

a script from



WORSHIP

“The Shepherds’ Guide to Surviving Christmas”

By
Tracy Wells

What It's Christmas Eve at the Shepherd house and Molly Shepherd has a lot to do if she's going to make the holiday perfect for her family... that is, if she can survive until Christmas morning! From nosy neighbors and unexpected guests to unsent cards and missing packages, to a ruined dinner and non-stop interruptions from a bunch of carolers, Molly is at her wit's end! Luckily a couple of Biblical shepherds are on hand to steer Molly in the right direction and remind her, and us all, what Christmas is really about.

Themes: Meaning of Christmas, Comedy, Jesus' Birth, All Ages, Pageant, Play

Who Shepherds (2): our guides; male or any gender
Molly Shepherd: a stressed out wife and mother; female
Tom Shepherd: Molly's patient husband; male
Blake Shepherd: their annoyed teenage child; any gender
Joey: their 8-10 year old precocious child, twins with Alex; any gender
Alex: their 8-10 year old precocious child, twins with Joey; any gender
Gabby/Gabe: nosy neighbor; any gender
Grandma Shepherd: Tom's mother; female
Grandpa Shepherd: Tom's father; male
Aunt/Uncle Pat: unexpected guest; any gender
Jaime: an excitable cousin; any age/gender
Quinn: a somber cousin; any age/gender
Pepper: a quirky family friend; any age/gender
Tayor: postal carrier; any gender
Angela/Angelo: leader of carolers; any gender
Carolers: any number/age/gender
Maggie/Magnus: delivery driver; any gender
Drew: pizza delivery driver; any gender

When Modern Day

Costumes Modern day attire. Molly should wear a bright and ugly Christmas sweater. Shepherds should be dressed in Biblical attire. Postal carrier, delivery driver and a pizza deliverer should wear uniforms. Pepper should be uniquely attired. All others should be costumed as would best suit their characters.

Set The set is an interior of a family's living room. A sofa is center, flanked by two chairs. A coffee table is in front of the sofa with clipboard and pen on it. A fireplace with stockings is present as is a decorated Christmas tree. A door leading outside may also be present or it can also be just offstage.

Props 2 Clipboards with lists on them
2 Pens
Phone
Plate of cookies.
Bible with a cover on it that says *The Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas*
Suitcases (several)
Wrapped gifts (several)
Water bottle
Burnt turkey on serving tray
2 Boxes, one with an action figure inside
Stack of pizza boxes.

Why Luke 2

How The bulk of the play takes place in the home of the Shepherd family, with interruptions from two Shepherds. These interruptions can be done with a simple lighting change and having the Shepherds enter the scene while all other characters in the scene freeze. You could also have a designated place off to one side of the living area that the Shepherds stay for most of the play and speak from when it's their turn. This play should be quick and funny and chaotic but also filled with warmth and love and heart.

Time 40-45 minutes

Molly enters with cookies and sets them on the table. She picks up the clipboard and pen.

Molly: T-minus four hours until Christmas Eve service and everything is right on schedule. *(crosses to the tree)* The tree is trimmed. *(makes a check on her list)* Check! *(looks under the tree)* The gifts are wrapped. *(makes a check on her list)* Check! *(crosses to fireplace)* And the stockings are hung over a crackling fire. *(makes a check on her list)* Check!

Tom enters and sees the cookies.

Tom: Ooh, cookies!

Tom reaches for a cookie but **Molly** swats his hand away.

Molly: Hey, those are for later!

Tom: Sorry, couldn't resist. *(sniffs the air)* Something sure smells good.

Molly: That would be our Christmas Eve feast. *(looks down at her list)* The turkey is seasoned and dressed and roasting in the oven, but I still need to finish plating the cranberries and mashing the potatoes before I can check the meal off my list.

Blake enters, scrolling through her phone, not looking up.

Blake: You and that list.

Blake sits on the sofa and gets comfy, all without looking up from her phone.

Molly: Hey! There's a lot to do to make sure our Christmas is perfect. *(holds out the list)* You guys could help if you want.

Blake: Sorry, Mom. Can't help right now. Super busy. *(sits on the sofa)*

Tom: And I help by staying out of the way.

Molly: That's right. *(looks at list)* Tom stays out of the way. *(makes a check on her list)* Check!

Tom: You didn't really have that on there, did you?

Tom tries to grab the clipboard but **Molly** turns so he can't.

Molly: Hands off, buddy. You know I need my survival guide to keep me organized and on track.

Tom: Your survival guide? Is that what you're calling it now?

Molly: Yes. *(turns list around to show him)*

Tom: *(reads)* The Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas.

Blake: This is Christmas, not the Hunger Games, Mom.

Molly: Well, it's going to be the Hunger Games if I don't get those potatoes mashed. *(indicates cookies)* Otherwise the only thing we'll have to eat tonight are those cookies.

Joey and **Alex** come running in, playing tag. **Joey** is chasing **Alex**.

Joey: *(tagging Alex)* Tag, you're it!

Alex: Not for long!

Joey bumps into **Blake**.

Blake: Ow! Watch it, will you?

Alex starts to chase **Joey**.

Molly: *(exasperated)* Tom! Please!

Tom: Joey, Alex—quit running through the house.

Alex and **Joey** crash into the coffee table, sending the cookies flying, maybe onto **Blake**.

Alex: Oops.

Joey: Sorry, Mom.

Molly: *(looks upward and sighs)* Lord, help me survive this Christmas.

Lights change. All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds up a book.

Shepherd 1: If there's anyone who knows survival, it's a shepherd.

Shepherd 2: Shepherding is not an easy job, that's for sure.

Shepherd 1: We've seen a few things out in the fields.

Shepherd 2: We've faced our biggest fears! Such as...

