The Strangest Night

A Musical of the First Christmas *by Linda Rose*

Characters:

Singers	**Non Singers**
Mary	Angel
Joseph	3 shepherds: Ben,
Grandmother	Judah,
Anna	Jethro
Simeon	3 Magi: Caspar,
Elisabeth	Melchior,
Herod	Balthazar
Innkeeper	Rabbi
Innkeeper's daughter	Astrologer to Herod
Herod's minders	

Groups

Angels

Magi Entourage

Children

Travellers

Herod's Minders

Songs

Song One:	Tell us a tale	Grandmother & Children
Song Two:	Love like this	Mary & Joseph
Song Three:	Mary's Song	Mary
Song Four:	Betrayal	Mary & Joseph
Reprise	Love like this	
Song Five:	Magnificat	Elisabeth & Mary
Song Six:	Travelling	Mary & Joseph
Song Seven:	Welcome!	Innkeeper
Song Eight:	Angel Chorus	
Song Nine:	What a Miracle	Innkeeper's daughter
Song Ten:	Bad Boy!	Herod & Minders
Song Eleven:	Now Your Servant can die in peace	Anna / Simeon
Song Twelve:	Song of Rachel	
Finale;	It's not the End	All

Scene One:

Children are sitting at the feet of an elderly woman, dressed in 1st Century Palestinian clothes.

Song one: Tell us a Tale

Children: Grandmother, grandmother - tell us a tale,

Tell us a story of long ago.

Take us to times that now are past

So we can dream we're there at last.

Grandmother: Well now my children, I'll tell you a tale

Of times in my childhood that I know well.

When father ran the inn that you see

The world it seemed so big to me.

Children: Grand mother, grandmother - tell us a tale,

Tell us a story of long ago.

Take us to times that now are past

So we can dream we're there at last.

Grandmother: The Emperor Augustus Caesar ruled

The world as we understood it was told.

He thought to count all the things that he owned

Like rich men like to count all their gold.

He told the people to go home

Leave all the things that they now do own

Return they must to their place of birth

So they could counted be.

Children: Grandmother Grandmother, what happened then

Tell us a tale of magnificent men

And love and war, and death and glory -

Just what you saw, tell it to me!

Grandmother: Well now my children, I'll tell you it now,

Just how my world changed - I'll tell you how.

It started in a place far away

(dreamily) I remember it well, right to this day.....*(music fades out)*

spoken I remember it well.....

It was a strange time indeed - full of unusual happenings, nothing was normal. I remember my father had a fair business. Travelers often came by on their way to Jerusalem to visit the temple, but this was different. It was in the time of the first Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar, nephew to the Roman god, Julius Caesar. He wanted to count all his goods, like a shepherd may count his sheep, or a tax collector, his gold. So in all of the Roman world, people had to be counted. But they could not be counted where they were - the Romans counted a citizen from where they were born, no matter where they now lived, and everyone had to go, back to their birthplace.

It was chaos - travellers, donkeys, carts, - so much activity for such a quiet little country. Such an upheaval all over the Roman Empire. I suppose Augustus Caesar wanted to show a new beginning - that an important ruler had arrived! Well - he got our attention!

Fortunately we had all been born in Bethlehem, so we could stay and get good business from all the travellers. And there were the strangest travellers - I can tell you. People from all over coming back to the town of their birth - rich, poor all sorts! But from all of these people visiting that winter, there was one couple that stands out in my memory- nothing much to look at - but something special about them. I will tell you their story, the strangest night which changed my life forever. Settle down, get comfortable, for it is a story as you wished - one of magnificent men, and terrible kings, and love and death and glory.

But to begin their story, I must go back further, to before this time.

They came from Nazareth, a northern town in Galilee. A respected carpenter called Joseph, betrothed to marry a bright young girl with shining eyes and a heart of gentle fire called Mary. They were the talk of the town - a couple made in Heaven. Well - maybe it was more than they ever knew! Mary was so young. Joseph has waited a long time to take her as his bride, but he was a kind and patient God-fearing man, who loved Mary very much, and was willing to wait. Mary, too, loved and respected Joseph, and was glad her family had chosen so well for her.

2: Love Song

Mary and Joseph are working away at opposite ends of the stage. Halfway through the song they look up at each other and come together to sing the last part.

Joseph: Mary - you're the sweetest thing in my life

Mary - I still can't believe the time is near to take you as my wife.

Watching you flit around like a small bird or a dove.

Pureness and a heart of gold, trusting God, it's what I love.

Mary: Joseph - what a man to care for me.

I have been in love with him as child upon his knee.

Joseph - Such a man, the town looks on,

asking for his help in matters God and family.

Joseph - Can I be all that you want?

I pray to God to help me be the person you want me.

Joseph - I pray to do my best for you,

I'll take the children that God gives. We'll live in harmony.

Joseph: Mary - you're the sweetest thing in my life

Mary - I still can't believe the time is near to take you as my wife.

Mary: Joseph - what a man to care for me.

I have been in love with you as child upon your knee.

Joseph - you still mean the world to me.

Strong and gentle, wise and loving - you're the man for me!

These lines are repeated as a duet while they walk towards each other.

Mary & Joseph: Love like ours is made in heaven(above)

(And) We know, we know God has blessed us,

Only Heaven could give perfection as you('re/are) to me.

Love like ours comes once a century

Finding security, each other's purity.

Love like ours is made in Heaven (above)

(We) Thank you God!

They hold each other lovingly and walk off.

