

THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERIES

**An one-act entertainment for Yuletide
based on the Wakefield Mystery Plays**

Interpolating

*The Offering of the Magii
The Second Shepherd's Play
The Flight Into Egypt*

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The Christmas Mysteries

This entertainment is based on plays from the Wakefield Mystery Cycle. That remarkable 14th century collection contains some 48 plays on Biblical themes, of which, four are centred around the Christmas story. Of those four, The First Shepherd's Play is the least: dull, unimaginative and generally unplayable. The remaining three are The Offering of the Magi, The Second Shepherd's Play and The Flight Into Egypt.

To make my adaptation into a stageable production by modern standards, I have amalgamated, or rather interpolated, the three plays, weaving their stories into each other (although The Flight Into Egypt remains intact at the end) and adding music. For those who are interested, the various scenes break down as follows:

Scene Layout

1	Gaudete	The Angel Choir sings
2	Magi 1	Herod sends the Messenger
3	Shepherds 1	The Shepherds meet
4	Magi 2	The Kings meet; the Messenger overhears
5	Shepherds 2	The Shepherds meet Mac
6	Magi 3	The Messenger returns to Herod
7	Shepherds 3	Mac steals a sheep
8	Magi 4	The Messenger invites the Kings to Herod's palace
9	Shepherds 4	Mac takes the sheep to his cottage
10	Magi 5	The Kings arrive at Herod's place
11	Shepherds 5	Mac returns to the Shepherds and they wake
12	Magi 6	Herod consults the Kings
13	Shepherds 6	Mac returns to his cottage; The Shepherds miss their sheep
14	Magi 7	Herod sends the Kings off to find Jesus
15	Shepherds 7	The Shepherds come to Mac's hut and find the sheep
16	Magi 8	The Kings on the road, looking for Jesus
17	Shepherds 8	The Shepherds are confronted by the Angel
18	The Adoration	combines the Kings' and Shepherds' adoration of the Babe
19	Exit 1	The Shepherds leave and sing
20	Exit 2	The Kings leave and are confronted by the Angel
21	The Flight Into Egypt	Joseph is warned by the Angel and he and Mary flee
22	Ave Vera Virginitas	The Angel Choir sings

The Christmas Mysteries

Characters

(in order of appearance)

The Angel Choir

Herod, a wicked king (Can double Joseph)

A Messenger, of the usual sort (can double Angel)

1st Shepherd, apparently from Yorkshire, first name Coll

2nd Shepherd, an older man named Gibb

3rd Shepherd, a youth named Daw

1st King, from Tartar (China), named Melchior

2nd King, from Araby (Arabia), named Jaspar

3rd King, from Sheba (Africa), named Balthesar

Mac, a sheep-stealing peasant, also from Yorkshire

Gill, his clever, but long-suffering wife

Mary, the Mother of God

Angel, Gabriel perhaps (can double Messenger)

Joseph, her affianced husband (can double Herod)

NOTES

Three shepherds, obviously from Yorkshire, England, are guarding their flock. They encounter a sheep stealer to whom they offer a place by their fire, but are wary of him. Before night's end, he has indeed gotten away with one of their sheep. The thief and his wife have hidden the sheep in a baby's crib and pretend it is their child. In the end, the shepherds reveal their stolen sheep, and they punish the thief and depart — and then the play takes an odd turn.

The three shepherds are greeted on the road by an angel who invites them to come to a stable and see a new born babe. They enter the stable, and witness there the new born Christ child. The play ends with a hymn.

What is going on here?

The *Second Shepherd's Play*, written in the 14th century for presentation to a very Catholic audience, clearly presents, in its first part, a comic parody of the birth of Christ. It then presents us with a very Biblical version of the story. This light approach to God and the sacred often startles people today. The fact is that Medieval people believed something we have largely forgotten today: that God created humour, too. They believed that He enjoyed a good joke. Consider the platypus.

Faith, as seen through the eyes of the Wakefield Master, the unknown playwright who probably created the Wakefield cycle, comes only from the Heavenly forces. In *The Offering of the Magii*, the devil (Herod) is seen for what he is -- evil incarnate. In the *Second Shepherd's Play*, the devil (as embodied by the thief) cannot convince the shepherds that they see a baby, when they plainly can see only a sheep. When those shepherds are presented with the forces of Heaven, they are witness to a manger where lies a baby. What they see there is God.

The man, or people, who wrote the Wakefield Mystery Cycle certainly were not concerned with absolute accuracies in their scripture. They were, rightly, concerned about the meaning of religion. They believed simply in a God who enjoys humour and laughter and humanity.

And that's something worth having faith in, whether you are a believer or not.

The Christmas Mysteries

Scene 1: Gaudete

(There are three playing areas: the traditional Bethlehem stable on one side with a manger, sheep and a donkey; a “peasant’s cottage” on the other side with a pallet and crib; and a neutral area in the middle which serves as the shepherds’ pasture, Herod’s palace and other places)

(Organ music is heard; an ANGEL CHOIR sings)

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!*

Soprano Angels *TEMPUS ADEST GRATIAE,
HOC QUOD OPTABAMUS;
CARMINA LACTITIAE,
DEVOTE REDAMUS.*

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!*

Tenor Angels *DEUS HOMO FACTUS EST,
NATURAM ERANTE;
MUNDUS RENOVATUS EST
A CHRISTO REGNANTE.*

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!*

Alto Angels *EZECHIELIS PORTA
CLAUSA PER TRANSSITOR;
UNDE LUX EST ORTA
SALUS INVENTOR.*

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!*

Bass Angels *ERGO NOSTRA CANTIO
PSALLAT IAM INLUSTRO;
BENEDICAT DOMINO
SALUS REGI NOSTRO.*

Scene 2: Herod sends a messenger

(Enter HEROD in his palace; he rants and raves, up and down, doing his best to scare the audience, snarling, addressing them directly and moving down among them)

Herod Peace, I say, both far and near.
Who makes noise while I am here,
I say, shall die.
The lord am I of all this land,
Of tower and town, of sea and sand;
Down to me, all shall bow,
For all that do not sure will die;
And therefore will I send and see
In all this land, by hill or sea,
To look if any dwellers be,
In tower or town,
That will not bow alone to me.
If there be found any who,
With bitter pain I'll rack them so.