Shepherd 1: Wolves.

Shepherd 2: Thieves.

Shepherd 1: And wolves.

Shepherd 2: Also rocky terrain.

Shepherd 1: Did I mention *wolves*?

Shepherd 2: So yeah, we know a little bit about making it through tough times. But we've had some amazing moments on the job as well.

Shepherd 1: *(excitedly)* Ooh, like that one time the baby sheep wandered off and then that wolf came and—

Shepherd 2: *(interrupts)* I was actually talking about the night Jesus was born.

Shepherd 1: Oh, right. *(smiles)* That was an incredible night.

Shepherd 2: We were out in the field, keeping an eye on the sheep when a choir of angels appeared and told us the Messiah had come!

Shepherd 1: We definitely weren't prepared for that.

Shepherd 2: The best moments in life often happen when you're least prepared.

Shepherd 1: Yeah, sometimes being too prepared isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Shepherd 2: Which brings us back to Molly.

***Shepherds** can stand to one side or cross to **Molly**; **Shepherd 1** puts his arm around her.*

Shepherd 1: Molly Shepherd is struggling. She's losing it!

Shepherd 2: Hey, give her a break. Christmas can be a stressful time.

Shepherd 1: The people.

Shepherd 2: The decorations.

Shepherd 1: The presents.

Shepherd 2: The food.

Shepherd 1: The wolves!

***Shepherd 2** gives **Shepherd 1** a withering look.*

Shepherd 1: *(sheepishly)* Sorry.

Shepherd 2: Which is why we've come up with a little survival guide of our own.

***Shepherd 2** holds up book which **Shepherd 1** grabs and reads the title.*

Shepherd 1: The Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas. *(thinks)* Now where have I heard that before?

Shepherd 2: You're probably thinking of this guide, but let me tell you, it's no good.

Shepherd 2 *takes the list off the clipboard to tear or crumple it but is stopped by Shepherd 1.*

Shepherd 1: Stop!

Shepherd 2: What? Our guide is better.

Shepherd 1: We can't just throw Molly's list away! She'll lose it for sure!

Shepherd 2: Fine. We won't throw it out, but we can make a few adjustments.

Shepherd 1: What kind of adjustments?

Shepherd 2: The kind that will remind her what Christmas is all about. Take Gabby, for instance.

Shepherd 1: Who's Gabby?

Shepherd 2: Oh, just a nosy neighbor. We'll meet her in a moment. She has an announcement.

Shepherd 1: Ooh, that's exciting!

Shepherd 2: Yes, but sometimes big news can mean a change in plans.

Shepherd 1: Somehow I think that's not going to go over well with Molly. She likes to be prepared.

Shepherd 2: Just like Mary was preparing for a life with Joseph when the angel Gabriel appeared and told her she was to carry the son of God.

Shepherd 1: That *is* big news!

Shepherd 2: It sure is. And I'm sure Mary was taken aback when she heard it... and so was Joseph. Which is why the angel Gabriel appeared to him in a dream and told him not to be afraid.

Shepherd 1: Unexpected visits from angels? (*elbows **Shepherd 2***) We can relate.

Shepherd 2: We sure can. And even though they weren't expecting this news, Mary and Joseph trusted in God and changed their plans.

Shepherd 1: Molly needs to do that too!

Shepherd 2: That's right. Which is why the first rule in our Shepherd's Guide to Surviving Christmas is—

Shepherd 2 writes on **Molly's** list, then looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Be willing to change your plans.

Shepherd 2 hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back and all resume their previous actions. **Molly** rushes to clean up the cookies, placing the clipboard on the table.

Molly: (*talking to herself*) It's alright. Everything is going to be just fine. I'll finish the dinner while Alex and Joey clean their room.

Alex & Joey: Aw, man!

Tom: You heard your mother.

Alex and Joey exit.

Molly: Tom, will you double check the guest room to make sure it's set for your parents? I want to make sure everything is perfect so your mom doesn't have anything to complain about this time.

Tom: My mom never complains!

Molly gives **Tom** a withering look.

Tom: What I meant to say was, of course darling, I'll go check on it now.

Molly and **Tom** both start to exit but stop when the sound of a doorbell is heard.

Molly: *(anxiously)* Please don't tell me that's your parents. They're not due here for another hour!

Tom crosses to the door or towards offstage.

Tom: Don't worry, Molly. Everything will be alright.

Tom opens door or exits. **Gabby** immediately enters, frantically. If **Tom** has exited, he should follow **Gabby** onstage.

Gabby: Everything is ruined!

Molly: Gabby! What's the matter? Is it that faulty light switch again? Tom, honey, why don't you head next door with Gabby and see what you can do about that light switch.

Gabby: No, it's not the switch! It's Christmas Eve! Big things are happening, let me tell you! Unexpected things! The whole town is abuzz!

Molly: *(aside to Tom)* Seriously, Tom, I've got too much on my plate right now. You've got to get rid of her.

Tom tries to steer **Gabby** towards the door.

Tom: Why don't I walk you back home and you can tell me all about it?

Molly looks at her watch or a mantel clock.

Molly: Only three and a half more hours until the Christmas Eve service. I can make it until then.

Gabby: Oh no you wont!

Molly: What is that supposed to mean?

Gabby: You haven't heard?

Blake: Just spit it out, Gabby.

Molly: Blake!

Gabby: There isn't going to be a Christmas Eve service. It's been cancelled!

Molly: Cancelled! It can't be cancelled.

Gabby: There's a big storm coming, so Pastor thought it was best to call it off.

Molly: But we always go to the candlelight service on Christmas now. Now I have to find another way to entertain the kids and the in-laws tonight.

Tom: It'll be fine, honey.

