

a script from

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PURCHASE

SCRIPT

TO

REMOVE

"He Was Their First Christmas"

By

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What	Ned needs a paying acting gig. He shows up to audition for the church Christmas play and finds four people already in character: the man lowered through the roof, the woman who bled for twelve years, the man freed from a legion of demons, and the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears. Are they actors... or heralds with a message about what it means when Jesus steps into a needy life? A timely reminder that Christmas is all about Jesus entering our lives . Themes: Christmas, Restoration, Humor, Bible Characters, Healing, Advent, Hope, Forgiveness, Love, Relationships, Ensemble, Grace, Miracles
Who	Ned, a down-on-his-luck actor Mary, a helper Gen, the man who was lowered through the roof Maryanne, the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears Lep, the man who was lowered through the roof Gal, the woman with the issue of blood
When	The present, in the weeks before Christmas, at a church.
Costumes	Period clothing for the Bible characters. On-trend clothing for Ned.
Props	Eight to ten chairs arranged in a semi-circle. A cell phone. A brochure. A small table with a box of donuts. A manger.
Why	Luke 7:26-50, Luke 8:22-39, Luke 8:30-48, Leviticus 15:25-27, Luke 5:17-26 Psalm 37:8
How	There is a lot of fun to be had in telling this story. Think of the famous Bible characters as three dimensional – real people who are re-visiting the moment in history that forever changed their life. They're like humble friends that know better but are respectful enough of Ned not to be heavy-handed. Have fun with the interactions. Let the characters tease and rib the others. Christmas has become so familiar and so commercial, let this story surprise you and the audience as you bring it to life. Explore the layers of what the Bible stories of Jesus' encounters with these individuals bring fresh meaning to what Advent really is for us today. Use lighting, where possible, to add intrigue, and use the space between the audience and the actors as a place to imagine the Bible stories, as though a great, invisible film screen casts the story playing on their imagination and memory.
Time	25-30 mins

*Lights up on **Ned**. He holds a crumpled brochure in his hand and he's on his phone.*

Ned: *(into the phone)* If I can't land this, maybe I'll just give up acting. It's at a little church in town that's known for putting on Christmas dramas. Yeah, they actually pay. Thanks. *(hanging up)* Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

***Ned** looks at his phone and taps at the screen. **Mary**, visibly pregnant, appears behind him. He doesn't notice her.*

Mary: And oh how far they fall!

***Ned** throws the phone up in the air in surprise then quickly grapples for it, trying not to drop it.*

Ned: Yikes! Where did you come from?

Mary: How long you got for that story?

Ned: If I don't get this gig *(nodding behind her)* then all the time in the world.

Mary: Here for the auditions?

Ned: Yes. Name's Ned. Ned Johnson.

He reaches out his hand, but realizes he has the phone in one hand and the brochure in the other. He quickly, but awkwardly places both in different pockets, then extends his free hand to share hers. They shake hands.

Mary: Mary.

Ned: Ned.

Mary: You said that.

Ned: Are you part of the production?

Mary: You could say that.

Ned: How are the auditions going?

Mary: About as well as you can expect. The director's changing it up a little this year.

Ned: Really? This thing's been going for over seventy years. A sure thing in a world without many sure things.

Mary: How did you hear about it?

Ned: You kidding? You can't live in this town and not know about this Christmas production.

Mary: So you're from here?

Ned: Sort of. Grew up. Left. Never wanted to return. *(opens his hands and bows)* Back.

Mary: Sounds like there's a story there.

Ned: How much time have *you* got?

Mary: *(her hands instinctively cup her pregnant belly)* I'm not sure. But we should probably get in there. I'll be your guide.

Ned: Guide? Are you the casting director?

Mary: I'm just here to support.

*They move across the stage. Lights up on the other actors – **Maryanne** (MA), **Gen**, **Gal**, and **Lep** who sit on chairs that are arranged in a semi-circle, as though lining three sides of a wall. Each is dressed in first-century style-robos, head coverings, sandals.*

Ned: Oh, wow, you came in costume.

