

THE FOUR GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS

A Christmas Play In Four Acts

by

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The Four Gifts Of Christmas

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by Delvyn C. Case Jr.

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

PROLOGUE

CHOIR

CHOIR DIRECTOR

NARRATOR

ACT I

SHOPPERS--MOM, DAD, JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK from

ACT IV

SHOPPER #1

MARCIA, 30's--40's

MICHAEL, her uncle

ACT II

SHOPPERS--KATHY, CLAIRE, and MARTHA from ACT III

SHOPPER #1

MAN, a homeless veteran

MOTHER

DAUGHTER, teenage child of MOTHER

ACT III

KATHY, a mother with pre-teen daughter

CLAIRE, friend of KATHY

MARTHA, friend of KATHY

ACT IV

JESSIE, oldest child, teenager

TERRI, middle child, pre-teen

NICK, youngest child, 5-10 years old

MOM

DAD

EPILOGUE

NARRATOR

SCENES

ACT I: The mall. The first week of December.

ACT II: A sidewalk in the city. The second week of December.

ACT III: Kathy's house. The third week of December.

ACT IV: Mom and Dad's house. Christmas eve.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: Marcia, exhausted by Christmas shopping, stops for a rest. She meets her uncle who helps her bring back the joy of Christmas into her Christmas season.

ACT II: A Mother and Daughter meet a homeless man as they are shopping. The Daughter gives him a touch of love, a Christmas gift he has not had.

ACT III: Claire and Martha have come to Kathy's house to help her wrap Christmas presents. Inadvertently they discover an envelope that contains a gift from Diane, Kathy's daughter, to her mother. The gift offers a way to restore peace in the family.

ACT IV: Three children come to the living room late Christmas eve. They discover that the tree has only been partially decorated and there are no presents. The children finish decorating the tree and put their presents under the tree. As they sit enjoying the tree, they read the nativity section of the gospel of Luke. After the children return to their bedrooms, the Mom and Dad come to the living room and find the Christmas tree decorated by the children. They finish reading the nativity section of Luke. The Christmas story provides hope for changes the family needs.

GENERAL PRODUCTION NOTES

Choir: The choir may be dressed in holiday clothes or for caroling. A small group for caroling can be used.

Slides: Slides will be shown of scenes at the mall (Act I), in-town Portland (Act II), outsides of homes decorated for Christmas (Act III), and living rooms of homes decorated with Christmas trees (Act IV).

Costumes: The Narrator and actors will be in contemporary dress for winter and Christmas. Outer clothes will be used for Acts I-III. Stylish dress clothes for Act III. The Man in Act II should be dressed as a homeless individual. The children and adults in Act IV are dressed in pajamas and bathrobes.

Scenery: Sets of the mall (Act I), in-town Portland (Act II), and insides of houses (Acts III and IV). Each set should have Christmas decorations.

The Four Gifts Of Christmas

PROLOGUE

[House lights on]

[Stage lights on]

[Instrumental music as audience enters]

[Stage lights out as music ends]

[House lights out as music ends]

Scene. The stage is bare.

(CHOIR and CHOIR DIRECTOR enter.)

[Lights up and spots on CHOIR]

[Song]

[Lights and spots off CHOIR]

[Spot on NARRATOR as enters from stage right]

(The NARRATOR enters from stage right and crosses to the edge of the stage right stairs. The NARRATOR is dressed in winter coat for the PROLOGUE and ACT I. THE NARRATOR also has a scarf and gloves for ACT II. The NARRATOR is attired in a suit/dress for ACT III. The NARRATOR is attired in a sweater and skirt/pants for ACT IV and EPILOGUE.)

NARRATOR: Welcome to our Christmas By The Bay production of... “The Gifts Of Christmas”. Tonight/this afternoon we’ll experience four different sketches in drama and music of gift giving at Christmas. You have already heard our choir (Points back to the choir) begin our presentation.

(Turns toward left side of audience) Of course, gift giving started long ago after the birth of Jesus. Wisemen from the East came to Bethlehem led by the star bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn King. These were the first Christmas gifts.

In the third century a pastor in Asia Minor named Nicholas, later Saint Nicholas, brought attention to Christmas giving by providing money during the holiday season to three young sisters each in need of a dowry. These girls came from a family of limited means. In those days if a girl’s family couldn’t provide a sum of money to a prospective husband and his family, that girl wouldn’t be considered acceptable for marriage.

(Turns to right side of audience) Since then the practice of Christmas giving has spread around the world and has continued up to the present time. Earlier, gifts were often simple consisting of little cakes or candies. Often the decorations of these delicacies were of different colors to symbolize Christ's attributes such as white for his sinlessness. Later gifts were more substantial and were tailored to people's needs or...whims. Today (Hands in the air), anything goes.

(Turns to center audience) Together let's enjoy these sketches of Christmas giving of today. Each episode takes place one week apart leading up to Christmas....

[Slides of the Mall]

[Spots on CHOIR]

[Song under NARRATOR]

(SHOPPERS dressed in coats carrying bags full of gifts cross the stage in groups and singly. They enter from stage right and left. They exit stage left and right.)

...We begin at the mall early in the Christmas season just after Thanksgiving. Who's been at the mall this week? Raise your hands (Narrator raises a hand)....

[Mall scenery for Act I is set up]

...Don't be shy! (Looks around for raised hands) That's it. (NARRATOR lowers hand) I was there, too. (Earnestly) Wasn't it crowded, even during the week? A lot's happening there. It's fun. (Enthusiastically) Kinda get's you into the Christmas spirit. (Looks around at the scenery and points toward it.) We're ready to start.

(NARRATOR exits stage right.)

[Spot off NARRATOR as exits]

[Song ends]

[Spot off CHOIR]

ACT I

Scene. There are two chairs center stage.

[Lights up on Stage]

[SFX: Christmas mall music, mall sounds]

(SHOPPERS enter from stage right, cross to stage left, and exit.)

[Spots on MARCIA, SHOPPER #1, and MICHAEL as they enter]

(MARCIA enters from stage left with several large shopping bags and packages in each arm and hand. She holds a small package in her teeth.--

the look is comical. She staggers toward the chairs and reaches them.)

(SHOPPER #1 enters from stage right carrying a shopping bag. The SHOPPER crosses to the chairs. The SHOPPER stops to watch MARCIA staggering with the bags. The SHOPPER is amused.)

SHOPPER #1: Gotta a match?

MARCIA: (Garbled) I don't smoke....

SHOPPER #1: ...I've always wanted to say that. (Points with right hand) At least you're (Emphasis) going to have a Merry Christmas.

MARCIA: (Garbled) I don't know.

(SHOPPER #1 crosses to stage left exit as Marcia begins to speak and exits.)

(MARCIA watches SHOPPER #1 exit and shakes her head. MARCIA puts down some of the packages and collapses into the stage left chair. She lets the rest of the packages fall to the ground. She acts relieved to be sitting down. She takes the package out of her mouth, looks at it, and puts it down in front of her. MICHAEL enters from the stage right and watches her struggle with the packages. He is carrying one bag. He is amused at the sight of MARCIA struggling. He shakes his head in amazement. He crosses toward the chairs.)

MARCIA: (To herself) What a relief! (She takes off her shoes and rubs her feet.)

(MICHAEL reaches her.)

MICHAEL: Marcia!

MARCIA: (She recognizes him) Uncle Michael! Great to see you! Christmas shopping?

MICHAEL: Yep. But the mall's a bit too crowded for my tastes.

MARCIA: Seems like almost everyone's here today. And it'll only get busier the

next three weeks.

MICHAEL: I suppose. (He motions to the chair) Can I join you?

