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**Box 18, Folder 22 - "The Gifts: A Nativity Play for Children"
(transcribed copies) (E.M.S.)**

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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THE GIFTS

A NATIVITY PLAY FOR

CHILDREN

by

MORTIMER STANDING

COTTON CONTENT
EZEKIAH
MILLERS PATTS

THE GIFTS

A NATIVITY PLAY FOR
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Our Lady.
St. Joseph.

Samuel)
John) small Jewish boys
Michael)

Rachel)
Ruth) small Jewish girls
Elizabeth)

Tullius)
Balbus) Roman soldiers

Angel or Choir of Angels

Also Shepherds and Kings

SCENE I A Road near Bethlehem
SCENE II Another part of the same
SCENE III The Stable at Bethlehem
TIME: The First Christmas
-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

"The only tolerable aim for a straightforward
Nativity Play is to teach the mystery of the Incarnation,
and inspire a fitting reverence in its presence."

Canon Drinkwater

Telling the Good News, p. 185

(Burnes and Oates)

INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE PLAY - THE GIFTS

The following notes are only suggestions, and are primarily meant for those who have had little or no experience in producing children's plays; and, in any case, are not intended to be slavishly followed.

THE CHARACTERS

The chief actors, in addition to St. Joseph and Our Lady, are six small Jewish children - three boys and three girls. Their ages should be around seven, though it would not matter if some were a little older and others a little younger. The younger the children the better, really, provided that they understand their parts and can do them properly.

The two Roman soldiers should, if possible, be played by older children, 12 to 14 years of age.

The Shepherds and the Three Kings have no speeches but do their part in mime. It is, of course, not absolutely necessary to have these; but they help to create the right atmosphere, and at the same time enable more children to take part.

The Angels. Angels' voices play an important part in Scene III. This can be arranged according to circumstances and the producer's tastes and the means at his disposal. The simplest way is just to have one clear, well-modulated voice, off stage, saying the angel's part. As against that one could have a choir of angels declaiming the verses, or - if you can find or compose suitable music - singing them. If you have a chorus of angels it would be best to keep them off stage until the final tableau. Otherwise their visible presence all the time would be a distraction, and might interfere with the steady progress of the action. But, whatever way it is done, it is important that the words spoken by the angels should be enunciated so clearly that the audience have no difficulty in following them. At those moments when the angels' voices break in and say their verses, everyone on the stage should freeze for a few moments into immobility.

SCENERY AND SETTINGS

The settings for Scenes I and II are simply a road near Bethlehem; and at a pinch these scenes could be played without any special scenery; though of course a painted background is always an advantage. In Scene II there should be a log of wood, or a mound of some sort, at the back of the stage for Our Lady and St. Joseph to sit on; and also a large slab of stone or the stump of a tree to serve as the doll's bed. Of course, any other properties as convenient for the purpose would do just as well, and there might be in addition a bush or a tree, or something else,

to serve as a kind of screen partially hiding St. Joseph and Our Lady from the children at their play in the first part of the scene.

Scene III, the stable in Bethlehem, can be arranged in many different ways according to individual tastes and circumstances. A simple, effective and inexpensive way of doing it - and one that can be very quickly set up - is as follows: It consists in making a sort of lean-to from the back of the stage, the kind of structure one sometimes sees in the paintings of the early Italian masters. For this purpose one needs four rustic poles from two to three inches in diameter (or wider) two of which are six feet long and two, five. The structure must be just high enough to fit in harmoniously with the size of the people acting. The two longer poles should be fixed by some clamping arrangement, which can be quickly fastened, to the back of the stage; whilst the two shorter ones stand out towards the audience (see diagram). There must also be some sort of device by which the two shorter poles, nearest the audience, can be firmly fixed to the floor of the stage so that they cannot slip. A small projecting spike which fits into a small hole in the floor of the stage does this very well. (But again this is only a suggestion and you may be able to think up something better).

Supported by these four poles is the movable roof made of a rectangular wooden framework, fitted with interlacing laths, which can be covered with branches of evergreen, or straw making a kind of thatch. By a simple arrangement of staples and hooks this roof-frame can be hooked on to the top of the supporting poles; all this can be so made as to be set up in two or three minutes.

Under this pent-house the manger should be so placed that it is clearly visible from the auditorium. If you are in the country you may be able to borrow an actual manger from a local farmer (we once borrowed some real shepherds too!). Otherwise it is quite easy to make one. If one prefers to have the manger raised above the floor, it is easy to manage this by resting it on two pairs of crossed sticks (see diagram) - one pair at each end. In any case things should be so arranged that the manger slopes somewhat upwards from the footlights towards the back of the stage so that the divine Bambino's head and arms can be seen, and also the "chalice" and the "Cross", which are eventually fixed there in such a manner as to be visible above the far end of the manger.

OTHER STAGE PROPERTIES - THE GIFTS

The Cup and Ball. This consists of a cup (or a cup shaped piece of wood) attached to a handle, to which is fastened a ball on a string. The game is to swing up the ball and try and get it to fall into the cup. This toy has gone out of fashion, though occasionally one may still come across it in certain toy-shops. Instead of searching the shops for it, probably in vain, the best and the quickest thing is to make one's own, which is not at all difficult. One way is to get a joiner to turn a wooden cup on a handle on his lathe. In this case one would have to paint it over with silver or gold paint so that it would look like a chalice.

Then one could buy a wooden or a rubber ball, the right size to fit the cup, and attach it with a piece of string. Another easy way is this. You buy one of those little "silver" cups - miniature prize cups for sports - which one can get in Woolworths for half-a-crown. Then you cut off the handles at both sides and the base (see diagram). Next you get an old or a cheap tool, such as a bradawl or a chisel, with a wooden handle. After removing the metal part from the handle you insert in its place the stalk of the silver cup, the base of which has already been removed. All you have to do now is to drill - or get someone to drill - a small hole near the bottom of the cup. Into this you thread the loose end of the string to which the ball is attached, fixing it there by a knot. If you use one of those little silver sports-cups just referred to a golf ball will fit exactly, and you can drill a hole through it for attaching the string.

An important practical point to remember (without which you might run into a very awkward moment) is that after Scene I and and before Scene III this knot, which keeps the string fastened to the cup must be cut off or so loosened that it can be made easy for the ball and cup to become separated "by accident". In the short time he is on the stage before this happens Samuel can keep the ball and cup together by pressing his thumb over the end of the string against the base of the cup, releasing it at the appropriate moment.

The Sword. This can be made - and is better made - out of wood, and the blade covered with silver paint. The hilt should be ornamented with "jewels" (imitation ones of course will do) which can be attached to the hilt with fine copper wire or any other convenient way. The sword - which represents the Old Testament dispensation and its idea of the Messiah and His coming - is later turned, symbolically, into a Cross by being placed upside-down. It is placed behind the cup, which has now changed into a "chalice", whilst the ball, now suspended in the air above the manger, represents, symbolically, the world in space.

These three objects, the ball, the cup and the sword, are the gifts presented by the boys; and it is important - as the play proceeds - that their symbolical significance should be made manifest. In order to facilitate this these gifts must be placed - by St. Joseph - in pre-arranged places so that they may be clearly visible, (and spot-lighted if you have such an arrangement). That everything would happen as it were easily and naturally and without a hitch, some arrangement must be made beforehand, on the back-stage end of the manger, by which, first the handle of the cup (now the chalice) and secondly, the blade of the sword (now the cross) can be fixed in a moment in their proper positions. This can be done with a little ingenuity either by driving in parallel nails to receive them, or with a wire frame-work, or in any other way you prefer. Whatever the means chosen it must be so made that - when the sword and cup are fixed in their places - the cup stands like a chalice above the end of the manger; whilst the inverted sword shows behind it like a jewelled cross.

Another small but important practical detail relates to what is done with the ball. As the two boys, Samuel and Midhael, together present the cup and ball "from both of them" to Our Lady, these objects become separated (this is because the string has come loose from the cup in the manner described above). Our Lady then gives the ball to St. Joseph who hangs it by the string above the manger, like a baby's toy above a pram. To enable St. Joseph to do this easily there should be placed - already before the scene begins - a piece of thin string hanging from the pent-house roof. This has a little loop at the bottom end of it to which St. Joseph can quickly and easily attach the loose end of the string. The ball now hangs over the cradle and - this being done - is the "cue" for the corresponding verse recited by the angel.

As far as the little girls' presents are concerned the only one that presents any difficulty is the ephod. (A little crown can easily be made out of cardboard covered with gold paint or gold paper, whilst the little shepherds crook can be made from a bent twig or a bit of wire wound round with ribbon or cloth). A real ephod was a very complicated garment, a sort of breast-plate worn by the High Priest, with the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Here of course something smaller and much simpler would serve. The best way, perhaps, would be to consult some book on the Old Testament which has illustrations in it, and make something similar to the ephod but less complicated. The important thing is to make twelve divisions, which could be done by sewing or sticking together small rectangles of different coloured cloths. (see figure).

SOME PRACTICAL POINTS

SCENE I In this scene the action is straightforward and simple. The only point that needs drawing attention to is to remember that when the boys have their skirmishes about the coming of the Messiah their struggle should be very brief and conventional - all over in a few seconds. Anything longer would be out of place in a Nativity Play.

SCENE III When the interval which precedes this scene is over and the lights have been turned down in the hall, but before the curtain goes up, it would be appropriate to have a carol sung or played in the comparative darkness, so preparing the right atmosphere for the coming tableau of the Holy Family in the Stable.

And when the curtain does go up for this tableau the lighting should still be very subdued. The best effect - if one can manage it - is to arrange it so that the faces of St. Joseph and Our Lady are lit up from a light concealed in the straw. A strong flashlight is best so as not to give any risk of a heated electric bulb setting the straw alight. If this light is not strong enough to illumine the figures, as might be the case in a large hall, then of course more light should be added, but only the necessary minimum.

The first part of Scene III, as said above, is a tableau; and, while the figures remain in position motionless, a carol should be sung. In our opinion, "Silent Night", for all its being hackneyed, is still the best for giving just the right atmosphere.

When this carol is finished - or as much of it as is desired - the tableau comes to life with the entrance of the Shepherds. While the shepherds come and act their part one might play, as soft background music, "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night", or some other suitable music. There is a good number to have for the shepherds, as it balances with that of the Three Kings who come in later.

Each shepherd kneels and adores, and then gives his present to Our Lady, who hands it on to St. Joseph. Then they pass on - walking backwards perhaps (after all it is a real King Who is holding His Court) and then off by the opposite exit, remaining ready to come in again for the final tableau. Presents which the Shepherds might give might include a woollen scarf, a sheep-skin coat (to be used as a coverlet) or simply a bundle of wool to be spun and knitted later by His Mother into a garment for Her Child.

As the shepherds go off the little boys come in, and all proceeds as in the text. The most difficult part of this scene is the giving of the boy's presents and the knowing what to do with them - which has already been described.

The girls' presents are easier to dispose of. The ephod might be put over the Child in the manger - it is small and light - whilst the crown and the crook could be placed in any convenient positions where they show, e.g. on the ends of the two crossed sticks that support the manger at that end of it nearest the audience: they would then be easily visible by all.

When the boys and girls have given their gifts, and had their last peep at the Divine Infant, they retire somewhat into the background to make room for the Three Kings.

Possibly some people might object to the childrens' singing "Happy Birthday to You". But after all it was - and is - a "birthday party"; and if the children do it with simplicity and reverence it is quite appropriate; and I am sure Our Lady Herself would not have objected. But if anyone does feel qualms about this little episode it can easily be omitted.

When the boys and girls have given their gifts and had their last peep at the Divine Infant, they retire somewhat into the background to make room for the Three Kings. As far as the gifts of the Kings are concerned - the gold, frankincense and myrrh - it is quite sufficient for them to present three boxes, the more elaborate and ornamental looking the better.

