A Change of Scenery

Written by Penny Chou

This children’s Christmas play tells the story of what it would be like if Jesus had been born during our time. There are no solos in this play, but there are songs sung by the cast as a group.

Mission connection:  When advertising, ask the audience to bring an unwrapped “baby gift for Jesus” to the play. At the end, they can bring them up to the communion rail.  They can be given to a children’s home.

Kids walk into the sanctuary in twos (older one with a younger one) and sit in front pews while “Yes!” medley by Alvin Slaughter plays. http://youtu.be/ajNBT8qgYUg

Director makes introductory remarks explaining how the play is set in modern time but the characters and situations mirror those of the true Biblical story.

**SCENE 1 The Annunciation**

(Mary, dressed like a modest modern young lady with an obvious cross necklace or religious tee shirt, is slowly walking across center stage while texting on her phone.  Enter Gabriel, in a leather biker jacket, up the center aisle on a bike or pretend motorcycle with motorcycle sounds: <http://www.sounddogs.com/previews/25/mp3/265137_SOUNDDOGS__mo.mp3> )

(Mary glances up and sees Gabriel, is fearful, and stops in her tracks.)

**Gabriel:** (Gabriel picks up the mic.) Don’t be afraid, Mary.  I have come to give you good news.

**Mary:** (Gabriel holds mic for Mary.) Are you in a motorcycle gang?  How did you know my name?

**Gabriel:** I am the leader of Heaven’s Angels and I was sent by God, Who told me your name. You are blessed among women.  God is with you.  You will bear a son and His name will be Jesus.  He will be great and called Son of the Most High.

**Mary:**(Mary bows her head slightly toward Gabriel.) May it be as you have said.

(Mary leaves the stage.  Gabriel also leaves and makes his way back to the sanctuary exit.)

**SCENE 2 Gabriel Speaks to Joseph**

(Joseph is on stage with hammer and nails doing some carpentry, wearing carpenter pants.)

**Joe:** (picking up the mic and talking to himself) I cannot believe that my fiancee’ is expecting a child!  And whose child could it be? I thought we were waiting until we were married, but apparently, Mary couldn’t wait.  Maybe I should just break off the engagement quietly, to avoid embarrassing her, me, and our families.

(The end of the day whistle blows, Joseph slips the hammer into the loop on his carpenter pants, picks up his lunchbox and begins to head home.

whistle sound: http://youtu.be/oCnRV3SQkKk

Gabriel enters, again on “motorcycle,” and Joseph stops to listen to him.

<http://www.sounddogs.com/previews/25/mp3/265137_SOUNDDOGS__mo.mp3> )

**Gabriel:** What’s the problem, Joe?

**Joe:** Who are you and why do you care?

**Gabriel:** Sigh.  I am the leader of Heaven’s angels and I was sent by God to talk to you.  You can call me Gabe.

**Joe:** Yea, right.  And I am Santa Claus.

**Gabriel:** Hmm.  We need to talk about this Santa Claus thing some other time, but right now let’s focus on you and Mary.

**Joe:** What do you know about my Mary?

**Gabriel:** Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.  She is carrying the Holy Spirit’s child.  She will bring forth a Son and you shall name Him Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.

**Joe:** Are you for real?

**Gabriel:**I’ve got to talk to God about this whole Heaven’s Angels biker wardrobe.  I think we need to go back to robes and halos.  But yes, I am really God’s representative here to tell you that Mary is a virtuous woman.  God chose her to give birth to His son so that He could live here on earth with His people and save them from their sins.

**Joe:** I will do as you have said.  I will take Mary as my wife and I will provide for her and raise Jesus as my own adopted Son.

**Gabriel:** Praise be to God.  A heavenly host of angels is celebrating in Heaven over your obedience to God.

(Joseph steps off the stage, smiling, and the angels, dressed in robes, wings, and halos, step on stage with Gabriel to sing.)

**Gabriel:** (stretching his arm out to the audience) Please join me and my heavenly host of angels in singing “Prepare the Way of the Lord.”  We will sing it twice in unison, then twice in rounds with the people on my right side beginning the round and the people on my left side ending it.

(Everyone comes to stage to sing UMH 207, “Prepare the Way of the Lord.”)

Angels sings UMH 207 “Prepare the Way of the Lord.”

*Prepare the way of the Lord.*

*Prepare the way of the Lord,*

*And all people will see*

*The salvation of our God.*

*(2x in unison, 2x in rounds)*

(Gabriel and the angels step off the stage.)

**SCENE 3 Nothing is Certain But Death and Taxes**

(Stage hands move a desk/table and 2 chairs to the stage.  Set a cardboard cutout of a tv screen frame on the desk/table.  Two anchors sit there and share mic. Joseph and Mary sit in chairs on the opposite side of the stage watching the news broadcast.)

