

**“IT’S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW”
NATIVITY PLAY**

DAVID COLEMAN AND ZAM WALKER

CHARACTERS (In order of appearance)¹

LADY WISDOM: - from the Bible: Book of Proverbs: the one who encourages those who would be great servants of God to learn whatever they can. [Large part]

CHARLES DARWIN. “The man who cannot tell a lie”. Studied the Bible thoroughly in the original languages. *Wardrobe note: Charles had a velvet jacket, high-forehead bald wig and lots of white hair and beard. He also carried an orang-utan.*

READER (provides some Bible quotes)

HEROD Evil bully, oppressor, nervous about his position.

JOSEPH Decent upright carpenter in need of a wife

MARY Young woman who says yes. Mother of Jesus.

ANGEL Scary messenger of God, offering evidence

SCRIBE A scholar who longs for freedom

SHEPHERD 1 Experts on sheep.

SHEPHERD 2

SHEPHERD 3

CHOIR OF ANGELS Making heavenly music.

MAGUS 1 Magi are Zoroastrian astrologers : rather like scientists today in the respect and suspicion they arouse.

MAGUS 2

MAGUS 2

¹ This play was designed to be presented as worship on a Sunday morning close to Christmas, in a church building. This meant that we could take advantage of screens and sound systems. So, for instance, the title of each scene was clearly legible to the audience. With the particular cast on the first performance, the script was available throughout on multiple computer monitors, so there was no need for paper or for much prompting. If you use it, however, please freely adapt it to your needs and circumstances.

A CALL TO WORSHIP, SORT OF....

Introduced by Lady Wisdom and Charles Darwin

Lady Wisdom introduced from the Bible [Proverbs Chapter 8] by minister/leader of worship/ MC

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PROLOGUE

TIME: OUTSIDE OF TIME

PLACE: TOUCHING MANY PLACES

CHARACTERS: Lady Wisdom, Charles Darwin, Reader

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious 'jingle' e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

LADY WISDOM:

Come with me. Come, Listen.
it will be to your good!

This will be my gift to you:
to learn all that you could!
for knowledge is not to be fled
No: seek and pursue it!

...until you find...

There are things you don't know.

If you can learn that, then you will be wise indeed.

If you can live with that,
and not give up your search
you will be wiser still.

And journeying with wisdom further,
If you grasp the truth in love,
and even love in truth

Then truly, truly you will be
Not merely wise,
Not merely wise,
but free.

Such knowledge makes you happy

To choose. To take. To leave. To trust.

Now, everyone, for you, it's nearly Christmas, so I would like you to put your hands together and give a great [*Place where it's happening*] welcome to everyone's favourite old man with a wonderful long white beard....
It's.... Charles Darwin. "The man who cannot tell a lie".

DARWIN: Er... hello! What am I doing here?

LADY WISDOM: Hello there, Charles, have you got anything for us today?

DARWIN: Hello Lady Wisdom. Yes, there's just one thing which might be very helpful in what you are trying to do here: this is it in my own words:

[In reading] my work, a crowd of difficulties will have occurred to the reader. Some of them are so grave that to this day I can never reflect on them without being staggered; but, to the best of my judgment, the greater number are only apparent, and those that are real are not, I think, fatal to my theory.

LADY WISDOM: That's wonderful Charles. But I wonder if everyone quite grasped what you were saying. You had children, didn't you.

DARWIN: Yes, I spent time with them every day.

LADY WISDOM: Did any of them play with jigsaw puzzles

DARWIN: Well, do you know, yes, they did.

LADY WISDOM: So what you are saying, is that when you do a jigsaw, even if some of the pieces are missing, or some of them are in the wrong place, there comes a time when you still have a pretty good idea of how the picture will turn out.

DARWIN: My goodness, you're so right. I should have put that in my book...

LADY WISDOM: Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls, Christmas is that jigsaw. As we will see. Play with it as you will.

Sometimes you force all the pieces together.
Wise men and shepherds jostling for position,
shoehorned in
like the ugly sisters' toes
into Cinderella's glass slipper.
Donkeys, camels and robins and snowmen.
Leaving out the nasty stuff with Herod!

Oh, you can enjoy it,
-but the picture's rubbish!

So come with us. Come, Listen.
it will do you good!