Grandmother: One night, Mary lay still in her corner of the house, listening to the gentle sounds of the animals murmuring below her. She felt strangely quiet, but not sleepy. Suddenly a bright light shone out and Mary thought perhaps the hay was on fire. She crept quietly to the ladder, then fell on her face in fear.

Angel Gabriel: Peace be to you - oh highly favoured lady! The Lord is with you.

Mary: Who are you? What do you mean?

Angel: Do not be afraid Mary. God has chosen you and will wonderfully bless you. He has looked on your good and pure life and he has chosen you from among all women.

Mary: Chosen me?

Angel: You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You must name him Saviour - Jesus. He will be very great and shall be called the Son of God. And the Lord God shall give him the Royal Throne of his ancestor David.

Grandmother: That's here in Bethlehem!!

Angel: And he will reign over Israel forever, his kingdom will never end.

Mary: But how can I have a baby? I haven't even been with any man!

Angel: The power of the Holy Spirit will visit you, and the power of God will enter you. Your baby will be utterly holy - the Son of God.

Pause

Furthermore - six months ago your elderly Aunt Elisabeth - the one people call the 'barren one' - became pregnant in her old age. Every promise from God always comes true.

Mary: I am the Lord's servant. I will do whatever He wants. May everything you have said come true.

Angel: The Lord be with you, Mary. Do not be afraid.

Angel Gabriel leaves.

Mary: Oh my Lord! How I am blessed! I must visit my Aunt and see God's miracle. I can tell her my news - she will understand. We can praise God together. I can learn about pregnancy and childbirth and share God's blessings to us! Oh Lord - how wonderful!

Song 3: Mary's Song

Mary: Adonai. Adonai. Oh my Lord, what can it mean?

Oh my God! Can I be worthy of this great honour that is mine?

Adonai - my trust is in you.

You'll see me safely through this time.

Adonai. Adonai. Oh - my Lord, you are my God.

My Lord! My Lord!

Oh, my God I am not worthy

But I will try to do your plan.

Adonai. Adonai! My trust is in you, Lord.

You'll keep me safe inside your hand.

spoken Joseph!! *She runs off.*

Grandmother: So Mary rushed off to tell Joseph - the man she was bound to marry. A wise man with a deep understanding of God and what was right. He would understand, she thought.

But Joseph was only a man. His love for Mary stemmed from her innocence, her purity. How many times had he heard this story of God's baby when young women found themselves pregnant. He wanted to believe her, but it was too much for any man - especially one of such a good reputation in the town.

Song 4: Betrayal

Joseph comes pacing on in anguish. He is not aggressive, but is emotionally distraught.

Joseph: Betrayal! Betrayal!

I feel my mind is splitting apart.

I hear this news like a knife in my heart.

Everything that I've held dear

Is now all lost with this that I hear!

Betrayal! Betrayal!

I can't believe this end to our life

I waited so long to make you my wife!

You were so pure, so kind and lovely

How could you do such a thing to me?

Betrayal! Betrayal!

Mary: Joseph please - I know what you fear.

But please believe God's angel was here!

I don't know what else I can say,

But you have the power to do as you may!

Joseph: The pain tears my heart and gnaws at me so.

I cannot hold on, but I dare not let go!

I've loved you so long, you are part of my life.

But no way now could you live as my wife!

Betrayal! Betrayal!

I can't think straight - there's a fog in my brain,

I trusted you, well never again!

I can't see you die for the crime that you've done -

I'll divorce you in secret, and then you'll be gone!

Betrayal! Betrayal! Betrayal!

Mary: Joseph! Please!

Joseph: Betrayal! *Storms off*

Mary stands and cries and slowly walks off

Child: Did she get stoned? For adultery?

Grandmother: No. It was usual for the woman in such a case to be pregnant outside marriage to be stoned, but Joseph at heart was a good man, and he did plan to divorce her send her away quietly. But that night as he tossed and turned trying to sleep off his hurt and upset, he too had a visitor!

Child *(excitedly)* An angel!! Was it an angel?

Grandmother: *(laughing gently)* Shhhhh! Wait and see!

Joseph is sleeping. The music heralding the angel sounds, and the angel appears.

Angel: Joseph, Son of David!

Joseph turns over and mutters in his sleep.

Angel: Joseph, Joseph, friend of God! *(Joseph stirs again)*

The Lord has Word for you. Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She speaks the truth. What grows inside her is from the holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you will name Him Jesus. He is the Christ; the Saviour of all sins. He will bridge the gap between God and people. He is the Immanuel, the "God with us". He is the promised One.

Follow God's guidance and you will be secure. You have both been chosen to serve God's purpose. Do not be afraid, but listen to God and love Mary. Love Mary.

The angel leaves. Joseph sits up. rubbing his eyes etc. puzzled. Suddenly he grins, jumps up and goes to find Mary, who is fairly tense. As the music begins he explains to her about the angel, and hugs her hard. Mary laughs delightedly, and they sing together:

Reprise: Love Song

Mary & Joseph: Love like ours is made in heaven(above)

(And) We know, we know God has blessed us,

Only Heaven could give perfection as you(‘re/are) to me.

Love like ours comes once a century

Finding security, each other’s purity.

Love like ours is made in Heaven (above)

(We) Thank you God!

They walk off arms round each other.

Grandmother: Now Mary had one problem out of the way, but the future would still be hard.

Usually women had help from relatives and experience of helping with other births to help them when their time came. But Mary was very young, and didn’t have much experience, and she would be very alone at the time of her giving birth.

But God in His goodness and wisdom had already provided for this, and Mary decided to visit her cousin Elisabeth, to share in their experiences of God’s gifts, and to learn about pregnancy and birth. She travelled the distance to visit her elderly cousin; intrigued yet trusting that it was as the angel had said; that Elisabeth was indeed pregnant.