Mary: Everyone, this is Ned.

Ned: Did I need to do that? *(pulling out the crumpled audition brochure from his pocket)* I don't remember seeing anything about coming in character.

Mary: You're fine the way you are.

Ned: I could run home and get a bathrobe or something..

Mary: You're good. I have to slip out to talk to the director. If I don't see you again today, just remember, He's the best there is and, while not all his directions may make sense at first, you'll never go wrong if you follow them. Help yourself to a donut. These guys can fill you in.

She exits.

Ned: Oh how the mighty have fallen, *(laughing nervously)* amiright?

Gen: I don't think I'd say I was ever mighty.

Ned: No? Local theater, then? TV?

Gen: Horror.

Ned: Oh. Wow, you must have some stories to tell.

Lep: Sure do.

Ned: *(turning to Maryanne)* and you?

MA: I was more into the dramatic stuff. Big tears, big moments.

He turns to Lep.

Lep: I like anything with a happy ending. Comedy in the Greek sense.

Ned: I hear you.

Gal: And you?

Ned: I've tried it all, really. Went out West for a series that looked promising but then it fell through. Haven't had regular work in a while. Phones went quiet.

Gal: I know what it's like to wait. For years.

Ned: It's brutal.

Gal: Very.

Gal: How'd you hear about this?

Ned: My ma.

MA: How sweet.

Ned: Yeah. She sent me this brochure. Said it was a paid gig. I think it was her way to try to get me back in a church.

Lep: Smart woman.

Ned: I didn't get to tell Mary, but when I was a kid, this thing was on every Christmas, and I was a little sheep when I was in grade school. *(looking at the brochure closer)* I didn't see anything about showing up in character, though. *(turning back to Gen)* So, what role are you playing? You gonna draw on your horror shows for this Christmas pageant?

Gen: Absolutely.

Ned: Well, alright. How does that work with Christmas?

Lep: When you know the backstory, in the best possible way.

Ned: Yeah? Who are you going for, a shepherd or something?

Gen: A gravedigger.

Ned: Oh, so like King Herod?

Gen: No, not a villain. Just someone, well... troubled in mind and spirit.

Ned: How about you two? *(nodding toward the women)* You must be both going for Mary.

Gal: Actually, we already have our parts.

Ned: Oh, serious?

Gal: We're here to support you.

Ned: Support me? How?

Gal: We help people coming here for the payday, but who might not be here for the story.

Ned: That so? You know that's why I'm here?

MA: You said as much.

Ned: Well, excuse me for needing to eat.

MA: No apology necessary. But if you want to tell this story, you need to come at it with some humility. Trust me.

Ned: Who are you playing with such humility?

MA: A woman who was used to being looked at with disgust.

Ned: Disgust? That's an unusual word.

MA: With even more unusual feelings.

Ned: If you say so.

Gal: Same here. But the disgust I was shown had less to do with what I did and more to do with my health. I was unclean and untouchable.

Ned: "Unclean and untouchable?" Yikes, you sound like some first century talk show guest talking about the laws of Moses.

Gal shrugs and is silent.

Ned: What kind of show are they putting on this year? Are they going to give us a script to read from? I prepared a scene from *A Christmas Carol* for my audition, but maybe I need to rethink my strategy.

Lep: I think they're going to want to hear more about you, in there. *(nodding with his head offstage)* About your first encounter with Jesus.

Ned: What?

Lep: We're here to tell *that* story.

Ned: Like a testimonial monologue?

Lep: Sort of.

Ned: And you expect people to pay for tickets?

Lep: Most people, when they think of the Christmas story, they think of lighting Advent candles, or a little pageant with kids dressed up as angels and shepherds.

Ned: Yeah, that's what this church has done for seventy years.

Lep: Exactly. Seeing the baby Jesus, lying quietly in a manger.

Ned: That's literally what Advent is about. In fact, the first time I ever heard about Jesus, it was in this very church. *(revelation, as if admitting it to himself)* At this very production.

Lep: The team will love that.

