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“One Chaotic Still Night”

by
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SYNOPSIS

Eliza re-tells the story of her first time participating in a Christmas pageant and how it re-ignited her faith. Through her account of the pageant, she ponders the discrepancies between our modern-day depiction of the manger scene and what may have actually happened.

CAST

Eliza: Female. 30's. The script's narrator, she is re-telling the story of the first time that she participated in the Christmas pageant. *This should be a strong actress who is comfortable memorizing lots of lines.

Christmas Pageant Characters

Director: Male or Female. Director of the Christmas Pageant.

Ally: Female (Character could easily be changed to a male if needed) Shepherd in Christmas pageant. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

Jan: Female (Character could easily be changed to a male if needed) Sheep in Christmas pageant. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

Caitie: Female (Character could easily be changed to a male if needed) Cow in Christmas pageant. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

Jack: Male (Character could easily be changed to a female if needed—change the name to Jackie) Donkey in the Christmas pageant. *This should be a strong, physically comedic actor. He only has two lines to memorize but is in three scenes.

Bill: Male (Character could easily be changed to a female if needed) Wise Man in Christmas pageant. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

Ben: Male (Character could easily be changed to a female if needed) Wise Man in Christmas pageant. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

Charlie: Male (Character could easily be changed to a female if needed) Wise Man in the Christmas pageant. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

James: Male. He plays Joseph in the Christmas pageant. *This actor has no lines.

Innkeepers 1, 2, 3: Could be male or female. *Innkeeper 1 is the only actor with a line.

Optional other characters: Barnyard animals. *No lines.

Bible Time Characters

Mary: Female. Young girl 15–25. Mother of the baby Jesus.

Gabriel: Male. Angelic messenger. *This actor is required to memorize only a couple of lines.

Joseph: Male 20's. Mary's husband.

Boaz: Male 20's. Friend of Joseph.

Man 1 & Man 2: (Can easily be changed to Woman 1 & Woman 2) Nazarene townsfolk.
*Although these actors have no lines, they should be strong, physically comedic actors.

Shepherd 1 & 2: Male. 40's+. Grumpy older men.

Shepherd 3 & 4: Male 20's or younger. Stoic young men.

Magi 1, 2, 3: Male. 50's + (They can be portrayed younger if needed) Wise Men searching for Jesus.

PROPS

Easel with a posted cast list on it

Clipboard with Paper and Pencil for Director

Bible for Eliza

Figs in a bowl

Bench

Staffs for Shepherds

Some pieces of wood for the Shepherd's fire

3 Compasses for Magi

Gifts for Wise Men and Magi (3 for Christmas pageant / 3 for Bible times)

Manger

Doll to play Jesus (This doll can be used for both the Christmas pageant AND Bible times)

Optional- Stones for the shepherds to sit on. (Can simply be made by covering large, durable boxes with gray fabric.)

SET

Keep it simple! Because there are so many transitions, a large set would prove to be cumbersome. I would advise keeping the stage mostly bare and using props to color the scenes.

SOUND EFFECTS

In Scene 7 there needs to be the sound of a baby crying. This serves as a cue for the actors to pause and look towards the manger. There are many online options that can easily be obtained for this sound effect. Another possibility would be to have an offstage actor that creates the sound effect.

COSTUMES

Eliza: Jeans and a causal top.

Christmas Pageant Characters

During Scene 1 all Christmas pageant characters should be in casual clothing. As the rehearsals take place, the characters should NOT appear in full costume, so that there is a clear distinction between them and the Bible characters. However, they may have a prop or small costume if they would like. For example, James may carry a staff.

**The only exceptions are:

In Scene 4 and 7 Jack should either be wearing a donkey head when he enters the scene OR he could be in a full donkey costume and chewing on a long piece of straw. The costume should distinguish him as the donkey; however, it should be incomplete, reiterating that this is simply a rehearsal.

In Scene 7 the sheep should be distinguished from the shepherds by some type of costume. They can be wearing sheep ears or tails. The costumes should distinguish them as sheep; however, they should be incomplete, reiterating that this is simply a rehearsal.

In Scene 7 the barnyard animals should again be distinguished from the human characters, however their costumes should be incomplete, reiterating that this is simply a rehearsal.

Bible Time Characters

All these characters should be in full Bible time garb.

Gabriel: A white robe.

Mary: A long blue colored tunic with a white overlaying garment. She should also have a light-colored shawl. Most of the time Mary is pregnant. Try to refrain from 'pillow-stuffed' attire. Loose clothing and good acting can allow the audience to believe she is pregnant without any awkward costumes.

Joseph, Boaz, Man 1 & 2: Long earthy colored tunics.

Shepherds: Long brown colored tunics. They should carry staffs.

Magi: Brightly colored tunics with elaborate head pieces. They should carry elegant gifts.