Mary walks on wearing a cloak etc. and Elisabeth comes to meet her. They hug.

Elisabeth’s Song

Elisabeth: Cousin Mary

I know the Lord is on you.

Mary, Mary

I know the truth.

When I saw you standing there

My baby jumped for joy!

Mary: Oh my Cousin

How glad I am to see you!

See fulfilled the

Promise of the Lord!

Now I know that every word

The Angel said was true!

Together: Oh our Father

How you have blessed us Lord,

With the gifts you

Gave to us both.

Mary: Oh my Lord you saw your servant!

May your name be praised forevermore.

Elisabeth: Oh my Lord, pray bless our children

As the plan you saw.

Mary: How powerful is His Hand!

His mercy is over this land!

Elisabeth: Oh my Father

Together: Bless our children

Lord, we praise your Name!

They hug and walk off together.

Grandmother: I called this the strangest night, but in truth it was a year of strange happenings.

As Grandmother talks, the wise men and entourage enter and mime discussing the stars to match her words.

Grandmother: Far in the east in some place strange and foreign to us - a land not of farmers and fishermen like us - but of science and learning, where great men study the mysteries of the heavens and the earth; a new phenomenon was remarked on. The heavens - with their untouchable movements of stars, sun and moon - shooting lights and falling stars foretold events of great importance. For what is more natural than that the heavens watch over the lives below and celebrate acts of greatness.

It is said that at the time of Julius Caesar's downfall - a star was seen shooting downwards from the heavens which foretold his doom.

Now an even more powerful portent was seen. A new star! The wisest people in the eastern kingdoms came together to discuss its meaning. The magi agreed - it meant only one thing - can you guess?

Child: A new King?

Grandmother: Yes...

Child 2: But Kings are born all the time and there aren't new stars.

Grandmother: Aha! So - not just a new King - someone of the greatest significance, not only in his own country, but as the star was seen by many, even those outside the Roman World, it was of significance around the world.

The Eastern Kingdoms agreed, they would send a delegate to find out where this powerful new ruler would be and pay homage to him. It would be quite a journey, take many weeks and require much preparation, for they could not plan the route - the only map was the star in the sky.

Child: What's this got to do with Mary and Joseph?

Grandmother: You'll see!

Child: What happened to them?

Grandmother: Be patient little one, and I will tell you. This story is like a carpet, many different threads which look separate, but are wound together to make a beautiful pattern.

Now, while the Eastern princes of learning were making their journey with comfort and splendour, another journey was going on, with little comfort and only bare necessities.

Joseph: Mary - are you feeling okay.

Mary: I need to rest, I'm sorry.

Joseph: We have come most of the way now. I think we will reach Bethlehem tonight. How long do you need to rest?

Mary: Just a little while - the baby is heavy now and the movement pulls my back. I hope the baby is safe.

Joseph: God will look after us. He cares and protects his own. Nothing will harm us, I'm sure of it. Here, have some water - or would you prefer a little wine?

Mary: Wine might dull the pain a little, but mix it with water please.

Joseph: Do you want some bread?

Mary: No, I'd rather wait until we're there. It feels as if the baby is lower than before.

Joseph: Is that bad?

Mary: It means the birth isn't far away now. *(She rests her head on Joseph's shoulder)*

Joseph: We'll be in Bethlehem soon. We'll find somewhere comfy there for you to rest properly. Somewhere nice, warm and comfy - fit for a king!

Mary: Fit for a king! Joseph - Joseph! I'm scared! Joseph - take care of me!

Joseph: I will care for you as long as I live! I love you Mary!

Silence. Mary struggles to get up.

Joseph: Are you rested enough. We should try to reach the town by nightfall. They will close the gates at dusk.

Mary: I can rest more in Bethlehem. I will manage.

Song: Adonai, my trust is in you Lord

Joseph: Oh my God, can I be worthy

of this great honour that is mine?

Adonai - my trust is in you.

You'll see us safely through this time.

Adonai. Adonai. Oh - my Lord, you are our God.

My Lord! My Lord!

Oh, my God I am not worthy

But I will try to do your plan.

Adonai. Adonai! My trust is in you, Lord.

You'll keep us safe inside your hand.

Mary stands up and then cries out in pain.

Joseph: Mary!?

Mary: We need to get there soon! The baby is coming!

Joseph: Do you want to sit on the donkey again?

Mary: It jars my bones and bumps the baby - I'll walk for a bit.

She starts walking and then cries out again

Joseph: Use the donkey, we'll go slowly. It's not far now. We'll see the lights soon.

Grandmother: Now the story comes near to us here. Much of this next part I saw with my own eyes right here in this inn, as a little girl.

Oh - it was a fine time for us this was, after years of scraping a living together with the odd pilgrim or traveller, suddenly we were overwhelmed with people - people passing through on their way to Jerusalem, not counting those coming back to their birthplace as Caesar directed.

Bethlehem! What a wonderful town - historical in many ways, yet just a village in the shadow of Jerusalem less than ten miles away. Birthplace of the

great King David - the beloved of God - and the prophets say - the place where the Messiah will come from. They say in the great holy books that the Messiah will not only be born in Bethlehem, but actually come as a direct descendent of King David. Well - that's something! Not everyone can lay claim to that bloodline - even if we are all related from the beginning of time - and people spread all over Israel, but there! - the prophesies stand - you children should know them from your learning!

Child: It's from the Prophet Micah!

Grandmother: Well done! Do you know what he says?

Children: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah - are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler - who will be the shepherd of my people forever."

