Time For Change

Written by Penny Chou

This children’s Christmas play tells the Christmas story from God’s perspective. God shares his Son with his people to teach them that He loves everyone and that He wants them to follow the meaning rather than the letter of the law. God also connects Jesus’ birth story with elements of the Old Testament.

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.

If possible, I recommend showing the kids’ speaking parts on a powerpoint during the play so that people can still follow the play if kids mumble or if audience members are hard of hearing.

Kids walk into the sanctuary in twos (older one with a younger one) and sit in front pews while playing one of the following or your own favorite Christmas hymn:

John 3:16

<https://youtu.be/M-jv8ruZxkI>

OR

God So Loved the World

https://youtu.be/a3c77OSI1iA

Director makes introductory remarks if desired.

SCENE 1

Person with sign on back that says “Poor Gentile” is kneeling by the walkway with an outreached hand to the person with a sign on their back that says “Pharisee” who is walking by.

Gentile: Sir, can you spare a shekel for a poor soul like me?

Pharisee: (avoiding Gentile as he/she walks by) No, I do not have money for a dog like you. I have more important things to do.

Pharisee: (kneeling down publicly and praying in a loud and braggy voice so that all will see, perhaps waving his/her arms) Lord, you are the almighty God of Abraham, the God of Israel. Please bless thy people who try to follow your commandments and live by your laws. (continue making motions a few more times and praying silently, then just remain in the prayer pose while God comes on stage and speaks.)

God: (walks onto center stage, rolling His eyes, glancing at the Pharisee and then addressing audience) My people have gotten so off track with my commandments. (sighs) I should introduce myself. Sometimes I come in the form of Morgan Freeman. I’ve also shown myself as George Burns, and even Whoopi Goldberg, but today I appear in the form of (insert your actor/actress’ name). I am God. Yes, God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. That’s me.

If you have a Powerpoint display, you can show clips of these representations of God in film as your actor/actress is speaking.

<http://images.gmanews.tv/webpics/2016/02/640_morgan-freeman_2016_02_23_16_33_22.jpg> (Morgan Freeman)

<http://www.oregonrepublicanparty.org/sites/default/files/quotepics/GeorgeBurns.jpg> (George Burns)

<http://cdn.moviestillsdb.com/sm/30599a49f1280f4dc40edfcd5bdd79eb/a-little-bit-of-heaven.jpg> (Whoopi Goldberg)

Anyway, back to what I was saying. My people just don’t understand that I love everyone, not just certain people who have descended directly from Abraham and follow all of those nit picky laws that Moses and Aaron came up with in the desert. They have gotten caught up in following the letter of the law while ignoring the meaning of it. So about two thousand years ago, I decided that I needed to re-teach them by sending my one and only Son to them to show and teach them.

(Gentile and Pharisee leave the stage, but God remains.)

God: Gabriel, can you come here for a minute?

(Gabriel joins God on stage.)

God: Gabriel, I need to straighten out the earthlings. I have decided to send my Son to earth to teach them how to love one another, and I need your help.

Gabriel: Ok, boss. What can I do to help?

God: I’m pretty sure that my people would be too frightened if I talked to them directly, so I’m going to need for you to get some messages to them.

Gabriel: Who do I talk to? What do you want me to say?

God: Well, I want to send my Son to somebody unexpected. Common folk. People with good hearts who could raise him to be kind, loving, and wise. I want the Pharisees to see that I love even the poorest and most common people just as much.

Gabriel: How about Mary and Joseph of Nazareth? I’ve heard that they are getting married soon. They seem like kind, loving and wise people, and they are dirt poor.

God: They sound perfect! Well, you know, not really perfect of course, but they sound like they could do the job well. Take care of it, Gabriel.

Gabriel: Yes, sir!

(God leaves the stage, but Gabriel remains for scene 2.)

SCENE 2

(Mary wanders onto the stage with a basket or a water jug or something to look like she is working. She stops abruptly when she sees Gabriel and reacts fearfully.)