Blake: Yeah, I'm sure there's something in your survival guide that can help. *(takes the clipboard and reads)* See, right here. You just need to change your plans.

Molly: It doesn't say that!

Blake: Yes it does.

Molly: Let me see. *(snatches the clipboard and reads)* Be willing to change your plans. *(looks around)* Who wrote this?

All look around and say things like "Not me!" and "I didn't."

Tom: I don't know who wrote it, honey, but it sounds like good advice to me.

Molly: Yeah, I guess.

Doorbell rings. **Alex** and **Joey** enter, running.

Alex: It's Grandma!

Joey: And Grandpa!

Tom: Oh, yay!

Molly: Oh no!

*Lights change. All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holding the guide.*

Shepherd 1: It looks like Molly's going to get another opportunity to practice changing her plans now that her in-laws have arrived early.

Shepherd 2: She sure will! But that's not the only problem Tom's parents are bringing.

Shepherd 1: *(frightened)* Don't tell me they're bringing wolves!

Shepherd 2: No, Grandma and Grandpa aren't bringing wolves with them to the Shepherd house. They're bringing something much worse.

Shepherd 1: *(frightened)* Coyotes? Bears?... *Sharks?!*

Shepherd 2: Sharks? Seriously?

Shepherd 1: *(shrugs)* It could happen.

Shepherd 2: No, they're not bringing sharks. But they are bringing luggage... lots and lots of luggage.

Shepherd 1: Yeah, that's pretty scary. *(thinks)* I wonder if Mary and Joseph brought a lot of luggage with them on their trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Shepherd 2: I doubt it. Mary was quite pregnant when she and Joseph made their long journey to Bethlehem. They knew they had to do their duty—King Herod had commanded that everyone register for the census. But Mary and Joseph had much more important things to think about than what to bring with them on their trip.

Shepherd 1: Like the fact that Mary was about to give birth to the son of God!

Shepherd 2: That’s right. And Mary and Joseph knew that no matter what they encountered on their journey, God would provide for them.

*If not already near **Molly**, **Shepherd 2** crosses to her and takes her clipboard and pen.*

Shepherd 1: So they didn’t need to bring a lot of luggage, unlike Tom’s parents.

Shepherd 2: That’s right. Which is why the second rule in our Shepherd’s Guide to Surviving Christmas is—

***Shepherd 2** writes on **Molly’s** list, then looks up at audience.*

Shepherd 2: If you have to travel, make sure to pack light.

***Shepherd 2** hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back and all resume their previous actions.*

Molly: (to **Tom**) Your parents! They’re an hour early!

Gabby: Early in-laws? Sounds like my cue to leave.

Tom: I’ll see you out.

***Tom** walks **Gabby** to the door or exits with her as **Molly** turns to the **Children**.*

Molly: Alex, Joey, go make sure your rooms are clean.

Alex & Joey: But mom!

Molly: (pointing offstage) Now!

***Alex** and **Joey** exit. **Molly** hands **Blake** the plate of cookies.*

Molly: Blake, take these cookies to the kitchen and see if we can salvage them for dessert later.

Blake: I wouldn't count on it.

Blake exits with the plate.

Molly: *(looking at her list)* There's still so much to do! And now with Tom's parents here early it'll be much harder to get everything on my survival guide done. *(takes a deep breath)* You can do this, Molly. You can still make Christmas perfect for your family. It's all about balance.

Tom enters, carrying an enormous stack of wrapped presents.

Tom: Tell me about it!

Tom slowly crosses into the house, nearly dropping the presents. **Blake** enters and sees.

Blake: Whoa! That's a lot of presents.

Tom: There's more where this came from. Go outside and help your grandparents.

Blake exits.

Molly: How much more are we talking?

Tom puts the presents near the tree.

Tom: Um, well...

Blake enters, carrying an enormous stack of wrapped presents.

Blake: Here's round two!

Molly: Please tell me there aren't many more gifts. We won't have anywhere to put them! I don't even know how Grandma and Grandpa fit them in their car!

Grandma and **Grandpa** enter, both laden with lots of bags and luggage.

Grandpa: That's easy—we rented a small trailer.

Grandma: And I rode on the roof!

Tom: Please tell me you're joking, Mom!

Grandma: Yes, I'm joking. But I told your father I was willing to!

Grandpa: *(to Blake)* She's a daredevil, that Grandma of yours.

Blake: That's a lot of luggage.

Molly: I thought you guys were just staying for Christmas.

Grandma: We are, dear. We just wanted to be sure we had everything we need.

Blake: *(looking over Molly's shoulder)* Maybe Grandma and Grandpa should've read your survival guide before packing.

Grandma: What's this about a survival guide?

Blake: Right here. *(points)* See? Rule number two—pack light.

Molly: I didn't write that. I swear!

Grandpa: I guess I should've left my collection of dinosaur bones at home.

Tom: Those aren't dino bones, Dad. They're just rocks you found in your back yard.

Grandpa: Yeah, well, I needed to bring 'em.

Grandma: Next time we'll be sure to pack less. *(looks around)* Now where can we put our bags?

Tom: Give them to me, mom, and I'll show you to your room.

Grandma: How nice of you, Tommy.

Grandma and Grandpa drop their luggage. Tom struggles to pick it all up. When he finally has it, they cross to exit.

Molly: *(calling)* I promise I'm totally fine with the amount of gifts and luggage you brought! *(looks around)* If I can find somewhere to put them.

Blake: I think they're gonna need a bigger bedroom.

Lights change. All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds a book.

Shepherd 1: Wow, you weren't kidding when you said Tom's parents were bringing a lot of luggage.

Shepherd 2: And a lot of presents!

Shepherd 1: No wonder Molly's stressed. Luckily she has her survival guide.

