

Part One -- Manuscript

Back to Bethlehem

Act One

Christmas Preparations

Stage directions: The play opens on a darkened stage, representing the large living room of the Johnson home. Mr. Johnson is sitting in an easy chair, his face buried in a newspaper. On the other side of the stage, sitting on a sofa, are his twin children Jimmy and Hannah. Sitting in between are the Junior Church children. The Narrator and piano player are off to the side. With the stage still dark and everyone still, the Narrator begins to speak.

Narrator The Christmas musical play entitled “Back to Bethlehem” makes one central point -- each Christmas season we should go back to Bethlehem!

Think about it! That very first Christmas back in Bethlehem, who was there?

- Was Santa there? or Baby Jesus?
- Was Baby Jesus born in a glittery shopping mall? or in a simple stable?
- Did Baby Jesus come into the world to sell merchandise? or to save sinners?

This Christmas season, let’s go back to Bethlehem, where Jesus came from Heaven to Earth so that we might go from Earth to Heaven. Yes, Jesus came from the land of light to the land of darkness so that we might go from darkness to light. (*The lights come on. Everyone is frozen, except the Narrator who continues to speak.*)

Our story begins in the living room of Fred Johnson, a widower whose wife died a couple of years ago. He and his twin children -- Hannah and Jimmy -- have invited the Junior Church children over to the house for a Christmas party. After playing some games, Mr. Johnson and the children sing the song *Back to Bethlehem*.

Stage directions: Mr. Johnson holds the newspaper out to the side with his left hand, points to it with his right hand, and begins to sing. At the end of the first verse, he tosses the paper down, stands up, and starts to sing the chorus with the children, who remain seated. At the start of the second verse, Mr. Johnson sits down, picks up his Bible and opens it as he starts to sing. At the end of the second verse, he stands up, holding the Bible over his head; the children stand up also as they all sing the chorus.

Back to Bethlehem

Mr. J I opened up my paper, and there stood Santy Claus,
Riding with his reindeer past jam-packed shopping malls,
The Winter Holiday parade, lots of candy and applause.
The meaning of Christmas sure has changed from what it was.

Mr. J and Children Back to Bethlehem! Manger in the stall.
Back to Bethlehem! Baby in the straw.
Back to Bethlehem! God became a man.
Each and ev'ry Christmas, let's go back to Bethlehem.

Mr. J Then I opened up my Bible and read of Bethlehem,
Where a newborn came to give new life to a world of dying men.
I looked for the adoring crowd, but I found none of them.
The worshippers were few that day back in Bethlehem.

Mr. J and Children Back to Bethlehem! Angels sing His praise!
Back to Bethlehem! Shepherds spread the news!
Back to Bethlehem! Wise men still seek Him!
Each and ev'ry Christmas, let's go back to Bethlehem.

Back to Bethlehem! Manger in the stall.
Back to Bethlehem! Baby in the straw.
Back to Bethlehem! God became a man.
Each and ev'ry Christmas, let's go back to Bethlehem.

Mr. J Children Each and ev'ry Christmas, let's go back to Bethlehem.
Back to Bethlehem!

Mr. J Good singing, kids! Have a seat while I read some of the Christmas story out of the Gospel of Luke. (*Everyone sits down*). The angels have just told the shepherds that the Savior has been born this day in Bethlehem. Now, how did the shepherds react to the news of the birth of Baby Jesus? Sssshhh! Listen carefully.

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

Jimmy Hey, Dad, would you please read that last verse again?

Mr. J Sure, Jimmy. “And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

Jimmy That's what I thought you said, Dad. That manger must have been pretty crowded.

Mr. J What do you mean, Jimmy?

Jimmy Children Well, Dad, the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus lying in a manger. (*Laugh*)

Hannah Oh, Jimmy. You're being silly.

Mr. J Well, kids, the verse before that is the verse that inspired Aunt Matilda’s song *Let Us Now Go to Bethlehem*. You see, God led those shepherds to Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Once they saw Baby Jesus and believed that the baby really was the Savior, then they “made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.” In one sense, those shepherds were the first Christian missionaries.