Gal: You should definitely use that.

MA: But that's not how everyone meets Jesus. And, to be honest, Ned, many people move beyond the manger and get to know the grown up Jesus.

Ned steps back, slightly offended. **Maryanne** crosses her arms across her chest. Ned dodges her looks and steps to the donuts. He looks over the box and picks one, stuffing a big bite into his mouth.

Ned: Well, the paying public wants Jesus in a manger. *(looking at the box of donuts)* This is the best donut I've had in my life. *(to the group)* You guys tried these?

Gal: For the Wisemen, and Mary and Joseph, that's what the first Christmas was about.

MA: But we're here to talk about the advent of Jesus in our lives, because we weren't there at the manger. We're gonna talk about the first time we met him ourselves.

Ned: And you think people want to hear that?

Gen: "But they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Yes, I do.

Ned: Sounds more like you four are going to be responsible for ending a seventy year run.

MA: We hope not.

Ned: So, how are you going to play it?

Gal: With the truth.

Ned: What truth?

Gal: Of our stories.

Gen: The first time I encountered Jesus, he terrified me.

Ned: That's a new angle.

Lep: I told you, you wanna hear this one.

Gen: He wasn't a sweet baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in straw. He was a grown man with eyes that blazed like fire wrapped in the power of God.

Ned: You gonna pretend to be a disciple or something?

Gen: I actually screamed out his name. It was my voice, but I wasn't speaking.

Ned: What are you talking about?

Gen: It's not something many people are comfortable to talk about, especially today. But the first encounter I had with Jesus he cast an evil spirit out of me. Not just one, *many*.

Ned: Ah... I'm not so sure parents are going to want to hear this with their children.

MA: His story needs to be heard. It's relevant for your time.

Ned: My time?

Gen: It had been *years* since I had a sound mind.

Ned: What do you mean *my* time?

Gen: I couldn't even remember my own name. Couldn't think my own coherent thoughts. It was like I was trapped in my own body, buried in there somewhere, and not myself. And then those winds would rage.

Ned: Winds?

Gen: Yes. Like a storm that could knock over trees, houses. I was like a hurricane of anger in my community. Those parents didn't want their kids to see me.

Ned: Sounds super Christmasy.

Gen: It causes me great shame to say it, but I was so dangerous that my family had to put me in chains. Think about that! Can you imagine? Putting your own boy, the sweet little child you raised, into shackles because he was such a danger to you?

Ned: Wait... I think I've heard this story before.

Gen: *(stepping toward the audience, looking above them)* It's unbelievable to say it now, but, the only place I could find solace, was in the graveyard. I found rest in tombs. Lived for the night. My only human companions were no longer alive. *(turning back to Ned)* And then Jesus arrived on our shores.

Ned: At that lake.

Gen: Yes, Gennesaret.

Ned: I remember this story from Sunday School. The pigs.

Gen: He came after a night when there was a terrible storm that raged across the sea of Galilee. He calmed that storm and then he commanded Legion out of me. Jesus was completely unafraid of me. He saw me and had mercy on me.

For the first time in my life I experienced the quiet that comes after a storm and that quiet remained. For the first time in my life I felt *whole* and I felt *safe*. It was shalom.

Ned: Oh, he's good. *(shaking his finger at Gen)*

Gal: I experienced something like that too, Ned.

Ned: He's good. *(he turns to Gal)* He had me thinking he was the real guy from that story. You gonna try to one up him?

Gal: No.

Ned: No?

Gal: I was going to ask you a question.

Ned: Oh yeah? About what?

Gal: If you've ever been sick.

Ned: Of course I have, who hasn't?

Gal: How about for a stretch of time?

Ned: Yeah. I got the chickenpox as a kid, real bad. Had them in my throat, the itch almost made me go crazy. *(turning to Gen)* No offence.

Gen: None taken.

Gal: How about a decade living with an ailment?

Ned: Can't say I have. But lemme guess, this is part of your character's back story.

Gal: You said you need a pay day?