Gabriel: Mary, do not be afraid. You are favored by God. You will give birth to a son and he will be a great man. He will be called the Son of the Most High. He will be given the throne of his ancestor, David. He will be King forever and his kingdom will never end.

Mary: But how? I am not yet married and I come from a poor family. My future husband is also poor.

Gabriel: The Holy Spirit will come to you and make you with child.

Mary: I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be as you have said.

(Mary bows slightly to Gabriel, then leaves the stage.)

Gabriel: (speaking to the audience) That went well, but I think I will try a different approach with Joseph. I remember another Joseph who saved his people from starvation back in the olden days. His brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt and he worked his way up the ladder to become Pharaoh’s assistant by interpreting dreams, including those of Pharoah himself. When his starving family came to Egypt decades later, he was able to give them food and save their lives. I think the Jewish people will really understand the connection if I speak to Joseph, father-to-be of Jesus, through dreams as well. Come to think of it, the father of Jesus saves Jesus by taking him to Egypt, but that is another story for another time.

(Joseph enters the stage and lays down to sleep.)

Gabriel: Joseph, I know that you have heard that Mary is with child.

Joseph: (sitting up on floor but sounding sleepy) Yes, I have. I do not know what to do. I thought that she was a virtuous woman, but I guess I was wrong. Now I will have to divorce her quietly.

Gabriel: No, Joseph, you were right. She is indeed a virtuous woman and is favored by God. She is carrying a child conceived of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son and you will name Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.

Joseph: I am to raise the Son of God? Why me? Why Mary?

Gabriel: God chose you both because you are kind, loving, and wise. You have won His favor by being His faithful servants.

Joseph: I will do as the Lord has said. I will take Mary as my wife and together we will do our best to raise Jesus.

(Joseph and Gabriel leave the stage.)

SCENE 3

(God enters the stage.)

God: (addresses audience) What do you think? Do you think Mary and Joseph will be good parents for my Son? It turns out that they did an excellent job of it. Nevertheless, I wanted to stack the deck for my people to make it as obvious as possible to them that I sent Jesus to them. I thought it would be best if Jesus was born in Bethlehem from whence King David hailed. Since Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, I had to pull a few strings with Caesar Augustus. I convinced him that he needed to take a census of the people and have each of them report to the town of their ancestry for it. That way he could perhaps collect more taxes from the people. Of course, Caesar Augustus was eager to assist. Here’s what happened.

(God leaves the stage and Mary and Joseph enter it.)

Joseph: (to Mary) Mary, pack your bags. We’re going to Bethlehem.

Mary: Now? But I am due to give birth very soon. Why should we go to Bethlehem?

Joseph: Caesar Augustus has declared that everyone must be counted in the census in the town of their ancestors. Our ancestors are from Bethlehem so we must go there and be counted.

Mary: Caesar Augustus has never traveled on a donkey while being 8 months pregnant.

Joseph: No, I suppose he hasn’t.

Mary: Where will we stay?

Joseph: I have many relatives in Bethlehem, so I hope that we can stay with them. However, many of us will be traveling there so it may be very crowded.

(Mary and Joseph walk a large circle as if traveling to Bethlehem. When they return to their original spot on stage, Joseph knocks on a pretend door and talks to a relative who has come onto stage.)

Joseph: (having knocked on the pretend door) Greetings, cousin!

Cousin: Greetings, Joseph! (They do a manly hug.) (looking at Mary) This must be your lovely wife, Mary.

Joseph: Yes. We have traveled far and our very tired. Can we stay with you for the census?

Cousin: Oh, I’m so sorry, but we are so full that some people are already sleeping with the animals. Why don’t you try the inn just down the road?

Joseph: Yes, of course. It was great to see you.

Cousin: And you too.

(Joseph and Mary walk another circle while the cousin leaves the stage and the inn keeper takes his place.)