HOW

Lights will serve as an important element to your performance. This is a fast, easy, and clear way to distinguish between present day and Bible scenes. I suggest:

- Spotlights during Eliza's monologues.
- Light yellows for present day scenes.
- Light blues for Bible Time scenes.

Whatever your designer chooses, there should be different lights for both time periods. When the stage is split, the lighting should be split as well. (Ex. Stage Right in light blues while Stage Left in soft yellows)

**The show CAN be done without lights, however, there still does need to be a distinction between the present day and the Bible scenes. If you do not have access to lighting capabilities, your actors must remain in a hard freeze (not moving at all) during the other time period's scene. Strong acting and hard freezes will help direct your audience's attention.

Also be sure to always have Eliza, when she addresses the audience, stand in the same place. (The script calls for her to stand Downstage Left during most of her monologues.) Likewise, when the stage is split between the pageant and the Bible scene, the pageant should always be performed on the stage left side of the stage, while the Bible scene should appear on the stage right side.

**Optional Idea: This show was originally written with the intent that Christmas carols could be sung by a choir in-between each scene. This option is not necessary to the plot but does provide a nice way to incorporate some music.

SCENE BREAK DOWN

Scene 1

Characters: Eliza, Director, Ally, Bill, Jan, Caitie, Jack, Ben

Scene 2

Characters: Eliza, Director, Mary, Angel

Scene 3

Characters: Eliza, Joseph, Boaz, Man 1, Man 2

Scene 4

Characters: Eliza, James, Jack, Director, Innkeeper 1, 2, 3, Mary, Joseph

Scene 5

Characters: Eliza, Shepherd 1, 2, 3, 4

Scene 6

Characters: Director, Ben, Bill, Charlie, Magi 1, 2, 3

Scene 7

Characters: Eliza, Director, All Christmas pageant characters, Mary, Joseph, Magi 1, 2, 3, Shepherd 1, 2, 3, 4

Scene 8

Characters: Eliza, Mary, Joseph, Magi 1, 2, 3, Shepherd 1, 2, 3, 4

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Scene 1

Upstage, slightly left of center, there is a cast list posted on an easel.

Director, Ally, Bill, Jan, Caitie, Ben, and Jack are standing near the easel, frozen.

The rest of the stage is bare.

Lights up downstage left. Eliza enters downstage left. She directly addresses the audience, as if telling a story.

Eliza: The first year Christmas really made sense to me, was the first year that I volunteered to audition for the Christmas pageant. *(Beat)* Volunteer is the wrong word. It was more of an obligation-ary volunteering. My grandmother begged me to audition, saying it was her lifelong wish to see someone in her family be part of a great tradition that had once ignited her faith. So, I agreed to audition for, what had become to the community, somewhat of a Christmas ritual. Now the Christmas pageant was perfect. I mean absolutely flawless, right down to the color of the angel's hair. *(Beat)* I was not an actress. I was not an active part of the church. But I was my grandmother's only granddaughter, and the only one willing to audition. The process was brutal. I had never gotten up in front of so many people before. I struggled reading my lines, I had no idea how I was ever going to memorize them. I was hoping maybe they would throw me in with the shepherds. I could pull off ragged and confused, especially in front of an audience. But everyone was in for a surprise when the cast list went up...including myself.

Lights up on the full stage.

Eliza watches the following scene from downstage left. The Director is standing near the easel with a clipboard.

Director: Now I want everyone to remember *all* of the parts in the Christmas story are important. So, whether you are an angel or a sheep, we are all needed to help tell the good news of Christ's birth. Please check the list. I will be in touch with you later this week to discuss rehearsal times.

Director exits.

Ally, Bill, Caitie, Jan, Ben and Jack scramble towards the list.

Ally: *(to Bill)* I knew you'd get a Wise Man.

Bill: Because I'm brilliant.

Ally: No, because you use gel in your hair.

Bill: *(putting a hand to his head)* What does that have to do—

Ally: You couldn't pull off a shepherd.

Bill: I'm a true actor. I could pull off—

Ally tries to mess up Bill's hair. He pulls away, guarding his head.

Ally: See?

Bill: I'm more comfortable playing royalty.

Jan: I was a sheep last year.

Caitie: So?

Jan: I just thought I'd at least upgrade to a barnyard animal this year.

Caitie: I got the cow. Wanna trade?

Jan: No.

Jack: What part did I get?

Caitie: Jack, you got the donkey.

Jack: Figures.

Ben: I thought the church rented actual animals.

Bill: Well, they tried that for a while.

Ben: And...what? *(Jokingly)* The cattle were lowing a little too loud?

Pause. The other actors nod looking serious.

Ben: Really? It was too loud?

Ally: Loud and smelly.

Jan: "Away in a Manger," is inaccurate. There's no way a baby could sleep thru all that noise.

Caitie: Seriously. That baby cried the whole night.

Ben: How do you know? Were you there the night Jesus was born?

Bill: No. We used to use the Pastor's son.

Caitie: It was the closest thing we had to baby Jesus...until he got old enough to climb out of the manger.