Grandmother: Well done! Well anyway, I'm digressing. Where was I?

Oh yes - that winter there were so many people travelling - such chaos - such excitement! Mum and Dad were run off their feet. I was constantly baking bread, and we had to get help to cook enough food for all those passing through. To a little girl - it was awesome! Different voices, languages, clothing, accents! Squeezing in between the bodies carrying water and wine to the visitors, washing hot feet and feeding the extra animals in the stables. Most people were in good spirits for all the upheaval. It was like an enforced holiday. On some nights when we had a musician or poet staying with us there would be a dance, and I would watch, half-hidden in the firelight as the music rose and fell!

Song & Dance: Welcome!

Innkeeper: Welcome! Shalom!

Come out of the darkness and come join us in the light!

Welcome! Shalom!

Come and lose your burdens and your weariness and fright!

Come and meet new people who can brighten up your night.

Welcome one, welcome all!

People, friends and strangers who are passing through our lives

Welcome one! Welcome all!

All God's creatures are the same when looking thru his eyes.

Don't believe the prejudice, the stories and the lies.

Welcome one! Welcome all! Welcome to you!

Enter shepherds; Ben is talkative and energetic; Judah stammers, tries to join in the conversation but can't get words out before Ben continues; Jethro is a man of little speech.

Ben: See that Jethro - ‘s alright for them. Anyone’d think this was a holiday - larking around like this!

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: Look at us, eh? Facing - who knows what wild animals, sheepstealers, who knows what else - and that’s without having frozen bits falling off us tonight! Don’t you think, Jethro?

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: ‘S alright for some - dancing round the fire - drinking warm wine....listening to that music (Judah’s mouth waters) Don’t you think Jethro?

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: And what’s up with you Judah ? You’ve not said much tonight!

Judah: I....I...m....m...

Ben: Now don’t go wanting to be down there with that lot, eh? Not when you could be up here - next to the stars, so close to the angels you could almost pick their noses! How could you think of swapping! (sighs miserably) Aye well - they’d not let us share anyway - us being unclean and all that - eh, Jethro?

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: They’d eat our lambs, and buy the best for the Temple offerings to pay for their sins as quick as nowt - but as for sharing bread with us - unclean!!! Makes you sick, dunnit Jethro?

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: Oh well, I suppose if they get up to all sorts tonight they’ll all be after lambs to sacrifice for their sins at the Temple. If we’re lucky the price of lambs ‘ll go up! Ey Jethro, Eh Judah?!

Jethro: Aye.

Judah: Er....m....m...

Ben: Mind you, got to be perfect for the Temple - not just any lamb’ll do, will it! look at this one - not a blemish! Worth a fortune - got to keep it carefully - mustn’t let anything happen to it at all or it can’t be used for the temple. Must stay perfect in every way. Only the perfect ones can pay for the sins!

Come on then - time to be going up to the fields. Nice talking with you both.

Jethro: Aye.

Judah stutters as the others go off.

Song: *reprise*

Innkeeper: Welcome! Shalom!

Come out of the darkness and come join us in the light!

Welcome! Shalom!

Come and lose your burdens and your weariness and fright!

Come and meet new people who can brighten up your night.

Welcome one, welcome all!

People, friends and strangers who are passing through our lives

Welcome one! Welcome all!

All God's creatures are the same when looking thru his eyes.

Don't believe the prejudice, the stories and the lies.

Welcome one! Welcome all! Welcome to you!

Mary and Joseph appear.

Mary: Oh, my baby's coming! I must rest!

Joseph: I must find somewhere.

Mary: You've done your best.

Joseph: Please, sir! Please sir, Can you help us!

(Innkeepers could be played by children standing up and answering)

Innkeeper 2: No sir! Go sir! We've no beds!

Joseph: Please sir, shelter us; help us; please miss!

Innkeeper 3: We've too many under our roof - fire risk!

Innkeeper 4: I'm so sorry, we're too busy - try another one.

Mary: Joseph! Joseph! What are we to do?

I can't believe we've come to this

Oh Lord please help us through.

Joseph: Mary, Mary - I will help thee.

Don't give up and don't despair, we

Will find somewhere soft and warm

The perfect place for our boy to be born.

Mary: Joseph! Now I know the angel said

Don’t fear - but now I struggle.

The pains I feel are hard and tough.

I cannot give birth sleeping rough.

Joseph: Mary - hold me - I will help you.

God will see us in our trouble.

Do not fear - we’ve come so far,

It’s not the end - let’s try this door.

Innkeeper: Welcome one - welcome all

We’ve no more room, but squash in more!

Joseph: Please sir, my wife... she

Mary collapses

Mary: Joseph!

Joseph: *(desperately)* Please - anywhere - just a space!

Grandmother: Oh I remember those poor people then, so tired, wretched, and her so big with child - about to give birth. I felt so sad for them. But we were full to bursting.

Innkeeper: Well - we’re already stepping over people - not an inch of floor left. I’d like to help, but it’s not decent – a woman in your condition needs privacy!

Innkeeper’s daughter: There’s the stable!

Innkeeper: What? They can’t...!

Joseph: Please sir! We’ll take anything!

Innkeeper: Well - if you really think so...

Daughter: Please Dad, I can fetch clean straw for them!

Joseph: It’ll be fine!

Mary cries out and he picks her up

Daughter: I’ll take you there, come on!

She leads them off.

Joseph: Thank you! Thank you so much! God bless you.

Innkeeper stands scratching his head. Shrugs and wanders off singing

Innkeeper: Welcome one - welcome all....