MARCIA: Of course. It's probably the last empty chair in the whole mall!

MICHAEL: Thanks (He sits down on stage right chair).

(MARCIA sighs deeply. She takes a long list from her pocketbook and looks at it intently.)

MICHAEL: Busy season.

MARCIA: Busy? Look!...

(He looks at the packages and list.)

MARCIA: ...And I'm nowhere done. (She looks at the list and says anxiously) I'm not even half-finished with the kids. And I'VE yet to get anything for Dave. His parents (She shakes her head) ? Whatever! And you know his sister--she's very particular; I'VE got to get exactly what she wants. And here (She takes out another list from her pocketbook), I'VE got to send out all these Christmas cards (She adds this list to the list in her right hand). But voila (She takes out two boxes of cards from a bag), I bought the cards today! (Right hand up pumping) Yes! Now I'VE to find stamps...

MICHAEL: ... (Points toward right side of audience) I think they've got them down there...

(MARCIA looks at right side of audience.)

MARCIA: ...Right. (Looks back at MICHAEL) (Speeds up) And the tree--I don't know when we can squeeze in a little time in the schedule for all of us to shop for one. (Disappointed) I'LL probably have to go on my own next week to buy it. I'VE decorated some of the house; but the kids want me to pull out all of the decorations I had up last year--some are still stuck way back in the attic. (Faster) And the week after that I'LL have to start cooking (Takes out another list from her pocketbook and puts in her right hand)--I'LL freeze everything I make--that'll help. The week of Christmas will be, of course, nonstop. The presents will have to be wrapped. Pies made. Cranberry sauce, stuffing, salad, etc. etc. Look (Takes out another list from her pocketbook and puts in her right hand. Now she has a fistful of lists.). Christmas day will be a total blur. And then, of course, there's the...

MICHAEL: ...(Hands down to slow MARCIA down) Whoa!

MARCIA; Oh (She sighs and shakes her head) ! (Leans toward him and puts her head on his shoulder for a moment) I'M sorry. I got carried away. (In almost in a whisper) Is it awful to admit that I almost wish Christmas were over (She sighs deeply) ?

MICHAEL: (Chuckles) No. I think your reaction's just about typical for this time in the season.

MARCIA: What have I done wrong?

MICHAEL: (Shakes his head) Nothing really. But I think you're missing the joy of Christmas.

MARCIA: Oh don't get me wrong, uncle. I'm happy. I am.

MICHAEL: No, I mean the joy. Remember what the angel said to the shepherd on the night Jesus was born, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people"? One thing that so many people miss at Christmas is the very excitement of that message.

MARCIA: Who has time for joy? I just want to make it through Christmas, alive!

MICHAEL: (He looks at her hands) Let me see your hands.

MARCIA: My hands? (She holds out her hands.)

MICHAEL: See, look....

(She looks at her hands.)

MICHAEL: ...Your right hand--look at all those lists of things to buy and things to do....

(She looks.)

MICHAEL: ...And your left...

(She looks at her left hand.)

MICHAEL: ...empty. If we're not careful, the hustle and bustle can rob us of the joy. If we're not careful, our many events, deadlines, or demands can keep us from the good news of great joy.

MARCIA: Huh?

MICHAEL: If you've not stopped to sing a simple Christmas carol, you've missed the joy.

MARCIA: (Scratches her head with her left hand) I don't have time to...

MICHAEL: ...How about dinner?

MARCIA: (Throws hands up in the air) Dinner? (Hurriedly) Why, the kids come home late from school because of track practice. Then we wolf down dinner. From soup to nuts, I'd figure about ten minutes flat. How'm I doing?

MICHAEL: (Right index finger up to make a point) I'M...

MARCIA: ...Then they're up to their rooms to study. And that's it for the night, unless they're on the phone for an hour--my daughter, anyway.

MICHAEL: I'M exhausted just listening to you.

MARCIA: I need a break (Leans back).

MICHAEL: Do you say “Grace”?

MARCIA: (Sheepishly) Most of the time, yeah. The short version.

MICHAEL: The short version(Smiles). How about reading one or two...

(MARCIA looks hassled.)

MICHAEL: ...OK one of the Old Testament prophecies during dinner each evening until Christmas?...

(MARCIA looks relieved.)

MICHAEL: ...It’ll help you pause to bring that sense of joy into your life (He points to her empty left hand).

Marcia: (Sits forward) (With interest) Maybe. (Thinking) And I could ask my pastor for some suggestions, though I know some verses from Isaiah myself, anyway. (She smiles) In one of our old Bibles, the Messianic prophecies have a star at the end of each verse. That makes it easy to find them.

(He nods.)

MICHAEL: That was your mother’s Bible.

MARCIA: It was (She smiles). (Thinking) We could even act out the nativity scene at home. Remember a couple, three years ago, the children’s Christmas pageant at church when the kids were little and were sheep? I turned their jackets inside out (Illustrates with her hands). (She shakes her head remembering) The lining made them both look like little baby lambs! What a sight--them coming down the aisle. It’d be easy to do the whole thing in the family room.

MICHAEL: (Hand up in the air) With all the old jackets you must have, you probably have all the props you’d need.

Marcia: And... and I know what role my husband would want.

MICHAEL: (With interest) Go ahead.

MARCIA: Baby Jesus.

MICHAEL: (Amazed) What?

MARCIA: Sure. Then he could lie down motionless throughout the whole production (She laughs).

MICHAEL: (He laughs) C’mon.

MARCIA: OK. I’M only joking. He’s not that bad. He’ll go for it. It just takes him a little time to get into stuff like that.

MICHAEL: Let him lie on some real straw. Then at least he’ll scratch every once in

awhile.

(They both laugh.)

MARCIA: Thanks, Uncle. I need a few laughs. (She smiles) You know, just sitting here talking about what Christmas really is, I feel...(Searching for a way to express the feeling with hands out) excitement about it. (She looks at both hands and compares the hand full of lists and the empty hand) Do you think I should give these up (Holding up the full hand) ?

MICHAEL: Oh no. Those lists, those activities, can express your love--God's love--to others.

MARCIA: But holding onto the joy of Christmas (Holds up the empty hand) keeps all this(Holds the full hand) from seeming like misery. (Balances the two hands).

MICHAEL: You've got the picture now.

(He looks pleased that she understands.)

MARCIA: ...(Looks at her watch) I have to get home and hide these presents before I pick up the kids after practice. Then I have to call to get on "Do You Want To Be A Millionaire?" so I can pay for all this (Waves her right hand over the bags).

(Marcia puts on her shoes and gets up. Michael gets up.)

MICHAEL: Good plan (He smiles).

(Marcia stuffs the lists into her pocketbook and picks up the packages.)

(MICHAEL helps MARCIA pick up the bags.)

(MARCIA'S hands and arms are all full of bags as at her entrance)

(MICHAEL picks up the little package and shows it to MARCIA.)

MICHAEL: Where you want this one?

MARCIA: (Opens her mouth) Here...

MICHAEL: ...You're kidding...

MARCIA: ...I'M not. Just 'til I can get to the car.

MICHAEL: (Shrugs shoulders) OK.

(MICHAEL places the bag between MARCIA'S teeth).

MARCIA: (Garbled because of package in mouth) Bye, see you Sunday...

(He shakes his head amused.)

MARCIA: ...And Merry Christmas.

MICHAEL: (Genuinely) Merry Christmas.

[Song]

(MARCIA crosses to stage left struggling with the packages, and exits left. MICHAEL watches MARCIA exit. He picks up his bag, crosses to stage right, and exits stage right.)