(A MESSENGER enters to HEROD)

Messenger, now look you go
Through town and country, to and fro,
I now command thee;
And truly look you peer and spy –
In every home thou dost come by –
Whoever does not hold that I
Am king of all;
And look you bring them hastily
Hither unto me;
And I shall see them swing away,
Those that will not heed our sway.

Messenger It shall be done without delay:
And surely, if I any find,
I shall not leave the one behind.

Herod Boldly must you bind and lead them here:
Mahoun, that wields the water and the wind,
Grant you speed!

Messenger All peace, my lord, stay with you still,
What I have said, that I will.

(He leaves HEROD and exits; HEROD snarls at the audience and exits)

Scene 3: The Shepherds meet

(The 1st Shepherd [Coll] enters to the neutral area)

1st Shepherd Lord, but this weather is cold! And I am ill happed;
I am all brain fogged, so long have I napped.
My legs they fold, my fingers are chapped.
I am all lapped in sorrow.
We foolish shepherds that walk on the moor,
No wonder it is if we be poor.
We are so hemmed and taxed and rammed,
We are hand-tamed by these politic men.
Thus are farmers oppressed to the point we miscarry in life!
They must have if they want it. If I should foregang it,
I were better be hangéd than once say them nay.
It does me good, as I walk on my own,
For a while to talk and to privately moan.

(The 2nd Shepherd [Gibb] enters opposite)

2nd Shepherd Lord, this weather is spiteful, and winds are so keen,
And the frosts are so hideous, they water my een.
No lie!
We poor husbands are all full of woe.
We have sorrow now and then; it falls oft so;
Men that are wed have not their own will,
God knows they are led, by the nose and for ill;
At table or in bed, they dare say nothing till bid.
Some men will have two wives and some men three.
Some men will have many, but as far as I can see,
Woe to him that has any, for sorry will he be.

1st Shepherd God watch thee now.

2nd Shepherd Have you seen any of Daw?

1st Shepherd Yea, I heard him blow; he comes here at hand.

2nd Shepherd He will make us both a lie.
We had best beware.

(The 3rd SHEPHERD [Daw] enters separately)

3rd Shepherd Lord, now speed me, and Saint Nicholas!
Not since Noah have such floods been seen;
Rains so rude and storms so keen;
Now God turn all to good, I say as I mean.
But I ponder.
These floods so they drown,

Both in fields and in town,
And bury all down,
And that is a wonder.
We that wake the nights, our cattle to keep,
We see strange sights when other men sleep.

(He sees the others)

Ah, sir, God save you and you, master mine!
A drink I crave you and somewhat to dine.

1st Shepherd God's curse, you knave; you are lagging behind.

2nd Shepherd What! Though the shrew came late,
Yet he's in a state
To dine, if he had it.

3rd Shepherd I shall do as I am done, sir, and so take what it yields,
For I never yet had supper while I watched in the fields.

1st Shepherd Thou wert an ill lad to go on teasing

2nd Shepherd Peace, boy, I say, no more jangling,
Where are our sheep, boy, we ask?

3rd Shepherd Sir, this same day at morn, I left them in the corn,
When the bells rang *Laudes*;
They have good pasture; they cannot go wrong.

1st Shepherd That is right, by the rood! These nights are long.
We should have us a song.

2nd Shepherd So I thought as I stood, to mirth us along.

3rd Shepherd I consent.

1st Shepherd Let me sing the tenor.

2nd Shepherd I, the treble so high.

3rd Shepherd Then the bass falls to me;
Let's see how you sing.

(They sing: Deo Gratias [The Agincourt Hymn])

All OUR KING WENT FORTH TO NORMANDY
WITH GRACE AND MIGHT OF CHIVALRY.
THERE GOD FOR HIM WROUGHT MARV'LLOUSLY,

THEREFORE ENGLAND CAN CALL AND CRIE: (*Sic Ed.*)

*DEO GRATIAS, ANGLIA,
REDDE PRO VICTORIA!*

THEN WENT HE FORTH, OUR KING COMELY,
IN AGINCOURT FIELD, HE FOUGHT MANLY,
THROUGH GRACE OF GOD, MOST MARV'LOUSLY
HE HAD BOTH FIELD AND VICTORY.

*DEO GRATIAS, ANGLIA,
REDDE PRO VICTORIA!
DEO GRATIAS, ANGLIA,
REDDE PRO VICTORIA!*

(The SHEPHERDS exit as they sing)

Scene 4: The Kings meet

*(The MESSENGER moves to the centre area, announcing
his message from a scroll)*

Messenger Take good heed to the message that comes to you
From Herod, the king.
He commands you, everyone,
To hold no king but him alone,
And other gods you worship none
But Mahoun, the evil one;
But if ye do, ye must be slain;
Thus told he me.

*(The 1st KING enters, alone, looking upward; the
MESSENGER moves behind and lurks unseen)*

1st King Ah! Lord, from whom this star is sent,
I pray to thee, with good intent,
That to me no harm is bent
On pathways wild.
Also I pray thee specially,
You grant to me some company,
That I may have some friend near me,
To travel far:
And, surely, then I shall not fail,
Till I shall find what may mean,
This star that has led me by its sheen,
From my country.