Grandmother: I stayed nearby to fetch and carry for them - in between sorting the other guests' needs. The love between those two - it was a special thing - quiet, trusting and kind. I've never seen the like, before nor since.

That night - her baby was born - a beautiful baby boy. I missed the moment of his birth - taking the slops out, but he was a special babe, and in the lamp light - it looked like a golden haze shone around him. Probably just the way I was standing - but I can remember it even now!

Song: What a Miracle

Innkeeper's Daughter: What a sight, what a miracle!

What a child; what love they show.

I am young, but I've seen the world

thru' other eyes, I know.

How can I quite understand

How this came to be?

The couple came from far away, and sheltered at our inn.

Their baby's born in straw and hay, but stirs me deep within.

He stirs me deep within.

What a sight! What a miracle!

What a child, such love they show!

Now I see the love there is -

I can feel its glow.

I know that I've found something

So pure and holy.

I know that I've found something

I want to have for me -

I want the love I see.

What a sight! What a miracle!

What a child - such love I see.

Now I know such love there is,

The miracle's for me!

The miracle's for me!

Shepherds enter

Ben: That's a bit better now. Gone quieter now, eh Jethro?

Jethro: Aye:

Ben: 'S alright for them - they can sleep off their warm wine and dancing - never a thought to those of us in the hills - freezing our fleeces off just for them to go toddling off to the Temple and get forgiven! 'S alright for them, eh Jethro? Eh Judah? But who's going to sort out our sins eh? That's what I want to know!

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: Mind you, it's not like there's much chance of committing any sins up here in this wind! No chance at all, worst luck!

music in the distance, fades with the wind

Ben: Hear that Jethro? Party's starting again! Bit late innit? Ha! 'S alright for them - probably haven't got to work tomorrow. Any excuse for a party eh, Jethro?

Jethro: Aye.

silence. music grows louder. Ben is confused, Jethro unmoved, Judah excited.

Ben: Are they coming up here or what?

silence. music gets louder

Ben: What....?!

louder music

Ben: Eh....?

the music gets louder and lights shine around.

The angel appears

Ben: Oh my life...! Aaargh!

Judah: I...It's an angel!

Jethro: Aye.

Gabriel: Don't be afraid.

Ben: *(weakly)* That's easy for you to say*! (Judah nudges him.)*

Gabriel: I bring you good news of great things! Great joy and celebration for everyone! Today in Bethlehem a Saviour was born. He is Christ the Messiah! The Anointed one of God! This will be your sign so you know it is Him, you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in an animal trough. A manger.

Judah: A....a.... a manger!

Jethro: Aye.

Ben: Aaaargh...!

Judah: A baby in Bethlehem, wrapped in cloths, in a manger - our Lord! Messiah! Praise God!

Gabriel: Praise God indeed!

Angel's Song

Gabriel: Glory to God! Glory to God! Glory to God! Glory!

Angels: Glory to God! Glory to God! Glory!

Gabriel: All glory be to God Almighty!

Angels: Glory be to God Almighty!

Gabriel: And on this earth peace to all men.

Angels: Peace to you! Peace to you!

Gabriel: All glory be to God Almighty!

Angels: Glory be to God Almighty!

Gabriel: And on this earth peace to all men.

Angels: Peace to you! Peace to you!

All: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise to God!

Ben: p....p.....a....mmm

Judah: Come on! Ben, Jethro - let's go and see this Messiah, in a manger. Come on! Let's go and see what the Lord has told us about!

Jethro: Aye!

Jethro and Judah go off together

Ben: A....a... (*He looks around and picks up the lamb and follows them.)*

Grandmother: And so it happened on that strangest night - that while the inn was heaving with bodies, more strange visitors came to pay homage to those staying in the stable at the back of the inn.

The shepherds appear by Mary and Joseph, and kneel while Grandmother is talking.

I didn't want to let them in at first! Those shepherds with their rough clothes and fierce weapons. But when they told us all their story, who dared doubt them - with their shining faces and tears of joy! Noone's going to challenge a

shepherd - with their toughness against the fears and whims of the night, and their bravery against the wild animals and armed thieves. A shepherd would know the difference between a dream and reality if anyone did, their lives depended on it!

We all saw the change in them as God's love melted their hardness and gave them a special touch of their own. And Ben - well never have I known him to be silent! Nor to give his best lamb - fir for the Temple - so easily and lovingly as a gift! Surely God was at work that night in all of us.

Innkeeper's Daughter's song (reprise)

Innkeeper's Daughter: What a sight, what a miracle!

What a child; what love they show.

I am young, but I've seen the world

thru' other eyes, I know.

How can I quite understand

How this came to be?

The shepherds who are strong and brave

They hear the Angel's sing.

These are men so hard; they see a child and worship him as King.

They worship him as King.

What a sight! What a miracle!

What a child - such love I see.

Now I know such love there is,

The miracle's for me!

The miracle's for me!

Grandmother: But not all would be as sweet for the young family. The journey the Magi from the East brought them west into Israel. The star was in the sky towards Jerusalem - the capital city of Israel, and home to the King - the old King Herod. The Magi consulted their scientific instruments, discussed their findings with each other, and concluded that their journey must take them to the palace of King Herod in Jerusalem. So that is where they went.

Herod enters with entourage

Grandmother: Of course, Herod wasn't even a proper King, just a puppet of Rome, friend of Augustus Caesar *(Herod looks around sharply)* But you wouldn't want him to know you even thought it! Scary person - they say power corrupts - well I

don’t know - but if killing off your wife and children counts as corrupt, then I’d have to agree! Herod’s paranoia cost many people their lives. It was into this den of murder and mayhem that the travelling scientist came.

