

A script from



## “The Thought That Counts”

by  
Don Bosley

**What** The Davidson family has the perfect plan for winning the annual Christmas yard decorating contest: a live nativity scene, with themselves in the lead roles. It would all be working just beautifully...if only they could get their Jesus to look a little more real. **Themes:** Christmas, Jesus, Form of Godliness, Reason for the Season

**Who** Sharon, an uptight mom and wife  
Ed, her easygoing husband  
Jack, their college-aged son  
Brittany, their teenage daughter  
Molly, their younger daughter  
Grandma, Sharon’s mom  
Ms. Eltoe, judge in the local contest  
Other committee judges

**When** A chilly Christmas Eve

**Wear** \*See the end of this script for a full prop list.  
(Props)

**Why** Luke 2:1-20; Isaiah 1: 13-15; 1 John 4:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

**How** The irritation among the family members absolutely must be played for laughs; if you don’t keep it light, you run the risk of poking the very family anxieties that plague a lot of audience members during the holidays. The skit can be played with just one judge (Ms. Eltoe) or you can add several others if you have actors who’d like non-speaking parts.

**Time** Approximately 14 minutes

LIGHTS UP on the **Davidsons'** front yard, evening. Changing hues from blinking Christmas lights might be dancing all around the scene. Presently **Molly** sprints in from downstage right, dressed in a bathrobe and headpiece to loosely resemble a Biblical shepherd.

**Molly:** (Hollering at front door) They're five houses away!

**Sharon:** (Offstage) Five houses!

**Grandma:** (OS) Five houses!

**Ed:** (OS) Five houses!

**Sharon** enters from front door, wearing a shepherd's head cloth and tying her bathrobe about her.

**Sharon:** All right, here we go! (Yelling into house) It's time! Ed?!

**Ed:** (OS, sing-songy) Coming! Just a sec, dear!

**Sharon:** Tell Brittany not to forget the baby, okay? And tell her to wrap him up in the beach towel, not the table doily! It's more swaddling!

**Ed:** (OS) You got it, dear!

**Molly:** (Shivering) Can I go get a coat, mom?

**Sharon:** No coats. The shepherds and wise men didn't have coats. We need to make this genuine. Jump up and down.

**Molly** begins stiffly jumping up and down.

**Sharon:** (Peering down the street) Did you get a good look at 'em, Molly? How many of 'em are there?

**Molly:** A bunch.

**Sharon:** Well, how many? Men? Women? Young? Old? Democrat? Republican? I need intel, child!

**Molly:** There's some women, I think. Tall women. They seem nice?

**Sharon:** Hoooo, yes, they always seem nice, but don't you let looks fool you. Always remember this, Molly: In life, there is nothing more ruthless and underhanded than a pack of judges for the annual Christmas yard display contest.

**Molly:** What's ruthless mean?

**Sharon:** *(Narrowing eyes)* It means they haven't got a heart, that's what it means. No qualms whatsoever about blowing your hopes and dreams to smithereens. Ruthless means cold, cold, cold.

**Molly:** *(Shivering, jumping)* I'm seriously ruthless right now.

**Sharon:** Quit complaining! Go back and keep an eye on them. Report back when they get to the Shermans' house!

*Molly runs off.*

**Sharon:** Ed?!!

**Ed:** *(OS, sing-songy)* Coming, dear!

**Sharon:** Tell Jack to grab those toy sheep when he comes!

*Jack enters from the front door, also dressed like a shepherd in a bathrobe. He carries three or four stuffed toy sheep.*

**Jack:** I've got 'em, I've got 'em.

**Sharon:** *(Taking the toy sheep)* I wish we had some cows. How, in a collection of 500 stuffed animals, your sister doesn't have even one cow...

**Jack:** Mom, this whole thing is out of control.

**Sharon:** Now, don't start with me, Jack. All right?

**Jack:** What kind of Christmas Eve is this?

**Sharon:** *(Pained)* It's the same kind as always., Jack. Every year we do the yard contest. Every year.

**Jack:** We do it with giant inflatable reindeer and light-up candy canes! Where'd this idea for the live nativity scene come from?