Joseph: (knocks on pretend door of inn) We are in need of a room for the census. Do you have a vacancy?

Inn keeper: No, I am sorry but we are full. We do not have any rooms left.

Joseph: Not even the penthouse suite? Meeting room? Perhaps the gym?

Inn keeper: Nothing. Not even a large closet.

Joseph: Do you have any suggestions? As you can see, my wife is with child and is due to give birth very soon. Can we stay in your barn with the animals?

Inn keeper: Yes, I can let you stay in the barn with the animals. Here are some towels and small soaps for your convenience. (Inn keeper hands pretend items to Joseph.)

Joseph: Thank you so much.

(Inn keeper closes pretend door and leaves stage. Joseph and Mary go to side of stage and sit on chairs with manger.)

SCENE 4

(Mary and Joseph continue to sit on side of stage in “barn.”)

(Gabriel and another Angel come onto stage.)

Gabriel: (excitedly to Angel) Have you heard what is happening?

Angel: No, what is happening?

Gabriel: God has sent his only Son to earth to re-teach his people and we get to make the announcement! He wants us to tell some of the common people first. Who do you think we should tell?

Angel: A common rabbi?

Gabriel: No, not common enough.

Angel: How about a butcher or a carpenter?

Gabriel: Hmm. (acts like he is thinking about it) No, they are still well known people in their community. Someone even more common.

(Shepherd or shepherds, depending on how many kids you have, quietly wander in to the side of the stage where the audience can see them.)

Angel: I know! (pointing toward the shepherd or shepherds) How about those simple shepherds in the field?

Gabriel: They would be perfect! Well, you know, they are not perfect people, but they would be the perfect people to tell first. Let’s go really big with the announcement!

Angel: A choral number? Dancing? Harps? Drums?

Gabriel: No drums, but I like the idea of a song. I’d like for you to go and write some special music for this occasion and practice it with the other angels. (If you have a lot of kids, they can be angels. If you don’t have enough, then edit this line and just let everyone except the shepherds sing the songs.)

Angel: (talking to shepherd and shepherd looks afraid) You there, shepherd. Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour was born to you. He is Christ the Lord. You will find a baby swaddled in a blanket and lying in a manger.

(more angels or rest of cast, depending on how many kids you have, come onto the stage to sing two verses of Hark the Herald Angel Sings, followed by 2 verses of O Little Town of Bethlehem. Then everyone leaves the stage except the shepherds who come onto the stage, and Mary & Joseph who sit back down in the manger scene.)

Shepherd 1: Let’s go to Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened which the Angel has told us about.

Shepherd 2: Who will take care of our sheep?

Shepherd 1: I guess we’ll take them with us. Let’s go!

(Shepherds walk in a circle and end up at manger seen. They bow down in front of baby Jesus for a moment, then exit the stage.)

SCENE 5

(God and Gabriel return to the stage. Mary & Joseph may continue to sit off to the side in the manger scene.)

God: Gabriel, I commend you for that excellent sharing of news to the shepherds. People will be talking about that for centuries, even millennia. But I want to do something even bigger now. Something that people in other countries and all over the world would notice. I want everyone to know about my Son, not just the Jews in Bethlehem and surrounding areas.

Gabriel: I have an idea. We could have birds all over the world speak in different languages and tell the news.

God: That’s an interesting idea, but let’s keep brainstorming.

Gabriel: We could hire a plane from the future to write the announcement in the sky.

God: I’ll give you points for creativity, Gabriel, but I think we had better stick to something less scary that the people of this time would better understand. Let’s use a star.

Gabriel: Do you mean that a celebrity will announce Jesus’ birth? Perhaps Caesar Augustus himself?

God: No, not that kind of star. A star in the night sky!

Gabriel: Oh. That’s right, these people lived before Copernicus and Galileo. They would follow a new star to see where it might lead. That’s a great idea, Lord.

