

PATIO NATIVITY

(See the saltedlightly.com blog for ideas on how to stage this piece)

(A carol finishes. Narrator invites everyone over to Bethlehem and the stable)

NARRATOR:

I've got a story to tell you this morning. A story about a shed. A very special shed. No, that's not true - no shed is special - they're all quite boring, actually. Even the town the shed was in wasn't special - it was a small and very ordinary place called Bethlehem, one of the least in all of Judah. But this shed, even though it was fairly small, had something in it that was bigger than the whole world. A bit like the Tardis, but without the need for a sonic screwdriver.

As you can see, I've got a shed here to help me. But this shed is even smaller than the one in my story - and this room is going to have to be different places, in Galilee and Judea.

(Taking them to Nazareth a long, rambling way, improvising, chatting to the audience)

We'll be doing a lot of travelling. I hope you brought sensible shoes and your toothbrush? Pyjamas? Oh. Well, never mind, maybe someone will lend you. Now where's Nazareth? I always get lost round here. Has anyone been to Israel before? - do you recognise where we are? Oh, here we are - great. So, if this room is an entire country, I'm going to need very small actors to keep the scale right. Are there any small actors here?

(Parent or helper encourages Mary from the audience onto the Nazareth area)

Oh, that's perfect - thank you. I'd like to introduce you all to a girl called Mary. Mary was one of God's chosen people, Abraham's family - the people God had called specially to produce his Anointed One or 'Messiah', a man who was going to rescue the world and set them all free. A bit like Superman, but without having to wear his underpants on the outside. Like Mary, the Anointed One was going to be a descendant of King David, as well as a descendant of Abraham.

But Mary wasn't thinking about that at all - she was much more excited about the fact that she was going to be getting married soon, to a nice carpenter called Joseph, in Nazareth in Galilee, where she lived. So imagine her surprise when one

day, just as she had finished doing the dishes, an angel appeared to her.

(Gabriel enters that area)

GABRIEL:

(To Mary) Hail, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.

NARRATOR:

Well, Mary was quite scared, because, as you can see, angels are a lot taller than humans. But Gabriel - that was his name - explained why God had sent him.

GABRIEL:

You are going to have a baby, and he will be great - the Son of the Most High. And God will give him King David's throne, to rule forever.

NARRATOR:

Mary was a bit confused, because she'd been told about how to make a baby, and she knew she hadn't ever made one. But the angel explained that this would be a special baby - not made in the usual way, but by the Holy Spirit - so Mary was happy to help God with his plan, and it all happened just like God had said it would.

(Joseph is brought onto the performing area from the audience by Gabriel)

Joseph was also rather surprised about this baby business, but the angel explained it all to him, so he was happy too.

(Gabriel encourages Joseph and Mary to kiss)

A while later, the Romans were making everyone go to their home town to count them, so Mary and Joseph travelled all the way to Bethlehem, where their ancestor King David had been born.

Band & congregation - "O, LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM"

(Gabriel leads Joseph & Mary over to Bethlehem (by a long way round) - maybe with Mary's dad, in donkey ears, giving her a piggy back, or on hands & knees with her sitting on his back?)

Well, loads of people were in Bethlehem, because of the Romans and their unhealthy obsession with counting things, so all the

hotels were packed. Bad news for the travellers, but not so bad for the people who ran the hotels.

(The Narrator leads Mary and Joseph to the shed)

So guess where Mary and Joseph ended up? That's right - the shed! You're very on the ball.

(Mary has a length of muslin or other cloth tied round and round her middle like a belt. While the Narrator continues, Gabriel undoes it, gently and carefully rolls it into the shape of a baby, and hands it back to her. Mary and Joseph sit in the stable, with the baby)

Someone lent them the shed they kept their animals in, so that Mary's baby could be born. They gave him the name Y'shua, like the angel had told them, which means 'the Salvation of the Lord'. That's Jesus in English. And then Mary had a rest.

(The Narrator goes over to look at the baby)

It was all a shock for the baby, as he'd been warm and snug where he was - but he didn't mind. It's not very nice to come and live in a shed, is it? Especially one that's dirty and smelly and cold. It's like when we ask God to come and live in us - because our hearts have parts that aren't so nice, and dirty corners where there's a bit of a whiff. But God doesn't mind - he comes anyway.

Mary, Joseph and children - "AWAY IN A MANGER"

(In the last verse, Gabriel gets the Shepherds to their place in the field)

Hey, look over there! While all this was going on, shepherds were out in the fields near Bethlehem, watching over their sheep, when suddenly something happened. Boy, were they surprised. Come on - let's go and see.