“The Bible Story
of the birth of Jesus”:
awe and wonder;
awe and wonder,
and yet,
what to need to know?

Scholars help us
with descriptions;
teachers, scribes and experts
working hard on “how”

DARWIN: Quite right, quite right!

LADY WISDOM: But what you won't and cannot change,
what you won't and can't destroy
is “why?”
With this authority:

READER: John 20:31 these things are written that you may trust that Jesus is the
Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you have life in Jesus' name.

LADY WISDOM: And with this:

READER: LUKE 1:37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

Let's have life. Say it with me:
“LET'S HAVE LIFE”

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CAROL

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**SCENE 1:
GATHERING THE PIECES
TIME: OUTSIDE OF TIME
PLACE: THE UNIVERSE**

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious 'jingle' e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

READER: In the Beginning was the Word
The Word was with God
The Word was God.
In God is life.
That shines as light
that even darkness
can't explain away.

LADY WISDOM:
You think light and darkness need to be enemies?
Think again!
Making friends with darkness.....
No problem.
You live half your life there.
And so, in darkness, we shed light..
the pieces take their place:
Darwin? What about the facts? What do we have to go on?

DARWIN: Well, there's Herod: ?
A murderous foreign king. Probably about eighty in this story.
He died "after a lunar eclipse". in 3,4,5, or 6 ad.
That's as good as it gets.

And then the stars?
And "wise men": wait and see!

And then the year? - your calendar,
"ad bc" was not in use
for half a thousand years or more,
so don't expect too much.
Just 'cause someone says it's 1 ad,
doesn't mean they got it right.

And then the census?
You might ask which one?
Augustus Emperor, Lord of taxes
in an Empire built on slavery,
The tyrant

who liked to be called
Saviour, and Prince of Peace
had a census every few years.

LADY WISDOM: Thank you Charles.
But you left one out. That's unlike you.
The Bible is as good
as any other ancient text!
when you know how to read it.

Where does that get us?
Plenty pieces;
some pop up more than once.

But our next step's a sly one:
As we eavesdrop on a young couple.
Are they an item?
Almost!
Two young folks with problems we can only dream of.

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**SCENE 2:
THE YOUNG COUPLE
TIME: BEFORE THE BIRTH
PLACE: VILLAGE OF NAZARETH**

MARY AND JOSEPH, BACK TO BACK

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*[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious 'jingle' e.g.
extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]*

JOSEPH: I don't deserve this.

I took note of what they always said.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength.

Prayed the prayers, paid the dues.
Skills and tools - just need a wife.

And then Mary....
- not that I saw that much of her, you understand.
Good boy, I am!
Upright.
I know how to wait.

And then Mary -....

Well. She's going to have a baby.
Whole village knows, it won't be mine!

At least, I hope that's what they think!

A decent man, they say, would turn away.
Out on the street, like she deserves!

The best thing would be, quietly call it off!

But **someone** changed my mind.
Said it would be ...

ANGEL: “..all right. God will understand, if no one else does”.

JOSEPH: And like a fool...
I said yes. And someone said.

ANGEL: One more thing: the baby's name:

JOSEPH: And I said: ‘Joseph?’ They said:

ANGEL: Jesus! - you make sure.

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MARY: Why me? I asked for evidence! but someone said :

ANGEL: “God likes you”

MARY: Nothing was explained. But someone said

ANGEL:“a baby.”

MARY: I said: no way, not yet! But someone said

ANGEL:“Your cousin Liz - a mother after all.

Look. See. Change your mind.”

MARY: And I said. YES! But someone said.

ANGEL: One more thing: the baby's name:

MARY: I said: Joseph? They said:

ANGEL: Jesus! - you make sure!

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They turn to face each other

JOSEPH: Mary!

MARY: Joseph!

JOSEPH: We can't stay here.
But there's a good excuse.
There's a census - like we've had before.

MARY: It's not safe here.
No, we need clear
of wagging tongues,
and folk who think they know too much.

JOSEPH: My family hail from Bethlehem.
We'll say we've gone to register.
Blame the bureaucrats
till dust settles; till the baby's born.

MARY: It's a long way, Joseph!
Are you sure? I thought there was a census a year or so ago?