When the Kings have done their part it would be a good thing to have a short curtain, so as to give a few moments' time in which

to arrange everybody and everything in their places for the final tableau. In this latter the children should, of course, be nearest to the crib, with the shepherds on one side and the Kings on the other. Adeste Fideles, in which the audience could be invited to join, is a very suitable carol to go with the final tableau.

Music.

It is well to remember that well-chosen and well performed music makes an enormous difference to the atmosphere of a Nativity Play. If there is no choir, a good gramophone or radiogram makes an excellent substitute; but there must be somebody in charge of it who knows - and has practiced - exactly what to put on and when to do so.

In the Family Circle

It is quite easy to produce the main part of this little play in a private house. To begin with the shepherds and kings could be cut out, if there are not enough actors to go round. Furthermore, it is quite feasible to cut out that part of Scene I in which the Roman Soldiers are present. This can be done without any fuss or re-arrangement simply by shortening the action, as follows: when you come to that part of Scene I where the boys are skirmishing for the first time you simply go straight on to where they are having their second "battle for the Messiah", i.e. to the place where Our Lady and St. Joseph enter, and where Michael says: "Pax! A minute! There's some people coming." This sentence is taken as the cue to end the skirmish, and the action then goes on without further change to the end of the scene.

If one is doing the play in a private house one can easily convert a bay-window alcove into the stable. Nor is it necessary to have a curtain, though it is easy enough to fix one up with a piece of string across in front of the stage to which one attaches a large sheet. This can be run back and forth along the string very easily by fastening to the top of the "curtain" (sheet) little metal rings at intervals. Footlights are not necessary either in a small room. Someone can just switch on and off the ordinary lights; good effect can also be obtained by using several strong reading lamps.

Costumes

Oriental costumes don't change much with the centuries. The main thing is to have plenty of colour. A dark background, like a rug hung up, helps to throw out the colours in a small room. Illustrations from family Bibles, or from a Child's Life of Christ, such as is found in most houses, will give one plenty of ideas to work on.

THE ONE ESSENTIAL

Finally it is well to remind ourselves, from time to time, that there is one quality in a Nativity play which is more important than all the rest put together. However brilliant may be the acting, however beautiful the costumes, however perfect the setting and stage-technique generally - all these things will be as nothing, or "as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal", unless both actors and audience are touched to a deeper sense of wonder at and reverence for the central mystery of our Faith - the Incarnation.

In the Creed we acknowledge, week by week, that God was made Man; but here, at the crib, we are confronted with an even more stupendous fact - that God was made a Baby. As St. Augustine says:

"The Maker of man was made man that the Ruler of the stars might suck at the breast, that Bread might be hungered, Light sleep, the Way be wearied and the Fountain thirst....."

"In order that weakness might become strong, strength become weak He is the Son of God without a mother, the Son of man without a father; unutterably wise - in His wisdom a Babe without utterance."

"He so loved us that, for our sakes, He was made in Time - He through Whom all Times are made. He was created of a Mother Whom He created; was carried by hands which He had fashioned; sucked at the breasts which He had filled; and was in the manger in wordless Infancy - He the Word without Whom all human eloquence is mute

"He lies in the manger, but contains the whole world; He sucks at the breast but feeds the angels; He is wrapped in swaddling clothes, but vests us in immortality. He finds no place in the inn, but He makes for Himself a temple in the hearts of His believers."

Venite Adoremus

S C E N E IA ROAD NEAR BETHLEHEM. TWO SMALL JEWISH BOYS PLAYING TOGETHER

SAMUEL: (PLAYING WITH CUP AND BALL) Look! This is how you do it. You've got to get the ball into the cup - like this. Missed it that time!

JOHN: Oh, do let me have a try!

SAMUEL: In a minute. (TRIES AGAIN) It's not so easy as it looks. There, you have a try. (GIVES IT TO JOHN)

(JOHN MAKES SEVERAL ATTEMPTS - PROBABLY UNSUCCESSFULLY - AND THEN.....)

JOHN: Where did you get it?

SAMUEL: My Daddy went to Jerusalem last week to "present" my little baby brother at the Temple, and he brought this back for me.

JOHN: How nice! I wish I had a little baby brother to be "presented".

(ENTER MICHAEL, RUNNING, WITH TOY SWORD)

MICHAEL: Your money or your life!

(DAVID CATCHES MICHAEL'S WRIST AND SLOWLY BRINGS DOWN THE SWORD)

SAMUEL: Oh, I say, what a beautiful sword!

JOHN: Is it a real one?

MICHAEL: Yes! at least the handle is a real one. It has real jewels on it.

SAMUEL: How it shines!

MICHAEL: It had a real blade on it once, too; but it was broken off in a battle.

JOHN: Who gave it to you?

MICHAEL: My Uncle. It used to belong to my great grandfather. He fought for Judas Machabeus against the Old Eliezer put a wooden blade on it for me.

JOHN: I vote we play at something.

OTHERS: All right - let's.

JOHN: What shall we play at?

SAMUEL: I know! Daniel in the lion's den.

JOHN: I'm tired of that game.

MICHAEL: So am I; we played it yesterday and the day before.

JOHN: Can't somebody think of a new game?

SAMUEL: I've got an idea!

OTHERS: What?

SAMUEL: Let's play that the Messiah has come.

OTHERS: All right.

JOHN: How do you play it?

(ENTER TWO ROMAN SOLDIERS, WHO STAND WATCHING FROM THE BACK OF THE STAGE)

SAMUEL: Well, my daddy says that - when the Messiah comes - He will set up a kingdom and rule over the whole world.

(THE SOLDIERS EXCHANGE GLANCES)

MICHAEL: My mummy makes me say a prayer every night that the Messiah will come too.

JOHN: So does mine.

SAMUEL: Old Reuben, who lives next door to us says that the Messiah may come any day now. He knows an old man in Jerusalem, called Simeon, who says that God has promised him that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah. He's very old already, so he can't live much longer.

JOHN: (Impatiently) Well, what I want to know is: how do we play this game that the Messiah has come. Is there any fighting in it?

SAMUEL: Sure to be. If the Messiah is going to rule over the whole world He will have to beat the Romans first.

MICHAEL: And that won't be an easy job!

SAMUEL: When I grow up I'm going to fight for the Messiah.

JOHN: So am I.

MICHAEL: I too.

SAMUEL: Well, we can't all fight for him now or we shouldn't be able to have a battle; so I'll be the Messiah and you two can be the Romans.

JOHN: All right. Come on Michael, let's get ready. (JOHN AND MICHAEL DRAW APART TO ONE SIDE OF THE STAGE)

SAMUEL: You can put up a good fight for it - as the Romans always do - but you will have to let yourselves be beaten in the end, for of course the Messiah could never be killed.

JOHN: Come on then, let's begin.

(THE TWO "ARMIES" ENGAGE IN BATTLE, WHICH IS OVER VERY QUICKLY. SAMUEL FIRST KNOCKS OUT MICHAEL. THIS IS DONE VERY CONVENTIONALLY WITH A TAP ON THE HEAD, AT WHICH MICHAEL FALLS DOWN. THEREUPON SAMUEL TAKES HIS SWORD AND ATTACKS JOHN, WHO FALLS AT ONCE; AND SAMUEL KNEELS ASTRIDE HIM. ALL THIS TIME THE SOLDIERS ARE WATCHING: ONE LOOKS AMUSED, THE OTHER ANNOYED).

SAMUEL: Down you proud Roman!

TULLIUS: (TO BALBUS) Did you mark that?

BALBUS: (LAUGHING) This is a serious revolt Tullius, I think we ought to call out the legions.

TULLIUS: This is no laughing matter, Balbus. It is from such small eggs as these that open rebellion will hatch out some day (GOING TOWARDS THE BOYS) I think we'd better crack their shells a little - just to teach them better manners.

SAMUEL: (STILL ASTRIDE OF JOHN) So perish all the enemies of Israel!

TULLIUS: (ROUGHLY PULLING SAMUEL TO HIS FEET) A sword too, by Jupiter! The young cub has a sword.

BALBUS: Let me see. Why it's only a toy one! see it has a wooden blade.

TULLIUS: No matter! I wouldn't allow any Jew to carry a sword, not even in make-belief.

BALBUS: There's no need to get excited about it, it's only a childrens' game. Is Rome so weak that she is afraid to let little children play in the streets? All boys play games like that at that age: it doesn't mean a thing. There you are young man.

TULLIUS: (SNATCHING AT THE SWORD) No, by your leave! I'm quite serious Balbus. Now, you young rascals run home or I will give you the soundest thrashing you've ever had in your lives - just to show you what the Romans can do.

SAMUEL: Oh, Sir, please give me back the sword. I wouldn't mind so much if it was mine; but it really belongs to Michael. I borrowed it from him.

TULLIUS: Well, if I do give it you back, will you promise never to use it against the Romans.

(SILENCE)

There you see! What did I tell you? True Jews they are - stubborn as mules, and as dangerous as serpents.

(THE BOYS WHISPER TOGETHER A MOMENT)

SAMUEL: We promise faithfully never to use it on the side of injustice.

BALBUS: Good enough! Give it them back Tullius! That ought to be good enough for any Roman. I can't help admiring the young fellows' pluck. You needn't be afraid, Tullius, that Caesar will tumble off his throne if you give back a toy sword.

TULLIUS: (GRUDGINGLY) Well, here you are, then, and don't let me hear you saying things against the Romans again.

SAMUEL & MICHAEL) Oh, thank you Sir, thank you very much. (THE BOYS RETIRE TO THE BACK OF THE STAGE).

BALBUS: You surprise me Tullius; I believe you were really angry with those youngsters.

TULLIUS: I was indeed. It infuriates me, all this perpetual talk about the Messiah. If you had been stationed in this country as long as I have, Balbus, you'd feel the same; and you would realize the danger of it. There's something about these Jews that makes them different from every other race under the sun.

BALBUS: Well, I would that all wars were as bloodless as this one we have just witnessed. I tell you, Tullius, though I have been a soldier all my life, and fought in every part of the Empire, I have come to hate war. I have seen too much of it. It would please me best if all wars would cease, and peace would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

TULLIUS: There is only one way to bring that about - and that is the Roman way: to conquer by the sword, and to rule by the sword.

BALBUS: I used to think so myself - do in part still. That is why I still fight for Rome. But no peace will ever be

a lasting one until you get an Emperor who thinks more of justice than of power, more of his subjects than himself.

TULLIUS: A vain dream, Balbus! Even if you did find such an Emperor he would have to live forever himself in order that his Empire might last forever; and that you must admit is asking rather a lot - even with the help of the gods!

BALBUS: Yes, I suppose you are right.

TULLIUS: The evening is drawing in! I think we ought to be moving on if we are to get to Bethlehem before sunset.

BALBUS: Time enough yet - how calm and peaceful it is this evening! The stars are already beginning to come out.

TULLIUS: Look at that one over there! How extraordinarily bright it is!

BALBUS: Yes, I don't remember having seen it before.

TULLIUS: Nor I. I think it must be a new star. I wonder what it portends.

BALBUS: Who knows? Perhaps a new war in Egypt.

TULLIUS: Or the birth of an Emperor.

BALBUS: (LAUGHING) Perhaps of your ideal Emperor, who is going to live forever, and bring peace on earth.

TULLIUS: Come on, Balbus, we must really be on our way or the dark will overtake us.

BALBUS: But, it's so wonderfully calm and peaceful here; I would fain linger a little longer. Look (POINTING TO THE BOYS) there's even peace between the Jewish and Roman armies.

TULLIUS: There'd better be!

BALBUS: I can't explain it Tullius, but there seems to me to be something special about the serenity and beauty of this evening - something numinous.

TULLIUS: I'm afraid that doesn't mean anything to me Balbus; I never went to school, you know.

BALBUS: Well it means that sense of wonder and joy you'd feel if one of the gods were present.

