

The Promise of Christmas

By

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## ACT I

This is a simple one-act children's play that involves only 2 speaking parts consisting of the Reader and the Christmas Fanatic. However, it can be divided up to accommodate more than one Reader.

The main premise is that of the Christmas Story being read aloud by the Reader(s) to the audience from a Giant Storybook. The book's "illustrations" are acted out on the opposite side of the stage and it also features some selected Christmas Carols sung by a Children's Choir.

Each of the "illustrations" is centered around a particular passage of scripture that contains a promise related to the advent of Christ.

Most of the scene changes as well as the staging of props and characters, etc. is done overtly with the assistance of two or more black-clad "stage ninjas."

### Scene 1

*The scene opens upon the Reader(s) sitting on a small settee at one end of the stage. Upon the Reader's lap is an oversized storybook titled "The Promise." At the other end of the stage is a curtained partition, which will later be opened to reveal the "illustrations" of the storybook.*

READER

Welcome to Story Time Theater! Today we bring you a wonderful story! It is a story that has been told over and over again for thousands of years, in numerous languages and in numerous ways. It's a story packed with drama and mystery, danger and fame! And it even comes with its very own Hollywood-style blockbuster ending, featuring a host of heavenly angels. But the very best thing of all is that this is a TRUE story.

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(Overenthusiatically jumping up from where they were seated)

Oh yay!! It's the Christmas story, right?! I LOVE to read the Christmas story!! And I LOVE to look at all the pictures, with the angels, and the shepherds, and the wisemen, and the happy animals, and Mary, and her little baby... Hey, do you have any pictures in that big book of yours?

READER

Yes! There's pictures.  
(smiles sweetly)

(CONTINUED)

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

Well... how are you gonna show them to us?

READER

Like this! Look!

(gestures to where curtain opens to reveal the first Illustration - Adam and Eve. They should be simply dressed in white clothing (or biblical style tunics), and each is standing on opposite sides of a large palm tree which is encircled by a large stuffed snake. Eve is holding out an apple.)

This is the first picture!

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(reacting automatically)

Ooooh! Pretty!

(with sudden realization)

Wait a minute... that's Adam and Eve! I thought this was the Christmas story! Where's the stable and the manger and the little baby Jesus?

READER

It IS the Christmas story. But the Christmas story doesn't start with a baby in a manger. That's how the story ends. The Christmas story actually goes way back to the very beginning of mankind. It starts with a promise, a promise that was given to a serpent!

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

A serpent! Yuck!! I hate serpents! Serpents are not very Christmassy AT ALL!! Why do you want to read us a story about serpents?

READER

(starting to show a little annoyance)

This isn't a story about serpents! Now if you will please just sit down and let me begin.

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(sitting down sheepishly)

Oh... okay.

READER

(reading from the giant storybook)

*Note: During the reading of the stories, the actors in the Illustrations are able to move around somewhat and subtly mime some of the action.*

Once upon a time, long, long ago at the very dawn of history, there was a man and a woman who lived in a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

READER (cont'd)

garden. This garden was the most beautiful garden that there ever was, because God himself had planted it, and it had no weeds and no thorns. And within that garden was every kind of fruit tree imaginable.

God told the man and woman that they could eat freely from all of the trees in the garden, except for one tree that was in the middle of the garden. That tree was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and God told them that if they ate from that tree, they would surely die.

One day a serpent came into the garden and he tricked the woman into eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He tricked her by lying to her. He told her that God didn't want her to eat the fruit of that tree, because if she did, she would become just like God. So the woman chose to believe the serpent instead of God, and she took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate it.

*Eve mimics biting the apple and then handing it to Adam and he takes a bite.*

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(stands up, interrupting, and points at Adam and Eve)

Ummm... excuse me but, are they allowed to be moving around like that? I thought these were supposed to be pictures.

READER

They are! But these are MOVING pictures.

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(sheepishly sitting back down)

Oh... okay.

READER

(continuing to read where she left off)

But God was not happy with what they had done, for they had disobeyed him. They had sinned. And because of their act of disobedience, sin came into the world.

So God cursed the man, and he cursed the woman, and he cursed the ground, and he cursed the serpent. This is what he said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

(CONTINUED)

But within this curse there was also a promise, for the "offspring" of the woman that God warned the serpent about was going to be Jesus Christ. Jesus would one day come into the world as the offspring of a woman, and he would strike down this serpent, who was in fact, the devil!