*(The 2nd KING enters, also alone, looking upward; they do
not see each other at first)*

2nd King Ah! Lord, that rules without end!
Where ever shall this star descend,
That led me thus to wend
Far from my land?
I shall never rest by day nor night,
Till I know whence comes this light,
And from what place.
Now lend me that grace!

(Watching the star, they bump into each other)

1st King Ah, sir, whither are you away?

2nd King Truth be known, I do not know my way;
I have followed yon star, many a day
From Araby;
For I am a king of that country,
And Melchior there men call me.

1st King And king, sir, was I wont to be,
In Tartar, my home,
Both of town and country;
Jaspar is my name;
The light of yon star there did I see.

2nd King The Lord be praised for it will greatly help us after
If we wend our way together.

(The 3rd KING enters as the others; he does not see them)

3rd King Ah, Lord! What far land may this be?
Such a star, with brilliant sheen,
I have never seen;
What it may mean, I know not;
But yonder are two, I think, in thought.
I shall find if they know ought
What it may be.
Lords, I pray you tell me clear
Whither you travel, in this manner,
And of this star, that shines so near,
What it may mean.

1st King Sir, I tell you truly,
From far Tartar for yonder star have I sought.

2nd King To seek yond light from Araby,
Sir, have I come.

- 1st King** Good sir, what country came you from?
- 3rd King** This light has led me from Sheba;
And Balthesar, my name to say,
A king, sirs, there, the truth to tell.
- 2nd King** And, kings, sir, are we two
Where we dwell.
- 3rd King** Now, sirs, I say we ride together,
Until we find, for good or ill,
What means this star that is shining still.
- 1st King** Such strange sight I have not seen,
What so ever it mean.
- 2nd King** Such a star was never yet seen,
As far in the world as I have been.
- 3rd King** Yond star tells, sirs, listen to me,
Of the birth of a prince, sirs, secretly.
This speaks of the prophecy
Or else the rules of astronomy
Suddenly escape me.
- 1st King** Balaam speaks of this thing,
That of Jacob a Star shall spring
That shall overcome Caesar and king,
Ending strife.
- 2nd King** Truly, lords, this wonder must be.
Now is fulfilled the prophecy.
This star bears witness, utterly,
Of His birthing.
- 3rd King** This star above, that brightly shines,
Shows us where that Prince we'll find.
- 1st King** Lords, I say we wend all three
To worship that Child.
In token that He the King shall be
Of everything,
This gold now will I bear with me
For offering.
- 2nd King** I'll incense bring, the truth to say,
Here in my hand,
In token that He is God To Be,

Forever without end.

3rd King In token that He shall one day die,
This Myrrh bring I.
Follow this light, in faith, I trust
That Child we'll find before long;

(The KINGS exit; the MESSENGER comes forward)

Messenger Mahoun, this is great news to me!
My lord, King Herod, the same shall see!

(The MESSENGER exits)

Scene 5: The Shepherds meet Mac

(The SHEPHERDS enter at the back; MAC enters at front)

Mac Now Lord, that made both world and stars,
Thy will, Lord, leaves me barren.
I am all uneven, my brain bewildered.
Now would God I were in Heaven,
For there weep no wives and children
Without end.

1st Shepherd Who is that pipes so poor?

Mac Lo, a man that walks on the moor
Just so he may scape out the door!

(The Shepherds recognize him as a thief; he pretends not to know them)

2nd Shepherd Mac, where have you been? Tell us your tidings.

3rd Shepherd *(Realizing who it is)* Is Mac coming? Then take heed to our things.

Mac Fie on you! Go out of my presence!
I must have reverence.

1st Shepherd Why make ye so quaint?

2nd Shepherd Mac, now you're a saint?

3rd Shepherd Mac, ye do wrong.

1st Shepherd *(Shaking his fist)* For this do you long?

Mac I shall swear a complaint and you all shall hang
At a word from my lord.

1st Shepherd Now, Mac, is that truth?

2nd Shepherd Mac, the devil in your eye.

3rd Shepherd Mac, know you not me?

(Mac pretends to suddenly recognize them)

Mac God look you all three!
You are a fair company.
Methought I knew you!

1st Shepherd You know us now, do you?

2nd Shepherd Enough of this jest!
As it often goes,
So will men suppose.
And you have the ill-nose
Of a stealer of sheep.

Mac Full sore am I and ill,
I am true as steel,
As all men know it.
I swear it is so:
I ate not a nettle
This month and more.

1st Shepherd How fares thy wife?

Mac A house full of brew, she drinks up, so.
Ill speed any other thing she must do!
But eat up as fast as she can,
And every year that comes to man
She brings forth a brat,
And some years two.
There is none that can say
Or knows better than I.
Now will you see what I offer:
To give all in my coffer
And pay for a Mass if she dies.

1st Shepherd I am cold and I'm wet and would have a fire.

2nd Shepherd I am weary with watching and have run in the mire.
Watch, you!

3rd Shepherd Nay, I'll sleep too.
But, Mac, come hither! Between us, lie down.

Mac But I'll keep you awake – you'll not sleep sound!

(They sing a round -- HEY HO -- and prepare to sleep, grabbing MAC and forcing him to lie down with them)

**The Shepherds
& Mac** HEY, HO, WHAT SHALL I SAY?
SIR JOHN HATH CARRIED MY WIFE AWAY.
THEY WERE GONE ERE I WHIST;
SHE SHALL COME WHEN SHE LIST.
HEY, TROLLY, LOLLY, LOLLY!
COME AGAIN, HO!
AH! AH! AH! AH! COME AGAIN, HO!