[Spots off MARCIA and MICHAEL as exit]

[Scenery for ACT I removed]

[Spots on CHOIR]

[Song ends]

[Spots off CHOIR as song ends]

[Lights off]

ACT II

Scene. A side of a building stage right.

[Spot on NARRATOR as enters]

(NARRATOR enters from stage and crosses to the tops of the stage right stairs.)

[Song under NARRATOR]

NARRATOR: (Speaks to stage right audience) Getting caught up with the hustle and bustle of the season and with the incidentals? It's easy, isn't it? That's about the easiest thing we do during the Christmas season....

(Turns toward center) It's now a week later. Our next step is downtown Portland....

[Slides of Portland]

[SKX: street sounds, cars, horns]

[Scenery of the Old Port for ACT II onto stage]

...There are lots of stores here as well, especially in the Old Port....

[Lights up on stage]

...Some like shopping in the city. A while ago that's all we had....

[Song ends]

[Spot on MAN as he enters]

(A homeless MAN enters from stage right and sits down against the store front stage right. He has an unkempt beard, hat, and coat. He wears boots--one has no laces. He holds a sign "Homeless Vet/I need help".)

(SHOPPERS enter from stage left and cross the stage. When they see the homeless MAN, they walk more hurriedly and exit stage right.)

...(A little laugh) I have friends who won't stop at a store in town unless they find a parking space right in front of it. (Points to the audience) I see by your smiles that some of you know people like that, or even do it yourself. (Aside to stage right audience) On the other hand, you certainly can't park close to any particular store at the mall anymore.

[Spot on SHOPPER #1 as enters]

(SHOPPER #1 enters from stage left and crosses the stage. SHOPPER #1 tries to avoid the MAN.)

(MAN holds up sign to SHOPPER #1.)

(SHOPPER #1 stops and looks at sign. SHOPPER #1 reaches into pocketbook and takes out one dollar. SHOPPER #1 gives the dollar to the MAN.)

MAN: Thanks, MA'AM. I'll use this to buy a Christmas gift for my nephew.

(SHOPPER #1 smiles, crosses to stage right exit, and exits.)

NARRATOR: (Please at what has just happened) Great time of the year to be generous....

[Spots on MOTHER and DAUGHTER as they enter]

(A MOTHER and DAUGHTER enter from the side door stage left. Both are very well dressed with attractive coats, shoes, and gloves. Each carries a shopping bag in their left hand. They walk hurriedly toward the stage. DAUGHTER is downstage to MOTHER.)

NARRATOR: (Nods toward MOTHER and DAUGHTER) ...Here we have a couple more shoppers--they must've had plenty of time for shopping, judging by their packages. (Looks around) There's a little snow in the air (Holds up right hand to catch snow flakes). Christmas is coming.

(NARRATOR exits stage right.)

MOTHER: Wasn't that cashmere jacket divine?

DAUGHTER: I've never felt anything so soft.

MOTHER: I should've gotten another one for myself. By the way, why'd you use the rest of your money to buy that scarf?

DAUGHTER: Since you have a direct line to the North Pole, Mom, and know nobody's going to get it for me, I thought I'd better get it myself. I really need it for school. And... (Shrugs shoulders) I'VE finished my shopping, anyway.

MOTHER: It's your money. (Points ahead) We're over there.

DAUGHTER: (Looks around and is concerned) (A nervous laugh) This was a bad (Emphasis) place to park!

MOTHER: I know. But it's so (Emphasis) crowded during the holidays. This was the closest lot that had a space.

DAUGHTER: (Shivers) It's cold, too.

MOTHER: We're almost there.

Daughter: And it's getting dark.

MOTHER: OK, OK. Let's just get to the car.

DAUGHTER: I hope no one's dented it. The spaces were pretty tight. You know what Daddy would say.

MOTHER: Too well: (Gentle mocking) "It's only two months old. Weren't you careful?" He treats it like a baby.

(They reach the stage. They walk up the stairs and turn toward stage right. The MOTHER looks toward the stage right exit trying not to look at the MAN.)

MOTHER: (Points to stage right exit) There it is.

(The DAUGHTER notices the homeless MAN, slows down, and points toward him).

DAUGHTER: Mom, there's someone who needs help.

MOTHER: (Tries not to notice MAN) Yes, dear.

(The DAUGHTER puts her hand on the MOTHER'S arm to stop her. Then she takes her hand away after they stop.)

DAUGHTER: Shouldn't we help him?

MOTHER: (Skeptical) I don't know...

DAUGHTER: ...He looks so pitiful.

MOTHER: He might use the money for alcohol...

DAUGHTER: ...Oh Mom...

MOTHER: ...or even worse--drugs!

DAUGHTER: (Not convinced) Oh please!

MOTHER: Alright, alright....

(They put down their bags onto the ground.)

MOTHER: ...(She reaches into her pocketbook and gives her DAUGHTER two quarters) But it's against my better judgment.

DAUGHTER: (Takes the quarters and looks at each of them) (Pleadingly) Mom, it's Christmas.

(MOTHER looks a little annoyed. She takes out two more quarters and gives them to her DAUGHTER.)

(The DAUGHTER smiles curtly, crosses to the MAN and gives him the money.)

MAN: Thank you.

DAUGHTER: You're welcome.

(DAUGHTER returns to the side of her MOTHER.)

MOTHER: OK?

(DAUGHTER nods.)

(They pick up bags and walk two steps.)

MAN: I'LL use this to buy a Christmas gift for my nephew.

(The DAUGHTER stops the MOTHER with her hand on her arm, then takes her hand away.)

DAUGHTER: Mom, did you hear that? Can't we give him more? You can't buy much of a gift for...a dollar (Emphasis) .

MOTHER: Dear, these guys are professionals at getting money from people. He probably says the same thing to everyone.

DAUGHTER: He sounds sincere. (Looks at MAN) Jesus told us to give to the poor.

MOTHER: (Looks at MAN then at DAUGHTER) (Not convinced) OK, sweetie. But we must be careful in our giving. (Aside) This man and his friends probably get together at the end of every day and compare notes on how to fleece honest people....

(They put down their bags onto the ground.)

MOTHER: ...(To DAUGHTER) Good stewardship. You know what I mean (She takes out two dollars from her pocketbook).

DAUGHTER: Yes, Mom (Genuinely)...

(The DAUGHTER takes the money.)

DAUGHTER: ...Thanks, Mom.

(DAUGHTER crosses to the MAN and gives the money to the MAN.)

(MAN mouths the words "Thank you" and nods.)

(The DAUGHTER returns to the MOTHER.)

DAUGHTER: I can do more...

(DAUGHTER takes red scarf out of one of the bags. She turns toward the MAN.)

MOTHER: But (Reaches out to DAUGHTER)...

(The DAUGHTER crosses to the MAN.)

MOTHER: ...that's the scarf you got for yourself.

(DAUGHTER reaches the MAN and stoops down. She puts the scarf around his neck and looks into his face.)

DAUGHTER: Merry Christmas. God loves you.

(The MAN looks at DAUGHTER'S hands on the scarf.)

(The DAUGHTER takes her hands away and stands up.)

(The MAN pats the scarf and holds it.)

(The DAUGHTER crosses to her Mother.)

(MOTHER smiles at DAUGHTER.)

(MOTHER and DAUGHTER pick up bags, turn and walk toward stage right.)

(The MAN puts his left hand to his mouth and audibly whimpers.)

(The MOTHER and DAUGHTER stop and ,turn to look at him, and take two steps toward MAN.)

MOTHER: (To the MAN) Are you all right?

MAN: I'm sorry (He wipes tears from his eyes). I'M happy.

MOTHER: Happy? We really didn't give you very much.

MAN: (Shakes his head) It's your daughter--her gift.

