

**MIRACLE
IN
BETHLEHEM**

A One-Act Play

by

Delvyn C. Case, Jr.

Miracle In Bethlehem

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Characters

FRED, a tourist, age 40—50's

JULIE, FRED'S wife, age 40—50's

JOSEPH, a tourist, age 40's—50's

MARY, JOSEPH'S wife, age 40's—50's

READER of Christmas story

MARY

JOSEPH

SHEPHERDS (2)

WISEMEN (3)

Time

Present. Summer

Place

Scenes 1 and 4: A tourist bus in Bethlehem

There are three rows of two seats stage left of center facing stage left stairs.

Scenes 2 and 3: Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

There is a rough, old bench at center stage. There is a large cave with scrim stage right (darken in Scenes 1 and 4). In Scenes 3 and 4, there

are two bales of hay for sitting and a manger.

FRED, JULIE, JOSEPH, and MARY are dressed as tourists for summer travel (for entering a church). FRED carries a camera and guidebooks. JOSEPH has a weekly news magazine. Women have pocketbooks and men have caps.

MARY, JOSEPH, SHEPHERDS, and WISE MEN are dressed in Biblical costumes. SHEPHERDS have crooks and WISE MEN have ornamental boxes for gifts.

Synopsis

Scene 1: FRED, JULIE, and MARY leave the tourist bus to enter the Church of the Nativity. JOSEPH remains on the bus because he does not want to visit any shrines. MARY pleads for him to go with her. She prays he will change his mind.

Scene 2: JULIE and FRED enter the Church of the Nativity looking for the Grotto of the Nativity. Inside the Chapel of the Kings, JULIE considers that a plain forgotten cave is the real birthplace of Jesus.

Scene 3: JOSEPH enters the church looking for MARY. He passes by the plain cave in the Chapel of the Kings. He sits on a bench and listens to the Christmas story. In the cave he sees the Nativity occurring.

Scene 4: FRED, JULIE, and MARY return to the bus to find JOSEPH sitting in his seat. JOSEPH recounts how he went into the church and heard and saw the Christmas story taking place in the cave. For JOSEPH Christmas will never be the same.

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Scene 1: In the Bus

(As the lights come up, FRED and JULIE are sitting in the first row seats with JULIE upstage. JOSEPH and MARY are sitting in the second row with MARY upstage. JOSEPH is holding a news magazine. FRED and JOSEPH have caps on)

FRED: This is it! Everybody off the bus! Let's... go.

(FRED, JULIE, and MARY eagerly take off seat belts. JOSEPH takes off belt slowly reluctantly)

JULIE: I thought we'd never see it with all the trouble going on.

FRED: We're lucky.

(FRED, JULIE, and MARY stand up. FRED moves into aisle and lets JULIE out. JOSEPH lets MARY climb over him. JOSEPH puts cap on seat and reads magazine. FRED, JULIE, and MARY cross to the stage left stairs. FRED and JULIE put sunglasses on. They exit off the stairs. MARY stops at the bottom of the stairs and looks at JOSEPH with sadness. FRED motions toward JOSEPH. JULIE puts hand on MARY'S left arm and encourages her to return to JOSEPH and talk with him. MARY enters up the stairs and crosses to JOSEPH. FRED and JULIE exit up the stage left aisle)

MARY: (kindly) You can still come, dear.

JOSEPH: (holding up magazine) I'm fine here.

MARY: Don't you want to see it?

JOSEPH: What?

MARY: The birthplace of Jesus. (pointing off stage left stairs) It's inside the church.

JOSEPH: Are you one hundred percent sure it's the place?

MARY: (earnestly) It's somewhere in there. It's in the guidebooks.

JOSEPH: (reading magazine) I told you I'd come on this trip with you...

MARY: I appreciate it...

JOSEPH: (looking at MARY) But wouldn't go into (looking for the word)...shrines.

MARY: I know how you feel. (pointing stage left) This is different. (JOSEPH reads magazine) It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance. (with pleading) Won't you please come in with me?

JOSEPH: No.

MARY: I'm sorry.

JOSEPH: (looking up at MARY) Don't be.

MARY: (pointing off stage left stairs) Our friends are praying you'll come in. So am I.

JOSEPH: Go ahead. (shrugs shoulders) I'm surprised you'd all spend time praying about something as insignificant as this with so much happening in the world... (waving arm) like here in Bethlehem. You're lucky there are no bombs going off today...

MARY: You're more important to me than anything in the world—you and the kids.

JOSEPH: Thank you.

MARY: You're welcome. (JOSEPH reads magazine. MARY looks at him and prays silently with hands folded. JOSEPH looks up at MARY praying) I'm praying.

JOSEPH: I noticed. (JOSEPH reads magazine) No one's stopping you.

MARY: Prayer works.

JOSEPH: (with condescension) (turning a page of the magazine) Yes, Mary.

MARY: They read the Christmas story every day in the church. (checking wristwatch) They'll be starting soon.

JOSEPH: (looking at MARY) (with a sigh) I've heard it many times. (Mary shakes her head) A few times. Really. (MARY sighs deeply) Part of it, anyway.

MARY: (earnestly) It's real special the way they do it. It'll change

how you think about Christmas.

JOSEPH: (looking into magazine) Why should it? It's a fairy-tale with make-believe characters. (looks up with hands not fitting together) I've never seen it fit together simply.

MARY: (pleadingly) Please, Joseph!

JOSEPH: (looking up at MARY) (gently) (pause) No, Mary.

(MARY is saddened. She turns and exits off stage left stairs and up stage left aisle. JOSEPH reads magazine and turns several pages. He cannot concentrate. He puts magazine down on next seat. He looks at wristwatch. He looks off stage left stairs and up stage left aisle. He taps knees with both hands. He picks up magazine and puts it down again. He puts on cap. He stands up and crosses to top of stage left stairs and looks off stage left. He sighs deeply)

JOSEPH: I'd better check on her.