(They lie back and close their eyes. MAC ostentatiously crosses himself)

Mac No dread have I, from my top to my toe.
Manus tuas commendo, Pontius Pilato.

(The shepherds soon fall asleep; MAC opens his eyes and looks slyly around, rubbing his hands together)

Scene 6: The Messenger returns to Herod

(The MESSENGER goes to the palace; HEROD enters)

Herod Where have you been, so long from me?

Messenger Lord, gone on your errand, through the country.

Herod Why have you been away so long?

Messenger Lord, I've brought news of great tidings.
Some good, some ill, mingled among.

Herod How? I say tell.

Messenger As I walked, far and weary,
Lord, by the way,
I met three kings seeking a Baby,
Or so they say.

Herod Seeking a Baby! For what should they try?
Said they anything of their reason why?

Messenger Yea, lord! They said that He should be King
And then they went, with their offering,
To do this Babe honour.

Herod King! the devil! Of what empire?
Of what land should this Babe be sire?

Messenger Lord, by a star, bright as fire
This King they knew;
It led them out of their country.

Herod What! Fie! Fie! The Devil take all three!
When the future in a star they see,
I hold them mad.
He shall never reign over me,
That new borne lad;
King? What devil is king, other than I!
Oh, fie on devils! Fie! Fie!
That boy his crown shall dearly buy!
His death's appointed!
But first will I send, and see
The answer of those foolish three.
Messenger, now stir yourself,
Go, bid those kings come speak with me.
Say I crave a favour of them still.

Messenger It shall be done, lord, at your will,
Your bidding shall I soon fulfill
In any country.

Herod Mahoun shield thee from all ill.

(The MESSENGER leaves HEROD who snarls and exits)

Scene 7: Mac steals a sheep

(The SHEPHERDS are asleep; Mac rises)

Mac Now it's time for a man that lacks what he would
To stalk quietly then into the fold
And nimbly to work.
He needs fast counsel
Who would fare well
And has but little for spending.

(The SHEPHERDS snore)

Lord! But they sleep hard! – that may all hear!
I was never a shepherd, but now will I shear.

A fat sheep, I dare say,
A good fleece I dare lay,
Made right when I may,
But for today,
(He grabs a sheep)

This will I borrow.

(He exits, with his sheep; the SHEPHERDS snore)

Scene 8: The Messenger invites the Kings to Herod's place

(The KINGS enter at back; the MESSENGER goes to them)

Messenger Mahoun save you, Sir kings three,
I have a message to you privately,
From Herod, king of this country,
Who is our chief.

(He hands them a scroll)

1st King Welcome be, good friend!
Your king seeks us? Tell us why.

Messenger Sir, thus he said to me,
That you should come full hastily
To him, all three,
That he might crave a favour of you all.

2nd King Messenger, before us go,
And tell your lord it shall be so.
His will to do,
Both I and my fellows two
Shall come him to.

Messenger Mahoun keep you, my lord so dear.

(The MESSENGER leaves the KINGS)

Scene 9: Mac takes the sheep to his cottage

*(MAC, with his sheep, goes to the cottage, where he
knocks; GILL is within)*

Mac How, Gill, art thou in? Get us some light.

Gill Who makes such din, this time of the night?
I think I might not rise, a penny to win.

(She turns over to go back to sleep; MAC pounds again; she rises and peers out a window)

It's him. I curse him on high!

Mac Good wife, open the hatch! See you not what I bring?

Gill I must thread the thong.

(She fumbles with the door and finally opens it)

Ah, come in, my sweeting!

Mac Aye, but you still keep me standing.

(She moves aside and MAC enters; GILL sees the sheep)

Gill By the naked neck, thou art ripe for a hanging!

Mac I am worthy my meat,
For in a pinch I can get
More than they that work and sweat

Gill It were a foul blot to be hanged for this case.

Mac I have scaped oft enough from as hard a place.

Gill But so long as the pot goes to the water, they say,
It will be broken, at last, one day.

Mac Come and help fast; I would like to eat:
This year I've been fain for some good sheep meat.

Gill If they come e're he's slain and hear the sheep bleat — !

Mac Then I shall be ta'en. It gives me cold sweat.
Go bar up the door.

Gill Yes, Mac, for if they come at your back . . .

Mac Then did I buy, from all of that pack,
The devil's what-for.

(Gill returns and points to the cradle)

Gill A good trick have I spied it, since you can none.
Here shall we hide it, till they be gone.
In the cradle we'll lie it, then let me alone,

And I shall lie beside it, in childbed and groan.

Mac I shall say thou has bred us
A man-child this night.

Gill So a woman's advise helps at the last.
I will fear no spies, if you will go fast.

(MAC leaves the cottage; GILL lies down)

Scene 10: The Kings arrive at Herod's palace

*(The MESSENGER and the KINGS come to the palace;
HEROD is within)*

Herod Welcome, sirs, you are welcome still.

3rd King Lord, your bidding to fulfill,
We come to you.

Herod Ah, many thanks for your good will.
Tell me, I pray you specially,
What token saw you in the sky
Of this new King?

1st King We saw His star rise in the east,
That shall be King of man and beast,

2nd King Lord, when that star rose us before,
Thereby we knew that Child was born.

(HEROD stands apart from the KINGS and rants)

Herod Oh, alas, I am forlorn
For evermore!
I would be rent and all atorn
With toil and care!
Alas, alas, I am full woe!

(HEROD moves back to the KINGS and speaks calmly)

Sir kings, sit down and rest you so.

(HEROD leaves the KINGS)

Scene 11: Mac returns to the Shepherds and they wake

(MAC joins the SHEPHERDS where they lie)

Mac I will go back to sleep.
Still sleeps this company,
And I shall slide in quietly.