MOTHER: (Looks at DAUGHTER then back at MAN) What?

MAN: (Puts left hand to his right shoulder) I don't remember the last time someone gave me something that mattered to them. I feel like I'VE been blessed or something--if I can use that word--I'M not religious.

MOTHER: (Touched) You can use that word, of course you can.

MAN: I felt real love from your daughter, ma'am. And if there's a God--there's gotta be, I guess--He must love me too, like she said.

MOTHER: It's true, sir. God loves you and He loves us. That's why we have Christmas. That's why Jesus came into the world.

MAN: Jesus...yes. You both have a Merry Christmas (Nods to DAUGHTER and MOTHER).

MOTHER: Merry Christmas.

DAUGHTER: Merry Christmas, sir.

(The MOTHER and the DAUGHTER nod to the MAN. They then look at each other. MOTHER pats the DAUGHTER'S left arm. They walk slowly and exit stage right.)

[Spots off MOTHER and DAUGHTER as they exit]

(MAN exits stage left.)

[Spot off MAN as he exits]

[Spot on CHOIR]

[Song]

[Spot off CHOIR]

[Stage lights off]

[Spot on NARRATOR as enters]

(NARRATOR enters from stage right.)

NARRATOR: Don't forget the poor--we're reminded of that in the Bible. But not all their needs are physical. I mean, that man seemed to need the touch of a kind of love that he hadn't felt for a lone time....

[Scenery from ACT II removed]

ACT III

Scene. A living room right of center stage. There is a sofa with low coffee table facing the audience at an angle. To the stage right side of the sofa is a comfortable arm chair. At center stage is a door and a chair right of center stage. There is also a door for a hall guest closet.

[Slides of decorated exterior houses for Act III]

[Scenery for ACT III placed on stage]

NARRATOR: (Crosses to center stage) Now it's even closer to Christmas day--another week has passed. (With excitement) Do you feel the excitement? It's the Christmas spirit-- it's in the air. (Taps chest) If you ask me, Christmas spirit's actually God's Holy Spirit working in the world, to provide a special kind of grace to the season. Have you noticed just about everyone has a gentleness for others and even an openness to spiritual things during Christmas time? (Leaning forward to tell something special) It's to make the world ready each year for the coming of God's son. (Leans back up) You don't see it any other month. (With conviction) Christmas spirit is the Holy Spirit, that's what I think. (Hands on lapels) (Looks from side to side) That ends my sermon (Hands off lapels)

[Stage lights up]

...(NARRATOR crosses to top of stage right stairs) Most of the houses that are going to be decorated are decorated by the third week of December. Some take it pretty seriously. I had so many lights on my house last year that CMP sent me a "thank you" card.

This is the time in the Christmas season that many get together to help others with Christmas preparations. There may be cookies to bake or indoor decorations to set up. It's a neighborly think to do.

[Song]

(KATHY enters from stage right. She carries two large shopping bags. In the bags are the following: one large box with a sweater; a moderately sized box with a dress; two small boxes; a smaller box; and two CD's. At the bottom of one of the bags is an open envelope with "To Mom" written on the outside. Inside the envelope is an eighteen-inch piece of thick colorful string. A note separate from the envelope is also at the bottom of the same bag. She puts the bags down next to the coffee table. She exits and brings back two pairs of scissors, three rolls of adhesive tape, gift tags, and several pens. CLAIRE and MARTHA enter from stage left. They each carry a large shopping bag with rolls of wrapping paper sticking out of the sides. In the bags are the following: one small and one medium size box both wrapped with gift tags. Each woman is smartly dressed. CLAIRE and MARTHA are wearing winter coats, hats, and gloves. CLAIRE rings the doorbell as KATHY is putting down the scissors and tape on the table.

[Song ends]

NARRATOR: Here we have two friends coming for an afternoon visit. Look at those big bags they're carrying--I wonder if they have something for me!

(NARRATOR exits stage right)

[Spot off NARRATOR as exits]

KATHY: (Looks up from table where she has placed the scissors and tape) Just a minute (Yells out)....

(KATHY crosses to center stage. She opens the door.)

KATHY: ...(Happily) Hi! Merry Christmas.

CLAIRE: Merry Christmas (Joyfully).

MARTHA: Merry Christmas, Kathy.

(CLAIRE and MARTHA embrace KATHY).

KATHY: Come on in...

(CLAIRE and MARTHA enter the house and put down the bags.)

KATHY: ...Thank you girls for coming over.

CLAIRE: We're glad to do it.

MARTHA: (Puts gloves in coat pocket. Takes off coat and hat) Where should I put this (Motions to coat) ?

KATHY: Oh let me, Martha (Takes MARTHA's coat and hat).

CLAIRE: (Taking off coat and hat and putting gloves into coat) Should I put these in here (Points to hall closet) ?

KATHY: Sorry Claire, it's like everybody's else's--full. Why do we call them guest closets? We fill them up with everyday stuff; and there's never any room for "guests" you know...

(CLAIRE and MARTHA look at each other and nod in agreement.)

KATHY: ...I'LL just put them on here if it's OK (She puts MARTHA's coat and hat on the chair next to the door).

CLAIRE: Just like home.

(CLAIRE puts her coat and hat on the chair.)

KATHY: This way (Directs CLAIRE and MARTHA to living room)...

(CLAIRE and MARTHA take the bags and walk into the living room toward the sofa.)

KATHY: ...Right over here (She walks into the living room)...

KATHY: ...Please (Motions to CLAIRE and MARTHA to sit down)....

(CLAIRE sits on the sofa.)

(MARTHA sits on the chair.)

KATHY: ...(Still standing) It was great of you to come over to help me wrap presents. It'll be a big help.

CLAIRE: We thought you might need a couple of extra hands.

KATHY: Thanks. I thought we'd do Diane's presents.

MARTHA: I like to wrap presents...anybody's!

CLAIRE: Kathy, get a thermometer. I think Martha has a fever!

(They all laugh.)

(KATHY sits down.)

(CLAIRE takes wrapping paper out of the bag.)

(MARTHA takes wrapping paper out of the bag.)

(KATHY brings her bags over to CLAIRE and MARTHA.)

(KATHY picks out the moderately size box.)

CLAIRE: What's in that one?

(KATHY opens the box and shows them the dress.)

MARTHA: It's so pretty. She'll love it.

KATHY: Me, too. We're both the same size. Maybe I'LL get a chance to wear it.

(MARTHA takes the box and wraps it.)

CLAIRE: Don't count on it. All mom's think that...

(They smile.)

CLAIRE: ...What's next?

(KATHY takes out large box. She opens the box and shows them the sweater.)

CLAIRE: Nice sweater. (She touches it) So soft...

(KATHY smiles.)

CLAIRE: ...I'LL get going on this one (She takes box with sweater and wraps it).

KATHY: (Jumps up) I almost forgot!

MARTHA: What?

KATHY: The coffee.

MARTHA: Don't bother.

KATHY: It's already made.

(KATHY exits stage right.)

(CLAIRE and MARTHA wrap the presents.)

(KATHY returns with a platter upon which is a coffee pot, three cups and saucers, and a plate of Christmas cookies. She puts the platter down on the coffee table.)

CLAIRE: Oh, thank you.

(KATHY pours the coffee.)

CLAIRE: Decaf?

KATHY: You bet.

CLAIRE: I think it's a sign of middle age.

KATHY: You're not alone, Claire. It's hard to admit it.

CLAIRE: Tell me.

(KATHY pours the coffee into three cups and passes the cups to CLAIRE and MARTHA. Then she sits down and drinks her coffee.)

MARTHA: (Takes a cookie and eats it) Delicious.

KATHY: It's really an easy recipe.