CURTAIN CLOSES ON ADAM AND EVE SCENE. TRANSITION TO ABRAHAM AND STARS SCENE.

READER (cont'd)

(reading from the storybook)

As time went by men multiplied upon the earth. Generations of people lived and died; some of these people did not believe in God and were very wicked, and some of them did believe in God, and were righteous.

There was one particular man, named Abraham, who believed in God. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had many possessions but they had no children, and they were also both very old. One day Abraham said to the Lord...

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(interrupting)

Is Abraham a wiseman?

READER

No! Well... yes, technically he IS a wise man, but not like what you mean. Anyway... getting back to Abraham.

*Christmas Fanatic sits back down and the Reader continues reading from the book.*

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had many possessions but they had no children, and they were also both very old. One day Abraham said to the Lord, "You have given me no children to leave my possessions to after I die; so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the Lord said to him: "A servant will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir."

*The Reader turns the page and the curtain opens to reveal Abraham holding a staff and looking up at the stars.*

Then the Lord took Abraham outside and said to him, "Look up at the sky and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to Abraham, "So shall your offspring be."

And so Abraham and Sarah did have a son, and they named him Isaac, a name which means "laughter," for they were filled with joy at the birth of their son and they loved him very, very much.

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*Isaac runs into the Illustration to join Abraham. Isaac is carrying a bundle of sticks. He stands next to Abraham and they both stare up at the stars.*

One day, several years later, God tested Abraham by telling him to do a very strange and difficult thing. God said to Abraham, "Take Issac, your son - your only son, whom you love - and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Now Abraham loved his son Isaac very, very much. But he also loved God, and he believed what God had told him when he said that through his son Isaac there would come many, many descendants, as numerous as the stars in the sky.

So Abraham got up very early the next morning, and he and his young son Isaac traveled up to the mountain. Along the way, Isaac asked, "Father, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

CURTAIN CLOSES ON ABRAHAM SCENE. TRANSITION TO SCENE WITH JACOB ON HIS DEATH BED BLESSING HIS TWELVE SONS.

Now, we may think that Abraham was just saying that in order to trick Isaac so that he wouldn't try to run away. But that isn't true. Abraham wasn't lying to Isaac. Abraham believed what God had promised him, and he knew that God always keeps his promises. He knew that Isaac was destined to grow up and get married and have children. He knew that, one way or another, Isaac was going to live, even if that meant that God would resurrect him from the dead!

At last, Abraham reached the place that God had told him about. He built an altar there and arranged the wood on top of it. Then Abraham bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he picked up the knife. At that very moment, the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," Abraham replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," the Lord said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son,

(MORE)

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READER (cont'd)

I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed - all because you have obeyed me."

*Curtain opens to reveal Illustration of Jacob and his twelve sons. Jacob is reclining on a cot, leaning up on one elbow with his other placed on the head of Judah who is kneeling on the stage in front of him. Encircled around the cot behind Jacob are the rest of his sons. Note: The actor that played Abraham should appear in this scene looking exactly as he did in the previous scene.*

READER (cont'd)

Abraham's son, Isaac, had a son named Jacob who was the father of TWELVE sons. Their names were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin.

*(as their names are announced each of the actors in the scene should briefly indicate who they are by standing up, or waving, etc. Note: if there are not enough actors to portray all 12 sons, they can double up the roles during the scene by moving to different spots and answering to different names.)*

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

*(blurting out from a seated position)*

Hey, Benjamin looks exactly like Abraham!

READER

*(briefly caught off guard, since the same actor really is playing both Abraham and Benjamin)*

Oh! Uh... there's just a strong family resemblance!

*(continues reading)*

One day when Jacob was very old and close to death he called all of his sons together and said: "Gather around me, and I will tell you what will happen to each of you in the days to come." He gave a promise to each one of his sons. When it came time for Judah's turn, Jacob said this to him: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor."

This promise that there would always be a ruler from the tribe of Judah came true, starting with King David,

(MORE)

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READER (cont'd)

who was the first King from the tribe of Judah, and ending with Jesus. Jesus Christ is the ruler that all the nations will honor, and his kingdom will have no end.