TULLIUS: Surely you don't believe all that sort of rubbish about the gods' coming down to earth.

BALBUS: You never know Tullius: all sorts of things might happen: there are more things in heaven and earth than you and I have ever even heard of.

TULLIUS: You'll be believing in the Jews' Messiah next.

BALBUS: Well, if he was really a god, we'd have to.

TULLIUS: Not me. Anyhow, gods or no gods, I'm getting hungry; let's be pushing on to the barracks at Bethlehem. I want my supper.

BALBUS: All right then! Let's go.

(EXEUNT ROMAN SOLDIERS)

MICHAEL: Whew!

SAMUEL: I'm glad those Roman soldiers have gone.

MICHAEL: So am I.

JOHN: I thought that tall one was going to thrash you.

SAMUEL: So did I.

JOHN: I'm sure he would have done it if it had not been for the older one.

SAMUEL: Yes, he was a decent, kindly old man.

MICHAEL: If all the Romans were like him, it wouldn't be so bad. He was good and just.

JOHN: (IMPATIENTLY) Well, now they've gone, what about finishing the battle for the Messiah.

(THE BOYS ARRANGE THEMSELVES IN TWO GROUPS AND HAVE JUST BEGUN TO SPAR, WHEN OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH ENTER FROM THE SIDE)

MICHAEL: "Pax" a minute, there's somebody coming.

(THE SKIRMISH ENDS ABRUPTLY. THE BOYS GET UP AT ONCE AND STAND RESPECTFULLY TO ONE SIDE TO LET THE STRANGERS PASS)

OUR LADY: Were you boys quarrelling just now as we came up?

SAMUEL: Oh no, my lady, we were just playing a game.

JOHN: You see, we were playing that the Messiah had come; (OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH EXCHANGE GLANCES) Samuel was the Messiah and Michael and I were the Romans.

MICHAEL: My mummy makes me say a prayer every night that the Messiah will come soon.

JOHN: So does mine.

SAMUEL: Mine too.

OUR LADY: I am sure God will answer your prayers - and perhaps sooner than you expect.

MICHAEL: I do hope so. My mummy and daddy would be so thrilled if that was so.

SAMUEL: So would mine; and so would my aunt Hannah; she's always in the synagogue praying that the Messiah will come soon.

ST. JOSEPH: Come, my dear, we must be getting on.

OUR LADY: Well good-bye children and God bless you.

TOGETHER: Good-bye!

(EXEUNT OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH AS THE CURTAIN FALLS)

S C E N E II

ANOTHER PART OF THE ROAD NEAR BETHLEHEM.
THERE IS A LOG OF WOOD BY THE SIDE OF THE
ROAD IN THE BACKGROUND, AND A LARGE FLAT
STONE, OR A STUMP OF A TREE, NEAR THE
FOREGROUND.

(ENTER ST. JOSEPH AND OUR LADY)

ST. JOSEPH: Let us rest for a few minutes. (LEADS HER TO THE LOG IN THE BACKGROUND WHERE THEY SIT ALMOST UNSEEN. ENTER RACHEL CARRYING HER DOLL).

RACHEL: You're so tired, my precious one, that you can hardly keep your eyes open. It's quite time you were in bed. (LOOKS AROUND HER). Ah this will do nicely. (PUTS DOWN HER DOLL AND PREPARES A BED ON THE TOP OF THE FLAT STUMP). Some that's better. Now into bed you go my David; and don't forget to say your prayers.

(RACHEL PUTS THE DOLL TO BED, COVERS HIM OVSER WITH A COLOURED CLOTH AND BEGINS TO SING A LULLABY.

ENTER RUTH AND ELIZABETH, EACH WITH A DOLL).

RUTH: Oh there's Rachel! Hullo Rachel!

ELIZABETH: Good evening.

RACHEL: (PUTTING HER FINGER TO HER LIPS) Hush! please don't make a noise, my baby is just going to sleep!

(THE NEW-COMERS GO AND PEEP AT DAVID IN HIS BED):

RUTH: He is very sweet.

ELIZABETH: What's his name?

RACHEL: David; he's got real hair.

ELIZABETH: So has my dolly, too.

RACHEL: What's your dolly's name?

ELIZABETH: Aaron.

RACHEL: (TO RUTH) And yours?

RUTH: Jacob.

- ELIZABETH: I think my baby's very sleepy too.
- RUTH: So is mine.
- ELIZABETH: In fact, Aaron's so sleepy I think I'll put him to bed too.
- RUTH: And I'll do the same with my Jacob.
- RACHEL: Well, there's plenty of room for all three in David's bed; that is so long as each of them stays in his own part of it.
- (THE OTHER DOLLS ARE PUT TO BED ON THE SAME STUMP)
- RUTH: Don't they look sweet - all in a row.
- RACHEL: Yes, let's sing them to sleep.
- (THE THREE GIRLS JOIN IN SINGING A LULLABY. SCHUBERT'S CRADLE SONG MIGHT DO).
- Elizabeth: There, I think they're all asleep now.
- RACHEL: Yes, let's all sit down and talk for awhile.
- RUTH: We must talk quietly or we might wake them up.
- (THEY SIT DOWN BY THE TREE STUMP).
- RACHEL: I often wonder what my David will look like when he is grown up.
- RUTH: What's he going to be, when he's a man?
- RACHEL: A king! a very great king, king over all the others. That is why I have called him David. Look I have just finished making a crown for him.
- ELIZABETH: What a sweet little crown! may I put it on him?
- RACHEL: Not now, it would wake him up.
- ELIZABETH: (TO RUTH) And what's your baby going to be when he's grown up?
- RUTH: My Jacob is going to be a shepherd - like my Daddy. Here's his crook. Daddy made it for him.
- RACHEL: (TO ELIZABETH) And your baby? What is he going to be?
- ELIZABETH: When Aaron grows up he's going to be the High Priest. He and he only will be allowed to go into the Holy of Holies. See I've got an ephod for him to wear.

RUTH)
RACHEL)
A what?

ELIZABETH: An ephod - it is a special garment that the High Priest wears when he goes into the Temple.

RACHEL: May I look at it? (EXAMINES IT) Why it's wonderful!

RUTH: Did you make it?

ELIZABETH: A little bit of it. Mummy did the really hard parts.

RACHEL: Doesn't it look lovely with all those different colours on it.

(OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH COME FORWARD AND REVEAL THEIR PRESENCE. THE CHILDREN GET UP, SOMEWHAT STARTLED AND EMBARRASSED).

OUR LADY: Good-evening children.

CHILDREN: (TOGETHER) Good-evening. (THEY BECOME LESS SHY AND DRAW NEARER TO OUR LADY).

OUR LADY: (TO ELIEZABETH) So Aaron is going to be a High Priest, is he? May I look at him?

ELIZABETH: (POINTING) That's Aaron, the one on the right.

OUR LADY: And may I look at his ephod?
(ELIZABETH HANDS IT TO HER AND SHE ADMIRES IT).
How beautifully it's done!

ELIZABETH: Mummy did most of it- but I did some - those stitches round the edges are mine.

OUR LADY: And very well done they are too. (TO RACHEL) And your David is going to be a king - "king over all the other kings".

RACHEL: (NODDING) At least that is what I hope for him. Would you like to see his crown?

OUR LADY: I would. (SHE HOLDS IT IN HER HANDS AND REGARDS IT THOUGHTFULLY) What a dear little crown.

RACHEL: It had to be small, you know, because his head hasn't grown very big yet.

OUR LADY: I see. (TO RUTH) And this is your Jacob who's going to be a shepherd.

RUTH: Yes, my lady, and he's going to be a very brave one too - like my Daddy. My Daddy killed a wolf once!

- OUR LADY: How brave of him!
- RUTH: This is Jacob's crook (OUR LADY TAKES IT AND EXAMINES IT ADMIRINGLY) Daddy made it: he's very clever with his hands you know.
- OUR LADY: He must be. I think all your dollies are delightful and their things are so suitable.
- RACHEL: (RATHER SADLY) Of course, you know, it's only pre-tending, because they are only dollies after all, and they will never really grow up and use these things.
- RUTH: (PHILOSOPHICALLY) Still, it's better pretending than not at all.
- ELIZABETH: It would be much better, of course, if it all really came true, not just imagining it.
- OUR LADY: Would you like it to come true?
- ALL TOGETHER: Oh, of course we would.
- RACHEL: But that would be impossible.
- OUR LADY: With God all things are possible. (AT THIS POINT ST. JOSEPH COMES FORWARD AND SPEAKS A WORD IN OUR LADY'S EAR). I must be going now children. We have to be in Bethlehem tonight. Thank you for showing me your dollies.
- RACHEL: Thank you for looking at them.
- RUTH: I do wish you weren't going.
- OUR LADY: Perhaps we shall meet again some time.
- RUTH: (CLAPPING HER HANDS) Oh that would be lovely.
- OUR LADY: Well, good-bye for the present.
- CHILDREN: Good-bye....
- RACHEL: ... AND A SAFE JOURNEY.

(EXEUNT ST. JOSEPH AND MARY AS THE CURTAIN FALLS).

SCENE III

The Stable at Bethlehem

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN IN THE AUDITORIUM AFTER THE INTERVAL A VERSE OR TWO OF A CAROL IS SUNG (OR PLAYED) AS A PRELUDE.

WHEN THAT IS FINISHED THE CURTAIN RISES AND PRESENTS A TABLEAU OF THE HOLY FAMILY (see note, page) DURING THIS TABLEAU THE CAROL "Silent Night" IS SUNG.

WHEN "Silent Night" IS FINISHED THE LIGHTS GO UP AND, TO THE TUNE OF "When Shepherds Watch Their Flocks By Night" - OR SOME OTHER (PLAYED SOFTLY), THE THREE SHEPHERDS ENTER. EACH IN TURN COMES TO THE MANGER, KNEELS DOWN AND ADORES FOR A MOMENT, THEN PRESENTS HIS GIFT. HAVING DONE THIS THEY ALL BOW AND MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAGE BACKWARDS, RETIRING FROM THE STAGE UNTIL THE FINAL TABLEAU.

AS THE SHEPHERDS RETIRE THE BOYS ENTER FROM THE OPPOSITE SIDE. SAMUEL AND JOHN COME IN FIRST, TOGETHER, MICHAEL JUST BEHIND.

- JOHN: (AS HE COMES IN AND IN A STAGE WHISPER) I didn't know there was going to be giving presents. I haven't anything to give. (TO MICHAEL) What are you going to give?
- MICHAEL: (HOLDING UP HIS TOY-SWORD) This.
- JOHN: (TO SAMUEL) And you? What are you going to give?
- SAMUEL: My cup and ball.
- JOHN: I say, Samuel, there are really two things there. Will you let me give the ball and you can give the cup. I'll swap you my new knife for it when I get home - it's a really good one.
- SAMUEL: All right, then, it will be from both of us. But you needn't bother about swapping the knife.
- JOHN: But I'd rather, if you don't mind, as I want to give something that is really my own.
- SAMUEL: Very well, if you'd like it that way.
- JOHN: Thank you very much.
- SAMUEL: (IN A LOW TONE) Come on then; come with me.
- (JOHN AND SAMUEL GO FORWARD HAND IN HAND WITH MICHAEL FOLLOWING JUST BEHIND)

SAMUEL (cont'd) This is from John and me. The ball is from John and the cup is from me. (THEY HAND THE TWO OBJECTS TOGETHER; AND AS THEY DO SO THE STRING, WITH THE BALL ATTACHED TO IT, BECOMES SEPARATED FROM THE CUP).

OUR LADY: Thank you both, very much.

SAMUEL: I'm sorry the string has come off.

JOHN: Shall I try and fix it on again?

OUR LADY: I think it's really better as it is, don't you? You see He is still too little to play with it properly. Look we will hang the ball above His head.

