

# A Christmas Odyssey

By John McNeil

## Summary

A narrator takes a journey of discovery into the true meaning of Christmas, with Easter in view. This play was designed as a vehicle for participation by all age groups of a Sunday School, who appear in sequence from youngest to oldest.

There are 2 alternate versions of this script. The first is written for a Southern Hemisphere summer Christmas, the second for a Northern Hemisphere winter Christmas.

## Script 1

Narrator: What does Christmas mean to you? Is it a family get-together, a big feed, Father Christmas and all that? Or what? You know, we've inherited a lot of European customs in our Christmas, perhaps when we should have been developing our own style of things. So while picnicking in blazing sun on the beach, we still sing a song about a white Christmas, and hunt for mistletoe. Bit silly when you think about it, isn't it! And after all, if the middle of winter is the proper time for Christmas, then maybe that's when we should have ours!? It's a thought.

Choir: (Starts singing in background)

Narrator: But there's always one thing you can count on at Christmas, and that's carols. Used to sing them myself once when I was a kid. How did they go? (Hums to himself.) Away in a manger, no crib for a bed. Yes, something like that. (Finishes off verse of carol.)

Group of children: (Pre-schoolers; they wander on)

Narrator: Kids! I think kids were made for Christmas. It's really their time, with all the goodies we pile on them. Lots and lots of goodies. (Turns to group) What does Christmas mean to you?

(Narrator asks several questions, such as, "What's the first thing you do Christmas morning?" "Where do you go for Christmas?" "Did you ask Santa for anything special?" etc. After they have given their answers, Narrator suggests they go and sit in a corner, and pretend they're opening their Christmas stocking, quietly acting out what they hope to find inside.)

It's a bit like watching yourself, isn't it! You know, there's something else about Christmas I was going to mention to you, but it's slipped my mind for the moment. It'll come back to me. Singing!?

Choir: (5-7 years; they file on, singing carol)

Narrator: (When they have finished singing, asks questions of some of the choir, such as, "Who are you singing about?" "Who's he?" etc. Finishes with, "Where are you going now?")

Choir: Off to church. Bye bye! (They file off.)

Narrator: (Turns to group still acting on floor.) Aren't you lot going to church too?

Group: Yes. Come on, let's go. (They get up, look to see if anyone's watching, and run off playing with toys.)

Narrator: I guess church is different things to different people. Jesus? I knew I'd heard the name before. His birthday or something. I wonder what sort of birthday he had. What would it have been like to be there then?

Animals: (7-10 years. File on, chattering among themselves. Perhaps a donkey, cow, goat, sheep, dog, etc. They have just been in the manger when Jesus was born, and now they tell each other what they think of Jesus, looking at it from an animal's point of view.)

Choir: (At rear, sing "Away in a Manger" quietly.)

Family: (Four children in congo line. When the animals have finished their discussion, the family comes on, honking, making other car noises, and comments such as: "Why can't we find a good place for a picnic?" "Did you bring your swimming costume?" "Mummy, can we have lunch now?" "What are all these animals doing on the road?" etc. They tour the stage once, and then exit out front. As they go, one of the animals - a lamb - is knocked over, and it lies down crying.)

Narrator: Hey, you've knocked over a lamb! Come back! (Goes over to the lamb, and picks it up, carries it down the aisle. Other animals file down in procession after.)

Choir: (Enter singing. They do one verse or chorus only.)

Paper boy: (Enters, waving papers.) Paper! Extra! Read all about it! Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem. Hit and run driver wounds family pet! Read all about it! Paper!

Narrator: Thanks, I'll buy one of those. (Paper boy exits.)

Newsreader: (While the voice is reading, choir hums a verse of its song.) Here is the news. The year 1AD was marked today by the birth of a baby boy in Bethlehem. Three traveling salesmen offered prizes to the mother, Mary, for having the first baby of the new century, and local farmers have given a year's supply of groceries free. Several authors are offering to write biographies of the child, but a prophet named Isaiah claims he already has copyright on the story. King Herod has sent a telegram of congratulations, and says he is planning a special reception for the family...but the parents are understood to have declined the offer. A new song for the event has

been written by a local choir of angels. It's selling well, and is expected to top the charts this week.