CURTAIN CLOSES ON JACOB AND SONS.    TRANSITION TO BETHLEHEM  
SCENE.

READER

King David was a good king who loved God, but his son, King Solomon, was not faithful to God and after Solomon's death the land of Israel was divided into two kingdoms, with two sets of kings. The northern kingdom was called the kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom was called the kingdom of Judah. Generations passed and the kings in each of the kingdoms, both the north and the south, did wicked things in the sight of God. They worshipped other gods and made sacrifices to idols and they encouraged their people to do the same.

God sent prophets to these wicked kings, he warned them that if they continued to disobey him, their land would be overtaken by other nations and they would lose their kingdoms. They did not listen to the prophets but continued to commit wickedness in the sight of God, and eventually the entire land of Israel was overtaken by other nations - the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and eventually, the Romans.

Now a prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. Many of the books in the Bible were written by the prophets. They wrote down the things that God spoke to them. One of these prophets was a man named Isaiah, who lived in the kingdom of Israel, 700 years before the birth of Christ.

The prophet Isaiah lived a long time and he wrote many prophecies during his lifetime. One of these prophecies is a very special promise about the birth of Christ. It says, "The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.",

*The children's choir has assembled on stage by this point. Now the lights come up on the children's choir.*

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(standing up again)

Excuse me, but... that picture doesn't seem to have anything to do with the story!

(CONTINUED)



READER

That isn't a picture. They're going to sing a song.

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(getting excited)

Is it a CHRISTMAS song?!

READER

(smiling sweetly)

Yes. It IS a Christmas song.

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

Oh yay!! I LOVE Christmas songs!!!

READER

(speaking through her clenched smile)

Well then, perhaps you should sit down and listen to this one!

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(sheepishly sitting down)

Oh... okay.

SONG: O COME, O COME EMMANUEL

*Children's choir sings, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"*

*Note: Choir continues to remain onstage until their next song (O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

READER

(reading from story book)

You've probably heard that name "Immanuel" before, since it's in a lot of Christmas carols. You may even know someone named Immanuel. But do you know what it means? The name "Immanuel" means, "God with us." And that's just what happened at Christmas! God came to earth to be born as a little baby!

Now we come to another promise about Christmas which was written by another prophet, named Micah. Micah predicted the town where Jesus would be born...

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(standing up and interrupting)

Wait a minute... isn't Michael one of the angels?

READER

This is MiCAH, not MiCHAEL. There's no L.

*The children's choir begins to get restless and slightly noisy.*

(CONTINUED)

## CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(straining over the perceived noise)

What?

READER

(Yelling to be heard over the noisy children)

No L! No L!

*Startled and confused, the children's choir begins to sing, "The First Noel."*

READER (cont'd)

(flustered, turns to yell at the choir)

NOT YET!

*The children's choir abruptly stops singing and stands quietly.*

READER (cont'd)

(struggling to regain composure)

Okay... now, where was I? Oh yes! The prophet Micah...

(reading from the storybook)

Micah predicted the town where Jesus would be born. He said, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past."

Bethlehem was a small town in the land of Judah, but it had a famous history that went way back, way before the time of Micah. Bethlehem was the setting for the book of Ruth. It was where Ruth met and married her husband Boaz, and where she gave birth to Obed, who was to be the grandfather of David, the righteous King of Israel. And Bethlehem was also the ancestral home of a young girl named Mary and her betrothed husband, Joseph.

*The curtain opens to reveal a the town of Bethlehem made out of building cutouts.*

SONG: O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

CURTAIN CLOSES ON BETHLEHEM SCENE. TRANSITION TO SCENE WITH  
MARY AND ANGEL

READER (cont'd)

Mary and Joseph lived in the little village of Nazareth, which was in the region of Galilee in the land of Judea. The land of Judea used to belong to the Kingdom of Israel, way, way back during the time of King David. But, as we told you before, that land was

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

READER (cont'd)

divided up and overtaken by other nations - first the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, and now it was controlled by the Roman Empire, and under the rule of the Roman Emperor, Ceasar Augustus.

But even after all of that time, there were many, many people living in the land of Judea who still loved and worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They believed all of the promises of God that had been written by the prophets. And they still believed that one day God would send them a righteous king. A king from the tribe of Judah, whom all the nations would honor, and whose kingdom would have no end.