Shepherd 2: Molly's guide is more of a to-do list.

Shepherd 1: You know who else had a list?

Shepherd 2: Who?

Shepherd 1: The census takers!

Shepherd 2: That's right. When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem they had to report to the census takers who took down all sorts of information, such as their names and where they came from.

Shepherd 1: *(nervously)* So what happens if someone forgot to show up for the census?

Shepherd 2: Why are you asking?

Shepherd 1: Because I'm pretty sure I forgot to go.

Shepherd 2: I guess it means people won't have a record of who you are or where you live.

Shepherd 1: Does this mean I'm not going to get any Christmas cards?

Shepherd 2: I'm pretty sure King Herod isn't sending out cards this year. But you know who is?

Shepherd 1: Who?

Shepherd 2: The Shepherd family... that is if they follow rule number three of the Shepherd's Guide to Surviving Christmas—

Shepherd 2 writes on **Molly's** list, then looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Be sure not to forget anyone on your list.

Shepherd 2 hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back as **Tom** enters, holding a stack of Christmas cards.

Tom: Mom and Dad are getting settled in their room. They'll be out once they finish unpacking.

Blake: So I guess it's gonna be a little while then.

Blake sits on the couch and scrolls through her phone. **Molly** looks at the cards in his hand.

Molly: Tom, what do you have there?

Tom looks quickly at the cards, then put them behind his back.

Tom: Oh, these? They're... nothing.

Molly: (slowly, trying to keep her cool) Are those our Christmas cards, Tom?

Tom: Um... yeah. Sorry.

Molly: *(annoyed)* I asked you to drop them off at the post office weeks ago!

Tom: Yeah, well, it turns out I forgot. I found them sitting on the nightstand in the guest room.

Molly: Seriously? You mean to tell me that it's Christmas Eve and we haven't even sent out our cards?

Tom: Don't worry. Taylor should be around soon delivering mail. I'll give her the cards and she'll make sure they get sent out ASAP.

Tom places the cards on the mantel of the fireplace as Blake crosses to Molly.

Molly: But now they won't arrive until after Christmas! What will our friends and family think?

Blake: Clearly they'll think we've forgotten all about them.

Molly: Blake!

Blake: I'm just saying, if Dad would've followed rule number three on your survival guide, then you wouldn't have this problem. *(points at list)*

Molly: *(reads)* Rule number three—be sure not to forget anyone on your list.

Tom: Yeah, that's good advice.

Molly: Good advice that mysteriously was added to my survival guide.

Tom: Well however it got there, I promise everything will be fine. Our friends will just have to wait a few extra days for our smiling faces to arrive in their mailboxes.

Molly: What a disaster. Now I'll have to erase the check mark next to Christmas cards on my survival guide! *(erases)*

Blake: *(sarcastically)* No! Not the check mark!

Tom stifles a laugh as **Molly** turns to him and glares and lights change. All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds a book.

Shepherd 1: Looks like Tom was the one who did the forgetting this time. Molly sure was mad about those Christmas cards.

Shepherd 2: Yeah, well, something tells me she's about to forget all about them in a few minutes.

Shepherd 1: What could possibly make her forget about that?

Shepherd 2: Ever heard of the phrase, "no room at the inn?"

Shepherd 1: You mean like when Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem and couldn't find a place to stay?

Shepherd 2: That's definitely where the phrase originated. Mary and Joseph went to every inn in the city, but each time they were turned away because all of the inns were full.

Shepherd 1: I guess they should've reserved their room in advance, huh?

Shepherd 2: You do know that wasn't a thing right? Biblical times, my friend.

Shepherd 1: True. So when Mary and Joseph were told there was no room at the inn, they were basically being told the inns already had a full house.

Shepherd 2: Right. And the Shepherd house is about to get very full which is why they should follow rule number four of the Shepherd's Guide to Surviving Christmas—

Shepherd 2 writes on **Molly's** list, then looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Be ready for unexpected guests.

Shepherd 2 hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back as all resume their previous actions.

Molly: I really need to get back to the kitchen to finish my dinner.

Tom: You go right ahead, honey. We've got everything under control.

Doorbell rings.

Tom: Who can that be?

Blake: I thought it was just going to be Grandma and Grandpa tonight.

Molly: It is. The rest of the family isn't coming over until tomorrow. *(worried)*
Please tell me it's not Gabby coming by with some more bad news!

Doorbell rings again.

Tom: If it is, I will handle it. You just worry about your meal.

Tom crosses to door/offstage as Molly starts to cross to exit. When he opens the door, **Aunt Pat, Jaime, and Quinn** all enter, chatting to one another, their arms laden with luggage and gifts. They are noisy and excitable. Molly stops and turns in shock.

Molly: Aunt Pat. You're here. A day early.

Jaime: What are we? Chopped chicken?

Quinn: *(scornfully)* That's not the saying, ignoramus.

Molly: And you've brought the kids.

Pat: With that storm coming we didn't want to chance it.

Jaime: We already had the gifts wrapped anyway.

Quinn: I told them we should've stayed home.

Pat: Christmas wouldn't be the same without the whole family.

Tom: It doesn't look like the whole family's here yet. Who are we missing?

Pepper enters boisterously, arms laden with luggage and gifts and a large water bottle.

Pepper: It's Pepper!

Grandma and **Grandpa** enter.

Grandpa: Yay! Cousin Pepper's here.

Pepper: Of course Pepper's here. Pepper wouldn't miss Christmas!

Tom: And apparently Pepper is talking in the third person now.

Pepper: *(leaning over to speak in Tom's ear)* Pepper loves third person.

Pat: I hope its alright that we're here.