Narrator: Hold on a minute. What's going on here? Who is this Jesus person everyone's talking about?

Choir: (Starts another verse of song.)

Narrator: (Breaks in at end of verse.) Now hold it! You still haven't answered my question.

Reporter: (Enters, explains he is from the local radio station; carries a tape recorder. Asks some members of the choir what they think of Christmas, who Jesus is, etc.)

Choir: ( Finishes song. As they do, Paper Boy comes back through.)

Paper Boy: Extra! Extra! Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem. Paper!

Choir: (Start to file out after Paper Boy.)

Narrator: Hey, where are you all going?

Choir: (Some members turn back and call out) To worship Jesus. We're going to church, etc.

Narrator: (Picks up paper, starts looking through it again.)

Child: (10-13 years. Same sex as Narrator. Enters carrying a sack.)

Narrator: Hello, what have you got there?

Child: A present for you.

Narrator: A present! That's very kind of you, seeing it's Christmas. Can I open it now? (Child smiles and nods.)

(Narrator reaches in and takes out a hammer, and two pieces of wood. Comments on each. Then reaches in and takes out a doll dressed in baby's clothes. Child takes them all off the Narrator, and cuddles the doll.)

Narrator: What is this all about? Why are these things in this sack?

Child: (Whispers in his ear.)

Narrator: Are you sure? That's in there? (Child smiles and nods. Narrator looks inside again, puzzled.) Who are you?

Child: Just someone you knew a long time ago, when you were my age. (Child takes the doll, hammer and pieces of wood and sits down to one side of the stage.)

Television crew: (Five or six of them. They are making a film, though the audience doesn't know this yet. They enter and act out the scene where the Pharisees come to Pilate and try to get him to indict Jesus. In explaining why they hate Jesus, they should bring out the reasons he is Savior of the world.)

Produce: (Comes on carrying a video camera.) Okay, cut it there. I didn't like that scene. We'll try it again in a moment. In the meantime, take five. And will the actors for the Crucifixion scene get ready please. (Director exits.)

Choir: (Enter and sings. While they sing, the TV crew stand round to one side, pretending to drink cups of coffee. Child sitting with the doll in the corner starts to hammer the two bits of wood together, in between verses. As the choir finishes, the actors break into laughter at a joke. One of the actors, laughing, chokes and falls unconscious to the floor. Members of the choir go over and pick him up, carry him out. Rest of the choir file after, singing. When they've finished, Child finishes hammering the two pieces of wood, holds the result up so the audience can see it is a cross. Child looks at the Narrator.)

Child: Would you do this to a baby? Then why do you do it every day to a grown man? (Child goes over to Narrator, drops the doll at his feet, and goes out. Narrator stares at the doll, then bends over it, crying. As Narrator is bent over, Questioner enters. Narrator looks up at Questioner.)

Questioner: Well, what do you think now?

Narrator: Why did he/she do that?

Questioner: We all do.

Narrator: But why did they kill Him? He was such a good man. There was no need for it? (Stands up, picks up sack, throws it over shoulder.) Such a good man, and they killed him. (Starts to go.)

Questioner: Where are you going?

Narrator: To see if I can find out where they took him.

Questioner: But what have you got in that sack?

Narrator: A Christmas present. This sack is my life. The Child told me it contains everything that ever happened to me.

Questioner: Wait a minute! Don't you see? That's what Christ died for. So we don't have to carry all our sins around with us. Christ died, but He also rose from the dead. He's alive now, and wants to give you life.

Narrator: You really mean that?

Questioner: Of course. 500 people saw Jesus not long after he rose from the dead, and millions since have turned to him and found that he's still real. He loves you. Let that sack go.

