

Receiving Christmas

Stage: Empty - Each person reads their lines from the same pace on stage, while holding a candle, moving off and on in the darkness. It is important that each transition line be smooth and continuous. During the reading corresponding still images will be projected onto a screen and will be the main focus of attention.

Characters: Narrator, Mary, Joseph, Innkeeper, Shepherd, Wiseman.

Narrator: **It's often said that Christmas is all about giving** - and so we think of the excitement and joy on a child's face as they unwrap a parcel, or a grandparent welcoming their family to their home for Christmas lunch, or giving a special gift to someone you love; but giving at Christmas means so much more than that - It started about 2,000 years ago, when God carried out His plan which He had promised - even thousands of years before that. God's plan was to give the World a gift - and it wasn't just any gift - because God loved us so much, He gave us.... His only Son. For generations people had waited for this gift - a Saviour who would provide the way for man to come back to God. So how did God give this amazing gift? Well, it all started with a young woman named Mary who was **living in Nazareth**.

Mary: **Living in Nazareth** usually meant living a quite life - Not that I was unhappy mind you, I loved the hills and the fields of Galilee. I had grown up there, and when I had come of age I was engaged to be married to Joseph. Joseph was a strong but gentle man from a family who were descendants of King David himself. It was while I was engaged to Joseph that the first Angel appeared to me. Oh don't get me wrong if I sound calm about the whole thing - At the time I was terrified. I can't describe it other than to say that a bright figure appeared before me. One second I was alone, the next, the angel was in front of me. I dropped what I had and fell to the ground.... I could feel my whole body shaking but was comforted as soon as I heard the angels voice. "Greetings, favoured woman! The Lord is with you!" the Angel said... I had no idea what that meant, and the angel must have been able to tell that I was still shaking, "Don't be frightened, Mary," the angel told me, "for God has decided to bless you! You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" It took a while for what the angel had said to sink in, but it still made no sense to me, "How can I have a baby? I am a virgin." I said.....and...well.... I'll never forget the words which the angel said next "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God." And then the angel vanished..... "The Son of God",..... "The Son of God" could it be true, could it really be happening to me.... but what would Joseph think? ... would he still marry me? Would he help bring up the child. Could the Son of God also be **the son of a carpenter?**

Joseph: **The son of a carpenter** - that's what I am. My family's been in the carpentry business for generations. We weren't wealthy by any stretch of the imagination, but we were respected and were proud of our heritage. It was one afternoon after finishing the days work that I learned that Mary believed she was pregnant. I have to admit I was shocked,.... stunned.... but Mary was a beautiful, honest young woman, and I couldn't bear for anything to happen to her because of the situation and so.... well I decided to call the wedding off - not to make any fuss of it mind you, just a quiet word to my parents - at least I had planned to before..... well.... before I saw the angel. I know it sounds incredible, but I saw it with my own eyes. I was asleep when all of a sudden, brightness.... like the bursting of a sunrise - only with the strength of the midday sun - appeared to me in the middle of my dream. The angel knew my name and called to me "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to go ahead

with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” I awoke with vivid recollections of the dream - every detail, every word was as real as the day itself. What else could I do - I told Mary about the dream and we agreed that the engagement was to go ahead. It was about that time that the census was decreed. The Romans wanted to count us all, which meant making the long trip back to Bethlehem - The City of David. It's not a pleasant journey at the best of times, least of all for a pregnant woman! Mary would sometimes walk or ride the donkey which we were grateful for, but what relief we felt as we saw Bethlehem in the distance, for **I knew that Mary would soon give birth.**