**Sharon:** *(Index finger)* The nativity, young man, is what Christmas is all about.

**Jack:** You read that on a Hallmark card, Mom.

**Sharon:** Well, it's true.

**Jack:** You're obsessed with winning the yard contest, is what it is. You're thinking the judges are going to give us higher marks if we make our display more religious.

**Sharon:** There's nothing wrong with putting the religion back in Christmas. More people should.

**Jack:** It's the height of hypocrisy, Mom. You're exploiting the *real* reason for the season in an effort to better embrace the *superficial* reason for the season!

**Sharon:** Listen to you. That college is teaching you to speak in tongues. You may not believe it, Jack, but this is our way of fighting back against the over-commercialization of Christmas.

**Jack:** *(Eye roll)* Oh, I got ya.

**Sharon:** *(Gesturing)* Just look at Gertie Polinski's house across the street. Should she get rewarded for an obnoxious, gaudy display like that? Of course she shouldn't! But every year she does! Six straight blue ribbons. Well, I can't string more lights than her, she's the one with the two-story mansion, so there's no way. I'll never have the bigger tree. She's got those stupid vaulted ceilings, you could put the Washington Monument in there. Face it, Jack, I can't beat Gertie Polinski in a head-to-head fight. But maybe...just maybe...if we can pull off a little humility...sincerity...

**Jack:** You call this sincere?!

**Sharon:** Oh, you're impossible! I don't know where you get it. Can't you just do this one thing for your mother? Can't you just smile and be a good little Joseph, for 10 minutes?

**Ed** enters, wearing a colorful robe and shepherd's headpiece.

**Ed:** Heeeere we are! Here's our little Mary. Isn't she adorable?

**Brittany** enters, pouty. Dressed like Mary, she carries a naked doll by the heel.

**Brittany:** You *can't* be serious. It's like 4 degrees out here!

**Sharon:** Is that how you're going to carry Baby Jesus? By the heel?

**Brittany:** It's a doll, Mom. There's no blood rushing to its head.

**Sharon:** Do we have clothes for it?

**Brittany** holds up a frilly lace tablecloth.

**Sharon:** That's the best you could do?

**Brittany:** Well, sue me! Like I'm supposed to know what swaddling is!

**Ed:** (*Wrapping doll in the tablecloth*) Now, now, it doesn't really matter, Sharon. It's the thought that counts!

**Brittany:** (*Sigh*) This is so weird, Mom.

**Sharon:** It's not weird, it's heart-warming! And if I say it's heart-warming, then that's just the way it's going to be, young lady! Got it?

**Grandma** enters from the front door, a little teetering and squinting to see. She carries three brightly-wrapped gifts, each with multiple bows.

**Grandma:** I lost everybody there! Where'd everyone go? (*Peering across the street*) Oooo! Now that's a pretty house *there*, isn't it?

**Sharon** frowns.

**Grandma:** I really like that reindeer way up there on top.

**Sharon:** Mom ...

**Grandma:** Yes, dear.

**Sharon:** What are those gifts you're carrying?

**Grandma:** Oh! Why, they're gold, frankincense and myrrh, sweetheart. Or is it...no, no, this one's frankincense, and *this* one's myrrh. (*To Ed*) Here, smell this and see if it smells like myrrh. (*To Brittany*) I'm afraid Granny's kinda lost her sniffer!

**Sharon:** (*Fighting to be gentle*) Mom?

**Grandma:** Hm?

**Sharon:** Mom?

**Grandma:** Yes, dear.

**Sharon:** Why are the gifts...wrapped?

**Grandma** thinks a moment.

**Grandma:** *(Shrug)* They're gifts.

**Sharon:** They're gifts. Okay. *(Deep breath)* Mom?

**Grandma:** Yes, dear?

**Sharon:** Do you really think the Three Wise Men had access to *Spiderman wrapping paper*?!!!

**Grandma:** *(Beat)* Well, you can get it anywhere, sweetie...

**Sharon:** We're trying to be authentic here, people!

**Jack:** Actually, you know, Mom, your whole concept of the wise men is off-base anyway. They didn't come the night Jesus was born.

**Sharon:** Excuse me, Mr. Smarty Britches. Were you there?

**Jack:** Look it up. They came later.

**Sharon:** Jack, I've seen a million nativity scenes in my life, and they've all got three wise men in them. You may have gotten 24,000 on your SATs but I don't think you know more than the Christmas *experts* who make those nativity scenes.

