) I hear they even take them with them into the bathroom.

Joseph: What? Gross! I’m not going to have to talk on one, am I?

***Angela** enters the stage with her “influencer kit” of gear: her ring light, tripod, a selfie stick for her phone. She’s dressed like a Wiseman.*

Rapha: No, but you’ll be chatting with someone who is basically fused to hers. She never puts it down. There. (*nodding toward **Angela***)

Joseph: Yikes. What is that?

Rapha: An influencer.

Joseph: A what?

***Rapha** looks at **Angela** and then back at **Joseph**.*

Rapha: I’d play this one happy.

Joseph: But what do I do? I’m not very good at conversation and I’ve never done one of these before.

Rapha: You do you. Here (*picking up and handing him the pile of wood*) take these. God speed.

Joseph: Thanks.

Rafa exits. Joseph takes a cautious step toward Angela who is checking her makeup on the screen of her smartphone. She’s dressed as a Wiseman, but she’s all dolled up in makeup.

Joseph walks toward center stage, whistling happily. Angela, about to record a video of herself, turns on the ring light which shines bright. When he sees the ring light Joseph drops the pieces of wood and falls prostrate to the ground.

Joseph: I am here, Lord, listening. Speak to me through your servant.

Angela turns to see what the commotion is all about, but keeps the camera at the ready.

Angela: Uh... sorry. Did I miss something?

Awkward silence.

Angela: Hello! Do I know you?

Joseph: Speak your message. Your servant is listening.

She lowers the selfie stick. She’s not pleased.

Angela: I was just about to do a live stream. Why are you on the floor like that?

Joseph: It’s become a habit, I guess. Whenever an angel appears, I tend to fall down in fear.

Angela: Wait, how did you know my name?

Joseph: I don’t.

Angela: You just said it: “Angel.” At least that’s what my friends call me, and it’s my handle on all my socials.

Joseph: So you are an angel - sent from above?!

Angela: Cute. Never heard *that* one before.

Joseph: Where’s the water coming from?

Angela: What water?

Joseph: For the living stream.

Angela: Funny. What’s that, some sort of boomer dad joke? Did you come here for the live stream or something?

He moves from the prostrate position to his knees. He risks a look up at her.

Joseph: I don’t see the water. They dug a well ten years ago just down the hill.

Angela: Dug a well? Oh, are you one of those natural farming influencers?

Joseph: No, I’m a carpenter. Joseph, son of Jacob, grandson of Mattan, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born. May God’s peace rest upon you.

Angela: Wait, what? (*looking around her*) Where am I?

Joseph: In Egypt. Alexandria to be precise. Normally you do the talking. This has happened twice to me now. Both times in a dream... this is a first, to meet God’s messenger in person. But like I said, the angel usually does the talking.

Angela: Oh my gosh. No. I’m not an *angel* angel.

Joseph: You’re not?

Angela: No, no. *No!* And this isn't a dream.

Joseph: But the lights, your strange clothing.

Angela: That's just my ring light.

She turns off the light.

Angela: And I'm getting ready for our Christmas concert at church. I play one of the Wisemen. Subversive, right? Plus, there aren't a lot of viable young guys in our congregation. You know, Fortnite and all that.

Joseph: I see. I thought you were sent to tell me we could go back.

Angela: Where to?

Joseph: Home. To Israel. Back to Nazareth. I wish death upon no one, but my heart quickened that you might tell me Herod is dead and that it's safe to return.

Angela: Are you saying I'm in Egypt with the father of Jesus? I think I need to join you on the ground.

She steadies herself and drops to a knee.

Joseph: I've only heard of this situation. Mary gets it mostly.

Angela: Fainting and lightheaded, because you're suddenly overwhelmed?

Joseph: No. These visits. Of people from your time. Who need some encouragement or insight. You know, a particular lesson at the moment? I've only had angels visit me in my dreams to guide me as I do my best to be a good husband and a good father to--well, you know--to the... Savior of the world.

Angela: No pressure, right?

Joseph: None at all. My intent was to just bring in these pieces of wood to dry near the fire... I was about to make a box to store the treasures Jesus received from the –

Angela: from the Wisemen!

Joseph: Yes - the Magi from the East who visited us in the weeks after that strange night of his birth. I want to keep his treasures safe for when he needs them. And I’m going to use the project to teach him some practical skills.

Angela: That’s so sweet.

She starts to fight tears.

Joseph: He’s going to build a whole kingdom on earth, so he may as well learn to make things with his hands, right?

She is sobbing now.

Joseph: Don’t do that.

Angela: I’m sorry.