MARTHA: (Nods. Then takes a second cookie, holds it up, and eats it) My limit. (Hands a cookie to CLAIRE) Here, you must have one.

Claire: (Takes the cookie and eats it) Mmmm.

(KATHY is pleased.)

MARTHA: What's next?

(KATHY takes out two CD's out of a bag.)

KATHY: These (She shows them the CD's).

MARTHA: (Looks at the CD's) I don't recognize any of these groups.

CLAIRE: May I see (She reaches for the CD's and looks at them) ?

KATHY: Diane says they're popular.

CLAIRE: (Shrugs her shoulders) Never heard of them...

(CLAIRE hands one CD to MARTHA. She wraps the CD.)

(MARTHA wraps the other CD.)

MARTHA: I still have some wrapping paper left. Anything more?

(KATHY reaches into the bags and pulls out two small boxes and one smaller box.)

KATHY: (Holding up the two boxes) A couple of nightgowns and (Holds up the smaller box) some make-up...

MARTHA: ...Remember when the kids were young and you had to always get the hot toy of the year, like the new rage Tickle me Elmer?

KATHY: And stand in line for it?

CLAIRE: It's "Elmo" and that was a couple of years ago. And at least you don't have to stand in line with e-shopping.

KATHY: Maybe not in-line waiting. But there's on-line waiting whenever I try it.

MARTHA: The point is: it's easy to get out of date fast with the trendy stuff once the kids grow up.

CLAIRE: (To MARTHA) Soooo... who's Elmer?

MARTHA: (Playfully pushes CLAIRE) Stop it!

(MARTHA takes the two boxes and wraps them.)

CLAIRE: Hand me that one (She takes the smaller box and wraps it).

KATHY: ... (Looks into the bags) I think that's it. But Diane'll get one or two things from her grandparents--they've been real generous. And Phil will give her something next weekend, I suppose (Looks upset).

CLAIRE: (Kindly) Why don't you get together with him?

KATHY: (Shakes head vigorously) There's still too much anger.

CLAIRE: Sorry.

KATHY: (Bites lip) Me too.

MARTHA: (Takes out two wrapped boxes from the bags they brought) I think Santa left these.

KATHY: (Takes the two presents) Oh, you shouldn't have. You've already been so generous with your time.

CLAIRE: They're from both of us.

MARTHA: Some earrings and a cotton sweater-thing for Spring from that new store at the mall. It's got some cute stuff for girls Diane's age.

KATHY: I'M sure she'll love 'em (She puts the gifts with the other boxes on the table).

MARTHA: Why don't we put all the presents back in the bags so you can hide them? Do you still do that--she's almost a teenager?

KATHY: And I don't put them under the tree Christmas eve until Diane goes to bed, either.

CLAIRE: Why not?

MARTHA: (As she stands up and picks up the bags to put the presents into them, she notices an envelope. She takes it out, and shows KATHY and CLAIRE) What's this?

KATHY: (Puzzled) I didn't get any gift-certificates.

(KATHY comes over to MARTHA.)

MARTHA: (Looks more closely at the envelope) It's open. (Looks inside) There's nothing inside...(Takes out an eighteen-inch piece of thick colorful string and shows KATHY and CLAIRE) except this piece of string.

KATHY: That's weird.

(CLAIRE comes closer intrigued.)

MARTHA: (Reads the outside of the envelope) It says "To Mom" on it.

KATHY: Oh...I guess Diane must have dropped that into one of my bags by mistake. She left a couple of shopping bags next to mine in the basement.

MARTHA: Some job hiding you do.

KATHY: I didn't know where to put all the stuff. (With sadness) That used to be Phil's job--he was good at hiding things.

(CLAIRE and MARTHA look at each other and then at KATHY.)

CLAIRE: Ouch!

(CLAIRE takes the bags and looks into them.)

CLAIRE: (Takes out a piece of paper) Here's a note. It was on the bottom of the same bag. Should I read it?

KATHY: (Shrugs shoulders) It must go with the envelope.

CLAIRE: (Reads the note) "Dear Mom. I'M going to pray every day this month that God will bring Daddy back to our house for a visit (CLAIRE looks at KATHY). And that if you will sit next to Daddy like you used to, closer than the length of this string I am giving you--maybe even touching-- and not be upset with each other..."

(MARTHA holds up the string and CLAIRE and KATHY look at it.)

CLAIRE: "...then you'll talk to each other like before and we might be a family again. Love, Diane".

(KATHY walks to the sofa, sits down, and weeps.)

KATHY: I'M sorry. What a time of the year to have this happen!

(CLAIRE sits down next to her and holds her arm.)

(MARTHA stands in back of her and puts her hand on Kathy's shoulder.)

MARTHA: She's one great girl.

KATHY: (Sighs heavily) Yeah.

(MARTHA walks around to the side of the couch.)

MARTHA: You really should let him come over. It's Christmas.

CLAIRE: You guys need a peace treaty, or something. And this could be the way to do it.

KATHY: (Pleadingly) It's hard. I'VE called him, several times. But we always get going on something. We start yelling, even over the littlest things....

MARTHA: ...Maybe you need to get a little closer, like face-to-face. (Hands up like holding the string) Remember the string.

KATHY: (Timidly) I know. I'M not surprised to get this from Diane for Christmas. It's hurt her a lot. I'LL try to have him over. But I'VE already talked with Diane. She understands that life changes and people change. Sometime you can't get back together or have.... "peace" as you've put it, Claire.

CLAIRE: (Hands up kindly) I was just trying to help.

KATHY: I know and thank you. Diane realizes that the only peace that doesn't change and doesn't leave is the peace here (Pats her chest) that comes from God, even if her Daddy doesn't come home again.

CLAIRE: That's tough stuff for a young girl, any girl.

MARTHA: (Walks around the couch) We'd better get this stuff back into the envelope...

(CLAIRE gives the note to MARTHA.)

(MARTHA takes the note and puts the string and the note into the envelope.)

KATHY: ...And I'LL slip it back into one of her bags downstairs.

(MARTHA hands the envelope to KATHY.)

MARTHA: Except for the prayer. That's already out of here (Hands up) and heard.

KATHY: I hope so (She puts the envelope on the table).

CLAIRE: This has been so heavy (Fans herself with hand) I'M getting palpitations. Unless it's a hot flash...

(KATHY manages a smile.)

MARTHA: ...Everyone, let's lighten up. It's almost Christmas! (To KATHY, patting her on the arm) (Genuinely) I'M hoping Diane's prayer is answered, anyway.

KATHY: (Looking with a smile at MARTHA) Me too.

CLAIRE: (Looks at wristwatch and taps it to draw attention to it) It's almost dinner time. We'd better go.

(MARTHA nods.)

(They all stand up.)

KATHY: Thanks, both of you, for everything...

(KATHY embraces CLAIRE and then MARTHA.)

KATHY: ...You are special friends.

MARTHA: Santa's helpers!

KATHY: Of course.

CLAIRE: You have a remarkable daughter. (Surveying the presents with her hand) (With conviction) With all the money spent here, the time taken today to wrap, and all the gabbing we've done, hers is still the best gift of all. And it didn't cost her very much and she didn't need us to wrap it.

KATHY: (Smiles) Thanks.

[Song under dialogue]

(CLAIRE and MARTHA look at each other, gather up the leftover wrapping paper and put the rolls into the two bags they brought. They take the two bags and walk to the door. They put down the bags.)

(KATHY picks up the coats and hats and hands them to CLAIRE and MARTHA.)

(CLAIRE puts on her coat and hat and then gloves.)

(MARTHA puts on her coat and hat.)

(KATHY opens the door.)