Song - Bad Boy!

Herod: I am the King and

Make no mistake, I

didn’t get here just on looks alone!

I am most deadly,

And the most powerful

King, this petty nation’s ever known!

Some say I killed my

Darling children

When the opportunity arose -

But let me ask you

If you’re not tempted

When the brats are getting up your nose?

But I know the people love me when they’re grovelling on the floor.

It’s not the threat of torture, it is me they just adore!

Minders: He’s just a bad boy! Bad boy!

Herod: I wield my power to keep control, I show my might!

Minders: Bad boy! He’s just a bad boy!

His parent’s taught him murder and he knows no other way.

He thinks mass execution is just going out to play.

He’s just a bad boy! Bad boy!

Herod: I cannot help my tendencies to pick a fight.

I’m just a Bad boy! Bad boy!

Minders: He’s just a bad boy! Bad boy!

Herod: It must be in the genes

I know no other means to be a

Minders: He's just a Bad Boy! Bad Boy!

Herod: In some books of history

They will tell the tale of me

That I'm a Bad Boy! Bad Boy!

I'm just a Bad Boy!!

Minders: He's just a Bad Boy!!

The Magi enter and bow to the King as the music fades, and so do the Minders into the background.

Balthazar: My Lord and Honourable King Herod Agrippa. We have come from far beyond the boundaries of Rome, and have travelled for many weeks from the East. We now hope that we have reached our destination.

Herod: We are always pleased to welcome guests of distinction and learning to our court. I welcome you.

Melchior: We thank you, great King.

Herod: What is the quest for your journey that brings you to this...humble....part of the world? Or as I like to call it - the gateway to the great Roman Empire.

Caspar: We are all people of science. We are considered the most learned people of our nations, and each by ourselves encountered a rare and puzzling phenomenon.

Balthazar: We came together with other scientists and astronomers to discuss its meaning.

Herod: *(trying not to show his impatience)* What..... pray tell me....phenomenon?

Melchior: The new star.

Herod: New star?! (*glaring at advisers*) oh yes - the new star! And - what did you decide its significance is?

Balthazar: We believe that a great King has been born.

Caspar: A King like none before Him.

Balthazar: A King we have travelled far to see and honour.

Herod: *(thoughtfully)* A newborn King?

The Magi look at each other confusedly, then nudge Caspar with the gifts

Caspar: We wish to see him and bring him gifts to honour his greatness. It would be a great privilege.

Balthazar: We were nominated to come and represent our various nations - to welcome him to the world. His importance will reach far beyond the place of his birth.

Herod: I see.

silence. The magi look at each other.

Herod: Please leave me now while I make some arrangements for you all.

Melchior: We thank you, great King.

Herod*: (distracted and waving them away, trying to think*) Not at all - I hope you will be comfortable. I will call you back when I have made some more appropriate arrangements. Now go!.... and rest! You must be very weary after your journey.

They bow and leave. Herod paces.

Herod: I want my advisers - astronomers - rabbis - Now!!! I don't care what they're doing - if they're sleeping, partying, meditating, dying - whatever! I want them here - NOW!

Herod paces up and down.

Song: Bad Boy Part 2

Herod: I am the King and

Make no mistake, I

didn't get here just on looks alone!

I am most deadly,

And the most powerful

King, this petty nation's ever known!

Some say I killed my

Darling children

When the opportunity arose -

But let me ask you

If you're not tempted

When the brats are getting up your nose?

But I know the people love me when they're grovelling on the floor.

It's not the threat of torture, it is me they just adore!

Minders: He's just a bad boy! Bad boy!

Herod: I wield my power. I show my might.

Minders: Bad boy! He's just a bad boy!

His parent's taught him murder and he knows no other way.

He thinks mass execution is just going out to play.

He's just a bad boy! Bad boy!

The advisers arrive in disarray

Herod: Now - tell me what you know about this new star -

Astronomer: Star...?

Herod: Apparently there is a new star in the sky that men of value followed from far in the east to...here! Now, either you have no skill and have taken my money for nothing - in which the sentence is death - or you have deliberately kept this knowledge from me - your King, in which case, the sentence is death! Now which is it??? Speak quickly!

Astron. We didn't want to worry you, my great Lord and King!

Herod: Why did you not tell me?

Astron: We accounted it to the rise of Augustus Caesar, your Majesty.

Herod: What - here in Palestine?! Fool! You, Rabbi - what do the prophesies say about the coming of the great King?

Rabbi: The Messiah?

Herod: Yes, yes - when and where?

Rabbi: *(nervously)* The when is cloaked in mystery, sire, The prophet Daniel quotes in numbers and figures that are hard to fathom. Even the scholars do not agree.

Herod: Well then - where?

Rabbi: It is believed to be in Bethlehem - the ancient seat of King David.

Herod: Bethlehem. That's to the east of us. Suppose from where they came, the star *looked* like it was over Jerusalem, but in reality.... hem.... *(to the astronomer*) Could it be over Bethlehem?

Astronomer: Er...it is possible, sire. It is hard to tell completely. It may still be moving.

Herod: Moving?

Astron.: It looks like it has moved from the east to the west, your greatness. We will not be able to tell until it ceases to move.

Herod: Perhaps it will move all the way to Rome, do you think? To Augustus Caesar?

Astron: Possibly, but it has not moved noticeably in the last few days.

Herod: Rabbi, what other prophesies are there about the coming of the Messiah?

Rabbi: There are many, my King. The different prophets all point to the Messiah's return at some point; born of a virgin of David's bloodline, in Bethlehem.

Herod: Could it be now?