Innkeeper: **I knew that Mary would soon give birth** as soon as I saw her. My first reaction was to turn them away. With so many people coming to Bethlehem, how they thought they could get a room I'll never know. I guess that with all the hustle and bustle of the day - people passing in and out, money changing hands, meals and drink to prepare, I was hardly in the mood to help another person out..... But..... well I can't explain it, there was something about the couple that made me want to help them. I didn't have much.... and I told them so..... "There's the stable out the back" I said, "take it or leave it"..... well, they took it, for what it was worth, and settled in for the night. It was later that same night.... and I remember because it was an unusually quiet night in Bethlehem - especially considering the number of guests we had that night - that I heard the cry of a baby.... Not the crying of a sad or upset child, but the cry that you hear as a newborn takes it's first breath of air and opens its eyes. That was all I heard - just a short cry, and... well.... I couldn't help poking my head around the back to see if everything was alright. I remember, there they were, amongst the cattle and donkeys with the little one nestled in the feeding box - just the right size it was! I was glad to have been able to give them the stable instead of turning them away, as **it was dark in Bethlehem that night.**

Shepherd: **It was dark in Bethlehem that night** still and dark, and very quiet. Well quiet except for the occasional bleating of a lamb looking for its mother to wriggle up against. And as usual I was with the other shepherds, looking after the sheep. With so many people coming into Bethlehem, I guess our master didn't want to lose any lambs to a hungry passer-by! I had watched many travellers that evening, one after another, tired and weary from their journey, making their way into the town. Sometimes I'm glad I'm just a shepherd - there's not much to worry about except the sheep - At least not until that night! We were all lying near a tree, ready to settle in for the night, when..... well I can't describe it. A brilliant flash of light - enough to blind us for a few seconds - appeared in the sky. It was radiating all around, and I'm not ashamed to say that I cowered like a small child.... when suddenly an angel spoke - "Don't be afraid! I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Saviour--yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David!" We may have been lowly shepherds, but even we had heard of the promised Messiah. The angel kept speaking "And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!" - well as if that wasn't enough to terrify us when suddenly there appeared... I don't know.... maybe hundreds of angels- it was brighter than we could bear, but as I shaded my eyes I could clearly hear the words they sang "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favours." As soon as the Angels vanished we didn't just walk we sprinted into the town to see if what we heard was true..... and as we came to the stable we slowed down, and marvelled at the sight of a baby, lying in a manger, and wrapped in strips of cloth. We told the child's parents what the angels had told us.... and while they were also surprised they seemed to somehow understand it. For us it was incredible.... for we're just lowly shepherds.... why God chose to tell us I'll never know, but as we returned to the fields we sang songs to the Lord with a passion and joy that we had never had before - Imagine that, **a King born in Bethlehem.**

Wise Man: A King born in Bethlehem - that's what the prophets had written, so when we saw the sign of the new star in the horizon we knew that the promised one had come. Almost at once we prepared our animals and headed westward toward the star. As we travelled along in the day, we would look forward to the reassurance of the star appearing each night and we shared our thoughts and expectations of what we would find at the end of our journey. We had packed gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh and longed for the day when we could give them to the new king. When we arrived in Jerusalem we were at once spotted as foreigners and were brought to king Herod. We were certain he would know of the whereabouts of the new-born king. But it seemed that Herod was unaware.... even uncomfortable at the knowledge of this new king, although as he sent us on to Bethlehem he requested that we let him know of the child's whereabouts so that he could come and worship him also. We were glad to see the star in the sky again that night. We followed it to Bethlehem and came to the house which it was above and that was when we saw him - the child and his mother together, and we knew that this was the new king. We knelt before the child, and gave him the gifts which we had been carrying all that journey - praising God for the arrival of the new king in exactly the way and the place that the prophets **had often said**.

Narrator: It's often said that Christmas is all about giving, after all God gave the greatest gift of all. But just as the purpose of a Christmas gift is not fulfilled until it has been accepted by the person you give it to, so too, **Christmas should also be all about receiving**. Because God loved us so much, He gave us His only Son - that who ever receives him will have everlasting life. If you don't receive God's gift of Jesus Christ then the true meaning of Christmas won't be complete.

We pray that this Christmas you won't only **give**, but that you will **receive**.