KATHY: Well, Merry Christmas.

MARTHA: Merry Christmas.

CLAIRE: Merry Christmas. Bye.

KATHY: And thanks again.

[Song up]

(CLAIRE and MARTHA take the bags and walk out the door and exit stage left.)

(KATHY watches them exit. She closes the door and crosses to the couch. She sits down and picks up the envelope. She taps the envelope against her left hand as she thinks about it. She gets up, looks at the gifts, and then at the envelope. She smiles. She exits stage right holding the envelope.)

[Spot off KATHY]

[Stage lights out]

[Scenery from ACT III removed]

[Song ends]

[Spot on NARRATOR]

(NARRATOR enters from stage left and crosses to top of stage left stairs.)

NARRATOR: You've probably heard the expression "Christmas is for kids". There may be gifts that children can give us that we (Emphasis) need. Christmas is for adults, too.

(NARRATOR exits stage left.)

[Spot off NARRATOR as exits]

ACT IV

SCENE 1

Scene. A living room. There is a partially decorated Christmas tree mid stage with one string of lights on illuminating the top-half of the tree. There are few ornaments on the tree. On the floor near the tree is a tangled string of lights. There is a low table to the stage right of the tree on which are several partially opened ornament boxes. Several ornaments lie on the table along with tinsel and garland. To the right of the low table is a sofa that faces the tree (with a different covering than ACT III). There is a small table near exit left on which are several books including a Bible.

[Slides of interiors of homes with Christmas trees]

[Song]

[Scenery for ACT IV brought on stage]

(NARRATOR enters from stage right and crosses to center stage)

[Spot on NARRATOR as enters]

[Stage lights up low]

NARRATOR: Now it's Christmas eve. For most of us the presents would be all wrapped. Right! Remember staying up half the night trying to put together that bicycle? Remember the instructions? And the nuts and washers and screws that never seemed to match? (Surveying the scene) There's not much time left here to finish wrapping. But there's hope for the rest of you after this performance--you gotta a couple, three weeks!

Let's see what's happening here.

(NARRATOR exits hastily stage right.)

[Spot off NARRATOR as exits]

[Spots on JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK as they enter]

[Song]

[Lights remain low]

(JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK enter from stage left, hesitantly at first. They look around. Each child is in pajamas. TERRI and NICK are holding hands. Each child is carrying presents. NICK points to the tree as they approach; he puts down his presents and claps his hands with glee.)

[Song ends]

TERRI: Are they asleep?

JESSIE: (Listens toward the back of the stage) I think so.

NICK: Goodie (He claps his hands). Then we can see the tree.

(NICK runs to the tree.)

TERRI: Wait, Nick.

(They all approach the tree.)

NICK: It's ...! (He extends his arms toward the tree.)

TERRI: ...(With disappointment) not even decorated.

NICK: (With disappointment) Oh.

(JESSIE and TERRI look at each sadly.)

JESSIE: (Shakes his head in agreement) They musta been tired after their friends left.(JESSIE motions to the tree and ornaments on the table.) They were laughing, anyway. I could hear them.

(NICK steps toward the tree and motions to the tree without any presents underneath).

NICK: Where are the presents?

(JESSIE and TERRI look at each other.)

JESSIE: No Santa, either.

NICK: (Annoyed) Very funny. (Discouraged) Jessie, do you think Christmas could ever be different?

JESSIE: For our family?

NICK: Yes.

JESSIE: I hope so. If it is, we're probably going to have to do it ourselves. (Looks at the lights on the ground and the ornaments on the table) Like the decorating.

(They put the presents down. JESSIE goes over to the lights and picks them up. TERRI goes to help.)

NICK: What can I do?

JESSIE: Why don't you put the presents under the tree?

NICK: Cool! (He picks up each group of presents and brings them the tree and places them under the tree).

[Song under dialogue]

(JESSIE and TERRI shut off the lights on the tree, untangle the second set, and put the second set on the tree.)

(NICK shakes one gift after looking at the tag.)

JESSIE: (To NICK) Don't do that! You might be able to tell what it is.

NICK: (He squeezes the present to his chest) Oh, thank you Jessie. (He embraces JESSIE. JESSIE embarrassingly accepts the embrace.) I knew you'd get it for me (NICK puts the present down).

JESSIE: (To TERRI) (Still embarrassed) Let's put on the rest of the ornaments.

(TERRI nods and goes over to the ornaments on the table. She hands him some of the ornaments and they put them on the tree. There is one ornament left on the table.)

[Song ends]

NICK: (He picks up one small present and reads the tag. He shakes the present.) (Annoyed) Is this it, Terri?

TERRI: (Hands on her hips defiantly) You'll like it. Just because it's small doesn't mean you won't like it.

NICK: (With skepticism) OK (He puts the present down).

(JESSIE and TERRI put on the tinsel.)

NICK: Here are our presents for Mom and Dad (He points to them).

(JESSIE and TERRI nod.)

TERRI: (To NICK) Did you get anything for us (sarcastically) ?

NICK: Of course (Strongly) ! Here (He holds up two presents and then puts them down.) !

(JESSIE and TERRI look at each other pleased that NICK remembered.)

NICK: Can I help some more?

JESSIE: (Looks over at the ornament on the table and points) Why don't you put on that ornament?

NICK: I can handle that.

(NICK puts on the last ornament. JESSIE and TERRI put on the garland. Then JESSIE motions for them to stand back.)

JESSIE: You ready?

(TERRI and NICK nod.)

(JESSIE walks over and plugs in the tree. The lights go on.)

JESSIE: How about that?

(TERRI claps. NICK jumps up and down.)

NICK: Did I help enough?

(JESSIE and TERRI look at each and smile.)

TERRI: Of course, Nick.

NICK: (Excitedly) Let's sit down and watch the tree....

(They sit down to the right of the tree. They sit close together.)

NICK: ...Now it's awesome!

TERRI: You got it. (Together)

JESSIE: It is.

NICK: (Proudly) (Gives "five" to JESSIE and TERRI) We do good (Emphasis) work.

(JESSIE and TERRI nod.)

(They look at tree.)

[Pause]

NICK: (Deep, audible sigh) I wish we could've gone to church tonight....

(JESSIE and TERRI look puzzled at him.)

NICK: ...We don't go on Sunday, and that's OK. But just tonight--you know, the lights, the decorations, all the people, the Christmas story they read...

TERRI: ...(Sadly) We haven't gone in years...

JESSIE: ...Not since you were real young, almost a baby.

NICK: (With determination) I wasn't a baby then and I remember.

JESSIE: Anyway (Hands up)... it was a long time.

NICK: Why don't we go anymore?

JESSIE: I guess 'cause Mom and Dad have a party each year (Shrugs shoulders), something like that.

TERRI: Or maybe 'cause they're too busy.

NICK: Dad is. He's never (Emphasis) home.

TERRI: Or is it 'cause they're always yelling when he's home?

JESSIE: Either way, we're not like a family.

(NICK shrugs his shoulders and looks discouraged.)

NICK: We gotta do something more.

TERRI: (To JESSIE) Nick's right. We bought the presents. We decorated the tree. So what about church?

NICK: Yeah.

JESSIE: It's probably too late for that tonight, and we're in our pajamas. But there's a Bible on the table in the family room (JESSIE points to the table at exit left). We could read from that.

NICK: (Turns to TERRI for encouragement) That's...something more. That might do.

(TERRI nods with enthusiasm.)

JESSIE: Hold on.

(JESSIE goes over to the table exit right.)

NICK: (Calls to JESSIE) (Insistently) We have to do this, Jessie. We really do. Something has to make this Christmas different.

JESSIE: (With a little laugh of amusement) OK, OK.