(SHE GIVES THE BALL TO ST. JOSEPH WHO HANGS THE BALL BY THE STRING ABOVE THE MANGER. AS SOON AS THIS IS DONE THE VOICES OF ANGELS ARE HEARD).

ANGELS:
 Oh mystery of God in man,
 Too deep for us to understand!
 He is too weak and small
 To hold the children's ball;
 Yet earth and sky
 Together lie
 Within the hollow of His hand.

OUR LADY: (TO SAMUEL) We will place your present here.

(ST. JOSEPH FIXES THE HANDLE OF THE CUP AT THE BACK-STAGE END OF THE MANGER, AS BEFORE DESCRIBED, IN SUCH A MANNER THAT IT SHOWS OVER THE EDGE OF THE MANGER LIKE A SILVER CHALICE).

MICHAEL: (COMING FORWARD) I would like to give this, if I may; the handle has real jewels on it. I do hope he will like it.

OUR LADY: I thank you for Him; for He is so very young yet He doesn't know a single word - not even "Ma-ma"!

ANGELS:
 In the beginning was the Word,
 And the Word was with God,
 And the Word was God,
 And the Word was made flesh
 And dwelt amongst us.

OUR LADY: What beautiful stones! How they sparkle! I think we'll put this here, too, so that if He looks up He will see them shining.

(OUR LADY PLACES THE SWORD - UPSIDE DOWN - IN THE PLACE PREPARED FOR IT SO THAT IT SHOWS ABOVE THE CHALICE LIKE A JEWELLED CROSS)

And now would you like to come a little nearer and have a peep at Him?

JOHN:

May we?

OTHERS:

We'd love to.

OUR LADY:

Yes - come - softly, softly!

(THE BOYS COME ON TIP-TOE AND KNEEL ROUND THE MANGER).

SAMUEL:

Isn't He lovely!

MICHAEL:

What pretty tiny hands!

ANGELS:

"Sweet Baby Hands upOpressed -
Dimpled and creased and curled -
Upon Her heart of love,
Who would have guessed
They wrought the mighty world
And all the stars above!

MICHAEL:

How good He is! Does He never cey?

OUR LADY:

Not unless I were to leave Him - then He might.

JOHN:

What sweet little lips!

ANGELS:

(SINGING UNSEEN)

"Sweet Baby lips that cry,
If Mary be not nigh
To cheer the gloom of night,
Who could conceive
That on Creation's eve
They spake .. "and it was Light"."

DAVID:

His eyes are just like yours.

OUR LADY:

(PLEASED) Do you think so?

DAVID:

(LOOKING FROM ONE TO THE OTHER) Exactly.

ANGELS:

(SINGING UNSEEN)

Sweet Baby Eyes that look,
As in a wonder-book,
Upon a world new-found
Of touch and sight and sound,
Who would surmise
That you are wise
With all the wisdom of the skies?

(ENTER THE THREE LITTLE GIRLS: THE BOYS GO TOWARDS THE BACK STAGE AS THE GIRLS COME FORWARD).

RACHEL: (WHISPERING) Yes, it's the same lady.

RUTH: May we come in?

OUR LADY: Yes, I've been expecting you.

(THE THREE GIRLS COME FORWARD: TIMIDLY AT FIRST UNTIL THEY CATCH SIGHT OF THE MANGER).

You see I've got a little baby too.

ELIZABETH: Is He real?

OUR LADY: Oh yes, very real. He is more real than anything else in the world.

RUTH: May we peep at him? (OUR LADY NODS).

OUR LADY: (TO RACHEL) Like your David He has got real hair.

RUTH: Isn't He sweet?

RACHEL: So beautiful.

ELIZABETH: And so good.

RACHEL: And what is He going to be when He grows up?

OUR LADY: He's going to be a King - greater than all the others.

RACHEL: Well, if He is going to be a King when He grows up, will you let me give Him this little crown?

OUR LADY: Thank you. I'm sure He would love it.

(RACHEL GIVES THE CROWN, WHICH ST. JOSEPH PUTS IN A CONSPICUOUS PLACE).

RACHEL: (CLAPPING HER HANDS WITH JOY) So it has come really true!

ELIZABETH: (RATHER SADLY) Yes, for you.

RUTH: But not for us. (TO OUR LADY) I do wish He was going to be a Shepherd - then I could have given Him my crook.

OUR LADY: But He is going to be a Shepherd, too.

RUTH: No, really? - What, a King and a Shepherd?

- OUR LADY: Well, His ancestor David was a King and a Shepherd too, wasn't he?
- RUTH: So he was! I never thought of that.
- OUR LADY: Yes; when my little boy grows up people will call Him the Good Shepherd.
- RUTH: (EXCITEDLY) So then could I give Him my crook, couldn't I? May I?
- OUR LADY: Certainly, my dear; and I am sure He will be very pleased with it.
- ELIZABETH: We learned a poem at school all about the Good Shepherd, written by King David.
- OUR LADY: Would you like to say it for Him?
- RACHEL: But he's so young - He wouldn't understand it.
- OUR LADY: He understands much more than you would think. Besides (LOOKING AT ST. JOSEPH) we should like to hear it too. (THE THREE LITTLE GIRLS STAND TOGETHER - RECITE THE PSALM 22) (PSALM23 IN THE PROTESTANT REVISED VERSION).
- LITTLE GIRLS: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- OUR LADY: Thank you very much. I think you said it very nicely.
- (AT THIS MOMENT ELIZABETH IS SEEN TO BE SOBBING).
- RUTH: (TO RACHEL) What's the matter with Elizabeth? She's crying!
- RACHEL: (TO ELIZABETH) What's the matter, Elizabeth?
- ELIZABETH: (BETWEEN SOBS) Oh, it's all right for you two. (SOB) Your presents have come true, (SOB) but mine hasn't; and I don't see how it can. If He's going to be a King when He grows up and a Shepherd, I don't see how He can possibly be a High Priest as well - could He? And I did so want to give

Him my ephod.

RACHEL: I suppose it couldn't possibly come true about Ruth's ephod, too, could it? You said "With God all things are possible".

OUR LADY: Yes, with God all things are possible. Be of good cheer, Elizabeth, I have good news for you. (ELIZABETH LOOKS UP QUESTIONINGLY). My little Son is actually going to be a High Priest, too, when He grows up.

ELIZABETH: (EAGERLY) No? Really and truly?

OUR LADY: Yes, really and truly O the highest of all the High Priests that have ever been.

ELIZABETH: (DANCING WITH JOY AND CLAPPING HER HANDS) Oh, I am so glad. Then I may give Him my ephod too - Please.

OUR LADY: Certainly you may; and I think perhaps He will like it the best of all.

ELIZABETH: Oh thank you! Thank you! Here it is. (GIVES THE EPHOD).

RACHEL: Isn't it strange to think that this little baby will grow up to be all these things - Shepherd and Priest, and King.

RUTH: Three in one.

ELIZABETH: And One in Three.

ANGELS:
Three in One
And One in Three,
Glory and praise forever be
Unto the Holy Trinity.

(AT THIS STAGE THE FOUR LITTLE BOYS COME FORWARD AGAIN).

MICHAEL: What is your baby's name?

OUR LADY: His name is Jesus.

RUTH: It is a lovely name.

MICHAEL: What did you call Him that for - is it a family name?

OUR LADY: No. Jesus means "Saviour"; and when He grows up He will save the people from their sins.

ELIZABETH: How old is He?

OUR LADY: He was born this very day.

RACHEL: This this is His birthday.

RUTH: (EXCITEDLY) ... And our presents are birthday presents.

OUR LADY: Yes, indeed.

ELIZABETH: How lovely!

MICHAEL: (TO THE OTHER BOYS) Just fancy, Samuel, this is a birthday party.

(AT THIS MOMENT THE CHILDREN - LED BY RACHEL - CONFER TOGETHER A MOMENT IN WHISPERS TO FINISH WITH A LOT OF AFFIRMATIVE NODDING OF HEADS).

RACHEL: Do you think He would mind if we wished Him a Happy Birthday?

OUR LADY: Do, if you like, only you'll do it very quietly, won't you?

CHILDREN: (ASSENTING IN A WHISPER) Yes, yes.

(THE CHILDREN ALL JOIN HANDS TOGETHER ROUND THE CRIB AND VERY SOFTLY AND SWEETLY SING:

Happy birthday to you!
 Happy birthday to you!
 Happy birthday, dear Jesus (HERE THEY ALL
 BOW THEIR HEADS)
 Happy birthday to you!

ELIZABETH: Well, that's the nicest birthday party I have ever been to.

OUR LADY: Yes, it's been lovely; and we thank you for coming.

SAMUEL: We thank you for letting us come.

RUTH: (SIGHING) I wish it would never end.

JOHN: Will He have another birthday party next year?

OUR LADY: Yes, He will have a birthday party every year until the end of the world - and you will always be welcome.

ALL: Thank you, thank you! we'd love to come.

OUR LADY: And now I think my baby wants to go to sleep. If

you come up very softly you can have one last
peep at Him.

(THE BOYS COME UP FIRST, ONE BY ONE, AND KNEELING
BEFORE THE DIVINE INFANT, SAY A BRIEF PRAYER AND
PASS ON TO A LESS CONSPICUOUS POSITION.

THEN FOLLOW THE THREE GIRLS. AS EACH KNEELS DOWN
SHE PUTS HER HANDS TOGETHER AS IN PRAYER, BOWS
HER HEAD, AND THEN SINGS VERY SOFTLY OR SAYS, HER
BRIEF LULLABY. THIS IS AT ONCE TAKEN UP BY THE
ANGELS. AND SO WITH EACH OF THE GIRLS IN TURN,
UNTIL THE END OF THE LAST VERSICLE "So, rest little
High Priest, rest".)

RUTH: Sleep little Shepherd Sleep,
With your crook to rescue your sheep.

CHORUS OF ANGELS: "Sleep little Shepherd sleep,
Your flock you will safely keep,
Protected from every ill -
Not one shall be taken,
Not one be forsaken,
And the lost ones brought home from the hill.
So - sleep - little Shepherd sleep!

RACHEL: Sleep little Kinglet sleep,
Ever so softly and deep.

CHORUS OF ANGELS: "Sleep little Kinglet - Sleep!
Ever so softly and deep,
While oxen are chewing the cud;
Sleep in a manger,
Outcast and stranger,
Though Prince of the Royal Blood.
But the day will come,
With trumpet and drum,
When your banner shall be unfurled,
And Light against Darkness hurled -,
Till you are crowned King of the
Kings of the world-
So, sleep little Kinglet - sleep.

(RACHEL RETIRES AS ELIZABETH COMES FORWARD)

ELIZABETH: Rest, little High Priest rest,
With your ephod over your breast.

CHORUS OF ANGELS: "Rest little High Priest rest!
With your ephod on your breast.
When you are older
This little shoulder
Will bow with the whole world's sin
When by that Enemy,
In dark Gethsemane,
A deed will be done
That will darken the sun
And the Earth will tremble and shake,

As you will atonement make,
 On that strange altar
 You will not falter,
 Victim and Priest in One."

So, rest little High Priest - rest.

(THIS IS THE MOMENT FOR THE GIRLS TO RETIRE
 INTO THE BACKGROUND AND FOR THE ENTRY OF THE
 THREE KINGS - TO APPROPRIATE MUSIC.

WHEN THE KINGS HAVE GIVEN THEIR PRESENTS
 AND KNELT AWHILE IN ADORATION, THE SCENE
 IS FINISHED - SAVE FOR THE LAST TABLEAU.
 SO AT THIS POINT THE CURTAIN IS LOWERED FOR
 A FEW MOMENTS WHILST THE CHILDREN, SHEPHERDS,
 MAGI - AND ANGELS - ALL TAKE THEIR PLACES.

WHEN THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE FINAL TABLEAU
 THE CHOIR BEGINS THE "Adeste Fideles" THE END
 OF WHICH IS THE END OF THE PLAY.