**TV Anchor 1**:  The IRS has just announced that citizens will be required to file and pay their income taxes in their cities of birth and by the end of the year.  Hotel, restaurant, and travel associations are absolutely gleeful about the boost in revenue that they will experience.  Citizens will not be permitted to deduct these travel expenses from their taxes.

**TV Anchor 2:**Mayors across the nation are preparing their cities for the onslaught of visiting tax payers.  City officials are scrambling to find lodging and food services for record numbers of travelers who will exceed the capacity of hotels and restaurants.

**TV Anchor 1:**  Wall Street is reacting to the decree as well.  Travel-related stocks prices are soaring as buyers scramble to purchase them.  Feeling the opposite impact are companies whose productivity is expected to drop as employees earn vacation pay during their travels. Their stock prices are falling.

**TV Anchor 2:** Speculators are not even sure what will happen with tax preparers and accountants.  Will they earn record salaries or will their earnings suffer as they travel to their cities of origin to pay their own taxes?

**TV Anchor 1:** In other news… (TV Anchor 1 trails off as the conversation between Joseph and Mary takes center stage.)

**Mary:** Joe, where were you born?

**Joe:**Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where the oldest organized Protestant denomination in the world, the Unity of the Brethren, settled. Since 1937, they have been known as Christmas City USA.  My father worked as a carpenter in the steel industry there and I did my carpentry apprenticeship under him at Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

**Mary:** How did you end up here in St. Louis, Missouri? ( or insert your own home town)

**Joe:** I came West for work.  There were lots of homes being built in the St. Charles and St. Peters area and they needed carpenters like me.  But it looks like we’ll be headed to Bethlehem for a visit.

**Mary:** Will your parents have room for us to stay at their home while we’re there?

**Joe:** Probably not.  With so many other siblings and their families trying to stay there, their small house will already be overflowing with people.  We can try to get a hotel reservation.  Could you call some hotels tomorrow?

**Mary:** Sure.  I’m getting sleepy.  Carrying this baby around is making me tired all the time.

**Joe:** Goodnight, Mary.

(Joseph steps off the stage while Mary lays down to sleep.)

(Mary wakes up and stretches, as if it is the next day.  She gets out her cell phone and begins calling hotels.)

**Mary:** This is Mary from St. Louis.  I am calling to make a hotel reservation for December 24.

(Motel 7 Manager goes to opposite side of stage with non-cell phone in hand. If there is a lectern or pulpit, use that as his/her front counter.)

**Motel 7 Manager:** I am sorry, ma’am.  There are so many people coming into town in December to pay their taxes that we are not taking reservations.  It’s first come, first serve.

**Mary:** Can you suggest the name of another hotel that I might call?

**Motel 7 Manager:** Ma’am, none of the hotels are accepting reservations for December. I recommend that you try to stay with your kinfolk.  Even the campgrounds will be full, despite the Pennsylvania winter.

**Mary:** Thank you sir/ma’am.

**Motel 7 Manager:** Good luck.  (Motel 7 Manager hangs up the phone and steps off the stage.)

(The TV Anchors also step off the stage and the stage hands replace the tv frame on the desk with a steering wheel. Mary remains on stage and Joseph joins her for the next scene.)

**SCENE 4 Road Trip**

(Mary slowly drags a suitcase to center stage.  Joseph quickly takes it from her.)

**Joe:** Let me carry that Mary.  You’re carrying enough as it is.

**Mary:** (holding her hand around her abdomen as if cradling her unborn baby) Thank you, Joe.  I’ll just get in the truck.  (Mary puts awkwardly sits down on the passenger side of the makeshift truck.)

(Joe puts the suitcase in the “back of the truck” and gets in on the driver’s side.)

**Joe:** I packed our camping gear, but I sure hope that we don’t have to use it with you in your condition and the weather turning cold. (Joe starts the “truck.”  truck starting sound:  http://www.soundsnap.com/tags/truck\_start\_up

**Mary:** Joe, can you turn on the radio?  It’s a long drive to Bethlehem.

**Joe:** Sure, Mary.  Joy FM? (Joe pretends to fiddle with the radio.)

**Mary:** Yep.  (pause for a moment to listen) I love this song!  It kind of reminds me of our situation!

(Joe and Mary sit silently “riding in the truck” while listening to Carrie Underwood’s “Jesus Take the Wheel.”  <http://youtu.be/U8-YO6g05aA>

**Mary:** Joe, I need to go the bathroom.

(pause for audience to laugh)

(Mary and Joseph get out of the “truck” and walk over to podium.  Motel 7 Manager stands at podium.  TV News Anchors sit at table and stage hands remove steering wheel and put tv frame back on table.)