Gabriel, Band and congregation - "WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT"

(The Narrator leads the audience over to gather round the shepherds.)

While everyone is distracted with the song, Narrator gets parents to take the baby and toddler angels to their starting point - putting them on their shoulders out of

sight of the audience.

Gabriel appears to the shepherds at the appropriate time, as described in the carol, striking a pose, singing solo on the angel's lines (the performer could be on an upper level, though you'd need to do something to attract attention to him/her, or people wouldn't notice)

When it gets to "Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith..." the parents walk through the audience to where the shepherds are, with the little angels flapping their arms as if flying, sitting on their shoulders.

The carol ends. Parents put the little angels down. Gabriel and Narrator encourage the angels each to take a shepherd by the hand, and Gabriel leads them over to gather round the shed.

Narrator encourages audience to follow behind them.

While everyone is distracted watching the shepherds and angels joining the tableau in the stable, Gabriel gets the star and takes the Wise Men out of the room, up a corridor or to another room, and they get ready)

So the shepherds came to see the baby king that the angels had told them about. They brought him some little bits and pieces, like a lamb, a stick or a woolly scarf. A bit like Christmas presents, only without the crowds and the commercialisation. And Mary and Joseph didn't look down on their presents and sulk for something nicer, because they knew that the shepherds had given the baby everything they had - and that was all anyone could do. So they smiled and said 'thank you'. The shepherds were part of Abraham's family too, so they loved the baby and worshipped him, hoping he was going to be the one to save Israel.

(The Narrator turns a page and is surprised)

But what's all this? It seems as if God's plan was bigger than that. A sign appeared in the sky - a bright star that could be seen not just by God's people, but far and wide. What was that all about?

Could it be that God wanted to bless all nations through Abraham and his Anointed One? Look way over there - do you see that far distant land? We're going to have to go on even more of a journey than I thought.

(The Narrator leads everyone to the entrance of the performing space and holds up a passport)

If everyone could get their passport out ready, that would really help. And I'm afraid we don't have time for Duty Free. Please stick together - has anyone got a phrase book? Or Google Translate or something.

(Narrator leads the audience away from the performance hall, encouraging them to look for the star.)

At some distance, Gabriel holds the star up (could be on a stick, like a wand or fishing rod). The Wise Men are frozen in a tableau, pointing at the star)

Yes, there they are - well spotted!

(Narrator takes audience to see the wise men, maybe questioning the wise men on what they've seen and what it could mean)

Some very wise and important men saw the star in a far off land, and understood what God was saying to them even though they were not his people, and they too went to see the baby.

Wise Men and Congregation - "WE THREE KINGS" (first and last verses)

(Gabriel walks back through the audience holding the star high, leading the Wise Men to the performance hall. Narrator encourages everyone to follow them in procession.)

The wise men get to Bethlehem and join the group around Mary and Joseph, and Gabriel encourages them to present their gifts)

They brought the baby presents - gold, that a king wears; frankincense, that's used to worship God; and myrrh, that you put on a dead body. A bit like Christmas presents, only without the difficulty finding somewhere to park, and worrying whether you've bought the right size. And Mary and Joseph didn't wish for something a bit less weird, and ask if they'd kept the receipts - because they knew this was a very special baby, and there were things about him they still didn't understand. So they smiled and said 'thank you'.

And the wise men (who were not really God's people) joined the shepherds (who were), and they all worshipped the baby

together. And they saw that he himself was really the best present of all.

Band and choir - "O, HOLY NIGHT"

That's not the end of the story - I could tell you of all the adventures they had keeping the baby safe, and how they took him from the shed to Egypt to hide, then back to live in Galilee, so that his light would shine on the people there too. And all about what he did when he grew up, and all about what he's going to do in the future.

But it's the end of the Story of the Shed. Thank you for helping me to tell it. Some stories are true, and some are made up; it's up to you to decide what you think of any story that you hear.

(Narrator stoops down to speak to the children, pointing to the audience)

Look at all those giants out there. Maybe they'd like to come and see the baby? Why don't you go and invite them? - everyone's welcome to come.

Band and congregation - "HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING"

(While everyone sings the carol, Narrator and Gabriel encourage the little ones to bring their parents and others to see the baby. Mary and Joseph say hello, shake hands etc and show him to them)

Short Preach, if you wish

NARRATOR:

And now, the end of a good story is the beginning of a good celebration!

Band & congregation - "O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL"

(Everyone dances, party poppers, streamers, whatever)