Ben: A live baby—no one could predict that would be an issue?

Bill: Anyway, we've progressed to dolls and *(uses his hands to make quotation marks)* "live" animals.

Eliza enters the scene from stage left.

Eliza: Sorry I'm late. What'd I miss?

Ally: Cast list went up.

Eliza: What part did I get?

Everyone looks at the list, then back at Eliza.

Eliza: Oh no. What?

Lights down.

Scene 2

The stage is split. Upstage slightly left of center there is an easel with a posted cast list. Eliza and the Director are talking downstage left of the easel.

Stage right is bare.

Eliza: I'm confused.

Director: About what?

Eliza: I think you made a mistake.

Director: I didn't.

Eliza: The cast list says that you want me to be—

Director: Mary.

Eliza: Mary?

Director: I want you to play the role of Mary.

Eliza: As in—

Director: The mother of Jesus.

Director freezes.

Eliza breaks the 4th wall and addresses the audience.

Eliza: *(to the audience)* When I auditioned, I wasn't really walking with God... I was more so crawling. I had only agreed to be part of this to please my grandma, but God was going to use it. God was after my whole heart... I just didn't know it yet. Anyway, suffice to say, I wasn't anything like Mary. When the director told me what part she wanted me to play I was confused. Confused and perplexed and honestly, a little scared to do it.

Mary and Gabriel enter stage right. Mary kneels facing Gabriel.

Eliza: And ironically, I think that's maybe exactly how the real Mary must have felt.

Eliza looks towards stage right, watching the following scene.

Mary: *(politely but stunned)* Excuse me? *(Beat)* I mean... I'm sorry... could you please say that one more time? I'm not sure I heard you—

Gabriel: *(gently)* I know this is a lot to take in right now.

Mary: I—I— but I haven't—

Gabriel: The Holy Spirit will come upon you.

Slight pause.

Mary should appear reverent, asking for information, not questioning God's plan.

Gabriel should appear confident but comforting.

Mary: Are you going to tell my parents?

Gabriel: No.

Mary: That's going to be rather...umm...

Gabriel: Difficult.

Mary: I was thinking terrifying.

Gabriel: That too.

Mary: Have you met my father?

Gabriel: God has a plan.

Mary: They're going to think I—

Gabriel: *(gently reassuring)* It doesn't matter what they think. God knows your heart.

Mary: You're going to tell Joseph, right? Please. Please tell Joseph. He could stone me. *(Aside)* If my parents don't kill me first. *(To Gabriel)* I mean the law says—

Gabriel: God knows the law.

Mary: Right. Of course. *(Beat)* I mean *legally* stone me.

Gabriel: God is going to take care of you.

Mary: But...how?

Gabriel: Mary, you have found favor with God.

Mary: *(slight pause)* How do I do this?

Gabriel: Nothing is impossible for God. Nothing.

Mary and Gabriel freeze.

Director unfreezes. Eliza addresses Director.

Eliza: How do I do this?

Director: We're going to take care of everything.

Eliza: I—I— if it's just a costume problem, I can try helping you sew a new—

Director: You're the only one that fits the costume. There's not time to hire a new seamstress. Besides the part of Mary is simple.

Eliza: Except that she's, like, the lead.

Director: The baby Jesus is the lead.

Eliza: But you're having a doll play that role.

Director: You just need to stand near Joseph and hold the doll— *(correcting herself)* the baby Jesus.

Eliza: But—

Director: I promise it won't be that hard. We just need you to be willing.

Director freezes.

Eliza addresses audience.

Eliza: And there it was. I remember her words like it was yesterday, because in that moment I realized something. God's plan was to bring clarity to a world hopelessly confused, and all He required was willingness.

Eliza looks at Mary.

Mary and Gabriel unfreeze.

Mary: *(nodding)* I am a servant of the Lord. Let this happen to me according to your word.

Lights down.

Scene 3

Eliza enters downstage left and addresses the audience. She has a Bible in her hand.

Downstage right stands Man 1 and 2 dressed in Bible time costumes; they remain frozen as Eliza speaks.

Eliza: So needless to say, *(Eliza opens her Bible)* I ran home and read the Christmas story. Over and over. It's not that I hadn't read it before, but if they wanted me to play Mary, I figured I should make sure I knew the part backwards and forwards. And as I read, I had questions. Lots of questions.

Eliza looks towards centerstage.

Joseph and Boaz enter from stage right.

Man 1 and 2 look as if they are in the middle of a conversation. Man 1 is eating a handful of figs.

Joseph: Slow down. Slow down. I've only been gone a few days. How much could possibly have happened in Nazareth since Monday?

Boaz: Joseph. Listen to me. I have to tell you something...something that's going to be hard to hear. No one knows yet, but they will.

Joseph: What are you talking about?

Boaz: She's pregnant.

Joseph: Who is?

Boaz: Mary.

Joseph: Mary who?

Boaz: Your Mary.

Joseph: What?