FINAL CURTAIN.
 :::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

THE GIFTS

A NATIVITY PLAY FOR

CHILDREN

by

MORTIMER STANDING

THE GIFTS

A NATIVITY PLAY FOR
CHILDREN

by

Mortimer Standing

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Our Lady.
St. Joseph.

Samuel)
John) small Jewish boys
Michael)

Rachel)
Ruth) small Jewish girls
Elizabeth)

Tullius)
Balbus) Roman soldiers

Angel or Choir of Angels

Also Shepherds and Kings

SCENE I A Road near Bethlehem
SCENE II Another part of the same
SCENE III The Stable at Bethlehem
TIME The First Christmas

-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-

"The only tolerable aim for a straightforward
Nativity Play is to teach the mystery of the Incarnation,
and inspire a fitting reverence in its presence."

Canon Drinkwater

Telling the Good News, p. 185

(Burnes and Oates)

INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE PLAY - THE GIFTS

The following notes are only suggestions, and are primarily meant for those who have had little or no experience in producing children's plays; and, in any case, are not intended to be slavishly followed.

THE CHARACTERS

The chief actors, in addition to St. Joseph and Our Lady, are six small Jewish children - three boys and three girls. Their ages should be around seven, though it would not matter if some were a little older and others a little younger. The younger the children the better, really, provided that they understand their parts and can do them properly.

The two Roman soldiers should, if possible, be played by older children, 12 to 14 years of age.

The Shepherds and the Three Kings have no speeches but do their part in mime. It is, of course, not absolutely necessary to have these; but they help to create the right atmosphere, and at the same time enable more children to take part.

The Angels. Angels' voices play an important part in Scene III. This can be arranged according to circumstances and the producer's tastes and the means at his disposal. The simplest way is just to have one clear, well-modulated voice, off stage, saying the angel's part. As against that one could have a choir of angels declaiming the verses, or - if you can find or compose suitable music - singing them. If you have a chorus of angels it would be best to keep them off stage until the final tableau. Otherwise their visible presence all the time would be a distraction, and might interfere with the steady progress of the action. But, whatever way it is done, it is important that the words spoken by the angels should be enunciated so clearly that the audience have no difficulty in following them. At those moments when the angels' voices break in and say their verses, everyone on the stage should freeze for a few moments into immobility.

SCENERY AND SETTINGS

The settings for Scenes I and II are simply a road near Bethlehem; and at a pinch these scenes could be played without any special scenery; though of course a painted background is always an advantage. In Scene II there should be a log of wood, or a mound of some sort, at the back of the stage for Our Lady and St. Joseph to sit on; and also a large slab of stone or the stump of a tree to serve as the doll's bed. Of course, any other properties as convenient for the purpose would do just as well, and there might be in addition a bush or a tree, or something else,

to serve as a kind of screen partially hiding St. Joseph and Our Lady from the children at their play in the first part of the scene.

Scene III, the stable in Bethlehem, can be arranged in many different ways according to individual tastes and circumstances. A simple, effective and inexpensive way of doing it - and one that can be very quickly set up - is as follows: It consists in making a sort of lean-to from the back of the stage, the kind of structure one sometimes sees in the paintings of the early Italian masters. For this purpose one needs four rustic poles from two to three inches in diameter (or wider) two of which are six feet long and two, five. The structure must be just high enough to fit in harmoniously with the size of the people acting. The two longer poles should be fixed by some clamping arrangement, which can be quickly fastened, to the back of the stage; whilst the two shorter ones stand out towards the audience (see diagram). There must also be some sort of device by which the two shorter poles, nearest the audience, can be firmly fixed to the floor of the stage so that they cannot slip. A small projecting spike which fits into a small hole in the floor of the stage does this very well. (But again this is only a suggestion and you may be able to think up something better).

Supported by these four poles is the movable roof made of a rectangular wooden framework, fitted with interlacing laths, which can be covered with branches of evergreen, or straw making a kind of thatch. By a simple arrangement of staples and hooks this roof-frame can be hooked on to the top of the supporting poles; all this can be so made as to be set up in two or three minutes.

Under this pent-house the manger should be so placed that it is clearly visible from the auditorium. If you are in the country you may be able to borrow an actual manger from a local farmer (we once borrowed some real shepherds too!). Otherwise it is quite easy to make one. If one prefers to have the manger raised above the floor, it is easy to manage this by resting it on two pairs of crossed sticks (see diagram) - one pair at each end. In any case things should be so arranged that the manger slopes somewhat upwards from the footlights towards the back of the stage so that the divine Bambino's head and arms can be seen, and also the "chalice" and the "Cross", which are eventually fixed there in such a manner as to be visible above the far end of the manger.

OTHER STAGE PROPERTIES - THE GIFTS

The Cup and Ball. This consists of a cup (or a cup shaped piece of wood) attached to a handle, to which is fastened a ball on a string. The game is to swing up the ball and try and get it to fall into the cup. This toy has gone out of fashion, though occasionally one may still come across it in certain toy-shops. Instead of searching the shops for it, probably in vain, the best and the quickest thing is to make one's own, which is not at all difficult. One way is to get a joiner to turn a wooden cup on a handle on his lathe. In this case one would have to paint it over with silver or gold paint so that it would look like a chalice.

Then one could buy a wooden or a rubber ball, the right size to fit the cup, and attach it with a piece of string. Another easy way is this. You buy one of those little "silver" cups - miniature prize cups for sports - which one can get in Woolworths for half-a-crown. Then you cut off the handles at both sides and the base (see diagram). Next you get an old or a cheap tool, such as a bradawl or a chisel, with a wooden handle. After removing the metal part from the handle you insert in its place the stalk of the silver cup, the base of which has already been removed. All you have to do now is to drill - or get someone to drill - a small hole near the bottom of the cup. Into this you thread the loose end of the string to which the ball is attached, fixing it there by a knot. If you use one of those little silver sports-cups just referred to a golf ball will fit exactly, and you can drill a hole through it for attaching the string.

An important practical point to remember (without which you might run into a very awkward moment) is that after Scene I and and before Scene III this knot, which keeps the string fastened to the cup must be cut off or so loosened that it can be made easy for the ball and cup to become separated "by accident". In the short time he is on the stage before this happens Samuel can keep the ball and cup together by pressing his thumb over the end of the string against the base of the cup, releasing it at the appropriate moment.

The Sword. This can be made - and is better made - out of wood, and the blade covered with silver paint. The hilt should be ornamented with "jewels" (imitation ones of course will do) which can be attached to the hilt with fine copper wire or any other convenient way. The sword - which represents the Old Testament dispensation and its idea of the Messiah and His coming - is later turned, symbolically, into a Cross by being placed upside-down. It is placed behind the cup, which has now changed into a "chalice", whilst the ball, now suspended in the air above the manger, represents, symbolically, the world in space.

These three objects, the ball, the cup and the sword, are the gifts presented by the boys; and it is important - as the play proceeds - that their symbolical significance should be made manifest. In order to facilitate this these gifts must be placed - by St. Joseph - in pre-arranged places so that they may be clearly visible, (and spot-lighted if you have such an arrangement). That everything should happen as it were easily and naturally and without a hitch, some arrangement must be made beforehand, on the back-stage end of the manger, by which, first the handle of the cup (now the chalice) and secondly, the blade of the sword (now the cross) can be fixed in a moment in their proper positions. This can be done with a little ingenuity either by driving in parallel nails to receive them, or with a wire frame-work, or in any other way you prefer. Whatever the means chosen it must be so made that - when the sword and cup are fixed in their places - the cup stands like a chalice above the end of the manger; whilst the inverted sword shows behind it like a jewelled cross.

Another small but important practical detail relates to what is done with the ball. As the two boys, Samuel and Midhael, together present the cup and ball "from both of them" to Our Lady, these objects become separated (this is because the string has come loose from the cup in the manner described above). Our Lady then gives the ball to St. Joseph who hangs it by the string above the manger, like a baby's toy above a pram. To enable St. Joseph to do this easily there should be placed - already before the scene begins - a piece of thin string hanging from the pent-house roof. This has a little loop at the bottom end of it to which St. Joseph can quickly and easily attach the loose end of the string. The ball now hangs over the cradle and - this being done - is the "cue" for the corresponding verse recited by the angel.

As far as the little girls' presents are concerned the only one that presents any difficulty is the ephod. (A little crown can easily be made out of cardboard covered with gold paint or gold paper, whilst the little shepherds crook can be made from a bent twig or a bit of wire wound round with ribbon or cloth). A real ephod was a very complicated garment, a sort of breast-plate worn by the High Priest, with the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Here of course something smaller and much simpler would serve. The best way, perhaps, would be to consult some book on the Old Testament which has illustrations in it, and make something similar to the ephod but less complicated. The important thing is to make twelve divisions, which could be done by sewing or sticking together small rectangles of different coloured cloths. (see figure).

SOME PRACTICAL POINTS

SCENE I In this scene the action is straightforward and simple. The only point that needs drawing attention to is to remember that when the boys have their skirmishes about the coming of the Messiah their struggle should be very brief and conventional - all over in a few seconds. Anything longer would be out of place in a Nativity Play.

SCENE III When the interval which precedes this scene is over and the lights have been turned down in the hall, but before the curtain goes up, it would be appropriate to have a carol sung or played in the comparative darkness, so preparing the right atmosphere for the coming tableau of the Holy Family in the Stable.

And when the curtain does go up for this tableau the lighting should still be very subdued. The best effect - if one can manage it - is to arrange it so that the faces of St. Joseph and Our Lady are lit up from a light concealed in the straw. A strong flashlight is best so as not to give any risk of a heated electric bulb setting the straw alight. If this light is not strong enough to illumine the figures, as might be the case in a large hall, then of course more light should be added, but only the necessary minimum.

The first part of Scene III, as said above, is a tableau; and, while the figures remain in position motionless, a carol should be sung. In our opinion, "Silent Night", for all its being hackneyed, is still the best for giving just the right atmosphere.

When this carol is finished - or as much of it as is desired - the tableau comes to life with the entrance of the Shepherds. While the shepherds come and act their part one might play, as soft background music, "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night", or some other suitable music. There is a good number to have for the shepherds, as it balances with that of the Three Kings who come in later.

Each shepherd kneels and adores, and then gives his present to Our Lady, who hands it on to St. Joseph. Then they pass on - walking backwards perhaps (after all it is a real King Who is holding His Court) and then off by the opposite exit, remaining ready to come in again for the final tableau. Presents which the Shepherds might give might include a woollen scarf, a sheep-skin coat (to be used as a coverlet) or simply a bundle of wool to be spun and knitted later by His Mother into a garment for Her Child.

As the shepherds go off the little boys come in, and all proceeds as in the text. The most difficult part of this scene is the giving of the boy's presents and the knowing what to do with them - which has already been described.

The girls' presents are easier to dispose of. The ephod might be put over the Child in the manger - it is small and light - whilst the crown and the crook could be placed in any convenient positions where they show, e.g. on the ends of the two crossed sticks that support the manger at that end of it nearest the audience: they would then be easily visible by all.

When the boys and girls have given their gifts, and had their last peep at the Divine Infant, they retire somewhat into the background to make room for the Three Kings.

Possibly some people might object to the childrens' singing "Happy Birthday to You". But after all it was - and is - a "birthday party"; and if the children do it with simplicity and reverence it is quite appropriate; and I am sure Our Lady Herself would not have objected. But if anyone does feel qualms about this little episode it can easily be omitted.

When the boys and girls have given their gifts and had their last peep at the Divine Infant, they retire somewhat into the background to make room for the Three Kings. As far as the gifts of the Kings are concerned - the gold, frankincense and myrrh - it is quite sufficient for them to present three boxes, the more elaborate and ornamental looking the better.