**SCENE 5 No Room at the Inn**

**Joe:** We’d like a room for the night.  As you can see, my wife is expecting a child and we are very tired.  Any room will do.

**Motel 7 Manager:** Sir, all of our rooms are filled.  All of the rooms in nearby hotels are filled.  Haven’t you seen the news lately?

(Joe, Mary, and the Motel 7 Manager glance over to watch the news for a moment.)

**TV News Anchor 2:** Travelers from all of the country have converged on Christmas City USA tonight.  Hotels are filled to the rafters and there is literally “no room at the inn” in any inn!

**TV Anchor 1:** Even the homeless shelters are having to turn away would-be customers tonight, despite the snow and cold weather.

**Joe:** (addressing the Motel 7 Manager) We brought our camping equipment.  Do you know of a campground nearby?

**Motel 7 Manager:** The campgrounds are all full too, but under the circumstances, I can allow you to camp behind our motel.

**Mary:** May the Lord bless you for your kindness, sir/ma’am.

(Joseph and Mary move to the side of the stage where Joseph mimes setting up a tent.  Mary sits down in a camping chair and Joseph rolls out 2 sleeping bags. The Motel 7 Manager steps off stage but the TV News Anchors remain in place.)

**Joe:** I’ll set up the generator for some heat.  It’s going to be a cold night.

**Mary:** Joe, I think the baby is coming.

**Joe:** (with a look of alarm on his face) When?

**Mary:** Soon.  Very soon.

**TV Anchor 2:** We have breaking news that a baby was just born in a tent behind Motel 7 overnight.  The proud parents hail from St. Louis, Missouri, but came to Bethlehem to pay their taxes.

**TV Anchor 1:** The mother and father of the baby boy have named him “Jesus.”  A nearby cattle farmer lent the young parents a manger filled with hay for the baby to sleep on.

(Mary and Joseph sit in camping chairs, with Mary holding the baby Jesus.  The rest of the cast come to the stage to sing “Away in a Manger.”  <http://youtu.be/CIo4N0EoV4A> )

(Cast steps off stage except for Mary, Joseph, TV Anchors, and “common folk.”)

**SCENE 6 The Common Folk Are Sent a Birth Announcement**

(Note: Common folk are to be dressed in any sort of costume depicting a base level worker such as construction workers, nurses, farmers, mechanics, etc. but you need at least one sheep farmer and a flock of sheep who consist of the youngest children)

(Mary and Joseph remain off to the side in their lawn chairs and TV Anchors remain at the desk.  “Common folk” and non-Gabriel angels split up into groups in center stage such that each angel can speak to one or more “common folk.”)

**Angel 1:** (addressing one or more specific “common folk”) Calm down.  I bring good news of great joy!  A baby boy was born today in Bethlehem Who is your Savior, Christ the Lord.  You will find Him in a manger behind Motel 7.

**Common Folk 1:** Thank you for sharing this amazing news with me.  I will go to see and worship Him at once.  (Common Folk 1 goes over to see the baby Jesus and gets on his/her knees to worship.

**Angel 2:** (addressing a different one or more “common folk”) Dude(s), settle down.  Don’t be afraid.  I am an angel of the Lord sent to tell you that your Savior was born today in a tent behind Motel 7.

**Common Folk 2:** Right here in Bethlehem?  What a joy!  I will go and see Him right away.  Thank you for telling me.  (Common Folk 2 goes over to see the baby Jesus and gets on his/her knees to worship.)

**Angel 3:** (addressing another “common folk”) Chill!  I have good news.  God’s Son was just born in a tent behind Motel 7 and I came to tell you about it so that you could go and welcome Him.

**Common Folk 3:** Do you mean the Motel 7 right down the road from here?  (Angel 3 nods “yes.”) Wow.  I’m headed over there right now.

(If you have more angels and common folk who need speaking parts, just add more reiterations of these lines.)

**Angel 4:** (addressing the shepherd and his sheep) Fear not!  I bring you good news of great joy.  A baby boy was born this day in the city of Bethlehem.  He is your Savior, Christ the Lord.  You will find Him in a Walmart onesie and lying in a manger.

**Shepherd:** (with sheep behind him/her) I and will go immediately to find Him and worship Him.  Thank you, messenger of God.

**Angels in Unison:** (led by oldest angel) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!

(Entire cast except Mary and Joseph gather on stage to sing.)

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”  UMH 230 or <http://youtu.be/C-vBAEvcjM0> (if you can stand the bouncing ball) or <http://youtu.be/ooCxCOd7My0> (if you’re not in any hurry)

(TV Anchors return to the news desk, Mary and Joseph stay put, and everyone else leaves the stage.)

**SCENE 7 Beneath the Star, a Star is Born**

(Use your acolyte robes or some sheets and construction paper to fashion 3 make-shift nun-like outfits.  Large cross necklaces would help get the point across as well.)