**Jack:** I'm not saying I know more, I'm just saying—

**Molly:** *(Sprinting back in)* They're at the Shermans' house!

*They all look in the direction **Molly** is pointing, then begin scurrying into 'nativity' position.*

**Sharon:** All right, places everybody! Molly, you're over here...

**Brittany:** *(Kneeling in the middle)* Wait a minute.

**Sharon:** Ed, grab a sheep. Maybe put one on your shoulder. I saw a picture of a shepherd doing that once. It was very cute.

**Brittany:** Wait a minute.

**Sharon:** Mom, just ditch the gifts. Here, you grab a sheep, too. And I'll—

**Brittany:** Wait a minute.

**Sharon:** *(Impatient)* What!

**Brittany:** There's no manger.

**Sharon:** What?

**Brittany:** There's no manger. We *need* a manger.

*They all stare at the empty space in front of **Brittany**.*

**Ed:** Can't you just *hold* the baby?

**Brittany:** Oh, forget that! No way am I going to sit here holding a baby like I'm it's mother. What if kids from school come by?

**Sharon:** Oh, for heaven's sake!

**Jack:** You gotta have a manger, Mom.

**Grandma:** *(High pitch)* Oh, nooooo! Manger danger!

**Sharon:** Mom, *please!* All right, all right. Let me think. *(Beat)* Here we go. Jack, grab a bucket from the garage. Molly, grab an armful of those tall, dry weeds from the back yard. Go!

*They go, **Jack** shaking his head.*

**Ed:** Honey, you can't lay Baby Jesus to rest on a bucket of dry weeds.

**Sharon:** There are no rules to this, Ed.

**Ed:** But it seems kinda sacrilegious.

**Sharon:** It's the thought that counts, Ed! Okay?! There is virtually no difference between real hay and the weeds in our back yard.

**Brittany:** Except that real hay actually gets cut down once in awhile.

**Sharon:** How about I cut down your cell phone access, Ms. Peanut Gallery?! I'll do it!

**Molly:** *(Returning)* Here you go!

***Jack** returns also. He sets the bucket down and **Molly** lays an armload of dry weeds across the bucket's mouth. **Brittany** rests the wrapped doll on top of the weeds. They all stare at the pathetic scene.*

**Jack:** *(Snide)* Oh, yeah. *There* we go. No one will ever suspect.

**Sharon:** It'll have to do. Okay, quickly, everyone get into their places now.

**Molly:** Should we all be looking at the baby, or what?

**Sharon:** Yes. Absolutely. Look at it lovingly, if you can.

**Ed:** Brittany honey, maybe you should be singing a lullaby.

**Sharon:** Excellent idea.

**Brittany:** What?! Gag me!

**Sharon:** Do you want to win the blue ribbon, or don't you?

**Brittany:** I couldn't care less! And I don't know any lullabies.

**Ed:** Um... "hush little baby don't say a word"?

**Sharon:** Yes! "Daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird"!

**Brittany:** That's stupid! Do I look like its Daddy?

**Molly:** She's right.

**Grandma:** "Moon River" is nice!

*They all stare at her.*

**Sharon:** How about "Rock-a-bye baby"?

**Jack:** What, in the treetop? That sounds lame.

**Brittany:** Everything *about* this sounds lame.

**Sharon:** All right, forget it. Just sing a Christmas carol instead.

**Jack:** Now there's a decent idea.

**Brittany:** This is so unfair. How come I'm the one who has to sing?!

**Ed:** Because you're *Mary*, honey.

**Sharon:** People like the image of Mary singing to the Baby Jesus!

**Brittany:** I don't care what people like.

**Ed:** *(Thru clenched teeth)* Brittany, you've sung a thousand Christmas carols in your life. Now if you *ever* want to see your cell phone again...*SING!!!*



**Brittany** frowns angrily. She lets out a big sigh.

**Brittany:** *(Singing slowly and bitterly)* I'm...dreaming...of a white...Christmas...

The others stare at her in disbelief.