(MAC lies down; the SHEPHERDS begin to stir)

1st Shepherd *Resurrex a mortuis!* Give me a hand!
Judas carnas dominus! I can hardly stand.
My foot is asleep, by Jesu, and no water's to hand.
I dreamt that we floated all the way to England!

2nd Shepherd *(Yawning)* Ah-ye!
Lord, I have slept well!
As fresh as an eel,
And as light I feel
As a leaf on a tree.

3rd Shepherd *(Waking from a nightmare)* Benste be here in! So my heart quakes
It will jump out of my skin, the way that it makes.
Hark fellows, awake!
We were four:
See you Mac now?

1st Shepherd We were up before thou.

2nd Shepherd When we had long napped, I thought it was him,
A fat sheep he trapped — but he made no din.

3rd Shepherd Be still:
This dream maddens thee;
It is but a phantom, by the Tree.

(1st SHEPHERD sees MAC, lying "asleep")

1st Shepherd Now God turn all to good.

2nd Shepherd Rise, Mac, for shame! Thou liest right long.

MAC *(Stirring)* Now, by Saint James!
I think I be lame! My neck has lain wrong
All night. *(They help him up and fix his neck)*
Many thanks. Since yester-even
Now by Saint Steven,
I was plagued by a nightmare, so that even
This morning my heart beats so.
I thought my Gill began to croak and in labour she had
At nearly first light, a newborn lad
To add to our flock.
The house full of chicks

From the straw to the sticks.
Woe to him who has kids
And so little bread.
I pray look up my sleeve, that I have stolen naught.
I am loath you to grieve or to take from you ought.

3rd Shepherd Go forth, and little may you achieve!

(MAC exits)

Still I would we sought this morn
That we had all our flock.

1st Shepherd Let's go at once.

(They exit.)

Scene 12: Herod consults the Kings

(HEROD and the KINGS enter in the palace)

Herod These kings will have me understand,
That newly born is, in this land,
A king that shall rule sea and sand;
You tell me so.

1st King Truly, sir, lo, did I find
Well written in a prophecy,
How that Isaiah,
That never did lie,
Tells that a maiden of her body
Shall bear a child.

2nd King And also, sir, to you I tell
That child shall be called 'Emmanuel'
When he is borne.

3rd King Lord, this is truth, most surely.
Witness the prophet Isaiah.

(HEROD moves apart from them and rants)

Herod Out, alas! for fear I die,
Shall he have more power than I?
Ah, curse the day!
Alas, alas, I am forlorn!
I shall be rent and all atorn
With toil and care!
Banish this fear, or I go wild;

But surely, enemies as good
Have graved me not;
I shall see that bastard's blood,
By He who my soul has bought!

(HEROD returns to the KINGS)

But tell me, as you did before,
For love of me;
Now tell me where that boy is born.

1st King Thus Micha the prophet did foresay,
In Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Out of it a king shall rise.

2nd King Sir, thus we find, in prophecy:
In Bethlehem, we say truly,
Is born that king.

3rd King *(Holds out a scroll)* Lord, we witness it truly;
Here the truth yourself may see,
If you can read it.

(HEROD moves away again and rants)

Herod Alas, why was I ever crowned?
What's the worth of great renown?
I am the foulest born down
That ever was man;
Alas, that ever I should be knight,
Or be a king of such might,
If a babe should rob me of my right
And leave me so;
My life I'd end tonight,
If this be so.

(HEROD returns to the KINGS)

Ah, noble kings, harken, friends!
You shall have safe conduct to wend;
But come again at journey's end,
Sirs, I pray;
Some worship would I do that king,
Therefore I pray you that you bring
Me tidings soon.

1st King And truly, lord, at your bidding
It shall be done.

(Exit HEROD and the KINGS)

Scene 14: The Shepherds miss their sheep

(The SHEPHERDS enter to the pasture)

3rd Shepherd Ah, Coll, good morn. Why sleep you not?

1st Shepherd Alas that ever I was born! We have a foul blot.
A fat yearling have we lost.

3rd Shepherd Mary, God forbid!

2nd Shepherd Who should do us that scorn? That were a foul spot.

1st Shepherd Some one who is shrewd.
I have sought with my dogs
All nearby shrogs
But we are short one ewe.

3rd Shepherd Now by Saint Thomas of Kent,
Either Mac or his Gill are of that bent.

1st Shepherd Peace, man, be still!
You slander him ill.
You ought to repent
With good speed.

2nd Shepherd Now as ever I might be,
I would say it were he
That did this deed.

3rd Shepherd Go we thither, I say, and give speed to our feet.

1st Shepherd I shall not eat till with him I meet.

2nd Shepherd I will not sleep, until I him greet.

(They exit)

Scene 13: Mac returns to his wife

(MAC enters to the cottage door; GILL is within)

Mac Open this door! Are you here? How long shall I stand?

Gill Who makes such a tear with the moon yet at hand?

Mac Ah, Gill, what cheer? It is Mac, your husband.

Gill Then see we here the devil at hand.
(She opens the door and bows sarcastically) Sir Guile.
I'll not get to my work
For yet a long while.

Mac Will you hear the noise she makes in her nose,
Who does nothing but nap and play with her toes?

Gill Why who wanders, who wakes, who comes, who goes?
Who brews, who bakes, who makes you your hose?
Ay, and more!
But what end have you made with the herders, Mac?

Mac The last word that they said, when I turned my back,
They would look that they had of their sheep all the pack.

Gill I shall swaddle him tight in my cradle;
When I sup with the Devil, I use the long ladle!
I will lie down straight; come help me.

Mac I will.

Gill Listen well for their call. They will come soon.
Sing on your own, for I must groan,
Sing "Lullaby" right fast,
When you hear them at last;
And if I play a false cast
Trust me no more.