When the Kings have done their part it would be a good thing to have a short curtain, so as to give a few moments' time in which

to arrange everybody and everything in their places for the final tableau. In this latter the children should, of course, be nearest to the crib, with the shepherds on one side and the Kings on the other. Adeste Fideles, in which the audience could be invited to join, is a very suitable carol to go with the final tableau.

Music.

It is well to remember that well-chosen and well performed music makes an enormous difference to the atmosphere of a Nativity Play. If there is no choir, a good gramophone or radiogram makes an excellent substitute; but there must be somebody in charge of it who knows - and has practiced - exactly what to put on and when to do so.

In the Family Circle

It is quite easy to produce the main part of this little play in a private house. To begin with the shepherds and kings could be cut out, if there are not enough actors to go round. Furthermore, it is quite feasible to cut out that part of Scene I in which the Roman Soldiers are present. This can be done without any fuss or re-arrangement simply by shortening the action, as follows: when you come to that part of Scene I where the boys are skirmishing for the first time you simply go straight on to where they are having their second "battle for the Messiah", i.e. to the place where Our Lady and St. Joseph enter, and where Michael says: "Pax! A minute! There's some people coming." This sentence is taken as the cue to end the skirmish, and the action then goes on without further change to the end of the scene.

If one is doing the play in a private house one can easily convert a bay-window alcove into the stable. Nor is it necessary to have a curtain, though it is easy enough to fix one up with a piece of string across in front of the stage to which one attaches a large sheet. This can be run back and forth along the string very easily by fastening to the top of the "curtain" (sheet) little metal rings at intervals. Footlights are not necessary either in a small room. Someone can just switch on and off the ordinary lights; good effect can also be obtained by using several strong reading lamps.

Costumes

Oriental costumes don't change much with the centuries. The main thing is to have plenty of colour. A dark background, like a rug hung up, helps to throw out the colours in a small room. Illustrations from family Bibles, or from a Child's Life of Christ, such as is found in most houses, will give one plenty of ideas to work on.

THE ONE ESSENTIAL

Finally it is well to remind ourselves, from time to time, that there is one quality in a Nativity play which is more important than all the rest put together. However brilliant may be the acting, however beautiful the costumes, however perfect the setting and stage-technique generally - all these things will be as nothing, or "as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal", unless both actors and audience are touched to a deeper sense of wonder at and reverence for the central mystery of our Faith - the Incarnation.

In the Creed we acknowledge, week by week, that God was made Man; but here, at the crib, we are confronted with an even more stupendous fact - that God was made a Baby. As St. Augustine says:

"The Maker of man was made man that the Ruler of the stars might suck at the breast, that Bread might be hungered, Light sleep, the Way be wearied and the Fountain thirst.....

"In order that weakness might become strong, strength become weak He is the Son of God without a mother, the Son of man without a father; unutterably wise - in His wisdom a Babe without utterance.

"He so loved us that, for our sakes, He was made in Time - He through Whom all Times are made. He was created of a Mother Whom He created; was carried by hands which He had fashioned; sucked at the breasts which He had filled; and was in the manger in wordless Infancy - He the Word without Whom all human eloquence is mute

"He lies in the manger, but contains the whole world; He sucks at the breast but feeds the angels; He is wrapped in swaddling clothes, but vests us in immortality. He finds no place in the inn, but He makes for Himself a temple in the hearts of His believers."

Venite Adoremus

SCENE IA ROAD NEAR BETHLEHEM. TWO SMALL JEWISH BOYS PLAYING TOGETHER

SAMUEL: (PLAYING WITH CUP AND BALL) Look! This is how you do it. You've got to get the ball into the cup - like this. Missed it that time!

JOHN: Oh, do let me have a try!

SAMUEL: In a minute. (TRIES AGAIN) It's not so easy as it looks. There, you have a try. (GIVES IT TO JOHN)

(JOHN MAKES SEVERAL ATTEMPTS - PROBABLY UNSUCCESSFULLY - AND THEN.....)

JOHN: Where did you get it?

SAMUEL: My Daddy went to Jerusalem last week to "present" my little baby brother at the Temple, and he brought this back for me.

JOHN: How nice! I wish I had a little baby brother to be "presented".

(ENTER MICHAEL, RUNNING, WITH TOY SWORD)

MICHAEL: Your money or your life!

(DAVID CATCHES MICHAEL'S WRIST AND SLOWLY BRINGS DOWN THE SWORD)

SAMUEL: Oh, I say, what a beautiful sword!

JOHN: Is it a real one?

MICHAEL: Yes! at least the handle is a real one. It has real jewels on it.

SAMUEL: How it shines!

MICHAEL: It had a real blade on it once, too; but it was broken off in a battle.

JOHN: Who gave it to you?

MICHAEL: My Uncle. It used to belong to my great grandfather. He fought for Judas Machabeus against the Old Eliezer put a wooden blade on it for me.

JOHN: I vote we play at something.

OTHERS: All right - let's.

JOHN: What shall we play at?

SAMUEL: I know! Daniel in the lion's den.

JOHN: I'm tired of that game.

MICHAEL: So am I; we played it yesterday and the day before.

JOHN: Can't somebody think of a new game?

SAMUEL: I've got an idea!

OTHERS: What?

SAMUEL: Let's play that the Messiah has come.

OTHERS: All right.

JOHN: How do you play it?

(ENTER TWO ROMAN SOLDIERS, WHO STAND WATCHING FROM
THE BACK OF THE STAGE)

SAMUEL: Well, my daddy says that - when the Messiah comes - He will set up a kingdom and rule over the whole world.

(THE SOLDIERS EXCHANGE GLANCES)

MICHAEL: My mummy makes me say a prayer every night that the Messiah will come too.

JOHN: So does mine.

SAMUEL: Old Reuben, who lives next door to us says that the Messiah may come any day now. He knows an old man in Jerusalem, called Simeon, who says that God has promised him that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah. He's very old already, so he can't live much longer.

JOHN: (Impatiently) Well, what I want to know is: how do we play this game that the Messiah has come. Is there any fighting in it?

SAMUEL: Sure to be. If the Messiah is going to rule over the whole world He will have to beat the Romans first.

MICHAEL: And that won't be an easy job!

SAMUEL: When I grow up I'm going to fight for the Messiah.

JOHN: So am I.

MICHAEL: I too.

SAMUEL: Well, we can't all fight for him now or we shouldn't be able to have a battle; so I'll be the Messiah and you two can be the Romans.

JOHN: All right. Come on Michael, let's get ready. (JOHN AND MICHAEL DRAW APART TO ONE SIDE OF THE STAGE)

SAMUEL: You can put up a good fight for it - as the Romans always do - but you will have to let yourselves be beaten in the end, for of course the Messiah could never be killed.

JOHN: Come on then, let's begin.

(THE TWO "ARMIES" ENGAGE IN BATTLE, WHICH IS OVER VERY QUICKLY. SAMUEL FIRST KNOCKS OUT MICHAEL. THIS IS DONE VERY CONVENTIONALLY WITH A TAP ON THE HEAD, AT WHICH MICHAEL FALLS DOWN. THEREUPON SAMUEL TAKES HIS SWORD AND ATTACKS JOHN, WHO FALLS AT ONCE; AND SAMUEL KNEELS ASTRIDE HIM. ALL THIS TIME THE SOLDIERS ARE WATCHING: ONE LOOKS AMUSED, THE OTHER ANNOYED).

SAMUEL: Down you proud Roman!

TULLIUS: (TO BALBUS) Did you mark that?

BALBUS: (LAUGHING) This is a serious revolt Tullius, I think we ought to call out the legions.

TULLIUS: This is no laughing matter, Balbus. It is from such small eggs as these that open rebellion will hatch out some day (GOING TOWARDS THE BOYS) I think we'd better crack their shells a little - just to teach them better manners.

SAMUEL: (STILL ASTRIDE OF JOHN) So perish all the enemies of Israel!

TULLIUS: (ROUGHLY PULLING SAMUEL TO HIS FEET) A sword too, by Jupiter! The young cub has a sword.

BALBUS: Let me see. Why it's only a toy one! see it has a wooden blade.

TULLIUS: No matter! I wouldn't allow any Jew to carry a sword, not even in make-belief.

BALBUS: There's no need to get excited about it, it's only a childrens' game. Is Rome so weak that she is afraid to let little children play in the streets? All boys play games like that at that age: it doesn't mean a thing. There you are young man.

TULLIUS: (SNATCHING AT THE SWORD) No, by your leave! I'm quite serious Balbus. Now, you young rascals run home or I will give you the soundest thrashing you've ever had in your lives - just to show you what the Romans can do.

SAMUEL: Oh, Sir, please give me back the sword. I wouldn't mind so much if it was mine; but it really belongs to Michael. I borrowed it from him.

TULLIUS: Well, if I do give it you back, will you promise never to use it against the Romans.

(SILENCE)

There you see! What did I tell you? True Jews they are - stubborn as mules, and as dangerous as serpents.

(THE BOYS WHISPER TOGETHER A MOMENT)

SAMUEL: We promise faithfully never to use it on the side of injustice.

BALBUS: Good enough! Give it them back Tullius! That ought to be good enough for any Roman. I can't help admiring the young fellows' pluck. You needn't be afraid, Tullius, that Caesar will tumble off his throne if you give back a toy sword.

TULLIUS: (GRUDGINGLY) Well, here you are, then, and don't let me hear you saying things against the Romans again.

SAMUEL &) Oh, thank you Sir, thank you very much. (THE BOYS RETIRE
MICHAEL) TO THE BACK OF THE STAGE).

BALBUS: You surprise me Tullius; I believe you were really angry with those youngsters.

TULLIUS: I was indeed. It infuriates me, all this perpetual talk about the Messiah. If you had been stationed in this country as long as I have, Balbus, you'd feel the same; and you would realize the danger of it. There's something about these Jews that makes them different from every other race under the sun.

BALBUS: Well, I would that all wars were as bloodless as this one we have just witnessed. I tell you, Tullies, though I have been a soldier all my life, and fought in every part of the Empire, I have come to hate war. I have seen too much of it. It would please me best if all wars would cease, and peace would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

TULLIUS: There is only one way to bring that about - and that is the Roman way: to conquer by the sword, and to rule by the sword.

BALBUS: I used to think so myself - do in part still. That is why I still fight for Rome. But no peace will ever be

a lasting one until you get an Emperor who thinks more of justice than of power, more of his subjects than himself.

TULLIUS: A vain dream, Balbus! Even if you did find such an Emperor he would have to live forever himself in order that his Empire might last forever; and that you must admit is asking rather a lot - even with the help of the gods!

BALBUS: Yes, I suppose you are right.

TULLIUS: The evening is drawing in! I think we ought to be moving on if we are to get to Bethlehem before sunset.

BALBUS: Time enough yet - how calm and peaceful it is this evening! The stars are already beginning to come out.

TULLIUS: Look at that one over there! How extraordinarily bright it is!

BALBUS: Yes, I don't remember having seen it before.

TULLIUS: Nor I. I think it must be a new star. I wonder what it portends.

BALBUS: Who knows? Perhaps a new war in Egypt.

TULLIUS: Or the birth of an Emperor.

BALBUS: (LAUGHING) Perhaps of your ideal Emperor, who is going to live forever, and bring peace on earth.

TULLIUS: Come on, Balbus, we must really be on our way or the dark will overtake us.

BALBUS: But, it's so wonderfully calm and peaceful here; I would fain linger a little longer. Look (POINTING TO THE BOYS) there's even peace between the Jewish and Roman armies.

TULLIUS: There'd better be!

BALBUS: I can't explain it Tullius, but there seems to me to be something special about the serenity and beauty of this evening - something numinous.

TULLIUS: I'm afraid that doesn't mean anything to me Balbus; I never went to school, you know.

BALBUS: Well it means that sense of wonder and joy you'd feel if one of the gods were present.