(JOSEPH exits off stage left stairs and up stage left aisle)

(black out)

Scene 2: In the Church

(As the lights come up, FRED and JULIE enter from stage left. They take off sunglasses. They look around with wide gazes. JULIE notices that FRED has his cap on. She takes it off him and hands it to him. She motions this is a church. He is embarrassed. They cross to center stage and stop at center stage)

FRED: (excitedly) We're really here!

JULIE: (looking around) Where's the rest of our group?

FRED: They went ahead.

JULIE: I told you to hurry.

FRED: I wanted to look at the doors of the church. (tapping guidebook) They're mentioned here. They're so old!

(JULIE crosses to stage left stairs)

JULIE: (looking off stage left stairs) Now we're lost.

(JULIE crosses to FRED)

FRED: (looking around) We'll find them. I didn't want to miss this part of the church. (looking around) (not impressed) Now I'm not so sure. It's pretty austere. What could happen here?

(FRED crosses to stage right stairs and looks off stage right stairs.
JULIE looks around. FRED points off stairs)

FRED: (excitedly) There they are. There it is!

(JULIE crosses to FRED and they look off stage right stairs)

JULIE: (putting left hand to head) What a crowd. Another tour bus must have arrived. We'll never get in there. (sniffing) Smell it? All

that incense and wax from the candles!

FRED: (smelling) Two thousand year's worth.

JULIE: (pointing to guide book) What does the guidebook say?

FRED: (reading from guide book) "Down a flight of steps from the Chapel of the Kings..." That's where we're standing.

(JULIE looks around in awe)

JULIE: (amazed) The Wise men were here.

FRED: (not convinced) Yes. "...is the Grotto of the Nativity". (pointing off stage right stairs) (with enthusiasm) There.

(JULIE looks off stage right stairs)

FRED: (reading) "On the white marble floor on one side of the cave is a fourteen-pointed silver star engraved with the words "Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary"". It's actually written in Latin. (pointing to book) This is the English translation. (looking up at JULIE) What do you think? Great?

JULIE: It's English all right.

FRED:(pointing off stage right stairs) I mean...over there.

JULIE: (not convinced) Are you sure it's the place?

FRED: What do you mean?

JULIE: It's so... (thinking of word) touristy down there.

FRED: (shrugging shoulders) A lot of people have come here for a long time to look at it. Why not?

(FRED waves JULIE to move to the top of the stage right stairs)

FRED: Let me get a picture.

JULIE: We should look around.

(FRED aims camera)

FRED: What's the matter? You sound...

JULIE: I don't...

FRED: Just one here, first.

(JULIE looks around)

FRED: Hold it.

(JULIE points over FRED'S right shoulder. She crosses past him to stage right. FRED looks confused)

JULIE: (pointing stage right) That's it.

FRED: (turning) What?

JULIE: Don't you see?

(FRED looks stage right)

FRED: You're kidding. It's an empty cave. Nothing more. (looking around) In fact, nothing in this part of the church is impressive.

JULIE: Exactly.

FRED: I don't understand.

(JULIE crosses to FRED)

JULIE: (pointing off stage right stairs) Down there's the incense and the candles. Down there's the star and the engraving. Down there's where everybody's looking and everybody's always looked. Someone decided that's the place. Who knows why? (pointing to stage right) But here's a cave with nothing in it. No incense or candles or star or engraving. Something here impressed the Wise men. They even named this chapel for them.

FRED: (looking around) (with sarcasm) What "impressed" them?

JULIE: (waves hand over scene) The simplicity.

(FRED looks around not impressed)

FRED: (shaking head) It's not Herod's palace, that's for sure.

(FRED looks off stage right stairs longingly)

FRED: (turning to JULIE) What's your point?

JULIE: (pointing to stage right) Isn't this the way God does things? He makes something special and holy from something plain and common. Christmas is a simple story in a humble place—the Wise men understood it. It changed their lives and it changes lives today.

(FRED smiles not knowing whether to agree. FRED crosses to stage right cave. JULIE crosses with him)

FRED: (waving toward cave) Here?

JULIE: (nodding) I'm sure.

FRED: It's worth one picture, I guess. (FRED motions JULIE to move toward cave) I can't believe I'm taking a picture of an empty cave. (motions JULIE to move more) Please.

(JULIE crosses to stage right. She smiles and poses. FRED aims camera and takes picture with flash)

FRED : (pointing off stage right stairs longingly) Now can we go see everything down there?

(JULIE nods and smiles. FRED motions JULIE to exit off stairs. They cross to stage right stairs. JULIE exists off stage right stairs and FRED

follows)

(black out)

Scene 3: In the Church

(As the lights come up, JOSEPH enters from stage left. He takes several steps tentatively and looks around)

JOSEPH: Mary? (softer realizing he is in a church) Mary? (He looks at plaque on the wall near stage left entrance) “Chapel of the Kings”. (looks around as he crosses to center stage) Some wise men. There’s nothing here.

(He crosses to stage right cave. He looks inside and then around. He crosses to stage right stairs and looks off)

JOSEPH : (waving hand in front of face reacting to smell of wax and candles) So churchy!

(He crosses to bench. He wipes off bench with hand and looks with disdain at the dust)

JOSEPH : This is a tourist attraction?

READER: (read dramatically and expressively throughout)

And it came to pass in those days...

(JOSEPH looks off stage right stairs, then up, and around for the source of reading)

READER : that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world be taxed.

(JOSEPH shakes head)

JOSEPH: Same old, same old.

(JOSEPH sits down and closes eyes)

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Script**