(JESSIE crosses to TERRI and NICK.)

JESSIE: (Looking into the Bible) Now where could it be? Probably in one of the gospels. (Thinking) They're toward the end of the Bible. Jesus came later.

(JESSIE sits down.)

Terri: I remember: (Counts on fingers) Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John.

JESSIE: No, Terri (Shakes head)-- Luke...

NICK: ...(Excitedly) the Luke in "Star..."?

JESSIE: ...(Condescendingly) No. (Looks through the Bible) Here it is, Luke chapter two.

NICK: Luke two, Luke two. (Excitedly) Read it, read it (Claps his hands)

JESSIE: OK. (Looks down in Bible and reads) "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a

son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there is no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’...

NICK: ...(He yawns) I'M tired. We've got to stop. But I'M glad we read it.

TERRI: (She yawns) Me, too. (To JESSIE) Thanks Jessie. (To NICK) I just heard a noise on the roof. Could it be Santa?

NICK: Not you too?

JESSIE: (Closes the Bible and puts it on the table left open) We'd better get to bed. We'll finish the rest of it (Bends the edge of the page) ...(Sighs) next year.

(They stand up.)

NICK: (Looking around) What if these are our only presents (Pleadingly)?

(JESSIE and TERRI look at each other knowingly.)

JESSIE: (Sighs and puts arm on NICK'S shoulder) They'll do. We're giving them to people we love.

TERRI: Yeah Nick, that's what really counts!

NICK: I guess (Not completely convinced)....

(They cross to stage left.)

NICK: ... (To JESSIE) Have we done enough to change Christmas?

JESSIE: (Puts arm around NICK) We've really tried.

NICK: (Yawns again) But...

JESSIE: ...You're really tired. Let's go to bed.

(They reach exit left.)

[Song under dialogue]

JESSIE: Good night. Merry Christmas!

TERRI: Merry Christmas! (Together)

NICK: Merry Christmas, Jessie!

(They exit stage left.)

[Spots off JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK as exit]

[Song ends]

Scene 2

[Lights remain low]

Scene. The decorated Christmas tree is left lit. The presents are around the tree. The Bible has been left open on the table with a book mark on a page.

[Spots on MOM and DAD as they enter from stage right]

(MOM and DAD are dressed in bathrobes. They enter from stage right. MOM enters first, walks several steps, and stops, amazed at the sight of the tree. DAD enters after her. He does not look in the direction of the tree.)

DAD: (Roughly) Let's finish the tree. Of course if we wait a few more hours, it'll be almost time to take it down and we won't have to bother...

(MOM spots decorated tree.)

MOM: ...Agh!...

DAD: ...What?...

(DAD stops.)

(MOM points at the tree.)

(DAD looks at the tree puzzled.)

DAD: ...What the...?

MOM: ...It's all decorated.

DAD: (Annoyed) I can see that....

(They advance toward the tree.)

DAD: ...Who do you think did it? I know, Martha Stewart.

MOM: (Edge on voice) The kids, of course. They must have done it after we went upstairs.

DAD: (Defensively) I just wanted to lie down for a little rest. I never thought I'D fall asleep. (Yawns) I was tired. (Pointing a finger at MOM) You did too.

MOM: (Flippantly) Sorry....

(They reach the tree and stop.)

MOM: ...(She stoops down and picks up a pile of four presents) (Looks at husband in amazement) And presents!

DAD: (Hands to chest) Don't look at me. Ours are...

MOM: ...(Reads the tags) They're from the kids...

(DAD looks unimpressed.)

DAD: ...(Without enthusiasm) Far out.

MOM: C'mon, join the festivities. (Reads a label) Here's one "To Terri, From Nick" (She looks at DAD)...

(DAD shrugs his shoulders.)

MOM: ...(Looks at another tag) and "To Jessie, From Terri" (She looks at DAD)...

(DAD tries to smile.)

MOM: ...(Looks at two presents) Here's one... for "Dad" (Holds it up)...

(DAD looks a little interested in the present.)

MOM: ...And ...(Tenderly) "Mom" (She holds her present close then puts all the presents down). So precious. (Turns toward Dad) By the way, did you wrap the kid's presents?

DAD: (Defensively) No. They're still in the attic--behind the summer clothes.

[Spotlight on stage left exit as JESSIE, TERRI, AND NICK enter]

(JESSIE, TERRI, AND NICK enter hurriedly from stage left. JESSIE stops. They bump into each other and stop. They listen to DAD and MOM talk.)

MOM: Well?

(MOM shakes her head and turns back toward the tree.)

DAD: I'VE been busy. And not just planning for the party tonight. Work, you know what's been like--non-stop. When am I ever home?

MOM: (Turns toward him) Never.

DAD: (Off-handed) There you go. (Points at MOM) (Strongly) I bring home the bacon. Why should you complain?

MOM: There should (Emphasis) be more than that.

DAD: (Defiantly) Like what?

MOM: (Counts on fingers) Little league games, taking the kids to the movies, eating with us the bacon you've brought home... once in a while.

DAD: I'VE told you "I've been busy"....

(DAD shakes, holding in angry.)

DAD: ...(Waves hand at MOM in angry) That's enough. I'M going to bed. This cutesy stuff with the presents doesn't do it for me.

(DAD tightens bath robe. He turns toward stage right exit. He crosses to exit.)

NICK: (To JESSIE and TERRI) It didn't work. It's never going to change.

JESSIE: (To TERRI And NICK) Let's go to bed.

(JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK exit stage left.)

[Spotlight off JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK]

(As DAD crosses to stage right exit, MOM notices the Bible on the table and picks it up.)

MOM: (Calling to DAD) Please....

(DAD stops but keeps looking at exit.)

MOM: ...You're right. This is not the night for arguments....

(DAD does not turn but fidgets.)

MOM: ...or me picking on you. (Deep breath) You are (Emphasis) a good provider....

(DAD turns.)

MOM: ...I'M sorry.

(DAD crosses to MOM.)

DAD: (Noticing Bible in MOM'S hand) What's that?

MOM: It looks like the kids have been reading from this tonight (She opens the Bible where the bookmark is located.)

DAD: From what?

MOM: (Holds it up for DAD to see) Our Family Bible.

DAD: (Quietly) Oh. We still have that sitting around?

MOM: (Looks where the kids had read) They must've read the Christmas story.

DAD: So (Doesn't know what to think).

MOM: (Holds onto Bible) I'M amazed they'd do all of this (Surveys the whole scene with her arm), on their own even....

(DAD nods his head trying to understand.)

MOM: ...(Walks up to DAD and holds his arm with her hand) And reading the Bible.

(MOM releases DAD'S arm and walks over to the tree. She looks at it with pleasure. She looks at the Bible and pats it. She crosses to the sofa and sits down on downstage side.)

MOM: (With enthusiasm, understanding the situation) Dear, come sit with me. Let's look at the tree.

DAD: Aren't you making too much of this?

MOM: (Pats sofa where DAD should sit) Let's look at the tree.

(DAD crosses to sofa sits down upstage to MOM.)

DAD: You haven't called me "Dear" in a long time.

(MOM smiles at DAD.)

MOM: Would you please read this to me? (Shows him the place) Where the kids left off.

(MOM shows DAD where to read again.)

DAD: I haven't read from the Bible in years...

MOM: ...(Pats his arm) You can do it.

DAD: (Looks down at Bible with trepidation) (Reads stiffly) "When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,..." Are you sure I...?

MOM: Just read, please.

(JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK enter from stage left. They stop, amazed at what they are hearing.)

DAD: "...the shepherds said to one another, Lets go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about...."

(MOM spots JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK and waves them to come over.)