Molly: Of course it is. *(looks around)* I just wasn't prepared for so many overnight guests. Tom's parents are already in the guest room.

Pat: I mean, if it's an imposition...

Tom: It's okay, Aunt Pat. We just need to make a little room. Isn't that right, honey?

Molly: Well... .

Blake: *(looking at the list)* The answer is right there, Mom. *(points at the list)* Be ready for unexpected guests. *(indicates others)* The unexpected guests are here, so I guess all you need to do is be ready.

Molly: But—

Tom: We're ready all right! Blake, run upstairs and tell Alex and Joey to grab their pillows and sleeping bags. They can have a sleepover with Jaime and Quinn in the basement.

Jaime: Woo-hoo! Slumber party!

Quinn: *(sarcastically)* Oh, joy.

Blake exits.

Tom: Aunt Pat, Pepper, will you be alright in the twins' room?

Pat: That'll be just fine, thank you.

Pepper: Pepper is perfectly alright anywhere, so long as she has somewhere to rest her head and room for her morning Jazzercise!

Pepper does some Jazzercise moves, then takes a big drink from her water bottle.

Quinn: *(rolling her eyes)* God help us all.

All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds a book.

Shepherd 2: There is definitely no more room at *that* inn!

Shepherd 1: Yeah, the Shepherd house is certainly full of people. But it's also full of love.

Shepherd 2: Awwww, that's so sweet. I didn't know you were such a softy.

Shepherd 1: Sometimes I can't help it. Looking around at this family gathering or Christmas in this cozy, inviting house... it warms my heart.

Shepherd 2: Warm, cozy, inviting... that's all Mary and Joseph were looking for when they were turned away from that final inn. But the innkeeper took pity on them and gave them a place to sleep in the barn.

Shepherd 1: I don't know about you, but when I think about barns, I don't think warm and cozy. All those animals with their sounds and their smells... I mean, we're shepherds—we would know.

Shepherd 2: Right, so you also know how warm hay can be and what a nice, soft bed it can make.

Shepherd 1: Okay, you’ve got me there. I have fallen asleep in a pile of hay once or twice.

Shepherd 2: More like twenty or thirty times! Leaving me to count all the sheep!

Shepherd 1: I’ll have you know I was counting sheep too! *(closes eyes and pretends to sleep as he draws lines of sheep jumping over a fence in the air)* One sheep... . two sheep... three sheep...

Shepherd 2: Well Mary and Joseph found the barn to be warm and cozy too. And there, nestled in the warmth of the hay, Mary gave birth to a little baby boy.

Shepherd 1: *(reverently)* And they named him Jesus.

Shepherd 2: That’s right. God made sure Mary and Joseph had everything they needed.

Shepherd 1: Like food and water too. I’m guessing after that long journey and giving birth to the son of God, they were pretty hungry. *(pats his stomach and looks down at it)* Come to think of it, I’m pretty hungry.

Shepherd 2: You know who else is hungry? The Shepherd family.

Shepherd 1: Good thing Molly is making that big turkey dinner. *(licks his lips)* Yum!

Shepherd 2: And good thing Molly has this guide because I’m guessing she’s going to need it—especially rule number five of the Shepherd’s Guide to Surviving Christmas—

Shepherd 2 writes on **Molly’s** list, then looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Make sure your guests are warm and well fed.

Shepherd 2 hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back as all resume their previous actions.

Tom: Jaime, Quinn, you guys can head down to the basement while I show Aunt Pat to her room.

Pepper: Don't forget about Pepper!

Tom: Yes, and Pepper too.

Alex and **Joey** enter running. Blake follows, walking.

Alex: Is it true?

Joey: Are we camping out in the basement with Jaime and Quinn?

Molly: It looks like it.

Alex & Joey: Yes! (they high five, then turn to **Jaime** and **Quinn**) Let's go!

Alex and **Joey** start running, as they do they brush past the cards that are on the mantle, knocking them into the fire. Maybe the lights in the fire brighten for a moment.

Molly: The Christmas cards!

Molly rushes over to the fireplace in horror, perhaps using fireplace tools to get them out.

Pepper: Pepper can help!

Pepper rushes to the fireplace with her water bottle and dumps the water on the fire. The fire goes out. All stand and look at the fireplace.

Blake: Well that just happened.

Doorbell rings.

Molly: You've got to be kidding me. Who's at the door now?

Tom: *(interrupting and calling out)* Come in!

Taylor enters, carrying a mail bag.

Taylor: Well hello there, Shepherds. Word on the street is you have some Christmas cards that need mailing?

Molly: *(chuckling ironically)* Well... we *did*, anyway.

Taylor: I'd be happy to get those right out for you if you want to hand them over. *(holds out her hand)*

Molly: Taylor, I'd love to hand you our Christmas cards. *(retrieves one from the fireplace—its scorched and soggy)* If they weren't burnt to a crisp.

Taylor: If we're getting technical, they look more waterlogged than scorched.

Grandma: I'm afraid they're a little of both, dear.

The sound of a smoke detector is heard.

Tom: Don't tell me that horrible doorbell is ringing again!

Quinn sniffs the air. Perhaps some smoke starts drifting in.

Quinn: Speaking of horrible... does anyone know what that awful smell is?

Everyone looks at **Alex** and **Joey**.

Alex: What?

Joey: It's not us.

Molly: *(realizing)* No, it's not the twins—it's my turkey dinner! And it's burning!

Molly shoves the survival guide into **Blake's** hands and runs offstage in a panic.

Pat: Well that isn't good.

Jaime: And neither is burnt turkey. Yuck!

Blake: *(reading the list)* I guess Mom should've read rule number five on her survival guide—make sure your guests are warm— *(indicates the fireplace, which is now dark and cold)*

Molly enters carrying a roasting pan with a blackened turkey. She sighs, upset.