Rabbi: Well - I don't know.... it is possible...

Astron: But unlikely.

Rabbi: God's timings are always least likely for humans. Look at Moses, the greatest Saviour of the nation of Israel - born into slavery; protected from the bloody murder of babies; raised as an educated Prince and the Saviour of Israel through the blood of innocent lambs.

Herod: Silence!! I do not want a history lesson. I need to think what to do. Do I take this star thing seriously. Is it a threat - or a ruse?

Rabbi: I don't understand, your Majesty....

Herod: Am I surrounded by imbeciles? Let me spell it out to you.

Learned visitors have arrived from a country outside Rome's jurisdiction - following this star. They claim to be looking for a new born king, so they come here. Logical, I suppose, to look in a palace for a baby King! only...there isn't one here! So where is he? Where is this powerful King - King of the Jews - great enough to drag people halfway across the world to honour him? No! I must find him - and *honour* him in my own way!

Messenger!

Go and find the Eastern Princes. Tell them to look for the new King in Bethlehem - a few miles to the west. Then tell them they must come back here to rest before their return journey home. They can tell me all about the baby, so that I may learn how best to honour him too. Now go!!

You two leave me too. If either of you remember anything else you forgot to tell me, you'd better come quickly, or I might forget to reprieve your mishandling of this affair! Go!!!

music to Bad Boy plays in the background as Herod walks out.

Grandmother: Mary and Joseph stayed with us for a while with their baby Jesus - which means Saviour. As they were so close to Jerusalem, they took him to the Temple for his circumcision and to offer thanksgiving for his safe birth.

Joseph: Mary - look at the Temple! Have you ever seen anything so magnificent!

Mary: It really is made for God's glory!

Simeon - an old man - enters to pray, and is attracted by them.

Joseph: It's the one good thing King Herod has done for us Jews - to improve and enlarge the Temple.

Mary: Hush Joseph - someone will hear you. There's a man there watching us.

Simeon: My name is Simeon. I am a servant of the Lord. I felt I should come today, and now I know why! Please - let me hold your child! I have waited all my life for this moment.

Oh my Lord! Now let your servant depart in peace, for I have seen your promises fulfilled! Praise God!

(handing Jesus back) As the prophet Isaiah said "This child will cause the uplifting of people, and the fall of others. He will be a sign that is spoken against, and the exposure of people's hearts and thoughts." You too, my dear, will have a sword that pierces through your very soul. The Lord bless you. Bless you all.

Joseph: What things he spoke of! I couldn't understand them all.

Anna - an elderly woman comes up to them

Anna: My name is Anna - don't be afraid. I follow the Lord, some call me a prophetess as I have dedicated 84 years of my life to God's service. I live in the Temple with my Lord.

Mary: We are honoured with your wisdom, oh ancient one.

Anna: You are more blessed, my child - for I am honoured just to see this child - you have been chosen to carry him, love him and see him grow. The Lord has kept me to see this day - the coming of the Saviour of Jerusalem. I praise you, O Lord, for allowing me this honour in my old age! God be with you, my children, for you will need his strength in the coming times.

Mary: Bless you, Mother.

Song: Duet of Simeon & Anna

Anna: My eyes are open Lord

Set on your son, Lord.

I'm holding your child in my arms

I am so happy

To see God's own wonders

And know that we're part of your plans.

Simeon: Lord now your servant can die with such peace

Lord now I've held your child in my arms.

Both: Lord now your servant can die with real peace

Having seen the fulfillment of your plans.

Anna: My eyes are open Lord

Set on your son, Lord.

I'm holding your child in my arms

I am so happy

To see God's own wonders

And know that we're part of your plans.

Grandmother: So many wonders - so many prophesies and people raised up to tell them and understand their truth. I was just a little girl, but I knew there was something miraculous - something great and life-changing happening in our own place in Bethlehem. If any were in doubt - the sight of the strangely dressed people travelling with their entourage arriving at a poor inn in Bethlehem should be enough to cause gossip and questions!

Child: Look - the star! The star is over the inn! It feels low enough to touch!

The Magi appear and act out homage to the family

Grandmother: Over the inn - over the stable - yes, where the humblest of animals lived; not even a palace stable, just a rough room hewn in the rock, with some clean straw and water. To this humble place came strangers from lands such as I can't even imagine. Who knows what Mary and Joseph felt as they saw such richly dressed people stoop to enter the stable, kneel in the straw and bow at the baby's cradle. This northern lass, with her carpenter husband, entertaining dignitaries! Father didn't even know what to serve them! I've never seen him stuck for words before! And he never was again! That story lasted until people didn't believe a word of it!

I brought drink and food, and stood as long as I dared, watching these wonderful people - sitting there- in my stable! In my home! Shepherds - I'm used to, rough, down to earth - nothing special - just everyman; but these the cleverest most educated and rich people from far away. I couldn't even dream such fantasies.

Child: Did they bring presents?

Child: What did they give?

Child: Did you see?

Grandmother: Oh yes - I saw it all! Three gifts - in boxes as rare and beautiful as the gifts themselves.

Child: What were they?? Presents for the baby?

Grandmother: Presents for a King; a great and holy King. Each present meant something special. They brought gold - for kingship - they would need that in their poverty; Frankincense - the holy incense used for the priesthood. A very expensive oil only to be used on holy occasions.

Child: What was the other one?

Grandmother: The last was the most mysterious of all. An expensive gift - but not a present for a newborn babe which should celebrate life! They gave myrrh - the embalmers oil for the dead. Why they should choose this gift I know not, apart from it's extreme value; but it must have been important to carry it all that way. Three gifts; three very different symbols.