Boaz: I'm telling you. I just found out. Mary's pregnant.

Joseph: Pregnant?

Boaz: Pregnant!

Man 1 and 2 are wide-eyed staring at Joseph and Boaz.

Joseph and Boaz realize they have been heard. They glance over at Man 1 and 2 and give a little wave. Then Joseph and Boaz move downstage center. Man 1 and 2 go back to their conversation.

Joseph: Not so loud.

Boaz: *(whispering)* Well?

Joseph: She's going to have a baby?

Boaz: You do know what pregnant means, right?

Joseph: You heard wrong.

Boaz: Joseph—

Joseph: *(interrupting)* Not Mary. Not *my* Mary.

Joseph, Boaz, Man 1 and 2 freeze.

Eliza addresses the audience.

Eliza: Joseph. Now there's an interesting character. I've always wondered how Joseph reacted to the news that Mary was pregnant. He must have felt betrayed. Rejected. Wronged. According to the law, he had every right to humiliate her, to make her feel the way he must have felt.

Joseph, Boaz, Man 1 and 2 unfreeze.

Eliza watches their scene.

Boaz: Listen, you can divorce her.

Joseph: She wouldn't betray me, not like that.

Boaz: She would. She did. Divorce her!

Man 1 and 2 once again slowly turn to Joseph and Boaz, wide-eyed.

Joseph looks over at them and waves one more time. Man 1 and 2 go back to their conversation.

Boaz: *(whispering)* Divorce her. Make an example—

Joseph: No. *(More adamantly)* No.

Boaz: The law says—

Joseph: *(interrupting)* I know what the law says. No.

Pause.

Joseph puts his hands to his head.

Joseph: I'll do it quietly.

During Eliza's next line, Joseph and Boaz move to downstage right and switch their pose. Man 1 and 2 move to upstage center and switch their pose.

Eliza addresses the audience.

Eliza: *(looking at her Bible)* The scripture then says that an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary home as his wife. *(Beat. Looking directly at the audience)* I'm guessing Mary had been begging God to clarify things with Joseph. She must have been relieved when he finally believed her. *(Beat)* But...I'm sure Joseph's friends were confused. I mean, it doesn't say that the angel appeared to any of them.

Joseph, Boaz, Man 1 and 2 unfreeze.

Eliza watches their scene.

Boaz: I thought we went over this yesterday.

Joseph: We did.

Boaz: You're not going to divorce her?

Joseph: No.

Boaz: She's pregnant!

Man 1 and 2 slowly turn to Joseph and Boaz, wide-eyed. Man 1 and 2 inch closer to Joseph and Boaz, clearly listening in on their conversation. Joseph and Boaz don't notice.

Joseph: I know.

Boaz: You do know what pregnant means, right?

Joseph: *(rolling his eyes)* I know. But things have changed.

Boaz: Joseph. Divorce her!

Joseph looks over at Man 1 and 2.

Man 1 and 2 look away quickly, trying to hide the fact that they were listening.

Joseph: *(whispering)* No.

Boaz: But—

Joseph: *(adamantly)* NO!

Boaz: Why?

Joseph: God told me not to. He told me not to be afraid to take her home as my wife.

Boaz: *(slowly)* No, he didn't.

Joseph: He did. *(Excited and confidently)* I had an angel visit me last night.

Man 1 and 2, clearly listening, drop their bowl of figs in surprise.

Joseph and Boaz look over at them.

Man 1 and 2 quickly pick up their dropped figs and exit as if they are in a hurry to get away from Joseph.

Boaz: *(quietly to Joseph)* You can't just say things like that in the marketplace.

Joseph: But it's true.

Boaz: An angel?

Joseph: Yes. Just listen to me—

Boaz: *(putting his hand to his head)* Joseph—

Boaz starts to exit.

Joseph: Listen. I had this dream.

Joseph follows him.

Eliza addresses the audience.

Eliza: His reputation was on the line. But Joseph chose to trust. He chose to believe. *(Flipping thru her Bible)* The angel shows up a few more times

later on, telling him where to go, where not to go, showing him the way when there didn't seem to be one. He was a man who not only heard from God but listened. He must have been quite the guy.

Eliza exits downstage left.

Lights down.

Scene 4

Downstage right there is a bench.

Eliza enters downstage left; she addresses the audience.

Eliza: So, I got the script, tried on the costume, and vowed to give it my best. But when rehearsals started it was pretty obvious that I wasn't exactly the best actress.

Director, James, Jack and Innkeepers enter to centerstage. Jack should be wearing a donkey costume. Jack should not be on all fours, but rather walking normally. He should simply be following Eliza and James.

Director: Eliza? Has anyone seen Eliza?

Eliza enters the scene.

Eliza: Here.

Director: Good. We're starting at your entrance to Bethlehem.

Eliza goes and stands next to James.

Director: Mary, Joseph, and the donkey enter from stage right and slowly make your way to the first Innkeeper.