Blake: And well fed. *(indicates turkey)*

Tom: Looks like we'll be having pizza for dinner. *(pulls out his phone and starts to type in a number then puts the phone to his ear)*

Alex & Joey: Yes! *(they high five)*

All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds a book.

Shepherd 1: The cards are a mess, her fire's gone out and now her meal is ruined!

Shepherd 2: That may be true, but there's more to Christmas than crackling fires and turkey dinners.

Shepherd 1: Like what?

Shepherd 2: Like the music, for instance.

Shepherd 1: I love Christmas carols! You know who my favorite singers are?

Shepherd 2: Who?

Shepherd 1: Those angels that appeared to us the night Jesus was born! Man, could those angels sing!

Shepherd 2: They sure could, but the message they brought was even sweeter. Remember what they said?

Shepherd 1: Do I ever! The angel said, *(clears his throat and recites)* 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 strips of cloth and lying in a manger.

Shepherd 2: Then suddenly, a vast, heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased!"

Shepherd 1: That was a special night.

Shepherd 2: The Shepherd family can have a special night too if they remember rule number six of the Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas—

Shepherd 2 writes on **Molly's** list, then looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Enjoy the sights and sounds of the season.

Shepherd 2 hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back as all resume their previous actions.

Tom: The pizza should be here in about twenty minutes.

Doorbell rings.

Jaime: Wow, twenty minutes sure went fast!

Grandpa: That can't be the pizza already.

Pat: Then who can it be?

Tom crosses to door or offstage. He opens the door or leads in **Angela** followed by **Carolers**.

Blake: It's Angela from church.

Molly: Don't tell me—

Blake: And her group of carolers from the church choir*. (**or children's choir if using children to play carolers*)

Angela: Howdy Shepherd family. I hope you don't mind but my carolers and I wanted to bring you a little Christmas joy in the form of a song.

Molly: That really isn't necessary,

Angela ignores **Molly** and turns to **Carolers**.

Angela: And a one and a two and a—

Angela blows into a pitch pipe and conducts **Carolers**. Maybe **Pepper** dances comically.

Carolers: (*singing*) Joy to the world; the Lord is come;
Let Earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing.

All except **Molly** clap their hands.

Pepper: Bravo! Bravismo! Pepper likes! Pepper likes very much!

Grandma: Beautiful job, dears.

Angela: Thank you. (*looks around expectantly*)

Quinn: Um, is there something we can help you with?

Angela: Well it *is* customary to provide carolers with a treat after they perform for you.

Caroler 1: Like candy canes!

Caroler 2: And roasted nuts.

Molly: Oh, I'm sorry, we don't have any of those.

Alex: How about cookies?

Joey: We have some of those.

Angela: Cookies work!

Alex & Joey: We'll get them!

Alex and Joey exit running. **Molly** calls after them.

Molly: Wait! Those cookies aren't—

Alex and Joey run on with the cookies.

Angela: Ooh, these look delicious! *(starts to reach for a cookie)*

Molly: No! Those were on the—

Molly swats **Angela's** hand away. In doing so she knocks the tray of cookies on the floor.

Molly: Floor. *(looks up sheepishly)* Sorry about that.

Angela: That's alright. We can come back later. And when we do, we'll bring you another song. How does that sound, Shepherd family?

All react in character, with most excited, other than **Molly** and **Quinn**. **Pepper** is very excited.

Angela: Great! Then we'll see you later. And don't forget the treats!

Angela and Carolers exit, singing "Joy to the World".

Molly: My survival guide sure did not prepare me for this.

Blake: Then you should have read rule number seven. See? *(points it out and reads)* Enjoy the sights and sounds of the season.

Molly: *(sighs)* Now why didn't I think of that?

All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds a book.

Shepherd 1: (*singing enthusiastically*) Joy to the Earth, the Savior reigns—

Shepherd 2: Why don't we leave the signing to Angela and her choir?

Shepherd 1: But I love that song!

Shepherd 2: Right now we're bring holiday survival skills to the world, not joy.

Shepherd 1: (*sighs*) Fine. So what's the next rule in the survival guide?

Shepherd 2: It has something to do with a well-known part of Christmas.

Shepherd 1: (*thinking*) The tree?

Shepherd 2: No. Molly has that covered already.

Shepherd 1: The food?

Shepherd 2: I'm pretty sure we just went over that one.

Shepherd 1: Please tell me it's not... (*looks around, worried*) the wolves?!

Shepherd 2: Wolves are not a Christmas thing.

Shepherd 1: From my experience, wolves are an *everything* thing. They do what they want, and they take no prisoners! (*thinks*) Except that one time a pack of wolves took me prisoner in a cave for three months with nothing to eat except tree bark and worms.

Shepherd 2: No wonder you're afraid of wolves!

Shepherd 1: We have a history.

Shepherd 2: Well you're in luck because our next rule is not about wolves... it's about presents!

Shepherd 1: Yay! I love presents!

Shepherd 2: On the night Jesus was born a star appeared in the sky for all to see, including three wise men from the east. They knew that the star meant the Messiah had been born. They followed that star to the newborn king so they could kneel before him and worship him.

Shepherd 1: And bring him presents!

Shepherd 2: That's right! They brought him gold, frankincense and myrrh, which were the perfect gifts to show how honored they were to be with him.

Shepherd 1: And that's why people give gifts to one another at Christmas?

Shepherd 2: That's right. Christmas is a time when people buy gifts to let the people they love know how much they mean to them, just like the three wise men brought gifts to Jesus. The tricky part is choosing the right gift, which is why rule number seven of the Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas is—

Shepherd 2 writes on **Molly's** list, then looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Choose your gifts wisely.