Ned: Do people think actors are all just rich or something?

Gal: Well being sick that long almost destroyed me. Financially I bled my family dry. And to add insult to injury, the care I received wasn't even very good. We spent all we had on doctors.

Ned: No medicare where you're from?

***Ned** is half paying attention as he steps and looks over the donuts.*

Gal: None. And how can you get good medical attention when the doctors themselves are afraid to touch you?

Ned: Why were they afraid?

***Ned** has selected a donut and is about to take a big bite as **Gal** shares the next lines, but pauses when she starts to talk about blood.*

Gal: The law made them afraid. *When a woman's discharge of blood flows many days... all the days of her discharge... she is unclean. Any bed she lies on. Any furniture she sits on will be unclean.*

***Ned** drops the donut back in the box.*

Ned: Thanks for that mental image.

Gal: Imagine!

Ned: I'd actually rather not.

Gal: Not being able to hold your spouse's hand. To greet a friend in the street. To sit down and share a meal. Imagine not being able to touch the face of the child you love.

Ned: That actually sounds quite sad.

Gal: And if your child does touch you? If in a moment of joy or pain your spouse reaches out to touch your hand?

***Gal** steps toward the audience and reaches out her hand smiling, expectantly. She stops suddenly, a look of shame on her face. She quickly pulls her hand into her body.*

*She goes and sits down on a chair beside **Lep**.*

Gal: If in a moment of forgetfulness a friend greets you and sits down on the same bench you're sitting on, then they too become unclean. And must wash. *Everything*. And isolate. Until evening.

Lep stands up and walks away from her.

Ned: Brutal.

Gal: It was brutal. I couldn't buy food in the markets. Prepare a meal for the family. Everything I did and anyone or anything I touched was tainted. My life, my very presence, was a burden to everyone I knew. At first. Then it was a terrible, shameful reminder of sin. For twelve years!

Ned: Twelve?

Gal: Yes.

Ned: Ouch.

Gal: Yes. But then came Jesus. Into the world. Into *my* world on *my* city street.

She walks out toward the audience again, looking over them as if seeing Jesus on her street.

Gal: I'd heard of him. Of his humble birth. Of the miracles he performed. The blind could see. The lame could walk. The deaf could hear and (*pointing to Gen*) demons raged out of bodies and into the abyss at his command!

I heard that he taught with authority. Loved little children. Was born of a virgin, in a manger of all places. He shamed the wisdom and pride of the Pharisees with simple, powerful words.

He was the Messiah, sent by God, just as the prophets promised, to set us free from the oppression of our enemies. I heard the stories about Jesus and sat in awe. Alone. In my dark room. Hidden from the world in my wretchedness.

And then he walked down my street.

Ned: So, whaddya do?

Gal: I ran. *(stepping quickly toward **Ned** and reaching out her hand)* And I reached out my hand. I grasped the hem of his garment.

Gal looks down at her body, holds out her hands, relives the moment of miraculous healing.

Gal: Healed.

They all look over the audience, as if they've just witnessed Jesus. There's a potent moment of wonder that fills the air.

Lep: She's good too.

Ned: Very. I'm impressed. You brought your A game, ma'am.

Lep: You're going to need to dig deep in this audition.

Ned: I can see that. Are you all part of some method acting consortium or something?

Lep: I'm from a family of manual laborers, from the wrong side of the Jordan.

Ned: Here we go.

Ned shakes his head and sits down. He drops his head between his knees, then looks up at **Lep**. He raises his hand, open-palmed, inviting **Lep** to continue.

Lep: When you look at me, you probably don't see a man who was run down and trampled by horses.

Ned: Horses?

Lep: You probably can't tell, either, that I was someone who worried a lot. The horse thing and the anxiety are connected, by the way.

Ned: You don't say.

Lep: Maybe you've heard that Psalm that goes, "do not fret, it only leads to evil."

Ned: Vaguely...