Joseph: I should get Mary. She always knows what to say. She’ll know what to tell you.

Angela: No, no. Stay. You’ve already said it.

Joseph: I have?

Angela: Yes. *(slowly composing herself as she speaks)* Look at you. Serving Jesus in your quiet, humble way. Building a vessel to hold the treasure of nations. Caring for him. I mean your body language speaks a language of love, of care, of protection.

Joseph: It does?

Angela: You *exude* it. You’re nurturing the reality of God’s gift to the world through simple, practical obedience. I mean. Look at me!

Joseph: Okay.

Angela: I’m putting on airs. Why am I in this ridiculous costume? I pushed out the only three guys in our young adults group who actually wanted to play the Wisemen in the church Christmas pageant because I wanted the costume and the content for TikTok.

Joseph: And that was bad?

Angela: That was terrible of me! And here you are. A truly wise, if not slightly terrified man. Humbly serving your family. Loving Jesus in your own way without any self consciousness or guile.

Joseph: Well, thank you... for saying that.

Angela: *(to herself)* Oh, that was good. I should’ve recorded that. I’ll do that later.

Joseph: You got all that, from me?

Angela: *(to Joseph)* I did. Thank you.

Joseph: You’re welcome.

She turns the ring light back on and then whips up the selfie stick.

Angela: This has been so meaningful. Thanks again.

Before he can respond, she turns and starts to talk to her camera. She picks up her gear and walks away animatedly as she addresses her social media audience.

Angela: *(to the self-facing camera)* Hey there, it's Angel! You won't believe what just happened! I've just had such a deep revelation about the Father's heart just in time for Christmas. And I want to tell you all about it before I go on stage tonight for my debut as a Wiseman.

She exits.

Joseph: *(to her, as she walks off stage)* Nice to meet you. Go in peace! And every blessing with that living stream of water...

Joseph bends over and starts to pick up the fallen wood. **Rapha** enters and helps pick up the pieces of wood.

Rapha: Well, that wasn't so bad, was it?

Joseph: Mary's going to have a fun time pondering this one!

Rapha: I bet.

Joseph: So, how did she fit into this family story?

Rapha: She's one of the grandkids. She might need another intervention to wean her off of social media and spend more time in devotion and prayer, at least that's what my notes say about how Grandma's been praying. But she's got a good heart.

Joseph: So, that's it?

Rapha: For you, for today. You can stick around and see how this plays out. *(to Balthasar offstage)* Balthasar, you're up next!

Joseph: From fake Wiseman to real Wiseman.

Rapha: You set the stage for this part well.

Balthasar enters out of breath.

Balthasar: Did I miss the drop?

Rapha: No, you’re good, but get ready. You’re going back to the desert. It’s a night scene.

*Lights up on **Archie** who stands frozen in place. He’s on his cell phone.*

Rapha: We’ll get out of your way.

Joseph: God speed!

***Rapha** and **Joseph** exit. Once they’re off stage, **Archie** begins to speak into his phone.*

Archie: Yes, Grams. I’ll be there this year. Just on my way. Wouldn’t miss it for the world.

He hangs up the phone, then sighs deeply.

Archie: Because who doesn’t want to go see the cheesy Christmas play? The same play the church has put on for twenty years?

*After he says the words “twenty years”, **Archie** jumps on the spot and lands in a crouching position (think *The Black Widow’s* crouched stance in a *Marvel* movie). He yells out in surprise as he lands. He looks around, disoriented. Then he stands up, covering his nose at a bad smell.*

Archie: What’s ... that... smell?!

*Lights up on **Balthasar** (if you don’t have lighting options, **Balthasar** can move from a frozen position and come alive at the question).*

Balthasar: It’s the camels.

***Archie** puts his hands up in defence, as if a gun is pointed at him.*

Archie: Hey, I don’t have much money in my apartment, but there is some cash in my sock drawer. Take it, but please, just don’t hurt me.

Archie braces himself, as if about to get hit with a punch.

Balthasar: So let me get this straight. You drop in on my cross-continent quest but somehow I'm going to rob you? Friend, you really gotta adjust your thinking.

Balthasar signals with his head at the space behind **Archie** and some imagined camel food.
Archie relaxes, looks behind him. He smells the air loudly.

Archie: Where are we?

Balthasar: Who was that?

Archie: Oh. My grandma. I forgot about my nephew's Christmas pageant again and frankly wish she hadn't called. It's in twenty minutes. And I was planning to work all night, to bill some overtime hours.

Balthasar: Well, if you're here, then I'm sure you're missing something even more important than a Christmas play.

Archie: Whaddaya mean?