**Brittany:** *(Singing)*...just like the ones I used to know...

**Grandma:** *(Dreamily)* Mmmm! She sounds just like Bing Crosby...

**Sharon:** All right, that does it!

**Brittany:** *(Fed up)* What?!

**Sharon:** Do you *think*...that *maybe*...just maybe...sitting here in the middle of a nativity scene...on Christmas Eve...we could *possibly* sing a carol that has *some thread of a religious theme*?!

**Brittany:** I don't know! You said sing a Christmas carol, I sang a Christmas carol! This whole idea stinks royally!

**Molly:** Shhhh!!! Here come the judges!

**Jack:** *(Quieter)* All right, all right...listen. What if we all sang softly, "Silent Night"?

**Molly:** Yeah!

**Sharon:** Ok, good, good!

**Jack:** Dad, you lead us.

**Ed:** Okay, okay here we go. *(Beat)* What are the first words?

They all stare at him.

**Sharon:** *(Clenched teeth)* Silent...Night!

**Ed:** Right, right. Right. OK.

On his downbeat, they all begin singing "Silent Night" very softly. It is not the most melodic rendering by any means. Presently **Ms. Eltoe** and possibly several other **Judges** enter, dressed warmly and carrying clipboards. They listen with smiles, seeming very pleased. This encourages the **Davidsons**, who eye one another and begin to sing with a ridiculous amount of feigned emotion.

**Sharon:** *(Stepping out)* Greetings, oh weary travelers.

**Ms. Eltoe:** Greetings.

**Sharon:** Have you come to see our newborn King?

**Grandma:** *(Loud whisper)* He's the one on the bucket!

**Sharon** rubs her forehead like she has a migraine.

**Ms. Eltoe:** This is nice. Very nice.

**Sharon:** Thank you.

**Ms. Eltoe:** Very...different.

**Sharon:** We like to think so.

**Ms. Eltoe** notices **Molly**, who's jumping again.

**Ms. Eltoe:** Well, aren't you a bouncy little one!

**Molly:** I've never been so ruthless in my whole life.

**Sharon:** *(Fake laugh, steering Ms. Eltoe away)* Yes, yes, isn't she sweet. I'm so glad you like our display. It really carries a lot of deep meaning for all of us.

*She looks at the family. It takes them a second to get the hint, but then they all dutifully nod in agreement.*

**Sharon:** You know, it just seems to us that there's so much...*commercialization* of Christmas out there. *(Gesturing across the street)* So much meaningless glitz. Every once in a while, all of us— perhaps even a person such as yourself— we really need to search ourselves and get back to the true reason for the season.

**Ms. Eltoe:** Well, that is so true.

**Sharon** smiles at her family.

**Ms. Eltoe:** And to play all the nativity parts yourselves...I must say, it really lends a personal touch. Which one of you is the donkey?

*They all stare at each other.*

**Ms. Eltoe:** *(Chuckling)* Joking, I'm only joking. Yes, this is a very nice effort. Very nice. Tell me, have you ever tried it with a real Jesus?

**Sharon:** A real...? *(Laugh)* Oh, no, I'm afraid not. This family's fresh out of live babies.

**Brittany:** He'd probably freeze his pacifier off, anyway.

**Jack:** No kidding.

**Ms. Eltoe:** I don't mean a real baby. I mean a real Jesus.

*Beat.*

**Molly:** They sell those?

**Ed:** Are those, like, inflatable, or what?

**Ms. Eltoe:** *(Smile)* No. Nothing like that.

**Sharon:** Well, that's a great suggestion, thank you. *(chuckle)* Obviously, we won't have time to go out and get one tonight. But we'll keep it in mind and try to get a real Jesus next year. Right, gang?

*The family all nods.*

**Ms. Eltoe:** *(Writing on clipboard)* It's really too bad.

**Sharon:** *(Looking over her shoulder)* What...what do you mean, it's too bad?

**Ms. Eltoe:** Oh, don't get me wrong. You do have a beautiful concept here...a real meaningful effort...but the one shortcoming changes the entire complexion of your message.

**Sharon:** Wait. It does?

**Ms. Eltoe:** Oh, I think so. What I see here is a group of people embracing and praising something that is very clearly an inanimate object. Now certainly we all agree that Jesus is anything but inanimate.