Narrator: (Looks at sack questioningly, shrugs shoulders and lets it drop.) Hey, you're right. Suddenly there's no load.

Questioner: The Bible says, "God loved the world so much, He sent us his only son, Jesus Christ; so that whoever believes in him won't die, but will be given everlasting life."

Narrator: That's tremendous. It's the best Christmas present I ever had. You've got to tell me more.

(As they exit, Choir and congregation sing a further song.)

## Script 2

Narrator: Christmas! What does it mean to you? Is it a family get together, a big feed, Father Christmas and all that? Or what? You know, we've inherited a lot of European customs in our Christmas, maybe we should have been developing our own style of things. Why is it we don't have Christmas in the middle of summer with fireworks and camping and cookouts and . . . we already have a holiday then, don't we.

Men's Quartet: (Starts singing Deck the Halls in background)

Narrator: But there's always one thing you can count on at Christmas, and that's carols. Used to sing them myself once when I was a kid. How did they go? (Hums to himself.)

Have Congregation sing 'Good Christian Men Rejoice'.

Group of children: (Pre-schoolers; they wander on)

Narrator: Kids! Now that I think of it, kids were made for Christmas. It's really their time, with all the goodies we pile on them. Lots and lots of goodies. (Turns to group) What does Christmas mean to you?

(Narrator asks several questions, such as, "What's the first thing you do Christmas morning?" "Where do you go for Christmas?" "Did you ask Santa for anything special?" etc. After they have

given their answers, Narrator suggests they sing a couple songs (Away in a Manger, ). When they have finished they go and sit in a corner, and pretend they're opening their Christmas stocking, quietly acting out what they hope to find inside.)

Narrator: It's a bit like watching yourself when you were young, isn't it! Those were the days . . . You know, there's something else about Christmas I was going to mention to you, but it's slipped my mind for the moment. It'll come back to me. ( 5-7 year olds enter dressed as carolers and chatting quietly) Oh yes, Singing!

Congregation sings: 'Angels from the realms of Glory'

Choir: (5-7 years; they file on, singing carol) Have this group do two or three songs.  
Go tell it on the mountain  
Hark the herald Angels  
Ring the bells

Narrator: (When they have finished singing, asks questions of some of the choir, such as, "Who are you singing about?" "Who's he?" etc. Finishes with, "Where are you going now?")

Choir: Off to Our Christmas program at church. Bye bye! (They file off.)

Narrator: (Turns to group still acting on floor.) Aren't you guys going to church too?

Group: Yes. Come on, let's go. (They get up, look to see if anyone's watching, and run off playing with toys.)

Narrator: I guess Christmas is different things to different people. Jesus? I knew I'd heard the name before. It was His birthday or something. I wonder what sort of birthday he had. What would it have been like to be there then?

Animals: (7-10 years. File on, chattering among themselves. Perhaps a donkey, cow, goat, sheep, dog, etc. They have just been in the manger when Jesus was born, and now they tell each other what they think of Jesus, looking at it from an animal's point of view.)

Angels We Have Heard on High  
O Little Town of Bethlehem  
A Child is Born

Choir: (Sing 'Away in the Manger' with congregation)

Narrator: I wonder what it was like on that morning in Bethlehem. If the people back then were anything like they are today, It must have been an interesting scene.

Paper boy: (Enters, waving papers.) Paper! Extra! Read all about it! Jesus born in Bethlehem. Confusion abounds! Read all about it! Paper!

Narrator: Thanks, I'll buy one of those. (Paper boy exits.)

Narrator: Here is the news. The year 1AD was marked today by the birth of a baby boy in Bethlehem. Three traveling salesmen offered prizes to the mother, Mary, for having the first baby of the new century, and local merchants have given a year's supply of groceries free. Several authors are offering to write biographies of the child, but a prophet named Isaiah claims he already has copyright on the story. King Herod has sent a telegram of congratulations, and says he is planning a special reception for the family...but the parents are understood to have declined the offer. A new song for the event has been written by a local choir of angels. It's selling well, and is expected to top the charts this week.