Balthasar: Let's do this quick. When I get visitors like this at this part of the journey, before we meet the Christ child, then that tells me there's something about your own journey to Jesus that needs to be analyzed.

Archie: Are you a.... Wiseman?

Balthasar: I'm a man who seeks wisdom and who fears the Lord. I study nature, maps, animals and ancient texts. I'm versed in languages and music. I look at the stars and spend much of my time in quiet reflection. I'm an advisor to a great king, just one such man among a hundred.

Archie: So, you're really one of the three Wisemen, from the Christmas story? If I woulda known, I would've dressed a little better. I can't believe I'm talking to one of the Wisemen!

Balthasar: Balthasar. Nice to meet you.

Archie: Your cologne. Do you mind?

Archie steps toward him and smells.

Archie: You smell like cinnamon and (*sniffing*) and candles and (*sniff*) really expensive leather and pure... pure *manliness*. Am I in the Bible?

Balthasar: You're at an important moment in your spiritual journey, that's where you are.

Archie: This is so trippy!

Balthasar: You need to be careful not to trip up. Over *yourself*.

Archie pulls out his phone and holds it up as if to take a photo of them together.

Archie: Do you mind? No one's ever gonna believe this.

Balthasar: Sorry. No selfies. I think it's important for you to be present in this moment. To learn from it.

Archie: First of all, we don't even know each other, so I don't want to be rude. Given who you are, and all, but you don't know me. Secondly, I don't really do “spiritual journeys”.

Balthasar: Immediately defensive. Fixated on material things.

Archie: It is the Christmas season.

Balthasar: Posturing and pretending to be something you're not.

Archie: Hey hey hey. What is this, therapy? I don't need some ancient rich guy to beat up on me, okay? But I will take some of that gold.

Balthasar: And then what?

Archie: I don't know, finally be happy?

Balthasar: I see.

Archie: What's so wrong with success, man? I mean, I'm talking to a high ranking official with frankincense and myrrh to spare. Can't you give me some inside scoop or advice on how to get what you've got?

Balthasar: Interesting.

Archie: What's that mean? “Interesting.”

Balthasar: Well, I'm on the road to meet the King of kings, the Lord of lords, travelling across harsh terrain in all types of weather. It's an epic pilgrimage to offer a gift to the Creator of all things, and you're asking me for wealth tips?

Archie: I'm intentional. Hey, I heard a podcaster say recently that the idea for crypto came out of ancient Mesopotamia.

Balthasar: Wow. No questions about how we mapped the stars. Or what prompted the journey. Who my companions are. You're worried about how you can leverage this to get more status? You found a way to make this about wealth maxing?

Archie: Well, maybe when I have enough of it I can pay attention to all those other things. Do you have any idea how hard it is to get ahead in *this* economy? To make something of yourself?

Balthasar: I might know more than you think.

Archie: Well, maybe show a little empathy then.

Balthasar: Listen: I made it to the top. Had the ear of my king. Know all the insider trading tips, all the palace intrigue. Can build or break a man's career with a word. I got to the exact place you want to be. A few thousand years before you.

Archie: I’m listening.

Balthasar: It wasn’t enough.

Archie: Everyone says that, but only once they’ve got it.

Balthasar: The people that drop into my story at Christmas so often miss the point.

Archie: So what’s the point of all those cute little shepherds and cute little sheep at a stable?

Balthasar: That the pinnacle of my life story was to embark on a journey toward Jesus. To *seek* him. To surrender myself to him. My story was written down to show that the riches of our lives belong to Jesus. You’ve got gifts to bring him too, Archie.

Archie: How do you know my name?

Balthasar: It’s written on your cufflinks.

Archie looks at his wrists. Kneads one wrist with his hand.

Archie: So, I dropped into this Bible story, got transported across time to join you on your trip to go see Jesus?

Balthasar: No. You gotta go back to where you’re from. Look up to heaven and get on your own pilgrimage. Then go and offer your gifts to Jesus there.

Archie: Just like that?

Balthasar: Just like that. It’s a lot easier and a lot harder than you think.

Archie: This isn’t how I normally hear the Christmas story portrayed.

Balthasar: Well, maybe when you’re at your nephew’s play, you can imagine real women and real men living out real lives with a lot on the line as they make their way to Bethlehem.

Archie: Maybe I’ll try.

Balthasar: Good. Well, I’m going to go feed the camels. We have a long journey ahead of us and we leave early in the morning. Journey well, Archie. Please, journey well.

Balthasar exits.