God: Here’s what I’m thinking. We’ll put a star in the sky over a nearby kingdom where the magi will see it. They will be curious about it and follow it to find out where it leads. Just as they will follow my Son as the light of the world, they will follow this star.

Gabriel: Will it lead them directly to the baby Jesus?

God: Actually, I was thinking that I might just stir the pot to get things going and lead them to King Herod first, then to Jesus.

Gabriel: Uh oh. King Herod is going to be very jealous.

God: Yep. Just as the Pharaoh in Egypt killed the Hebrew baby boys, King Herod will try to kill my Son by killing all of the baby boys.

Gabriel: It saddens me.

God: My Son will escape and fulfill his mission, but His life will not be easy nor long. (pause for a moment of sadness)

God: The magi will bring gifts to honor the newborn King.

Gabriel: Will they bring toys?

God: Do you remember when the royal visitors from Sheba came to visit King Solomon and brought gifts? They will bring the same gifts to this newborn King.

Gabriel: They will bring gold and spices. Frankincense and myrrh.

God: Yes.

(God and Gabriel leave the stage. King Herod comes onto the stage and sits on a throne. The three magi enter the stage, walk up to King Herod and bow.)

King Herod: Wise magi from the East, I have heard that you have followed a star here. May I ask why?

Magi 1: We saw the star moving in the sky and thought that it was a sign that a new king was born.

King Herod: (a little angrily) But I am king! (then calming down) What do you know about this new king?

Magi 2: We do not know anything yet. We have traveled from the East to see him.

Magi 3: We have brought gold, frankincense and myrrh for him.

King Herod: I would also like to see this newborn king. When you have found him, please come back and tell me where he is so that I may also go and see him.

All Magi: Yes, your highness.

(Magi leave King Herod, walk to other side of stage and bow one at a time in front of baby Jesus and leave a gift, then exit the stage. While this is happening, King Herod also leaves the stage.)

(Gabriel runs onto the stage to talk to Mary and Joseph.)

Gabriel: Mary, Joseph, King Herod is looking for Jesus and wants to kill him. You must flee to Egypt to keep him safe. God will tell you when it is safe to return.

(Mary and Joseph leave the stage in a hurry.)

SCENE 6

(God returns to the stage.)

God: And so it began. Jesus had a safe childhood and grew in wisdom and stature. Here are some pictures of him growing up.

Show <https://pixabay.com/static/uploads/photo/2012/03/04/00/38/adorable-21998_960_720.jpg>

God: Here he is as a baby. Wasn’t he adorable?

Show <http://www.timberframe-tools.com/wp-content/files/savings-shed-hammering.jpg>

God: He showed an interest in carpentry at an early age.

Show <http://www.richard-seaman.com/Travel/Egypt/BedouinBoyOnCamel.jpg>

God: Jesus really enjoyed riding the camels while he was in Egypt.

Show <https://encrypted-tbn2.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQnYrNxuOyd3y1hG_t-fHPPBGyOZ78EpG9SERjq76gwMALvHk3N4w>

God: He really had a way with fish. He could feed thousands of people with a single fish!

God: My Son went on to teach the people in Jerusalem and Galilee through example and through parables to love. When the people asked Jesus which of my commandments was greatest, he replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great **commandment**. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

God: I would like to end my story by telling you that no matter what your race, your gender, your gender identity, your sexual orientation, your political party, your IQ, or whatever else, I love you all equally and I want you to love each other in the same way.

(All cast members come to the stage. Director steps in front for final words and final song.)

**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)

Gentile (1)

Pharisee (1)

God (1)

Gabriel (1)

Mary (1)

Joseph (1)

Cousin (1)

Inn Keeper (1)

Angel (1 or more)

Shepherd (2 or more)

King Herod (1)

Magi (3)

stage hands (0 to 2)

tech person to run powerpoint, microphones, sound bites, and music (1 – can be an adult)

Some of the parts do not overlap, so if you have very few actors, you could let them double up on parts and just change costumes between scenes.