DAD: ... (More comfortably) "So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby,..."

(JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK tiptop over to tree and sit on the floor around the tree. They listen to DAD.)

DAD: "...who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them...."

(DAD looks to see JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK and smiles at them.)

DAD: ... (Animatedly) "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (With trembling of emotion) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

(DAD closes Bible.)

(MOM and DAD and children sit looking at each other and watching the tree.)

[Song under dialogue]

DAD: (Mock anger) Shouldn't you kids be asleep? You've already been here tonight, (Points to tree and presents) we can see that.

NICK: We couldn't sleep. We were too excited about Christmas.

TERRI: We were down here a second time, too.

DAD: Really?

JESSIE: When you were arguing.

DAD: (Embarrassed) Oh.

JESSIE: We had decided to come down and see if anything had changed after all we did. Nick was convinced it would.

NICK: (Sadly) I hoped it would. But it didn't.

DAD: Why are you here again? (Counts to three on fingers) The third time, if I count right.

TERRI: (Dead pan) We thought it was morning.

DAD: A likely story.

JESSIE: We couldn't sleep. Nick said I should read the rest of the Christmas story. But...you've read it...

DAD: ...(Surprised what he has done) So I have...

JESSIE: ...to us, Dad.

(JESSIE nods to TERRI and NICK.)

(JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK nod to DAD.)

(JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK move closer to MOM and DAD.)

MOM: And we're sitting here together because of it.

DAD: (Realized what has happened) So we are.

NICK: You see! Things can change! They really can! (Gets up and hugs DAD)
Merry Christmas, Daddy. (Then sits down.)

(JESSIE and TERRI get up and hug MOM and DAD.)

TERRI: Merry Christmas, Mom, Dad. (Together)

JESSIE: Merry Christmas.

(TERRI and JESSIE sit down.)

MOM: (To DAD) (In a dainty fashion) Don't we (Emphasis) have a little chore to do, dear?

DAD: Give me another minute. I want to enjoy the present we've just started to unwrap together.

(MOM puts her head on DAD'S shoulder.)

(DAD puts arm around MOM.)

[Spots slow fade to out]

[Spots off as all exit]

(MOM, DAD, JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK exit stage right.)

[Song continues]

[Spots on CHOIR]

[Spots off CHOIR when Song completed]

EPILOGUE

[Spot on NARRATOR as enters]

(NARRATOR enters from stage left and stops after two steps on stage. NARRATOR looks on scene.)

NARRATOR: (To audience) (Earnestly) It's the season of hope. (With finality)
Things can change after all, can't they....

(NARRATOR ponders and smiles.)

(NARRATOR crosses to the Christmas tree and fusses with the decorations. Then NARRATOR looks at the presents.)

...What are you going to give this Christmas? What about the gifts you've seen given tonight/this afternoon (Motions to the stage with left hand) ?...

(NARRATOR crosses to the top of stage right stairs.)

...But you'll say, "Which ones? We've seen many gifts bought and wrapped, or... being wrapped, or ...hopefully wrapped?" (Nodding) Incidentally, (Genuinely) I betcha the Dad in the last episode probably got everything wrapped and put under the tree, (Nods to audience) but I'M sentimental. What do you think?

(Turns) No, I don't mean the gifts that were being purchased or wrapped. I mean the ones that were unwrapped before us (Sweeps right hand in front) tonight/this afternoon. One in each (Emphasis) episode: joy, love, peace, and hope. These gifts are also the themes of the Sundays of the Christmas season, the Advent season.

I said before that the first Christmas gifts were given by the Wisemen to Jesus. Actually... Jesus Himself gave the first Christmas gifts to you (Points to audience) and to me (Taps chest) by coming into the world. By His virgin birth, sinless life, passion and death, and resurrection He has given to us joy, love, peace, and hope through our reconciliation with God. We have in Christmas the gifts Jesus, the son of God, has given to us.

Free gifts, but priceless. That's what He's given to us. Can we afford to give these same gifts this Christmas, to our family and friends, and even to strangers? (Opens up hands) (Slowly) Joy, love, peace, and hope--these (Emphasis) are the Four Gifts of Christmas.

[Lights up half]

[Christmas tree remains on for the rest of the play]

(Turns to another part of the audience) There you have it: "Christmas By The Bay 2000. Let's thank the cast and choir for this evening's/afternoon's performance....

(Full cast on stage for bows)

(NARRATOR leads applause.)

(Cast and NARRATOR point to CHOIR for recognition and applause.)

(Cast, CHOIR, and NARRATOR point to CHOIR DIRECTOR for recognition and bow.)

NARRATOR: ...As we conclude this performance the CHOIR will lead us in singing some of the best loved Christmas carols. You will find the words in the program. After we finish the sing-a-long, please make sure you stop at the Family Life Center (Points to the back) on your way out. Our ladies have prepared some refreshments for you. Don't miss the chocolate chip cookies, they're my favorite.

Please stand and join the CHOIR in singing.

Good night/good afternoon to you all and Merry Christmas.

(NARRATOR exits stage right.)

[Lights up]

[House lights up for Sing-a-long]

[Sing-a-long with CHOIR]

[Instrumental Christmas music as audience exits]

END OF PLAY

SCENERY PLOT

PROLOGUE: Bare stage

ACT I: Slides of mall

Set of mall

ACT II: Slides of in-town Portland

Set of in-town Portland with side of building

ACT III: Slides of exteriors of homes

Set of interior of home

ACT IV: Slides of living rooms with Christmas decorations

Set of interior of home (different than ACT III)

EPILOGUE: Set of interior of home (same as ACT IV)

PROPERTY PLOT

ACT I: Straight-back chairs

Bags of unwrapped Christmas gifts

Long Christmas lists

Boxed Christmas cards

ACT II: Home-made sign: "Homeless Vet--I need help"

Bags of unwrapped Christmas gifts

Red scarf in box

Dollar (1)

Quarters (4)

Dollars (2)

ACT III: Sofa

Low coffee table

Arm chair

Doors (2)

Straight-back chair

Shopping bags with boxed gifts: sweater, dress

CD's (2)

Long envelope containing letter and 18Æ piece of thick string

Scissors

Adhesive tape (3 rolls)

Gift tags

Pens

Wrapping paper

Platter with: coffee pot, three coffee cups and saucers, cookies.

ACT IV: Christmas tree

Christmas lights (2 strings)

Christmas ornaments

Extension cord

Tinsel

Garland

Sofa (different covering than ACT III)

Small table with books and Bible

Wrapped presents (12)

COSTUME PLOT

PROLOGUE: NARRATOR

Winter coat

ACT I: NARRATOR

Same as PROLOGUE

MOM, DAD, JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK

Winter coats, scarves, and gloves

SHOPPER (1)

Winter coat and hat

MARCIA and MICHAEL

Winter coats, scarves, and gloves

ACT II: NARRATOR

Scarf and gloves

KATHY, CLAIRE, AND MARTHA

Winter coats, hats, and gloves

HOMELESS MAN

Unkempt beard, hat, coat, and boots--one without laces

SHOPPER (1)

Winter coat, hat, and gloves

MOTHER and DAUGHTER

Attractive coats, shoes, gloves, and pocketbooks

ACT III: NARRATOR

Suit/dress

KATHY, CLAIRE, and MARTHA

Dresses

Coats and hats--CLAIRE and MARTHA

ACT IV: NARRATOR

sweater and skirt/pants

JESSIE, TERRI, and NICK

Pajamas, bathrobes, and slippers

MOM

Nightgown, bathrobe, and slippers

DAD

Pajamas, bathrobe, and slippers

EPILOGUE: NARRATOR

Same as ACT IV