Shepherd 2 hands the clipboard and pen back to **Molly**, then he and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back as all resume their previous actions.

Molly: This entire evening has been a disaster! First the candlelight service got cancelled. Then the cookies I baked were destroyed.

Alex & Joey: Our bad.

Molly: Then we weren't ready for Grandma and Grandpa, and everything that came with them.

Grandma: Sorry, dear.

Grandpa: I suppose I didn't need to bring *all* of my Civil War action figures.

Molly: Then the rest of the family showed up a day early.

Quinn: I told you we should've stayed home!

Pat: We had to beat the storm!

Molly: Then most of our Christmas cards burned up in the fire.

Taylor: Even I can't deliver those!

Molly: And the cards that didn't burn got completely soaked.

Pepper: Pepper was only trying to help.

Molly: Then my dinner burned, so we have nothing to eat! And if that wasn't bad enough I just insulted Angela and her caroling group! *(sits and puts her head in her hands)* Christmas is ruined.

Blake: It's not ruined! We still have presents to open.

Jaime: Yay presents!

Tom: Um... don't we usually wait until Christmas morning to open presents?

Molly: I think we can make an exception just this once. Everyone look to the person on your right.

*All do. **Molly** should be on **Tom's** right.*

Molly: Whoever is standing on your right is the person you will give a gift to. So on a count of three, everyone get your gifts!

***Blake** puts the survival guide on the table in front of **Molly**.*

Molly: One... two... three!

All rush over to the tree and grab a gift. They hand the gift to the person that was on their right and everyone opens the gifts. There are "oohs" and "aahs" and everyone is holding up their gifts and exclaiming what they are or saying something nice about them, like "I got a gravy boat", or "I really needed one of these", or "this is great, thanks!", etc. In the end, **Molly** is the only one without a gift and **Tom** is standing near the tree, looking sheepish.

Blake: Mom, where's your gift?

Tom: I... I'm sorry, Molly.

Grandma: Tommy! Don't tell me you forgot!

Tom: I didn't forget! There was an issue with shipping and I thought it would be here by now.

Taylor: Blaming it on the postal service. *(crossing her arms)* I see how it is.

Molly: It's alright Tom. Don't worry about it.

Doorbell rings.

Tom: That might be your gift now!

Tom rushes to the door. He brings in **Maggie**, who holds a delivery box, a clipboard and a pen.

Maggie: *(reading the clipboard)* I've got a package for Tom Shepherd.

Tom: *(excitedly)* That's me!

Maggie: Sign here.

Maggie holds out the clipboard and pen which **Tom** signs. He shoves the clipboard back to a surprised **Maggie**, grabs the box and rushes over to **Molly** and hands her the box.

Tom: Your present! It's here. Open it!

Maggie opens the box. She holds up an action figure.

Maggie: *(confused)* It's a Civil War action figure.

Grandpa: That would be mine. *(crosses to Maggie and plucks the figure from her)*
Thank you very much.

Tom: Really, Dad?

Grandpa: What? We were going to be out of town so I shipped it here instead!

Maggie: *(looking at the clipboard)* Let me guess? Tom Shepherd, senior?

Tom: It appears so. *(looks at her clipboard)* Do you have a delivery on there for a Tom Shepherd, junior?

Maggie: I don't see anything but I can go back and look in my truck.

Taylor: I'll help you.

Maggie and Taylor exit.

Tom: I'd really appreciate it. *(turns to Molly)* I'm so sorry, honey. *(picks up survival guide)* I guess I'm the one who really needed this. *(points to it)*
Yep, right here, rule number seven—choose your gifts wisely. You had it right here on your Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas all along.

Maggie: Let me see that. *(takes the clipboard and reads)* I really don't remember writing that. But it doesn't matter anyway because everything has gone wrong. *(crosses to door or offstage)* I guess this guide won't help the Shepherd family survive Christmas after all!

If there's a door, Molly opens it. She raises her arm to throw the guide out the door or offstage.
All are alarmed.

All (except **Molly**): No!

All freeze as Shepherds enter. Shepherd 2 holds a book.

Shepherd 1: Alright, it's official now—Molly has lost it.

Shepherd 2: I agree.

Shepherd 1: *(surprised)* You do?

Shepherd 2: Yes. She's lost the true meaning of Christmas!

Shepherd 1: *(smiles)* Ah, yes, I see what you did there. Nice.

Shepherd 2: Christmas isn't about the food or the cards or the decorations or the presents. It's about celebrating the birth of Jesus, God's only son, who He sent to us on here on Earth to save us from our sins.

Shepherd 1: And when you remember what Christmas is all about and share it with the people you love, there's no better gift than that.

Shepherd 2: *(smiles)* Couldn't have said it better myself.

Shepherd 1: So are you going to make one last adjustment to Molly's survival guide?

Shepherd 2: Actually, I think I have a better idea.

Shepherd takes the cover off his book. *Underneath is a Bible.*

Shepherd 1: It's the Bible!

Shepherd 2: That's right. It's the only survival guide the Shepherd Family needs.
(calls out) Hey, Maggie!

Maggie enters and crosses to **Shepherds**, holding a box and her clipboard.

Maggie: Got something you need delivered?

Shepherd 2: Right here. *(holds up the Bible)*

Maggie: Let me guess... is that for some other Shepherds I know?

Shepherd 2: You've got it!

Maggie holds out the box and **Shepherd 2**, who starts to put the Bible in, then stops.

Shepherd 2: Actually, let me add one little reminder.

Shepherd 2 can write in the front cover of the Bible or can tear a piece of paper off the cover he discarded or get a piece of paper or sticky note from **Maggie**. He writes on it, sticks it in the Bible and puts the Bible in the box.