(The SHEPHERDS come to the cottage; MAC and GILL wrap up the sheep; GILL lays down; MAC sings HEY HO, badly; GILL cries out as if in pain)

3rd Shepherd Do you hear how they hack? Our lad likes to croon.

1st Shepherd I never heard one crack so clear out of tune.
Call on him.

2nd Shepherd Mac! Undo your door soon.

Mac Who is it that speaks as if it were noon,
With the sun high aloft?
Who is that, I say?

3rd Shepherd Good fellows enough, if it were day.

(MAC opens the door and the SHEPHERDS enter)

Mac As far as you may, good fellows, speak soft
Over a sick woman's head who is all at mal-ease.
I had sooner be dead, than she had any disease.

Gill Go to another house! Stay not so!
Each step that you take goes up through my nose!
Oh! So go!

Mac But how goes it with you?
You have run in the mire and are wet.
I shall make you a fire, if you sit.

(MAC indicates his "ailing" wife)

My nightmare last night, my dream, this is it:
Full season.
But we must drink as we brew,
And that is but reason.
Now, sir, goes it ought but good?

3rd Shepherd Yea, the sheep that we keep,
They are stolen as they stood. Our loss is great.

Mac Sirs, had I been there – !

1st Shepherd Mary, some insist that you were.
In fact, so think we.

2nd Shepherd Mac, some men say that it must have been ye.

3rd Shepherd Either you or your spouse, so say we.

Mac Now, if you have doubt of Gill or of me,
Come and rifle our house and then you may see
Whether *any* sheep I have got.
And Gill, my wife, rose not
Since she laid herself there.
If I speak not true, then to God I pray

(He points to the sheep in the cradle disguised as a baby)

That *this* be the first meal I eat this day.

(They begin to search the house)

Gill I faint!

Out, thieves, away from my roof!
You come to rob us, warp and woof!

Mac Hear you not how she groans? Your hearts should melt.

Gill Out, thieves, from my child! Get out of my door!

Mac Do you hear how she's feared? Your hearts should be sore.

Gill Ah, my middle!
I pray to God so mild if ever I you beguiled
That I eat this child that lies in this cradle.

Mac Peace, woman, for God's pain, and cry not so.

2nd Shepherd I'm sure our sheep is slain. What found you two?

3rd Shepherd We search but in vain. We may as well go.
(Holds up some rags) But tatters!
I can find no flesh,
Hard nor soft,
Salt nor fresh,
But two bare platters.

(He approaches the cradle and sniffs)

But no cattle I guess, tame or wild,
As I would have bliss, are as bad as *he* smells.

Gill Not so, God bless me and give me joy of my child!

1st Shepherd We have marked amiss; I hold us beguiled.

2nd Shepherd So we're done.
Mac, friends will be we, for we are all one.

Mac *We!* Now don't include me, for amends get I none.
Farewell to all three, and we're glad you are gone.

(He shoves them out and slams the door)

3rd Shepherd Fair words there may be, but love is there none
This year.

1st Shepherd Gave you the child anything?

2nd Shepherd My word, not a farthing.

3rd Shepherd Quickly back will I fly;
Abide for me here.

(He knocks on the cottage door; MAC answers)

Mac, take it not wrong if I come to your child.

Mac Nay, you've done me great harm, accusing so wild.

3rd Shepherd The child I'll not grieve, that little day star.
Mac, by your leave, I'll give him a start with
This six pence.

Mac Nay, away! He sleeps!

(The sheep bleats)

3rd Shepherd He peeps.

Mac But when wakened, he weeps.
I pray you go hence.

(1ST and 2ND SHEPERDS enter the cottage; 3RD SHEPHERD goes to the cradle)

1st Shepherd Let me give him a kiss; I'll lift up this clout.
What the devil is this? He has a long snout!

Mac He is birthmarked amiss! There's ill hereabout.

2nd Shepherd "From badly spun wool" they say "bad will come out."
Ay, so!
He is like to our sheep!

3rd Shepherd How, Gib? May I peep?

1st Shepherd This was a cute trick and a brazen one!

2nd Shepherd Aye, sirs, so it was!

(He pulls the covers off the sheep)

Do you see how they swaddle
His four feet in the middle?

3rd Shepherd I never saw in a cradle
A hooved lad before now.

Mac Peace, I say! Go bother some other!
I am he that him got, and yonder his mother.

1st Shepherd What name for this sot? Lo, God! Mac's heir!

2nd Shepherd Let be all that! Now, God give him care.

3rd Shepherd Yet, look at the ear mark. That's surely our token.

Mac I tell you, sirs, hark! His nose was broken.

1st Shepherd An end to all joking!
Get weapons!

2nd Shepherd You two are well-matched; one flesh, indeed!

3rd Shepherd Since they maintain their theft, let us do them dead!

Mac If I trespass again, cut off my head!
I leave it to you.

1st Shepherd Sirs, pay heed!
For this trespass,
We will neither banish nor smite,
Chide nor fight,
But will do what we might
And toss him in canvas!

(ALTERNATIVE 1: They drag MAC outside and toss him in a blanket, possibly with the aid of the audience; after a few tosses, they let him down)

(ALTERNATIVE 2: The Director steps forward and speaks the following)

DIRECTOR: *Wait! At this point in the play, the simple-hearted and boisterous folk of the 14th century, who had never heard of insurance premiums, would drag poor Mac into the audience and enlist the help of friends and neighbours in tossing him energetically on a sheet of canvas. While it would undoubtedly be fun to toss Mac twenty or thirty feet into the air, out of respect for the place we are in and being pretty sure our insurance won't cover it, we'll let it go by and Mac shall remain untossed. For now. Shepherds, leave the stage.*

Scene 17: The Kings look for Jesus

(RESUME: The SHEPHERDS exit and the KINGS move centre)

2nd King Alas, for the world, how have we sped!
Where is the light that has us led?