Hannah Dad, I want to be a missionary.

Mr. J That’s great, honey! How about the rest of you kids? Do any of you want to be missionaries?

Children (*Some of the children say*) Yes, sir!

Mr. J Well, let’s sing!

•••••
 ••••• **Stage directions:** Mr. Johnson, Jimmy, Hannah, and the Junior Church children sing this exciting shepherds’ song. In the first verse, everyone is seated as Mr. Johnson sings. At the first chorus, Mr. Johnson grabs the staff, leaps to his feet, motions for the children to stand, and then marches them around the stage. They stop abruptly at the start of the second verse. The children freeze and stare at Mr. Johnson as he sings the second verse. Then, at the start of the chorus, Mr. Johnson resumes marching with the children.
 •••••

Let Us Now Go to Bethlehem

Mr. J The angels and the shepherds
 Were both so much excited,
 For they had been invited
 To witness Jesus’ birth.
 They had the same reaction
 To the news of Bethlehem.
 I wonder, Yes, I wonder,
 Would I have done the same?

Mr. J and Children Let us now go to Bethlehem,
 Bethlehem, Bethlehem.
 Let us now go to Bethlehem
 Where Baby Jesus is born,
 Where Baby Jesus is born today.

Mr. J The angels and the shepherds
 Were both so much excited
 When they had fin’ly sighted
 The Christ, the newborn King.
 They had the same reaction --
 Spread the news of Bethlehem.
 I wonder, Yes, I wonder,
 If I have done the same?

(continued on next page)

The Perfect Gift

Girls Ev'ry good gift and ev'ry perfect gift
cometh down from the Father of lights.

Boys Ev'ry good gift and ev'ry perfect gift
cometh down from the Father of lights,
With whom is no variableness,
All neither shadow of turning.

Girls Yes, ev'ry good gift
and ev'ry perfect gift
Boys cometh down from the Father of lights.
All With whom is no variableness,
neither shadow of turning,
Baby Jesus was the perfect gift
that came down from the Father of lights.

Hannah Hey, Dad, the church bus is here.

Mr. J OK, kids, let's head'em up and move'em out. Thanks for coming, and I'll see you on Sunday.
(The telephone rings.)

Mr. J Hannah, get that, please.
(The children start to leave. Mr. Johnson hands out gifts from a bag.)

Hannah Dad, it's Uncle Herbert!

Mr. J *(Mr. Johnson looks from the phone to the children to the phone. He hands the bag to Jimmy, who starts handing out gifts.)* Howdy, Uncle Herbert.
(Pause)

Mr. J Yep. Aunt Matilda will be coming, too. She can't wait!
(Pause)

Mr. J We're all packed and ready to go for an old-fashioned Christmas. We can be there in three hours. Is something wrong?
(Pause)

Mr. J Oh, I see. Let me ask the kids. Hold on. *(Mr. Johnson turns to Hannah and Jimmy.)*
Hey, kids. Uncle Herbert says that a big winter storm is headed his way. Some of the other family members have already called, saying they won't make it tonight to the family reunion.

Jimmy Dad, did Uncle Herbert say "mighty inconvenient"?

Mr. J *(Laughing)* Of course. What do you think, kids?

Jimmy Sounds like a great adventure to me, Dad. We cowboys have got to be tough.

Mr. J Sure, Jimmy. How about you, Hannah?

Hannah Oh, Dad, I hate going anywhere in bad weather. And you know I don't like Uncle Herbert's farm and that awful cow of his.

Jimmy *(Jimmy starts laughing.)*

Hannah *(Hannah glares at Jimmy.)*

Jimmy I won't ever forget when old Bessie bumped you into that pile of cow manure.

Hannah It wasn't funny then, and it isn't funny now.

Mr. J Well, kids, what's it gonna be? Aunt Matilda was really looking forward to visiting some of your mother's relatives again and seeing her brother Herbert.

Hannah *(Looks all put out.)* Well, I guess I'll go. But, please, Dad, be careful.