(Three nuns enter center stage and gaze at the Star on a stick being held up by a stage hand behind your audience.)

**Nun 1:** Do you see that big star?

**Nun 2:** It wasn’t here in Alabama before.

**Nun 3:** I think it’s a sign from God.

**Nun 1:** What do you think God is telling us?

**Nun 2:** Maybe there is something under the star that we should see.

**Nun 3:** Let’s follow the star to see what it is.

**Nuns 1 and 2 in unison:** Ok!

(The 3 nuns walk down the aisle to the star.  When they get there, the stage hand carries the star up to the stage and stands behind Mary and Joseph and the nuns follow the star until they get to the stage, but then they are intercepted by President Herod’s henchman.

**President Herod’s Henchman:** You three nuns there.  Stop and state your business.

**Nun 1:**We are but 3 humble servants of God, following a star.

**President Herod’s Henchman:**Why are nuns interested in astronomy?

**Nun 2:** We feel that God is leading us with this star.

**President Herod’s Henchman:**Word has come to President Herod that a very charismatic leader has been born recently.  This star wouldn’t have anything to do with Him, would it?

**Nun 3:** (Nun 3 turns around to let the audience see that she is crossing both of her fingers behind her back as she tells the following fib.) Sir, we have neither heard nor been told anything of a new leader.

**President Herod’s Henchman:** Then you may continue your travels, but come back through Washington, DC to report on what you find.  President Herod is anxious to meet this new leader.

**Nun 3:** (Again showing the audience her crossed fingers behind her back) Yes, sir, we will visit Washington, DC.

(President Herod’s Henchman leaves the stage and the 3 nuns proceed to look at the baby Jesus.)

**Nun 1:** I can just feel the holiness coming from this Child.

**Nun 2:** We should get on our knees at once and worship Him.

**Nun 3:** This Child is truly the Son of God.  We are blessed beyond belief to see Him.

(Nuns get on their knees and worship Jesus.)

**TV Anchor 1:**Police are reporting traffic jams around the Motel 7 where the baby was born.  Witnesses are calling the baby the Son of God.  He has had many visitors and is said to have a supernatural glow about Him.

**TV Anchor 2:** Breaking news is that Joe, Mary, and the baby Jesus have disappeared.  Folks at the scene say that Joe heard that Jesus’ life was in danger from President Herod’s militia so before dawn, they took the baby and went into hiding.  Let’s hope that the little Tyke safely grows up to fulfill his potential.

(Entire cast gathers on stage.)

**Director:** Please join us in singing “Silent Night” together.  If you have bought a baby gift, you may bring it to the communion rail during the song or raise your hand and one of the stage hands will bring it up for you.

Everyone, audience included, sings Silent Night.  Either use UMH 239 or http://youtu.be/jFT604sgMCQ (Elvis style) or <http://youtu.be/Tp7YMXyN9wM> (a little faster, as long as you don’t mind mispelled words on the screen)

Children bow for applause.  Afterward, actors stand in place while director thanks everyone and invites everyone to Fellowship Hall for Jesus’ birthday cake.  Children process by two’s while “Joy to the World” plays:

<http://youtu.be/Bsz3wxlK398>  (classical by New London Choir and London Symphony)

or

<http://youtu.be/-lI6wGafOjM> (by the Howard Gospel Choir - a fast version)

Cast –  In order of appearance (# of people in that role)

Mary (1)

Gabriel (1)

Joe (1)

TV Anchor 1 (1)

TV Anchor 2 (1)

Motel 7 Manager (1)

Common Folk 1 (1 or more)

Common Folk 2 (1 or more)

Common Folk 3 (1 or more)

Shepherd (1 or more)

Sheep (1 or more)

Angel 1 (1)

Angel 2 (1)

Angel 3 (1)

Angel 4 (1)

Angels without speaking parts (0 to whatever)

Nun 1 (1)

Nun 2 (2)

Nun 3 (1)

President Herod’s Henchman (1)

stage hands (at least 2)

tech person to run powerpoint, microphones, sound bites, and music (1)

Cast – (# of sentences spoken)

Joe (35)

Mary (25)

Gabriel (23)

TV Anchor 1 (14)

TV Anchor 2 (11)

Motel 7 Manager (11)

Common Folk 1 (2)

Common Folk 2 (4)

Common Folk 3 (3)

Shepherd (2)

Sheep (0)

Angel 1 (5)

Angel 2 (4)

Angel 3 (4)

Angel 4 (6)

Angels without speaking parts (0)

Nun 1 (5)

Nun 2 (5)

Nun 3 (7)

President Herod’s Henchman (7)

stage hands (0)

tech person to run powerpoint, microphones, sound bites, and music (0)