3rd King Woe to Herod, that cursed wight!
Woe to that tyrant, day and night!

1st King Lords, I say, we pray all three
To that Lord, whose Nativity
The star betokened.

2nd King Thou Child, Thou Lord of heaven and hell,
Thy noble star, Emmanuel,
Please to us show.

3rd King Ah, to that Child be ever honour,
That in this time has heard our prayer,
And lent us light to show our way.

1st King Behold, yond star is now shining,
From out the sky!

2nd King There is the place that we have sought.
Behold, and see!

3rd King I say we make offering, all three,
Unto this Child, Whom we shall see.
Our Saviour, aye, will He be.
Well have we sought.

(They exit)

Scene 18: The Shepherds are confronted by the Angel

(The SHEPHERDS enter to the centre space)

1st Shepherd Lord, but I am sore, nearly to burst.
In faith, therefore will I rest.

2nd Shepherd I could sleep anywhere I think that I list.

3rd Shepherd Now, I pray you,
Lie down on this green.

1st Shepherd To think on these thefts some more do I mean.

3rd Shepherd Wherefore should you worry?
The thief is caught clean.
Lie down.

(They lie down to sleep, but an ANGEL choir sings)

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!*

(An ANGEL appears and speaks to them)

Angel GENTLE SHEPHERDS, WAKE! ARISE!
FOR NOW HE IS BORN
THAT SHALL TAKE FROM THE FIEND
WHAT ADAM HAD LORN.

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!*

Angel GOD HIS SON TO YOU HAS SENT.
NOW AND AT THIS MORN,
IN BETHLEHEM, 'MID CATTLE LOW,
IS YOUR SAVIOUR BORN.

Angel Choir *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX.
MARIA VIRGINE GAUDETE!
GAUDETE!*

(The ANGEL exits and the music ends)

1st Shepherd The sweetest voice that ever I heard.
And marvel it is that I never was scared.

2nd Shepherd Of God's Son he spoke from on high.
The air shone brightly while he was nigh.

3rd Shepherd He spoke of a babe
That's in Bethlehem laid.

1st Shepherd See, a star in the air
That beckons us there!

2nd Shepherd Say, what was his song? You heard how he crooned it?

3rd Shepherd Yea, Mary, he mooned it – was no crotchet wrong.

1st Shepherd Let's sing it again, just as he trilled it,
2nd Shepherd To Bethlehem he said we should go;
I am troubled we tarry too slow.
3rd Shepherd Be merry and not sad, of mirth is our song.
Evermore glad shall we be before long.
1st Shepherd High we thither cheerly,
Though we be wet and weary.
To that Child and that Lady
Let us wend there quickly.

(They sing the song as they move to the stable.)

The Shepherds *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX MARIA VIRGINE.*
GAUDETE!

Scene 19: The Adoration

(The KINGS, also singing, approach the stable which lights brightly as they near it; MARY, JOSEPH and the BABE are in the stable)

**The Kings
& Shepherds** *GAUDETE, GAUDETE CHRISTUS EST NATUS EX MARIA VIRGINE.*
GAUDETE!

(The SHEPHERDS approach the stable from the opposite side; both SHEPHERDS and KINGS enter the stable; each kneels before the Child and Mary as they speak)

1st King Hail be thou, Maker of all thing!
In token that thou art our king,
And shall be aye,
Receive this gold, to my offering,
Prince, I thee pray.
1st Shepherd Hail, comely and clean! Hail, young child!
Hail, Wonder, born of a maiden so mild!
Lo, he laughs, the sweeting.
I have had my hearing;
And can give Him but some cherries.
2nd King Hail, Overcomer of king and of knight!
Thou art God's Son, most of might.
I bring thee incense, as is right,
For my offering.
2nd Shepherd Hail, suffering Saviour! that all things has wrought!

Hail, full of favour, that made all of nought!
Hail! I kneel and I cower. A bird have I brought
To thee, Saviour!

3rd King Hail, King of all, on Mother's knee!
In token that Thy Death shall be,
On Golgoth's Hill,
For thy graving, this myrrh of me
Save thee until.

3rd Shepherd Hail, darling dear, full of godhead!
I pray You be near when I have need.
I bring but a ball for You to have
And to play thee with all.

Mary Sir kings, marvel not what this may mean;
This Child, this night now born has been,
Our Hope is in;
I am His Mother, and maiden clean
Without sin.
Therefore, lords, where so you fare,
Boldly look you tell all there
Both man and beast to him shall bow,
In town and field;
My blessing, sirs, be with you now
Where so you rest.
May He keep you from woe!
I shall pray it be so.
Tell the tale as you go,
And think on this morn.

1st King Farewell, Lady, with Thy Child on Thy Knee!

2nd King A Wonder to see! Lord, it is well with me.

3rd King What Grace we have found.

1st Shepherd Come forth, we are won.

2nd Shepherd To sing are we bound.

3rd Shepherd Let us sing on aloft!

*(The SHEPHERDS and KINGS leave the stable; the
SHEPHERDS continue on and exit singing)*

The Shepherds *DONA NOBIS PACEM, DONA NOBIS PACEM.*

**The Kings
& Shepherds** *DONA NOBIS PACEM, DONA NOBIS PACEM.*

1st King Ah, lords dear! the truth I say,
We have made a good journey;

2nd King Lords, we have travelled long
And rested little all along,

3rd King I well agree. We are well sped
To rest awhile.