Eliza, James and Jack go to stage right.

The Innkeepers form a straight horizontal line centerstage.

Director: Scene

Eliza, James and Jack begin to walk towards Innkeeper 1.

Director: Innkeeper gently shake your head.

Innkeeper 1: There really isn't a door.

Director: Just shake your head and turn upstage.

Innkeeper 1 turns to face upstage.

Director: Mary and Joseph move on to the next door.

Eliza, James and Jack move to Innkeeper 2.

Director: Good. Gently shake your head. Nice. Now turn upstage.

Innkeeper 2 turns upstage.

Eliza, James and Jack move towards Innkeeper 3.

Eliza, James, Jack, Director, and Innkeeper 1,2,3 freeze.

Mary and Joseph enter from stage right, the same way that Eliza and James entered.

Mary is clearly in pain. She moves downstage right and sits on the bench.

Joseph approaches the first Innkeeper and then the second. Both Innkeepers should remain turned upstage.

Joseph joins Mary downstage right.

Mary: Well?

Joseph: They're full.

Mary: Did you tell them?

Joseph: Yes.

Mary: That I'm pregnant.

Joseph: Yes.

Mary: That I'm in labor.

Joseph: I tried everything.

Mary: *(referring to Innkeeper 2)* Try that Inn.

Joseph: I already did.

Mary: Try again.

Joseph: We're going to find a place.

Mary: No, we're not.

Joseph: Yes, we will.

Mary: The baby's coming.

Joseph: I know.

Mary: This wasn't supposed to happen.

Joseph: Think. Did the angel say anything about this?

Mary: About how not to have the baby in the middle of the street?

Joseph: Yeah.

Mary: No.

Mary and Joseph freeze downstage right.

Eliza, James, Jack, Director, and Innkeeper 1,2,3 unfreeze.

Eliza: I have a quick question.

Director: Yes?

Eliza: If I'm in labor, should my hair be a little more mess—

Director: We'll talk costumes and hair later. Anything else?

Eliza: Should I be a little bit more distraught?

Director: No.

Eliza: Really? Not even a little worried? Upset? I did just ride a donkey from Nazareth.

Jack jokingly grabs his back.

Eliza glances at him. Jack stops.

Director: No. Just keep going.

Eliza, James, Jack, Director, and Innkeeper 1,2,3 freeze.

Mary and Joseph unfreeze.

Mary: What do we do?!

Joseph: Don't panic.

Mary: Don't panic? If there ever was a time to panic, it's now.

Joseph: *(praying)* God, we trust in your provision.

Mary: *(praying)* God, what's your plan? *(To herself)* Did we miss your plan?

Joseph: He's going to take care of us. He's got a plan.

Mary: I wish He would just tell us what that is right now.

Joseph: Me too.

Mary and Joseph freeze.

Director, Eliza, James, and Innkeepers unfreeze.

Director: *(to Innkeeper 3)* Shake your head, 'No.' Yup. Just like that. Pause one moment. Look like you have an idea. Then point offstage towards the stable. *(Innkeeper 3 points offstage, behind the audience)* Good. Now Mary and Joseph react.

James puts his hands together and quickly nods his head as if thanking God for an answered prayer. Then he slightly raises his hands to the sky, in praise.

Eliza reacts as if she's angry and upset.

Director: Cut. Cut. Eliza what are you doing?

Eliza: Reacting to the news that we're supposed to have the baby in the barn.

Director: The stable was God's plan all along.

Eliza: I know that, and you know that, but did Mary and Joseph know that?

Eliza, James, Jack, Director, and Innkeeper 1,2,3 freeze.

Mary and Joseph unfreeze.

Joseph: *(looking offstage behind the audience)* No. We're not—

Mary: *(interrupting)* Yes! We'll take it.

Joseph: Mary, it's a stable.

Mary: Joseph, it's not the street.

Joseph: Fine.

Mary and Joseph start to exit down the aisle, moving to an unseen stable behind the audience.

Joseph: Just for a few minutes. I'm going to find you another place.

Mary: We'll be fine. This stable could be God's provision.

Joseph: Where are we supposed to put the baby, in the manger?

Lights down.

Scene 5

Centerstage there is a pile of wood, staged as if it is a campfire. **Shepherd 2, 3, 4** are warming themselves by the fire and stoking it. There are large stones (or props that look like stones) around the campfire. The Shepherds are sitting or lying on the stones as they settle in for a long night.

Shepherd 1 stands upstage right, looking offstage, as if he's counting sheep.

Eliza enters downstage left with her Bible in her hand.

She addresses the audience.

Eliza: The shepherds. When I auditioned, I was hoping to get a shepherd. Even as a kid, they were always my favorite part of the Christmas story. I always pictured them as group of stoic boys and grumpy old men who miraculously got front row seats to the best show in town.

Eliza looks towards center stage and watches the following scene.

Shep 1: Fifty-three. Fifty-four. Fifty-five.