Lep: Well, I can tell you, it's true. My life, until I met Jesus, was one long and tiring fret. I was like Samson, chained to the millstone, turning that big round object to grind grain. My chains were resentment and anger. But unlike Samson, I wasn't strong. I was even weaker than *weak* Samson after he was duped by Delilah and they cut off all his long, beautiful hair.

Ned: Well, you look like you bounced back. Like you track your macros and all that.

Lep: That's right. (*flexing like a body builder*) But these legs and these arms were useless. I was bedridden and paralyzed. Unable to move my body. The only thing I could move was my mind and it pushed thoughts round and around. Worried. Angry. I guess you could say I was paralyzed in body and mind, because this thinking led nowhere. And I was so stuck. But who wants to criticize a paralytic, amiright?

Ned: With a name like Lep I thought you might have had a skin disease or something.

Lep: Touche'. When I shared my despair with friends and family, no one could blame me. All that potential, all that possibility, lying there with dormant and useless limbs. What were they to do, add insult to injury and tell me to cheer up?

Ned: That's definitely an awkward situation, I mean, relationally..

Lep: I wasn't anything special before my accident. I mean, I went to the synagogue on weekends. Showed up for work through the week. Did my best to follow the law and made the sacrifices necessary to atone for the big stuff: a few turtle doves here and there, the occasional goat. But I wouldn't have called myself religious. Just full of zest for life.

Ned: I can relate to that. I mean, not the goats and the turtle doves, but the big calendar events, you go with your ma to church.

Gen: You and half the country.

Lep: But all that zest was quickly zapped when I stepped in the path of a unit of Roman soldiers as they tore through a side street to quell an uproar near the Temple.

Ned: You got in a fight with some Romans?

Lep: I wish. But not quite.

Ned: That'd be some big bragging rights.

Lep: We were in the holy city for a festival. And what can I say? I was filled with fervor and passion and that energy you get when you're with people you love on the streets of the Holy City. I felt invincible.

You'd think I was a high priest the way people almost venerated me after the accident. "A Hebrew of Hebrews, who stood up to Rome," they'd say. The last stand I ever took.

And so my bitterness and my anger were never really checked or challenged by those around me. Until I met Jesus, that is.

Ned: What did he say?

Lep: Words no one expected. It was my friends who cut a hole in the roof.

Ned: Get out of here!

Lep: Yes! And they lowered my helpless body through it. Plopped me right in front of Jesus. You shoulda seen the look on his face.

Ned: Was he surprised?

Lep: For sure. But he had a look... more like respect. Dare I say the profound respect he had for my friends for the bold move they made to get me in front of him was the coolest look to see. Some say they were motivated out of guilt that their bones didn't get crushed during the events on the fateful day that turned me into a paralytic. But Jesus himself recognized they were moved by faith in him to heal.

The strangest thing that day was what he said for everyone to hear. "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Ned: Sins? But you were injured.

Lep: Unexpected, right? I don't know what I expected, precisely. I wanted him to reach out his hand and heal me. I'd imagined it a thousand times ever since I heard of his miraculous power. But Jesus said what no one else would say: I was a sinner with a sickness that went so much deeper than my body. A man with a problem worse than failed limbs. You know the rest of the story. Look at me!

Ned: You're saying you're playing the role of the paralytic for this church's Christmas play?

Lep: No, I'm saying I am the paralytic, or used to be. And I'm here to help you for your little audition.

Ned: What are you talking about?

Lep: Until the advent of Jesus in my life I lived on the other side of those words. In despair and the regret that tells you every day there is no reason to hope and no way to experience joy again.

Ned stands up from his chair.

Ned: You want me to believe that you somehow traveled through time and came to this audition to help me prepare for it? That you're characters from the actual Bible?

MA: Not characters. Real people.

Ned: *(pointing at Gal)* The real woman who had the issue of blood.
(pointing at Gen) The man possessed by Legion at the lake.
(pointing at Lep) The paralytic man who slipped through the roof.
(stopping at Maryanne) And you?

MA: And me. I needed forgiveness too.