Innkeeper's Daughter's Song Part 3

Innkeeper's Daughter: What a sight, what a miracle!

What a child; what love they show.

I am young, but I've seen the world

thru' other eyes, I know.

How can I quite understand

How this came to be?

The men of science know so much

They understand the world.

They travelled from such distant lands

To see God's plan unfurled.

What a sight! What a miracle!

What a child - such love I see.

Now I know such love there is,

The miracle's for me!

The miracle's for me!

Child: Did they stay long at the inn?

Grandmother: They stayed one night with us and only one night. They were due to return to the King, I remember them saying that, but something different happened.

All are sleeping. The angel appears.

Gabriel: Melchior, Caspar, Balthazar! Wake up! You have done well to come this far, and you have pleased the Almighty God. You have found who you were looking for. Now you must leave in secret, for Herod is a jealous King and he will try to kill the baby. You must return to your countries a different way, in secret, without arousing suspicion. Go now, while all is quiet.

The Magi gather their things, quietly bade good-bye to Mary and Joseph, and leave.

Joseph sleeps again. Angel Gabriel goes over to him.

Gabriel: Joseph! Joseph! You must not stay here. King Herod will send a thousand deaths in your pursuit. Leave now - take Jesus and Mary to Egypt. You will be safe there. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will not rest until the child - or he himself - is dead.

Joseph: I will do as you say.

Angel: Go! God is with you!

Grandmother: And so when I went in the following morning with water to wash and wine to drink, I found that they had vanished. Oh, it was almost like a dream - almost.

The girl picks up a fallen piece of cloth, smells it, and holds it to her chest.

Grandmother: The prophet Hosea said " When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my Son". I did not know it then, but when I heard it in the tabernacle as a woman the truth of it came to me. Once before had Egypt saved our nation; once before had a leader been brought alive out of the death of others - saved to lead God's people into freedom. For this was what Joseph saved his family from. Herod was a jealous and dangerous king, and his anger was terrible when he realised he had been betrayed.

Herod rants and raves winding himself up more to the point of almost madness

Herod: Am I the King - to be scorned and disobeyed? Who am I that welcomed strangers into my palace, gave them food and shelter - and now they run and hide from me, fleeing from me in fear. I will show them fear! I will show them power and awesome anger!

Guards! messengers! Soldiers! I will have all the boys born in Bethlehem in this last year killed! Kill them! Kill them all - every last one! No - kill those up to two years old! That will show the people to plot against me - that will show them who holds the power. This will mark my name among the stars! I am the King of the Jews! I have the authority for life and death! I can award life, and cause death! You will see how powerful I am! Who is mightier than the sword of Rome! Who is this baby that can outthink me - outrank me! No! All boys under two will die! A small sacrifice in honour of their King - me!! You are Roman soldiers - fearless legions! What are you waiting for! (*screaming*) Do it! Kill them!! Kill them!! Do it now!!!

Song of Rachel

Sounds of screaming women, shouting men, and then moaning and weeping

Spoken: A voice is heard in Ramah

Weeping and great mourning.

Rachel weeping for her children

And refusing to be comforted -

Because they are no more.

Grandmother: It was terrible! Everyone knew someone affected. Why? People couldn't understand it - such bloodshed! Such unnecessary killing of innocents. No reasons given. Never since the birth of Moses had such wanton destruction of babies been seen. And yet - out of those deaths had been the saving of Israel - a leader had been spared and saved to lead the people out of their bondage and into freedom and new life.

Child: Is that the end of the story?

Child: It's not a very happy ending.

Grandmother: *(smiling*) No. It's not the end, and even now it's still going on. And we can play our part.

Grandmother gets up and faces the audience. The characters appear as she names them and take up the traditional nativity pose.

What part will we play? Each of us must decide our role. Will you play Mary? The innocent child-like woman, who trusted God beyond her understanding; Joseph? Wise man of God, who did his best and listened to God's voice calling him to places he had never dreamt of. Will you be the shepherds - down to earth, realistic and brave, not dreamers; yet willing to see truth when they were faced with it, and to follow what they didn't understand. Or the Magi - the scientists, who had to follow their discoveries to the end to find out the truth, then put pride and position away, to kneel on a filthy stable floor in front of a dirty manger to worship a baby King. Or do you allow fear, selfishness and greed to stop you hearing God's news and promises of a better life - and try to shut out or destroy the words God whispers to you - like Herod, the saddest and loneliest person in all of the story. What price was his power? - that he killed his family, made him live in terror and loneliness, what did he really gain from his Kingship?

Or would you be me -, a little child - full of wonder - watching, serving, listening. A happy spectator to all that went on - growing in myself - and learning from all of the other's experiences.

No - it isn't a sad ending! It's a fantastic, wonderful, exciting beginning!

The story continues.....

Finale: It's not the End

Voice: It's not the end.

It's just a choice of how you go from this place to the next.

You have to choose

The path to follow, life to lead for this world and the next.

Choir: For what is done and what's begun and what is written in God's plan,

We must believe we can achieve a kind of caring, loving, giving

Make-a-difference sort of living;

Worthy of God's love;

Worthy of God's love.

Voice: It's not the end.

It's just a choice of how you go from this place to the next.

You have to choose

The path to follow, life to lead for this world and the next.

Choir: For Jesus came for me and you,

But our response is what we choose,

And in this time of celebration, will we see God's delegation

Bringing us a revelation?

Jesus loves you too. Came for me and you.

All: It's not the end.

It's just a choice of how you go from this place to the next.

You have to choose

The path to follow, life to lead for this world and the next.

Freeze - no bowing!!

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