Archie jumps on the spot and lands in a crouching position again, yelling as he does. He stands back up and exhales, as if breathing out a whole lifetime of suppressed air. He thumbs his cufflinks. Smooths out his hair. He looks toward his exit. As he does, **Rapha and **Prodigal** appear.**

Archie: “Journey well.” What does one wear to a kids’ Christmas pageant these days?

Archie exits. **Rapha and **Prodigal** watch him leave.**

Prodigal: You think he’ll change?

Rapha: You of all people should know.

Prodigal: Good point. I had the opposite problem. Everything at my fingertips. Why is it so easy for us to squander what God’s given?

Rapha: Even angels wish to understand this about humans.

Prodigal: Touché. Well, guess I’m up. Last but not least.

Rapha: Last but not least.

Prodigal: Are you happy with how this is going?

Rapha: I am. We’re setting the table, it’s up to them to come and feast.

Lights up on **Amanda**.

Rapha: You ready?

Prodigal: Let’s do this.

Amanda bites her lip and is visibly stressed. She’s re-reading an email on her phone.

Amanda: I can’t believe they emailed me. How do I respond to them after everything I’ve said to them?

After she says the words “said to them”, **Amanda** jumps on the spot, yelling in surprise as she does, and lands in a crouching position (think *The Black Widow’s* crouched stance in a *Marvel* movie). She looks around, disoriented. Then she stands up. She notices a bucket and some rinds on the ground.

Lights up on **Prodigal** (if you don’t have lighting options, **Prodigal** can un-freeze and step towards **Amanda**)

Prodigal: Welcome to the farm.

Amanda: Where’d you come from? Wait, where am I?

Prodigal: I’d ask you to sit down before I tell you, but in this case, you probably don’t want to, given the surroundings.

Amanda: Is this mud?

Prodigal: Close.

Amanda: Manure?

Prodigal: Pig poop.

Amanda: Disgusting. These are new shoes.

Prodigal: Try the food.

Amanda: Gross.

Prodigal: Well, when you're this desperate —

Amanda: You've been eating it?

Prodigal: For a few days now.

Amanda: Don't you have any self-respect?

Prodigal: I could ask you the same thing?

Amanda: What, you somehow think you know me?

Prodigal: Maybe not you. But I do know your type.

Amanda: Excuse me! What's that supposed to mean?

Prodigal: I know your type because you're just like me.

Amanda: A guy who looks like a hobo and eats pig feed? I don't think so, buddy. I gotta get out of here.

Prodigal: Don't be angry.

Amanda: I think it's more like scared. I don't know who you are or how I got here.

Prodigal: We're both alike. I'm telling you.

Amanda: We've never met before.

Prodigal: No?

Amanda: But, now that you mention it, you seem familiar.

Prodigal: I’m someone who grew up with so much blessing and love but was too blind to see it or too afraid to receive it. Like you, I was too stubborn and too independent so I tried to do it all on my own. And now here we are, standing in what all that self will and effort amounted to.

He looks down at her shoes. She follows his gaze and lifts up a foot in disgust.

Amanda: You can tell that about me, just like that?

Prodigal: The people who arrive at this part of my story tend to be running in the wrong direction.

Amanda: I’m not running.

Prodigal: Sometimes they even think they’re happy.

Amanda: I have a great life!

Prodigal: If you say so. What was all that self talk after you got your email?

Amanda: How’d you know about that?

Prodigal: You’re running from something.

Amanda: Aren’t we all?

Prodigal: Away from home.

Amanda: I’m a grown woman. I’ve been on my own for years.

Prodigal: Away from the Father.

He points up at the sky. She exhales deeply, like the balloon of her chest swelled up too full and finally releases. She’s not so much deflated by the statement, but relieved by the honesty of it.

Prodigal: Away from his accepting love.

Amanda: I can't go back.

She looks up at heaven. The weight of the world and her past on her shoulders.

Prodigal: Why not?

Amanda: There's so much pain there.... So much history. Things others have said. Things I've done.

Prodigal: But there's also the Father's love. His arms. In His house there's a way to work it all out.

Amanda: I don't know.

Prodigal: Or you could keep eating the scraps and stay where you are, standing in pig poop.

Amanda: My parents invited me to church on Christmas Eve. It's a candle light service.

Prodigal: That's nice of them.

Amanda: My dad's a youth pastor... it's complicated.

Prodigal: I can tell.

Amanda: As a girl I always loved that night. The dark sanctuary, a hundred shining lights. It was magical. Holy.

Prodigal: And now?

Amanda: I said a lot of things, these last few years, to my family. About their church. You know how crazy the world has been. They invited me to Christmas dinner too. Going back is...

Prodigal: ... is what?

Amanda: Loaded. It’s more than a church service and a dinner, if you know what I mean.