Shep 2: All that to say, I asked her father and he said no.

Shep 3: Again.

Shep 2: He said no...again. But this time he wasn't—

Shep 4: Yelling at you?

Shep 3: Throwing things?

Shep 4: Screaming?

Shep 2: He wasn't so sure.

Shep 3: You said that last time.

Shep 2: But this time I think he *wanted* to say yes.

Shep 3: *(as if he wants Shepherd 2 to stop talking)* He probably wanted to say anything that would make you stop talking.

Shep 4: I don't know why you keep asking.

Shep 3: We're shepherds.

Shep 4: We're not exactly every woman's dream.

Shep 3: Or every father's, for that matter.

Shep 2: You make it sound so hopeless.

Shep 3: It is. He's got one daughter. He's not going to choose you.

Shep 1: Sixty-five. Sixty-six.

Shep 4: *(to Shepherd 1)* Stop. You're making my head hurt. They're all here.

Shep 1: How can you tell? They all look the same.

As he says this next line, Shepherd 4 lays down and puts a hat or scarf over his eyes, as if he is going to sleep.

Shep 4: *(annoyed)* Do this job for another 30 years. They won't all look the same by then.

Shepherd 1 sits.

Shep 1: *(sarcastically)* You're in a good mood.

Shep 4: What's there to be in a good mood about?

Shep 3: Kid, we're shepherds. *(To Shepherd 2)* We don't get the girls.

Shep 4: No father dreams of choosing a shepherd as a son-in-law.

Shep 3: Most people don't even make eye contact with us.

Shep 1: *(teasingly to Shepherd 2)* Afraid if they got too close, they'd smell you.

Shep 2: I don't smell.

Shep 4: I can smell you from here.

Shepherds freeze.

Eliza addresses the audience.

Eliza: They weren't highly educated or the wealthiest or even the most liked. They were the lowest. The most common place. And God chose to send his heavenly choir to them.

A bright light shines above the Shepherds.

Shepherds shrink back.

Eliza: *(reading from her Bible)* "Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Bright light down.

Shepherds begin to laugh.

All Shepherds ad lib as they exit down the stage right aisle.

Shepherd 1,3,4: Did you hear that? He was talking to us. Let's go. Let's go. Hurry!

Shep 2: *(as he exits)* He chose us! God chose to tell us!

Eliza: They're still my favorite part of the Christmas story. Every time I read about the shepherds I'm reminded, that God still chooses to bring joy to the hopeless and laughter to the stoics.

Lights down.

Scene 6

*The three **Wise Men (Ben, Bill, Charlie)** enter from behind the audience down an aisle. They walk towards the stage, acting out their roles, as the **Director** stands downstage giving directions.*

*All three **Wise Men** are holding gifts in their hands. **Charlie (Wise Man 3)** is holding his gift like a football, under his arm.*

Director: Wise men, guide us to thy perfect light. Divinely led, confidently moving forward in your journey. Excellent. Your direction is clear.

*Director sees how **Wise Man 3** is holding his gift.*

Director: Hang on. Wise Man number 3! Charlie, that's not how you hold—

*Director moves off the stage into the aisle to speak with the **Wise Men**.*

Director: You're holding Frankincense.

Charlie: Myrrh.

Director: What?

Charlie: I'm holding myrrh.

Director: All of these boxes are empty, no one is actually holding anything—never mind. Let's try holding our gifts like Kings, not football players. And look up. Your eyes are fixed on that star.

Wise Men and Director freeze offstage in the aisle.

The Magi enter to centerstage. Magi 2 and 3 are holding compasses out like cell phones that are trying to find reception. Magi 1 is squinting and staring at the sky.

Magi 1: I can't see anything. How are we supposed to follow a star if we can't see it?

Magi 2: Does anyone else feel like we're just aimlessly wandering?

Magi 3: *(agreeing)* These clouds are frustrating.

Magi 2: *(referring to stage left)* This is north.

Magi 1: Yeah?

Magi 2: So, let's go north.

Magi 1: Last I checked the star was westward leading.

Magi 2: Are you sure?

Magi 1: No.

Magi 3: What is this, the fifth day of cloud covering?

Magi 1: Yeah.

Magi 2: *(to Magi 3)* I told you to stop for directions back there.

Magi 3: How do we ask for directions when we don't really know where we're going?

Magi 2: Where are we? Let's just figure out where we are.

Magi 1: Well we've already passed the fields.

Magi 2: And fountain,

Magi 3: The moors—

Magi 2: And mountains—

Magi 1: *(in rhythm)* If only we could see that star.

Magi 2: Jerusalem is the closet city around. Let's go to the palace. I'm sure he's there.

Magi 3: We've been through this before. The star isn't directly over—

Magi 2: According to my calculations, Jerusalem is well within the margin of—

Magi 3: *(interrupting)* How can you call yourself a wise man if you're continually using margins of error.