Maggie: I'll get it to them right away.

Shepherd 2: Thanks, Maggie.

Maggie exits.

Shepherd 1: What did you write on there?

Shepherd 2: Oh, just rule number eight of the Shepherds' Guide to Surviving Christmas.

Shepherd 1: Which is?

Shepherd 2 puts his arm around **Shepherd 1** and looks up at audience.

Shepherd 2: Remember the true meaning of Christmas.

Shepherd 2 and **Shepherd 1** exit or cross to one side and observe. Lights change back as all resume their previous actions.

All (except **Molly**): No!

Molly stops and turns.

Molly: Why not?

Maggie and Taylor enter. Maggie holds the box and Taylor holds the clipboard and pen.

Taylor: Because we have a package with your name on it.

Tom: *(relieved)* Finally!

Maggie: *(holding out the box)* Why don't you open it? I have a feeling there's something pretty special inside.

Molly: Alright.

Maggie takes the box to the couch and sits.

Alex & Joey: Open it! Open it!

Blake: I wonder what it could be!

Molly: There's only one way to find out.

Molly starts to open it. As she's about to pull out the gift, the doorbell rings.

Molly: You have got to be kidding me!

Gabby runs onstage, through the door, if present.

Gabby: Big things are happening, let me tell you! Unexpected things! The whole town is abuzz!

Molly: If this is about the candlelight service, you've already told us, Gabby.

Tom: And if this is about that faulty switch of yours I'm afraid it's going to have to wait until after Christmas.

Gabby: It's not about the switch, but it *is* about the candlelight service!

Blake: Just spit it out, Gabby.

Molly: Blake!

Gabby: Everything is fixed! There is going to be a Christmas Eve service after all!

All cheer. Molly starts to stand.

Molly: Really? But what about the snow storm?

Gabby: It passed us by! We just got a light dusting—perfect for a white Christmas. Luckily the roads are nice and clear.

Molly: That's so great to hear!

Angela enters with Carolers.

Angela: You know what else is great to hear? A song!

Pepper: Pepper didn't hear the doorbell. Did she just let herself in?

Angela: *(turns to Carolers)* And a one and a two and a—

Angela blows into a pitch pipe and conducts Carolers. Maybe Pepper dances comically.

Carolers: *(singing)* Joy to the world; the Lord is come;
Let Earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing.

All clap/cheer.

Angela: Now about that special treat? *(holds out her hand)*

Blake holds up the burnt turkey.

Blake: I don't suppose you accept burnt turkey?

Angela: Um...

Doorbell rings.

Tom: I'll get it.

Tom crosses to the door/offstage.

Jaime: This is one busy house.

Molly: Tell me about it.

Tom enters with Drew, who carries a large stack of pizza boxes.

Tom: (to **Angela**) How do you guys feel about pizza?

Angela: We love it!

Tom: Then everyone dig in!

All cheer and rush to Drew, where they grab boxes of pizza and start passing it out.

Drew: That'll be one-twenty-two fifty. Plus tip.

Tom takes out his wallet and pays Drew.

Tom: Keep the change...

Tom leans in to look at Drew's name badge. Drew points to it.

Drew: Drew.

Tom: Right. Keep the change, Drew.

Drew: Thanks! And Merry Christmas. You look like you have a really nice family and a warm and loving home.

Tom: Say, do you have any plans tonight?

Drew: Nope. It's just gonna be me and my cat and a microwave dinner.

Tom: *(turns to Molly)* What do you think? Should we invite Drew to join us?

Molly: *(chuckles)* The more the merrier!

Tom: Tonight you are part of the Shepherd family, Drew! Grab a slice!

Drew: Don't mind if I do!

Drew grabs a slice of pizza and joins others as **Tom** joins **Mary**.

Tom: I know things didn't work out the way you'd hoped, but all things considered, I'd say this is a pretty perfect Christmas.

Mary: It sure is. I'd gotten so wrapped up in the details that I forgot what a gift it is to celebrate Christmas with the ones you love.

Maggie: Speaking of gifts, you haven't finished opening up yours.

Molly: Oh, right. I almost forgot *(sits and opens the box, pulling out the Bible)*
It's—

Pat: A Bible.

Grandma: It's beautiful.

Molly: *(turns to Tom)* Thank you, honey. I love it.

Tom: You're welcome, Molly, but... that's not from me.

Molly: Then who's it from?

Quinn: Look inside.

Molly opens the Bible and reads.

Molly: Step number eight of the Shepherd's Guide to Surviving Christmas...

Grandpa: Well? What is it?

Molly: Remember the true meaning of Christmas. *(smiles)*

Blake: It sounds like that's the survival guide you needed all along.

Alex: So, Mom, aren't you going to tell us?

Molly: Tell you what?

Joey: What's the true meaning of Christmas?

Molly: Oh, I'm not going to tell you... *(opens the Bible)* I'm going to share it with you. This is the story of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

*All gather around **Molly** as she reads.*

Molly: Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire for taxes. Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem because he was of the house and family line of David. He went to be registered with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

*All freeze as **Shepherds** enter. **Shepherd 2** holds a book.*

Shepherd 2: Well, I guess our work here is done.

Shepherd 1: But she's about to get to my favorite part!

Shepherd 2: The part about us? You already know how it ends!

Shepherd 1: Yep! With the light and love of Jesus spreading all over the world.

Shepherd 2: I guess there really isn't a better way to end a story than that, is there?

Shepherd 1: I couldn't agree with you more.

Shepherds *turn to audience and smile.*

Shepherd 2: Good night* everyone! (*or afternoon)

Shepherd 1: And Merry Christmas!

Shepherds *cross into the scene and join the others gathered around **Molly** as lights fade to black.*

End of play.