Narrator: Hold on a minute. This can't be what really happened? Who is this Jesus person everyone's talking about?

Scripture reading: Luke 2:1-7

Narrator: (Breaks in at end of verse.) Now hold it! This still isn't clear to me. No one has really answered my question.

Scripture reading: Luke 2:8-20

Paper Boy: Extra! Extra! Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem. Paper! (Exits)

Choir: (Start to file out after Paper Boy.)

Narrator: Hey, where are you all going?

Choir: We're going to worship Jesus. Do you want to come along?

Narrator: No, I think I'll just read more about it.(Picks up paper, starts looking through it again.)

Scripture reading: Luke 2:21-22,25-38

Child: (10-13 years. Enters carrying a sack.)

Narrator: Hello, what have you got there?

Child: A present for you.

Narrator: A present! That's very kind of you, seeing it's Christmas. Can I open it now? (Child smiles and nods.) (Narrator reaches in and takes out a hammer, and two pieces of wood. Comments on each. Then reaches in and takes out a doll dressed in baby's clothes. Child takes them all off the Narrator, and cuddles the doll.)

Narrator: What is this all about? Why did you give me these things? I'm not sure a doll's quite my style. There must be something else.

Child: (Whispers in his ear.)

Narrator: Are you sure? That's in there? (Child smiles and nods. Narrator looks inside again, puzzled.) Who are you?

Child: Just someone you knew a long time ago, when you were my age. (Child takes the doll, hammer and pieces of wood and sits down to one side of the stage.)

Song:

(During the song, the Child sitting with the doll in the corner starts to hammer the two bits of wood together, in between verses. As the choir finishes they file out, singing. Child finishes hammering the two pieces of wood, holds the result up so the audience can see it is a cross. Child looks at the Narrator.)

Scripture reading: Isaiah 53:1-12

Child: Would you nail a baby to this cross? Then why did they do that to Jesus? (Child goes over to Narrator, Places the doll at his feet, and goes out.

(Narrator stares at the doll, then bends over it, confused. As Narrator is bent over, Questioner enters. Narrator looks up at Questioner.)

Questioner: Well, what do you think about Christmas now?

Narrator: ( Still thinking about his gift) Why did he/she do that?

Questioner: He wanted you to understand what Christmas was all about. It's not about presents, packages, trees or tinsel. Not even about carols. It's about God coming to Earth to do something no-one else could do.

Narrator: But why did they kill Him? He was such a good man. There was no need for it? (Stands up, picks up sack, throws it over shoulder.) Such a good man, and they killed him. (Starts to go.)

Questioner: Where are you going?

Narrator: To see if I can find out where they took him.

Questioner: What have you got in that sack?

Narrator: A Christmas present. This sack is my life. The Child told me it contains everything that I've ever done wrong or that has ever happened to me.

Questioner: Wait a minute! Don't you see? That's what Christ came and died for. He wasn't just a good man, He was God in the flesh. Christ died, but He also rose from the dead so we don't have to carry all our sins around with us. He's alive now, and wants to give you life.

Narrator: You really mean that?

Questioner: Of course. 500 people saw Jesus not long after he rose from the dead, and millions since have turned to him and found that he's still real. He loves you. You can let that sack go.

Narrator: (Looks at sack questioningly, at first cannot drop it, but finally shrugs shoulders and lets it drop.) Hey, you're right. Suddenly there's no load. But why did God do it that way. I would have done things differently . . .

Special Music: He became a man like me

Questioner: The Bible says, "God loved the world so much, He sent us his only son, Jesus Christ; so that whoever believes in him won't die, but will be given everlasting life."

Narrator: That's tremendous. It's the best Christmas present I ever had. You've got to tell me more.

(As they exit, Choir and congregation sing Joy to the world.)

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