Ned: Here we go. Ok. Where are the cameras? Is this being recorded for social media or something. A prank? *(walking around the space, looking for hidden recording devices)* Mary? Where are you? You can come out now!

They all stand watching **Ned**, smiling respectfully.

Lep: This isn't a prank, Ned.

Ned: Yeah right. Then what is it?

Gal: Maybe because you know something about being forgotten or overlooked.

Ned: *(he stops looking for the hidden cameras and looks at Gal)* Who doesn't?

Lep: Or maybe you've felt paralyzed, don't know what to do or where to go.

Ned: Clever.

Gen: Or hopeless and in the dark?

Ned: *(walking to the donuts)* Did they put something in the donuts, is that it? Some sort of hallucinogen?

MA: Maybe you've had someone look at you with disgust?

Ned: What did you say?

MA: Like me.

Ned: *(moving to leave)* Okay, I think I'm done here.

MA: Used to people writing you off at a glance. Without a single word spoken.

Ned: I have somewhere else to be.

MA: *(she blocks Ned's way)* It's hard to describe because it can be so subtle. But you know it -- painfully, terribly *know* it -- when it happens. *(she snaps her fingers)* There. In a blink, your worth is assessed.

Ned: I picked the wrong career if I can't handle judgment.

MA: Not a single word is spoken between you but they've communicated as clearly as if they shouted it. Dismissed. Disgusting. *Disposable*. That's a good word for it.

Ned: I've actually never heard those words directed at me.

MA: I have.

Ned: Well, I'm sorry. But what does this have to do with me?

Lep: We think it's something a lot of people can relate to, especially at Christmas. Feeling forgotten, unwanted.

Ned: No disrespect, but if you have little kids dancing around as sheep and sing a few carols, maybe they'll forget all about that. Theater helps people escape.

Gen: For a few moments, maybe. Then what do they do when they go back home, back to their lives?

Ned: They deal with it. Suck it up, buttercup. Push through.

Gal: And when you come to the end of yourself?

Ned: Your audition for a Christmas pageant I guess! I knew this was a bad idea.

Gal: But that's the whole point.

Ned: Of what?

Gal: *(gesturing to the whole room)* Of this! Christmas is the best time to acknowledge we're at the end of ourselves and to encounter Jesus.

Ned takes a another few steps to leave.

MA: Would you at least hear my story? You listened to the others.

Ned: *(turning to her he sighs)* I guess.

Ned takes a seat.

MA: I was always disposable to men. Especially the religious leaders. Of course, there are words that come with these looks too, but they're not worth repeating here. I'm sure you can imagine what they might call someone like me. A poor woman with no prospects. A woman without a husband. And a *sinner* at that.

Ned: Yeah, I have a good idea.

MA: But, do you know what I feared most? More than whether I'd be able to eat from day to day. How I'd ever pay off my debts?

Ned: I understand that.

MA: Or what I'd have to do to make the money to pay those debts back?

Ned: Why do you think I'm here?

MA: More than anything I feared to look at Jesus because of the way that the Pharisees looked at me. *(she turns toward the audience)* I could bear the look from those self-proclaimed religious men, even though their scorn caused me great pain. I learned to live with their disgust. Most of us had to because there was nothing we could do to please them anyway. *(turning back to Ned)* You don't have to be a scribe to understand that some of them threw their own shame upon me because it was their own acts toward me that made me a sinner in the first place! I watched him, you know, from a distance.

Ned: Who, Jesus?

MA: Yes. As he walked the outskirts of the city. Greeting children, touching the sick. Laughing with those set free of demons or cancer, even leprosy. He healed people of everything! It was incredible. And you didn't have to be a religious person to see that Jesus was sent from God into the world.

But I kept my distance. Because, well, I couldn't abide the thought of having the Messiah look at me in the same way that the Pharisees looked at me. If he was disgusted, I'd know it. If his famous love for the poor didn't fall upon me, I'd see it.

So, I stayed away from him until I could no longer stay away. I had to know.

Ned: Know what?

MA: How he (*pointing at the sky*) would look at me.