1st King Lords, before our steps we homeward turn,
To King Herod should we first return?

2nd King As we have said, so should we do,
With all our strength.

3rd King Let us journey on that way at length;
For in great matters we have strayed.
This tidings should be not delayed.

(The ANGEL CHOIR sings; the ANGEL speaks as they sing)

Angel Choir *DONA NOBIS PACEM.*
DONA NOBIS PACEM.
ETC.

Angel Oh, gentle kings, now listen well,
And wonder not, but silence still;
From God Himself I am now sent
To warn you, as your faithful friend,
That Herod king has evil meant,
To kill you is his vile intent;
And so that to you no harm's bent,
By other ways God wills you wend
Into your own country;
And as your fears have grown,
For the faith that you have shown,
Your Shield, aye, will He be.

*(The ANGEL exits and the ANGEL CHOIR finish their
song)*

1st King Harken, harken, fellows dear!
Our safety is no longer here;

2nd King Our false foeman we must flee,
That would us slay.

3rd King Now fear I not that we shall twine
In danger more;
For come we have, with many winds,
By pathways sore.

1st King This way will lead, the truth to say,
To my country;
Therefore, my lords, now have good day!
God with you be!

2nd King This is the gate, I understand,
That will lead me to my land.
To God of Heaven I you commend,
And have good day!

3rd King This is the way that I must wend;
Now God to us his angels send,
And save us from perils of the fiend,
For His Sake.

All three Kings Amen.

(They exit)

Scene 20: Joseph is warned by the Angel and he and Mary must flee

(Music; A bright light shines on JOSEPH and an ANGEL appears above the stable; an ANGEL CHOIR sings)

Choir *AVE VERA VIRGINITAS;
IMMACULATA CASTITAS;
CUIUS PURIFICATIO, NOSTRA FUIT PURGATIO.
AVE VERA VIRGINITAS;
IMMACULATA CASTITAS;
CUIUS PURIFICATIO, NOSTRA FUIT PURGATIO.*

Angel Awake, Joseph, and take intent!
I am an angel to thee sent
That there shall be no harms sent to catch thee out of care.
If you here longer lent, full soon will you repent and rue it very sore.

Joseph Ah! Mighty God, what does this mean, so sweet of tone?

Angel Lo, Joseph, it is I, an angel sent to thee.

Joseph For love, I pray thee why? What is thy will with me?

Angel Hence away thee high, and take with thee Mary,
With her child so free;
For Herod wills to die all young children here

That be less than two years old.

Joseph Alas, and woe is me! Where may we go?

Angel To Egypt shall thou fare with all the might thou may;
And, Joseph, hold thee there until the time I say.

Joseph I do not know the way; how shall we wend?

Angel Thereof have thou no dread; wend forth and leave God find
The way; He shall you lead, the King of all mankind.

(The ANGEL CHOIR sings)

Angel Choir AMEN. AMEN. AMEN.

(The ANGEL exits and the bright light comes down)

Joseph How should I thither find my way?
This news is thin and bare, and I am cast astray!
I have no strength to fare, nor sight that I should see.

(He wakes MARY)

Mary, darling dear, I am full woe for thee!

Mary *(Waking)* Ah, Joseph love, what cheer? Your sorrow frights me, dear.

Joseph As I lay sleeping through, as deep as in a swoon,
An angel to me drew, as blossom bright on bough
And told betwixt us two, that Herod wrought great woe,
And all young children slew wherever he might do.
That fiend! And he thy son would slay, a shame upon this day.

Mary My son? Alas for care! Who would my darling kill?
Woe unto Herod fare! Alas! My son? Why should he spill?
Alas! What man is there to slay this child I bear?

Joseph Now, love Mary, be still! This helps us not;
It is no use to fret and worry of thy brain.

Mary Alas! How should I not?
My son that is so sweet is sought for to be slain.

Joseph Shortly swaddle we this child and let us flee this deed.

Mary Dear Joseph, what plan ye?
To slay him were pity and full a hideous sin.

Joseph To Egypt land shall we.
For now, let be thy din and cry.

Mary How shall we thither wend?

Joseph I shall know the way; there is nought else to say,
But tight pack up our gear and haste us out of here.

(JOSEPH begins to fill a pack with their belongings; if a donkey is available, JOSEPH bridles it and places a blanket on its back; MARY takes up the baby; they speak separately, not to each other)

Mary My child, how should I bear so far from home?
Alas! I am full woe! Was never child so ill?

Joseph God will I may say so, my mother lives there still;
And I may to her go, and lead by land these two;
So ill a fool as I was never such a man;
My household, wife and I must fly as ere we can.
Young men, beware, say I: wed wisely if you can.

(JOSEPH returns to MARY with the donkey [if available] and helps her on to it)

Take I this bridle, Mary; tend thou to that page carely,
With all the craft thou can;
And may He that this world began, wish us the way!

Mary Alas, full woe is me! Is none so ill as I!

Joseph Whey! Love Mary, let be.
Forth now let us flee, dear love;
To Egypt let us fare;
But now, have thee no care;

(He addresses the audience directly)

I say God bless you one and all,
And have now all good day!

(Exit JOSEPH and MARY, MARY riding on the donkey, JOSEPH leading; the ANGEL CHOIR sing)

Angel Choir AVE VERA VIRGINITAS;
IMMACULATA CASTITAS;
CUIUS PURIFICATIO, NOSTRA FUIT PURGATIO.
AVE VERA VIRGINITAS;
IMMACULATA CASTITAS;

CUIUS PURIFICATIO, NOSTRA FUIT PURGATIO.

*O MATER DEI, O MATER DEI, O MATER DEI,
MEMENTO MEI!
AMEN. AMEN. AMEN.*

END OF PLAY