Magi 1: *(clearly annoyed with this argument)* Quiet! Jerusalem isn't a bad idea. We've been stranded here for 5 nights, no idea which way to go. If he's not in Jerusalem, maybe someone at the palace has at least heard of a new king.

Pause.

Magi 3: Fine.

Magi start to exit off stage right.

Magi 3: I just hope this doesn't turn into another detour. At this rate we aren't going to get there till the new King is 2-year-old.

Wise Men and Director unfreeze.

Director: Let's take this again from the top.

Wise Men and Director begin to exit down the aisle.

Director: *(as they exit)* Eyes up. Focused on the star. Remember what it symbolizes. You're following the light that brings direction to the lost and aimless. Eyes up!

Lights down.

Scene 7

Centerstage there is a manger.

Director stands in front of the manger.

Director: Ok. One more time from the top of this scene. *(Slight pause)* Barnyard animals! You are supposed to start on stage.

Cow and any other barnyard animals enter and stand upstage of the manger.

Director moves to downstage left.

Director: First come Mary and Joseph.

As the characters enter, they form a typical manger scene.

Eliza, James and Jack enter from stage right. Eliza is carrying a doll wrapped in cloth.

Eliza silently lays the baby in the manger. James and Eliza stand directly behind the manger. James moves upstage.

Director: Good. Now the shepherds come and kneel.

The Shepherds enter from stage right. There are a few Sheep that follow them. Jan is a sheep.

The Shepherds cross in front of the manger and kneel stage left, facing the manger.

The Sheep should follow them to stage left.

Director: Next come the wise men. Remember to lay down your gifts.

The Wise Men enter from stage right and lay their gifts down in front of the manger. Then the Wise Men move to stage right of the manger and kneel.

Director moves towards center stage to address the cast.

Director: Perfect. Absolutely perfect. Ok. Shows at 7pm, but I want everyone back here in one hour to make sure we're in costume on time.

All actors exit stage left except Eliza and Jan.

Jan: Want to grab some dinner?

Eliza: Sure. *(Referring to the manger)* Do you think that's how it really happened?

Jan: The first Christmas? Yeah. *(Beat)* Well, I guess no one really knows *when* the wise men arrived. Jesus was probably closer to two-years-old, but our pageant is only an hour long. *(Beat)* But...other than that, yeah. I think that's how it happened. Don't you?

Eliza: I don't know. I just picture it a little more chaotic.

Eliza and Jan exit stage left.

The baby Jesus doll should be left in the manger, and used for the following scene.

Mary and Joseph enter stage right and move to upstage of the manger, just like the Christmas pageant. Mary's hair and clothes should not be perfect, but rather a little messy.

Shepherds come storming in, almost scaring Mary and Joseph. The Shepherds are loudly praising God and singing.

The following lines are said quickly and on top of each other.

Shep 4: *(singing)* Joy to the world the Lord has come let earth receive her King.

Shep 2: Is this him? The king?

Joseph: Who are you?

Mary grabs the baby, as if to protect him.

Shep 3: The angels came to us in the field—

Shep 1: It was so bright. We were terrified.

Shep 4: I think I wet my tunic.

Shep 2: *(seeing the baby)* There he is!

Joseph: Please, come in. Umm there's not really a place to sit, but—

Mary: *(trying to fix her tangled hair)* We weren't expecting company. But—

Shep 1: *(to Mary)* I'm sorry the sheep followed us here. It's just the way we trained them.

Mary: It's ok. Just don't let them—

Shep 2: They don't bite. Sheep don't bite. *(Rethinking what he has just said)* Well, actually they do. Some do. But ours don't. *(Rethinking)* They never have before. I don't think.

Mary is clearly not comforted and holds the baby closer.

Shepherd 3 spits on the ground.

Mary: Did you just spit?

Shep 3: We're in a barn.

Shep 1: *(glancing offstage as if counting sheep)* Forty-five, forty-seven—wait. Oh no.

Shep 2: Can I hold him?

Mary: *(to Shepherd 2, kindly but a little panicky)* It's just he's just an hour old, and your hands don't look clean.

Joseph: *(to Mary)* It's ok.

Joseph takes the baby from Mary and hands it to Shepherd 2.

Shepherd 2 holds the baby like a football.

Joseph: Two hands. *(A little panicky)* Use two hands, please.

Shep 4: It kind of has a ring to it.

Shep 3: What does?

Shep 4: *(singing)* Joy to the world. *(Talking to Shepherd 3)* I'm going to write a song.

Shep 3: Who do you think you are? King David?

Shep 4: King David was a Shepherd.

The Baby cries.

The dialogue abruptly stops as everyone looks at the baby.

Mary takes the baby back from Shepherd 2 and places him in the manger.

Mary kneels upstage of the manger and puts her hand on the baby as if calming him.

Joseph puts his hand on Mary's shoulder, making sure that she's ok.

She smiles at him.

Slight pause.

In a whirlwind the Magi enter from stage right, again almost scaring Mary and Joseph.