*Curtain opens to reveal the Illustration of Mary and the Angel. Mary is standing and staring at the Angel, whose arms are outstretched as though proclaiming something. There is a cot on the stage behind them.*

READER (cont'd)

Mary and Joseph were among these people who still believed in God and all of his promises. And they tried their very best to do all the things that God required of them.

One day, a heavenly angel, named Gabriel, appeared before Mary and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was very confused and disturbed and tried to think what the angel could mean. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this be, since I don't have a husband?" Gabriel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God." Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

*Mary leaves the scene, but the curtain remains open. Joseph enters the scene and lays down on the cot as though sleeping. The Angels steps behind the cot and strikes the same pose as before.*

(CONTINUED)

READER (cont'd)

When Mary's fiance, Joseph, learned that Mary was pregnant, he did not understand what had happened. He assumed that she must have been unfaithful to him, and he was trying to figure how he could break off their engagement in a way that would not bring disgrace to her.

One night as he was trying to sort all of this out, an angel appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

*Angel taps Joseph on the shoulder, waking him.*  
When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife.

CURTAIN CLOSES ON JOSEPH AND ANGEL. TRANSITION TO NATIVITY SCENE.

READER (cont'd)

During this time, Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire, so he ordered that everyone must return to their ancestral town to register for the census. Since Joseph was a descendant of King David, he and Mary had to leave Nazareth and travel to the town of Bethlehem, which was the ancient home of King David. Mary was VERY pregnant by this time, and about to have her baby any minute, but the town was very crowded with all of the people who had come there to register for the census, and there was no lodging available at the inn. So Mary gave birth to her son in a stable and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.

During that very same night, there were some shepherds who were staying out in the fields nearby, watching over their sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared before them, and the glory of the Lord shone all around them. They were terrified! But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people! Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you! He is Christ, the Lord! And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." All at once a great multitude of the heavenly host appeared with the angel. They were praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

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## SONG: JOY TO THE WORLD

*Curtain opens to reveal the Nativity Scene as the children's Choir sings, "Joy to the World." At the front of the stage is a manger with the baby Jesus and Joseph and Mary standing on either side. The Angel is also there along with at least 2 "shepherds" and some prop sheep. (Note: other actors depicting shepherds or angels, etc. can also be in the scene, but no "wisemen!")*

READER (cont'd)

(with building enthusiasm)

After the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds looked at one another and said, "Let's go to Bethlehem right now and see this thing that the Lord just told us about." So they hurried off to the town of Bethlehem, where they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus, who was lying in a manger, all wrapped up in swaddling clothes, just like the angel had said. After they had seen the baby, the shepherds went out and told everyone they could find about all that they had seen, and what the angel had said to them about this child. Everyone was amazed at what the shepherds told them. And as the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen. For they saw, with their very own eyes, the Saviour who been promised from long ago, the king who would bring salvation to all God's people, and whose kingdom would never end. They had seen Jesus, the promise of Christmas!

READER (cont'd)

(closing the storybook with a satisfactory thud)

The End!

CHRISTMAS FANATIC

(leaping up from their seat and clapping enthusiastically)

Yay! Yay! Yay for Christmas! Yay for Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus! Oh wow! This is my very favorite part!!! Look there's a shepherd with his happy sheep! And there's the angel, and the wisemen... wait a minute... WHERE ARE THE WISEMEN?!! How can you have a Christmas story with NO wisemen?!!!

*At this point two of the "stage ninjas" go out to where Christmas Fanatic is standing and begin to forcibly remove Christmas Fanatic from the room.*

(CONTINUED)

CHRISTMAS FANATIC (cont'd)

(continuing their rant while begin  
forcibly removed by the stage ninjas)

What about the frankinsence and the gold and the  
myrrh!! You've gotta have myrrh! And what about that  
little drummer boy!! I didn't see any drummer boy in  
there...!

(etc., etc., etc.)

READER

(speaking over Christmas Fanatic as  
they're being dragged from the room)

Well, that's all the time we have for today! We want to  
thank you for joining us here at Story Time Theater,  
and we wish all of you a very Merry Christmas!!

*The entire casts joins the Children's Choir in  
singing an encore of "Joy to the World" as the  
audience is encouraged to sing along.*

THE END