I. Will. *Never*. Forget. It.

(*stepping toward the audience, looking at them as though they're the very crowd*) I walked through the crowd. Timid as a mouse. Trying to hide myself in the throng of people. But suddenly the crowd moved as he stood up and he turned and it seemed almost by chance that our eyes met.

And I don't care what anyone else says. It was like that story from Joshua, when the sun stood still and time stopped and he just *looked* at me.

(*turning to Ned*) Our eyes locked. And the same man who told the famous parable about the shepherd who went looking for the one lost sheep was looking back at me.

There was no disgust. There was no disdain. He saw me.

And Ned?

Ned: What?

MA: He didn't look away. (*touching her face*) His eyes were full of love. He smiled with happiness to see me. Like I was a long-lost friend. Somehow he knew exactly who I was. Everything I'd done. The bad, the sin and the good too. *And he didn't look away.*

(*taking Ned's hand*) He reached out his hand. He smiled and called me *daughter*. Not "a woman lost in sin." None of the other names people always called me. But *daughter*.

And I think you've heard the rest of the story. I can't believe how many people know it! About the alabaster jar of perfume. How I entered the house where Jesus visited for a feast and how I washed his feet with my tears as I wept.

That was my first Christmas, Ned. Right there in a forgotten town. He wasn't a sweet babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in straw. The Jesus I met was a man surrounded by people who wanted his attention and help. Jesus met me in my forgottenness and shame and looked at me with love.

Ned pulls his hand away. **Gal** walks to **MA** and puts her hand on her shoulder. **MA** reaches across her chest and puts her hand on **Gal's**.

Ned: You're all very good at what you do. *(defeated)* But can you just tell me what this is?

Gen: Christmas for many has become this beautiful but strange celebration that so often overlooks the simple and shocking human story of Jesus' advent into the world, Ned.

Gal: We wanted you to remember who we all are.

Ned: And who's that? Actors playing Bible characters or people who traveled through time?

Lep: All of us, Ned. Alone.

Gal: Lost.

Ned: Stop.

Gen: Without hope.

MA: Desperate.

Gal: Forgotten.

Gen: Powerless to help ourselves but so in need of help.

Gal: Unclean and unable to make ourselves clean. So in need of God's touch.

MA: And suddenly, there he was! Among us.

Gal: God's answer to all our pain. The great healer.

Lep: Our redeemer.

Gal: On humanity's street.

Gen: We just want you to carry that into the story that you bring to life this Christmas.

Ned: I just came to play a part in a story that—

Gen: — that what?

Ned: That I'm familiar with.

Gen: Most people do.

Gal: Don't get used to how wonderful and miraculous it is when people encounter Jesus for the first time.

***Ned** turns his back on them and walks toward the audience. He's clearly troubled. **Lep, Gal,** and **MA** exit. **Ned** doesn't see them go. **Gen** starts to leave but **Ned** turns just in time to see him.*

Ned: Hey!

Gen: Hey what?

Ned: I don't have what it takes to take on a role like this.

Gen: No one does. But when you encounter Jesus, everything changes.

Ned: This is the weirdest audition of all time.

***Gen** smiles, bows slightly, and starts to exit.*

Ned: What am I supposed to do?

Gen: Maybe think back to the moment when you first encountered Jesus in your own life. Right here.

Ned: I was just a little kid in Sunday School.

Gen: That's a beautiful story, Ned.

Ned: And then what?

Gen: Then approach it all again, with awe.

Gen exits. **Ned** raises his hands, mystified, then raises one arm higher in an awkward wave goodbye as he watches **Gen** leave.

Ned: Approach what with awe?

A spotlight flickers behind him. He turns and notices a simple manger illuminated in a bright spotlight.

Ned: Oh.

*Ned turns toward the manger, then looks behind him in the direction that **Gen** left.*

He turns back to the manger and takes a hesitant step forward.

As he steps closer, he looks over his shoulder at the audience, feeling self-conscious.

But when he arrives at the manger, he stops, takes a deep breath, and kneels.

Lights fade to end the play.