TULLIUS: Surely you don't believe all that sort of rubbish about the gods' coming down to earth.

BALBUS: You never know Tullius: all sorts of things might happen: there are more things in heaven and earth than you and I have ever even heard of.

TULLIUS: You'll be believing in the Jews' Messiah next.

BALBUS: Well, if he was really a god, we'd have to.

TULLIUS: Not me. Anyhow, gods or no gods, I'm getting hungry; let's be pushing on to the barracks at Bethlehem. I want my supper.

BALBUS: All right then! Let's go.

(EXEUNT ROMAN SOLDIERS)

MICHAEL: Whew!

SAMUEL: I'm glad those Roman soldiers have gone.

MICHAEL: So am I.

JOHN: I thought that tall one was going to thrash you.

SAMUEL: So did I.

JOHN: I'm sure he would have done it if it had not been for the older one.

SAMUEL: Yes, he was a decent, kindly old man.

MICHAEL: If all the Romans were like him, it wouldn't be so bad. He was good and just.

JOHN: (IMPATIENTLY) Well, now they've gone, what about finishing the battle for the Messiah.

(THE BOYS ARRANGE THEMSELVES IN TWO GROUPS AND HAVE JUST BEGUN TO SPAR, WHEN OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH ENTER FROM THE SIDE)

MICHAEL: "Pax" a minute, there's somebody coming.

(THE SKIRMISH ENDS ABRUPTLY. THE BOYS GET UP AT ONCE AND STAND RESPECTFULLY TO ONE SIDE TO LET THE STRANGERS PASS)

OUR LADY: Were you boys quarrelling just now as we came up?

SAMUEL: Oh no, my lady, we were just playing a game.

JOHN: You see, we were playing that the Messiah had come; (OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH EXCHANGE GLANCES) Samuel was the Messiah and Michael and I were the Romans.

MICHAEL: My mummy makes me say a prayer every night that the Messiah will come soon.

JOHN: So does mine.

SAMUEL: Mine too.

OUR LADY: I am sure God will answer your prayers - and perhaps sooner than you expect.

MICHAEL: I do hope so. My mummy and daddy would be so thrilled if that was so.

SAMUEL: So would mine; and so would my aunt Hannah; she's always in the synagogue praying that the Messiah will come soon.

ST. JOSEPH: Come, my dear, we must be getting on.

OUR LADY: Well good-bye children and God bless you.

TOGETHER: Good-bye!

(EXEUNT OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH AS THE CURTAIN FALLS)

S C E N E II

ANOTHER PART OF THE ROAD NEAR BETHLEHEM. THERE IS A LOG OF WOOD BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD IN THE BACKGROUND, AND A LARGE FLAT STONE, OR A STUMP OF A TREE, NEAR THE FOREGROUND.

(ENTER ST. JOSEPH AND OUR LADY)

ST. JOSEPH: Let us rest for a few minutes. (LEADS HER TO THE LOG IN THE BACKGROUND WHERE THEY SIT ALMOST UNSEEN. ENTER RACHEL CARRYING HER DOLL).

RACHEL: You're so tired, my precious one, that you can hardly keep your eyes open. It's quite time you were in bed. (LOOKS AROUND HER). Ah this will do nicely. (PUTS DOWN HER DOLL AND PREPARES A BED ON THE TOP OF THE FLAT STUMP). Some that's better. Now into bed you go my David; and don't forget to say your prayers.

(RACHEL PUTS THE DOLL TO BED, COVERS HIM OVER WITH A COLOURED CLOTH AND BEGINS TO SING A LULLABY.

ENTER RUTH AND ELIZABETH, EACH WITH A DOLL).

RUTH: Oh there's Rachel! Hullo Rachel!

ELIZABETH: Good evening.

RACHEL: (PUTTING HER FINGER TO HER LIPS) Hush! please don't make a noise, my baby is just going to sleep!

(THE NEW-COMERS GO AND PEEP AT DAVID IN HIS BED).

RUTH: He is very sweet.

ELIZABETH: What's his name?

RACHEL: David; he's got real hair.

ELIZABETH: So has my dolly, too.

RACHEL: What's your dolly's name?

ELIZABETH: Aaron.

RACHEL: (TO RUTH) And yours?

RUTH: Jacob.

ELIZABETH: I think my baby's very sleepy too.

RUTH: So is mine.

ELIZABETH: In fact, Aaron's so sleepy I think I'll put him to bed too.

RUTH: And I'll do the same with my Jacob.

RACHEL: Well, there's plenty of room for all three in David's bed; that is so long as each of them stays in his own part of it.

(THE OTHER DOLLS ARE PUT TO BED ON THE SAME STUMP)

RUTH: Don't they look sweet - all in a row.

RACHEL: Yes, let's sing them to sleep.

(THE THREE GIRLS JOIN IN SINGING A LULLABY. SCHUBERT'S CRADLE SONG MIGHT DO).

Elizabeth: There, I think they're all asleep now.

RACHEL: Yes, let's all sit down and talk for awhile.

RUTH: We must talk quietly or we might wake them up.

(THEY SIT DOWN BY THE TREE STUMP).

RACHEL: I often wonder what my David will look like when he is grown up.

RUTH: What's he going to be, when he's a man?

RACHEL: A king! a very great king, king over all the others. That is why I have called him David. Look I have just finished making a crown for him.

ELIZABETH: What a sweet little crown! may I put it on him?

RACHEL: Not now, it would wake him up.

ELIZABETH: (TO RUTH) And what's your baby going to be when he's grown up?

RUTH: My Jacob is going to be a shepherd - like my Daddy. Here's his crook. Daddy made it for him.

RACHEL: (TO ELIZABETH) And your baby? What is he going to be?

ELIZABETH: When Aaron grows up he's going to be the High Priest. He and he only will be allowed to go into the Holy of Holies. See I've got an ephod for him to wear.

RUTH)
RACHEL)

A what?

ELIZABETH:

An ephod - it is a special garment that the High Priest wears when he goes into the Temple.

RACHEL:

May I look at it? (EXAMINES IT) Why it's wonderful!

RUTH:

Did you make it?

ELIZABETH:

A little bit of it. Mummy did the really hard parts.

RACHEL:

Doesn't it look lovely with all those different colours on it.

(OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH COME FORWARD AND REVEAL THEIR PRESENCE. THE CHILDREN GET UP, SOMEWHAT STARTLED AND EMBARRASSED).

OUR LADY:

Good-evening children.

CHILDREN:

(TOGETHER) Good-evening. (THEY BECOME LESS SHY AND DRAW NEARER TO OUR LADY).

OUR LADY:

(TO ELIEZABETH) So Aaron is going to be a High Priest, is he? May I look at him?

ELIZABETH:

(POINTING) That's Aaron, the one on the right.

OUR LADY:

And may I look at his ephod?

(ELIZABETH HANDS IT TO HER AND SHE ADMIRES IT).

How beautifully it's done!

ELIZABETH:

Mummy did most of it- but I did some - those stitches round the edges are mine.

OUR LADY:

And very well done they are too. (TO RACHEL) And your David is going to be a king - "king over all the other kings".

RACHEL:

(NODDING) At least that is what I hope for him. Would you like to see his crown?

OUR LADY:

I would. (SHE HOLDS IT IN HER HANDS AND REGARDS IT THOUGHTFULLY) What a dear little crown.

RACHEL:

It had to be small, you know, because his head hasn't grown very big yet.

OUR LADY:

I see. (TO RUTH) And this is your Jacob who's going to be a shepherd.

RUTH:

Yes, my lady, and he's going to be a very brave one too - like my Daddy. My Daddy killed a wolf once!

OUR LADY: How brave of him!

RUTH: **This is Jacob's crook (OUR LADY TAKES IT AND EXAMINES IT ADMIRINGLY)** Daddy made it: he's very clever with his hands you know.

OUR LADY: He must be. I think all your dollies are delightful and their things are so suitable.

RACHEL: **(RATHER SADLY)** Of course, you know, it's only pre-tending, because they are only dollies after all, and they will never really grow up and use these things.

RUTH: **(PHILOSOPHICALLY)** Still, it's better pretending than not at all.

ELIZABETH: It would be much better, of course, if it all really came true, not just imagining it.

OUR LADY: Would you like it to come true?

ALL TOGETHER: Oh, of course we would.

RACHEL: But that would be impossible.

OUR LADY: With God all things are possible. **(AT THIS POINT ST. JOSEPH COMES FORWARD AND SPEAKS A WORD IN OUR LADY'S EAR)**. I must be going now children. We have to be in Bethlehem tonight. Thank you for showing me your dollies.

RACHEL: Thank you for looking at them.

RUTH: I do wish you weren't going.

OUR LADY: Perhaps we shall meet again some time.

RUTH: **(CLAPPING HER HANDS)** Oh that would be lovely.

OUR LADY: Well, good-bye for the present.

CHILDREN: Good-bye....

RACHEL: ... AND A SAFE JOURNEY.

(EXEUNT ST. JOSEPH AND MARY AS THE CURTAIN FALLS).

S C E N E III

The Stable at Bethlehem

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN IN THE AUDITORIUM AFTER THE INTERVAL A VERSE OR TWO OF A CAROL IS SUNG (OR PLAYED) AS A PRELUDE.

WHEN THAT IS FINISHED THE CURTAIN RISES AND PRESENTS A TABLEAU OF THE HOLY FAMILY (see note, page) DURING THIS TABLEAU THE CAROL "Silent Night" IS SUNG.

WHEN "Silent Night" IS FINISHED THE LIGHTS GO UP AND, TO THE TUNE OF "When Shepherds Watch Their Flocks By Night" - OR SOME OTHER (PLAYED SOFTLY), THE THREE SHEPHERDS ENTER. EACH IN TURN COMES TO THE MANGER, KNEELS DOWN AND ADORES FOR A MOMENT, THEN PRESENTS HIS GIFT. HAVING DONE THIS THEY ALL BOW AND MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAGE BACKWARDS, RETIRING FROM THE STAGE UNTIL THE FINAL TABLEAU.

AS THE SHEPHERDS RETIRE THE BOYS ENTER FROM THE OPPOSITE SIDE. SAMUEL AND JOHN COME IN FIRST, TOGETHER, MICHAEL JUST BEHIND.

JOHN: (AS HE COMES IN AND IN A STAGE WHISPER) I didn't know there was going to be giving presents. I haven't anything to give. (TO MICHAEL) What are you going to give?

MICHAEL: (HOLDING UP HIS TOY-SWORD) This.

JOHN: (TO SAMUEL) And you? What are you going to give?

SAMUEL: My cup and ball.

JOHN: I say, Samuel, there are really two things there. Will you let me give the ball and you can give the cup. I'll swap you my new knife for it when I get home - it's a really good one.

SAMUEL: All right, then, it will be from both of us. But you needn't bother about swapping the knife.

JOHN: But I'd rather, if you don't mind, as I want to give something that is really my own.

SAMUEL: Very well, if you'd like it that way.

JOHN: Thank you very much.

SAMUEL: (IN A LOW TONE) Come on then; come with me.

(JOHN AND SAMUEL GO FORWARD HAND IN HAND WITH MICHAEL FOLLOWING JUST BEHIND)

SAMUEL (cont'd) This is from John and me. The ball is from John and the cup is from me. (THEY HAND THE TWO OBJECTS TOGETHER; AND AS THEY DO SO THE STRING, WITH THE BALL ATTACHED TO IT, BECOMES SEPARATED FROM THE CUP).

OUR LADY: Thank you both, very much.

SAMUEL: I'm sorry the string has come off.

JOHN: Shall I try and fix it on again?

OUR LADY: I think it's really better as it is, don't you? You see He is still too little to play with it properly. Look we will hang the ball above His head.

(SHE GIVES THE BALL TO ST. JOSEPH WHO HANGS THE BALL BY THE STRING ABOVE THE MANGER. AS SOON AS THIS IS DONE THE VOICES OF ANGELS ARE HEARD).