The following dialogue should be loud and chaotic as well. The lines can be said quickly and almost on top of each other.

Magi 1: There he is! He's in here.

Magi 2: I can't believe we made it.

Magi 3: We would have been here sooner, but the clouds.

Magi 1: And Herod held us up for a bit...but that's a different story.

Shep 3: Did you see the angels as well?

Magi 2: The star! Who could miss the star?

Mary: What star?

Joseph: Who are you?

Mary grabs the baby, as if to protect him.

Magi 1: We saw the new king's star and have come to worship him.

Magi 2: We brought gifts.

Shep 2: *(to Shepherd 3)* I knew we forgot something.

Magi 2: Can I hold him?

Mary: Umm.

The Baby cries.

The dialogue abruptly stops again, as all eyes look at the baby.

Mary stands next to Joseph, still holding the baby. The Shepherds kneel stage left of the manger as the Magi lay their gifts in front of the manger and kneel stage right of the manger. They form the same manger scene that was created by the Christmas pageant.

Magi and Shepherds freeze.

Joseph: *(to Mary, whispering)* This is chaos.

Mary: This is not how a baby is supposed to be born, much less the King of Kings.

Joseph: It does seem fitting though, doesn't it?

Mary: What do you mean?

Joseph: This hectic night.

Mary: Why is it fitting? The prophet said he would be a prince of peace. Not of chaos.

Joseph: If our world wasn't chaotic, we wouldn't need the Prince of Peace.

Mary places the baby in the manger and she and Joseph kneel upstage of it, exactly like the traditional manger scene.

Joseph: He didn't *come* to peace; he came to *bring* peace.

Lights down.

Scene 8

*Centerstage the **Magi, Shepherds, and Joseph** form the exact same manger scene as at the end of Scene 7. They remain frozen. **Mary** is absent from the scene.*

Eliza enters downstage left and directly addresses the audience.

Eliza: The night of the first show, I was nervous. But as I sat there, playing the role of Mary, the Christmas story suddenly came alive to me, just like it had for my grandmother so many years before.

Mary enters downstage right and directly addresses the audience.

As she does the manger scene behind her comes to life. Although the manger scene actors should be absolutely silent, their actions should remain as chaotic as Scene 7.

*The **Wise Man 1** should cross and speak with the **Shepherds**.*

*Wise Man 2 and 3 should talk with **Joseph**.*

Joseph grabs the baby as if trying to comfort a crying newborn.

*The **Shepherds** should be trying to act out the angel choir, clearly trying to explain to **Magi 1** what they saw.*

Mary: *(as **Mary** talks, she takes her shawl and puts it over her head, as if trying to drown out the noise)* The Wise Men were still talking about the star, and the shepherds were still shouting and singing. The animals were loud, there was no loving the baby to sleep. Everything was chaos. But for one moment, for one brief moment... He cried. And I realized. He's here! He's really here. Our world is a mess. We're confused and directionless and ruled by fear. We're stuck in the middle of chaos, but our peace has come at last. At last.

Slight pause.

Mary: There were so many voices screaming in my ears.

Eliza: The crowd was loud, and babies were crying.

Mary: But for one moment...

Eliza: For one brief moment there was this...

Both: Stillness.

Optional: The manger scene actors freeze on the word "stillness".

Eliza: Our peace.

Mary: Our hope.

Eliza: Our Savior. He really came.

Mary: He was here. And nothing else mattered. All the noises and the distractions in my head bowed to the stillness that was in my heart. He was here.

Mary freezes downstage right.

Manger scene actors turn to face upstage.

Eliza: It was in that moment that I realized the true meaning of Christmas. Emmanuel, God with us. *(Beat)* When he came—

Mary moves centerstage, behind the manger.

Eliza looks at Mary and the manger.

Eliza: He brought clarity to our confusion.

Joseph turns to face downstage and stands next to Mary.

Eliza: He made a way when there seemed like there wasn't one. When we were panicked, he provided.

The Shepherds turn to face downstage. They kneel stage left, facing the manger.

Eliza: He brought joy to the hopeless.

Magi turn to face downstage and kneel slightly stage right of the manger.

Eliza: He brought direction to our aimlessness.

The manger scene is now complete. Bible characters remain in a soft freeze.

Eliza addresses the audience.

Eliza: That pageant changed the way I viewed Christmas. I was used to Christmas being parties and presents and every moment of every day packed with something Christmassy to do. Christmas had become noise...or rather noise had become my Christmas.

Eliza moves centerstage towards the manger.

Eliza: Our manger scenes, despite our attempts to make them perfect are probably far from accurate. It probably was chaotic and loud. I'm almost certain it was anything but a silent night.

Eliza kneels center stage in front of the manger. She should be slightly tilted towards stage right, so that she can still address the audience, but also be kneeling towards the manger.

Eliza: But that's why he came. To our chaos he brought peace, and to our noise, stillness.

Lights down.

The End.

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