Prodigal: It’s admitting you need love?

Amanda: That’s probably part of it. And that I’ve been so.... so....

Prodigal: Just say it.

Amanda: Stubborn, okay?

Prodigal: Amen, sister.

Amanda: And foolish, so selfish. And... *wrong*.

Prodigal: Well, look at you. Your first step.

Amanda: What?

Prodigal: You just took the first step toward home.

Amanda: I did?

Prodigal: It’s easier than you think. Can’t you hear that sound?

He puts his hand on his ear. Leans in the direction of a sound. She leans toward him.

Amanda: No, what is it?

Prodigal: The Father’s footsteps. He’s running toward you.

She laughs, a joyful burst that shines through the heaviness.

Amanda: Where am I? What is this? Are you the actual, like, *literal* Prodigal Son from the Bible?

Prodigal: One in a long line of many. One who waited too long to go home.

She looks away from **Prodigal**, back toward the direction or the sound of footsteps. **Prodigal** slowly steps away to the edge of the stage.

Amanda: You make me feel like it’s possible that I -

At the words “that I” she turns back to him, but he’s gone. She looks for him, then looks up at heaven. She hugs herself. After a beat, she pulls out her phone.

The other Bible characters – **Elizabeth, Balthasar, John, and Joseph**, along with **Rapha** – join **Prodigal** on the edge of the stage. They stand close together like the cast of Saturday Night Live at the end of a great show, proudly standing before their audience. They watch as **Amanda** pulls out her phone and taps out an email.

At center stage, the table that was used at the beginning of the play that the Bible characters gathered around is now a dinner table. **Kendra** and **Archie** are setting the table. John is upstage, looking off into the distance. **Angela** is setting up a camera. In all this commotion, Amanda exits.

Kendra: Did you see how fast the cousins disappeared the minute I said we were gonna set the table?

Jim: Nothing changes.

Kendra: Angela, dear, what are you doing?

Angela: I’m setting up a time lapse. The algorithm loves them right now.

Archie: You do see that we’re all working here, right?

Angela: Chill out and stop being such a Martha. Plus, I want to capture the moment when Grandma comes and sees us all here.

Kendra is beside Angela and gives her a side hug.

Kendra: That’s a really sweet idea. Thank you for capturing it. Did I pick the right sweater?

Angela: Perfect. It'll really pop in this shot.

Archie: You'll hear them before you see them, Uncle John. That gravel driveway is like a mile long.

Kendra: Archie, shh. Leave him.

Jim: You're right, Archie. I just can't believe that she's going to come.

Archie: How long since you've seen her?

Jim: Over eighteen months.

Archie: What?

Jim: And seven days.

Archie: You haven't seen Grandma in close to two years?

Angela hits him on the arm.

Archie: Ow.

Angela: Not Grandma, you dolt.

Archie: Oh, sorry uncle Jim.

Jim turns to the family, the first time he's looked away from the window.

Jim: It's okay. I'm just nervous over here.

Angela: We all are.

Archie: I mean, what if she brings a tofu turkey or something?

They all chuckle.

Jim: Anything’s possible.

Kendra: I hear a car.

Jim turns back to the window like an excited puppy. **Kendra** is beside him watching the car with him.

Kendra: It was sure nice of her to pick up Grams.

Jim: I hope they had a nice long talk on the way.

Kendra: You know they did. (*side-hugging Jim*). Your daughter’s coming home, little brother. I’m so happy for you.

Jim: Thanks sis.

Kendra: Just try to play it cool.

Amanda and **Grandma** enter, holding wrapped Christmas gifts.

Everyone turns to see them and greets them with “Hellos” and “Merry Christmases”.

Archie takes the packages from **Grandma** and **Kendra** walks her over to the table.

Angela takes the wrapped gifts from **Amanda** and walks to the table after their quiet hello.

That leaves **Amanda** standing alone and **Jim** staring at her.

Everyone turns, aware of the moment, unsure what will happen next.

The **Bible characters**, still quietly watching the scene, step toward **Grandma**. **Elizabeth** places her hand on **Grandma’s** shoulder.

Amanda: Hey dad.

Amanda looks at her feet.

Jim: Mandy!

Jim throws out his arms and runs to her, embracing her and lifting her off her feet. He holds her close. After a moment, he puts her down. He's a little shy after his big, emotional act of love. And she looks back down at her feet.

At the table **Grandma** grabs each of the hands of her family members and pulls them close to her.

Jim gently touches **Amanda's** chin and moves her face up so that she's not looking at the floor but into his eyes.

Jim: Welcome home.

Lights slowly fade to end the play.

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