ANGELS:
 Oh mystery of God in man,
 Too deep for us to understand!
 He is too weak and small
 To hold the children's ball;
 Yet earth and sky
 Together lie
 Within the hollow of His hand.

OUR LADY: (TO SAMUEL) We will place your present here.

(ST. JOSEPH FIXES THE HANDLE OF THE CUP AT THE BACK-STAGE END OF THE MANGER, AS BEFORE DESCRIBED, IN SUCH A MANNER THAT IT SHOWS OVER THE EDGE OF THE MANGER LIKE A SILVER CHALICE).

MICHAEL: (COMING FORWARD) I would like to give this, if I may; the handle has real jewels on it. I do hope he will like it.

OUR LADY: I thank you for Him; for He is so very young yet He doesn't know a single word - not even "Ma-ma"!

ANGELS:
 In the beginning was the Word,
 And the Word was with God,
 And the Word was God.
 And the Word was made flesh
 And dwelt amongst us.

OUR LADY: What beautiful stones! How they sparkle! I think we'll put this here, too, so that if He looks up He will see them shining.

(OUR LADY PLACES THE SWORD - UPSIDE DOWN - IN THE PLACE PREPARED FOR IT SO THAT IT SHOWS ABOVE THE CHALICE LIKE A JEWELLED CROSS)

And now would you like to come a little nearer and have a peep at Him?

JOHN: May we?

OTHERS: We'd love to.

OUR LADY: Yes - come - softly, softly!

(THE BOYS COME ON TIP-TOE AND KNEEL ROUND THE MANGER).

SAMUEL: Isn't He lovely!

MICHAEL: What pretty tiny hands!

ANGELS: "Sweet Baby Hands upOpressed -
Dimpled and creased and curled -
Upon Her heart of love,
Who would have guessed
They wrought the mighty world
And all the stars above!

MICHAEL: How good He is! Does He never cey?

OUR LADY: Not unless I were to leave Him - then He might.

JOHN: What sweet little lips!

ANGELS: (SINGING UNSEEN)
"Sweet Baby lips that cry,
If Mary be not nigh
To cheer the gloom of night,
Who could conceive
That on Creation's eve
They spake .. "and it was Light"."

DAVID: His eyes are just like yours.

OUR LADY: (PLEASED) Do you think so?

DAVID: (LOOKING FROM ONE TO THE OTHER) Exactly.

ANGELS: (SINGING UNSEEN)
Sweet Baby Eyes that look,
As in a wonder-book,
Upon a world new-found
Of touch and sight and sound,
Who would surmise
That you are wise
With all the wisdom of the skies?

(ENTER THE THREE LITTLE GIRLS: THE BOYS GO TOWARDS THE BACK STAGE AS THE GIRLS COME FORWARD).

RACHEL: (WHISPERING) Yes, it's the same lady.

RUTH: May we come in?

OUR LADY: Yes, I've been expecting you.

(THE THREE GIRLS COME FORWARD: TIMIDLY AT FIRST UNTIL THEY CATCH SIGHT OF THE MANGER).

You see I've got a little baby too.

ELIZABETH: Is He real?

OUR LADY: Oh yes, very real. He is more real than anything else in the world.

RUTH: May we peep at him? (OUR LADY NODS).

OUR LADY: (TO RACHEL) Like your David He has got real hair.

RUTH: Isn't He sweet?

RACHEL: So beautiful.

ELIZABETH: And so good.

RACHEL: And what is He going to be when He grows up?

OUR LADY: He's going to be a King - greater than all the others.

RACHEL: Well, if He is going to be a King when He grows up, will you let me give Him this little crown?

OUR LADY: Thank you. I'm sure He would love it.

(RACHEL GIVES THE CROWN, WHICH ST. JOSEPH PUTS IN A CONSPICUOUS PLACE).

RACHEL: (CLAPPING HER HANDS WITH JOY) So it has come really true!

ELIZABETH: (RATHER SADLY) Yes, for you.

RUTH: But not for us. (TO OUR LADY) I do wish He was going to be a Shepherd - then I could have given Him my crook.

OUR LADY: But He is going to be a Shepherd, too.

RUTH: No, really? - What, a King and a Shepherd?

- OUR LADY: Well, His ancestor David was a King and a Shepherd too, wasn't he?
- RUTH: So he was! I never thought of that.
- OUR LADY: Yes; when my little boy grows up people will call Him the Good Shepherd.
- RUTH: **(EXCITEDLY)** So then could I give Him my crook, couldn't I? May I?
- OUR LADY: Certainly, my dear; and I am sure He will be very pleased with it.
- ELIZABETH: We learned a poem at school all about the Good Shepherd, written by King David.
- OUR LADY: Would you like to say it for Him?
- RACHEL: But he's so young - He wouldn't understand it.
- OUR LADY: He understands much more than you would think. Besides **(LOOKING AT ST. JOSEPH)** we should like to hear it too. **(THE THREE LITTLE GIRLS STAND TOGETHER - RECITE THE PSALM 22) (PSALM 23 IN THE PROTESTANT REVISED VERSION).**
- LITTLE GIRLS: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- OUR LADY: Thank you very much. I think you said it very nicely.
- (AT THIS MOMENT ELIZABETH IS SEEN TO BE SOBBING).**
- RUTH: **(TO RACHEL)** What's the matter with Elizabeth? She's crying!
- RACHEL: **(TO ELIZABETH)** What's the matter, Elizabeth?
- ELIZABETH: **(BETWEEN SOBS)** Oh, it's all right for you two. **(SOB)** Your presents have come true, **(SOB)** but mine hasn't; and I don't see how it can. If He's going to be a King when He grows up and a Shepherd, I don't see how He can possibly be a High Priest as well - could He? And I did so want to give

Him my ephod.

RACHEL: I suppose it couldn't possibly come true about Ruth's ephod, too, could it? You said "With God all things are possible".

OUR LADY: Yes, with God all things are possible. Be of good cheer, Elizabeth, I have good news for you. (ELIZABETH LOOKS UP QUESTIONINGLY). My little Son is actually going to be a High Priest, too, when He grows up.

ELIZABETH: (EAGERLY) No? Really and truly?

OUR LADY: Yes, really and truly O the highest of all the High Priests that have ever been.

ELIZABETH: (DANCING WITH JOY AND CLAPPING HER HANDS) Oh, I am so glad. Then I may give Him my ephod too - Please.

OUR LADY: Certainly you may; and I think perhaps He will like it the best of all.

ELIZABETH: Oh thank you! Thank you! Here it is. (GIVES THE EPHOD).

RACHEL: Isn't it strange to think that this little baby will grow up to be all these things - Shepherd and Priest, and King.

RUTH: Three in one.

ELIZABETH: And One in Three.

ANGELS: Three in One
And One in Three,
Glory and praise forever be
Unto the Holy Trinity.

(AT THIS STAGE THE FOUR LITTLE BOYS COME FORWARD AGAIN).

MICHAEL: What is your baby's name?

OUR LADY: His name is Jesus.

RUTH: It is a lovely name.

MICHAEL: What did you call Him that for - is it a family name?

OUR LADY: No. Jesus means "Saviour"; and when He grows up He will save the people from their sins.

- ELIZABETH: How old is He?
- OUR LADY: He was born this very day.
- RACHEL: This this is His birthday.
- RUTH: (EXCITEDLY) ... And our presents are birthday presents.
- OUR LADY: Yes, indeed.
- ELIZABETH: How lovely!
- MICHAEL: (TO THE OTHER BOYS) Just fancy, Samuel, this is a birthday party.
- (AT THIS MOMENT THE CHILDREN - LED BY RACHEL - CONFER TOGETHER A MOMENT IN WHISPERS TO FINISH WITH A LOT OF AFFIRMATIVE NODDING OF HEADS).
- RACHEL: Do you think He would mind if we wished Him a Happy Birthday?
- OUR LADY: Do, if you like, only you'll do it very quietly, won't you?
- CHILDREN: (ASSENTING IN A WHISPER) Yes, yes.
- (THE CHILDREN ALL JOIN HANDS TOGETHER ROUND THE CRIB AND VERY SOFTLY AND SWEETLY SING:
- Happy birthday to you!
 Happy birthday to you!
 Happy birthday, dear Jesus (HERE THEY ALL BOW THEIR HEADS)
 Happy birthday to you!
- ELIZABETH: Well, that's the nicest birthday party I have ever been to.
- OUR LADY: Yes, it's been lovely; and we thank you for coming.
- SAMUEL: We thank you for letting us come.
- RUTH: (SIGHING) I wish it would never end.
- JOHN: Will He have another birthday party next year?
- OUR LADY: Yes, He will have a birthday party every year until the end of the world - and you will always be welcome.
- ALL: Thank you, thank you! we'd love to come.
- OUR LADY: And now I think my baby wants to go to sleep. If

you come up very softly you can have one last peep at Him.

(THE BOYS COME UP FIRST, ONE BY ONE, AND KNEELING BEFORE THE DIVINE INFANT, SAY A BRIEF PRAYER AND PASS ON TO A LESS CONSPICUOUS POSITION.

THEN FOLLOW THE THREE GIRLS. AS EACH KNEELS DOWN SHE PUTS HER HANDS TOGETHER AS IN PRAYER, BOWS HER HEAD, AND THEN SINGS VERY SOFTLY OR SAYS, HER BRIEF LULLABY. THIS IS AT ONCE TAKEN UP BY THE ANGELS. AND SO WITH EACH OF THE GIRLS IN TURN, UNTIL THE END OF THE LAST VERSICLE "So, rest little High Priest, rest".)

RUTH: Sleep little Shepherd Sleep,
With your crook to rescue your sheep.

CHORUS OF ANGELS: "Sleep little Shepherd sleep,
Your flock you will safely keep,
Protected from every ill -
Not one shall be taken,
Not one be forsaken,
And the lost ones brought home from the hill.
So - sleep - little Shepherd sleep!

RACHEL: Sleep little Kinglet sleep,
Ever so softly and deep.

CHORUS OF ANGELS: "Sleep little Kinglet - Sleep!
Ever so softly and deep,
While oxen are chewing the cud;
Sleep in a manger,
Outcast and stranger,
Though Prince of the Royal Blood.
But the day will come,
With trumpet and drum,
When your banner shall be unfurled,
And Light against Darkness hurled -,
Till you are crowned King of the
Kings of the world-
So, sleep little Kinglet - sleep.

(RACHEL RETIRES AS ELIZABETH COMES FORWARD)

ELIZABETH: Rest, little High Priest rest,
With your ephod over your breast.

CHORUS OF ANGELS: "Rest little High Priest rest!
With your ephod on your breast.
When you are older
This little shoulder
Will bow with the whole world's sin
When by that Enemy,
In dark Gethsemane,
A deed will be done
That will darken the sun
And the Earth will tremble and shake,

As you will atonement make.
 On that strange altar
 You will not falter,
 Victim and Priest in One."

So, rest little High Priest - rest.

(THIS IS THE MOMENT FOR THE GIRLS TO RETIRE
 INTO THE BACKGROUND AND FOR THE ENTRY OF THE
 THREE KINGS - TO APPROPRIATE MUSIC.

WHEN THE KINGS HAVE GIVEN THEIR PRESENTS
 AND KNELT AWHILE IN ADORATION, THE SCENE
 IS FINISHED - SAVE FOR THE LAST TABLEAU.
 SO AT THIS POINT THE CURTAIN IS LOWERED FOR
 A FEW MOMENTS WHILST THE CHILDREN, SHEPHERDS,
 MAGI - AND ANGELS - ALL TAKE THEIR PLACES.

WHEN THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE FINAL TABLEAU
 THE CHOIR BEGINS THE "Adeste Fideles" THE END
 OF WHICH IS THE END OF THE PLAY.

F I N A L C U R T A I N .
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