*She waits for a response from the family. They stare at her open-mouthed, then all react at once.*

**Family:** Oh...yeah! Sure. Of course! *(etc.)*

**Ms. Eltoe:** The whole idea of celebrating Christmas, of course, is to remember that Jesus is alive, that He walked as one of us. That he moves...and shines...and has a vibrancy...much like those blinking lights on that two-story across the street.

**Grandma:** (To **Ms. Eltoe**) You know, that's *my* favorite, too!

**Sharon** stands agape.

**Sharon:** Wait. That?! (*indicating across street*) You're calling *that* your standard?! *That?!!!!* (*Jumping up and down*) But this is heart-warming, for crying out loud!!! (*Noticing something across the street*) What're you laughing at, Gertie Polinski?!! (*Throwing lamb across the street*) I hope your electric bill goes through the roof and your hamster chews on the Christmas tree wires!!!

*She regains her composure and returns.*

**Sharon:** Sorry. Little, uh, joke we have. Gertie and me.

**Ed:** (*To Ms. Eltoe*) Listen, we've worked hard on this, we're out here in 20-degree weather...what if we got a different doll...one that moved or cried or something? *Then* we'd be looking real.

**Ms. Eltoe:** A form of godliness, yes...but, I think, denying its power.

**Sharon:** Denying its power?

**Molly:** But...it's the thought that counts...right?

**Ms. Eltoe:** Is it?

*Beat. Family members think through this one.*

**Ms. Eltoe:** (*Bending down to Molly*) How would you like it if somebody threw you a birthday party...went to a lot of trouble to set up the cake and gifts and decorations, all the trimmings...but never showed up themselves?

**Molly:** That would stink!

**Ms. Eltoe:** Mm. And what if you asked them why they went to all that trouble and then didn't show up? And they just shrugged and said, "Hey, it's the thought that counts.?"

**Brittany:** Not cool!

**Grandma:** Totally bogus.

**Ed:** So, wait. You're saying...nativity scenes are bad?

**Ms. Eltoe:** No. I’m saying they’re *useless*... (smile) unless Jesus is in them for real. And that’s not a doll issue. That’s a heart, soul, mind and strength issue.

**Sharon:** But...isn’t it obvious? (*Indicating their scene*) This is all *about* Jesus!

**Ms. Eltoe:** Is it? You run around stressed and hurrying...to celebrate a season that proclaims “peace on earth.” You put on your costumes and act your parts...but then you go back to your same old selves again. You light your candles, prop up your nativities, put a star from the east atop your tree...but you yourself never show up in his presence. You actually make your day of thanksgiving *shorter* every year so that you can make your day of door-busting, materialistic madness a little *longer*.

**Ed:** Um...I stayed home Black Friday. Just sayin’.

**Ms. Eltoe:** You ask each other what gifts you want to receive, then you bend over backwards to buy them for each other. And you do it all without ever once asking the Lord of heaven what *he* wants, let alone giving it to him.

**Brittany:** Um...well, what *does* he want?

**Ms. Eltoe:** Just you. It’s what he’s always wanted.

**Jack:** He wants *her*? (*Nodding to Brittany*)

**Ms. Eltoe:** And you. And all of you. (*Smile*) It’s the only reason he arrived in the manger in the first place. For you.

*Beat.*

**Molly:** Mrs. Judgey Lady? Will you do me a favor?

**Ms. Eltoe:** What’s that, little one?

**Molly:** When you see the real Jesus...will you tell him that I have a Christmas gift for him?

*Molly pulls a bow off one of the gifts, sticks it on her head and presents herself.*

**Ms. Eltoe:** (*Smiling*) Tell you what. Why don’t you tell him yourself?

*The other family members nod, also put bows on themselves and re-take their nativity positions. Sharon is last, nodding and understanding. They freeze-frame like a postcard.*

LIGHTS DOWN.

# PURCHASE SCRIPT

**Props:**

Bathrobes for all family members  
Biblical shepherds head cloths for all family members  
Numerous stuffed toy sheep  
Life-sized doll  
Frisly tablecloth  
Three wrapped Christmas gifts, each with multiple bows  
Glasses and cane for Grandma  
Bucket  
Handful of dry weeds  
Coats, mittens, beanies for judges  
Clipboards for judges

TO  
REMOVE  
WATERMARK

AT

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