JOSEPH: Census Shmensus. Who's to know or care?
Don't make it awkward. Can't stay here!
Unless you *want* to be stoned?
Let's say, from now, we're married.
A couple.
But with separate beds!

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**SCENE 3:
SILENCE OF THE SCRIBES
TIME: BEFORE THE WISE MEN VISIT. NEAR END OF HEROD'S REIGN
PLACE: SCRIBES HQ JERUSALEM**

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious 'jingle' e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

**Scribes HQ Jerusalem. Towards the end of Herod's reign.
Scribe.[Looking around nervously]**

SCRIBE: "King" Herod wants magicians.
Not scribes. Not scholars.
The hat won't fit without a rabbit.

Me? I've studied. Studied, Studied, argued,
changed my mind and studied more.
But what's my job?

Saying yes.

I have spent my life for learning.
You could say that I “fought.”
But pens are poor defence against a sword.

“Two scribes, five opinions”
we so proudly used to say.
Blessed by God
with whom Moses argued.

But Herod just wants yes-men.
Herod wants one truth.
Leak-tight. Certain
Herod’s truth. No other.

All our learning!
Adds up to what?
When rabbis and the men of God risk death for doing their job?

So all we have left here in Jerusalem
are poor scholars or skilful cowards
who know to keep their head below the parapet.
If Herod wants an answer...
Well. we give him one.
-And hang our heads in shame, but live.
To learn and teach another day.

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SCENE 4:
SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS
PLACE: HILLSIDE ABOVE BETHLEHEM
TIME: THE NIGHT OF JESUS’ BIRTH

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious ‘jingle’ e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

On the hillside, surrounded by sheep: by Bethlehem.

SHEPHERD 1: We know sheep. Inside out.
Eat sleep sheep. Eat sleep sheep.
Day in, and yes, day out.

SHEPHERD 2: We like good stories, like good song,
No side on us; well, not for long.

SHEPHERD 3: At night we keep the wolves at bay.
It's a living; not much pay.

SHEPHERD 1: Time gone by they made us kings.
Like David, with his stones and slings

SHEPHERD 2: Now dirty outcasts, poor, uncouth.
Ripe to welcome God's own truth.

SHEPHERD 3: We know, we don't know.
We're not wise -
Hold on - scary flashing
Light - light in the skies!

ALL SHEPHERDS: HELP!

ANGEL: Don't.... be..... afraid!
I suppose that's a bit late!
Do I need to introduce myself?

(shepherds shake heads)

ANGEL: That's a relief.
You know, a while ago, there was a priest -
a priest of all people - and I had to **tell** him I was an angel.
That was about a birth as well.
(Does God think I'm a stork?)

Down to business:
You won't find us in science books.
Unless they're very badly written.

Nor can you ever calculate
our size,our age, or shape.
Nor how we dance,
Nor measure span of wings.

But truly, as God's messengers
we are charged with change.

We are your decisions.
We present the choices.
We are those moments
when all comes to a head.

Yes, choice is always yours.
But there's no shame in canvassing.

Our authority should be obvious,
And experience is fact.
but we still offer evidence on top.

So. We say:
“This you’ll find-
And “That you’ll see”
And who you’ll meet, and think of me.

So Shepherds: this, for you:

Tonight a baby has been born.
to you that know to celebrate.

You could just take my word for it
but God wants you to see.
A homeless family,
sheltering
their first, their new-born child.

To stir them up, to be there first.
You’ll find him, and his parents.
And when you do, then think of me.

Oh - You like songs, I overheard.
So here’s one: on your way:
Take it away, folks!

GLORIA (sung by church choir: could also be a cantor-response version, like the well-known ‘Peruvian’ gloria.)

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Tableau: Adoration of the shepherds

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**SCENE 5:
EASTERN SCHOLARS
TIME: BEFORE THE WISE MEN VISITED
PLACE: “THE EAST”**

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious ‘jingle’ e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

DARWIN: Magi- Wise men: Worshippers of Mazda God of light. Probably from Mesopotamia How many were there? (to audience) What do you think?

All it says, is more than one.
If wise men came to Bethlehem
To see a babe, turned toddler
in a house, no more a stable;
What gave them life?
What did they see?
what sent them on their way:

MAGUS 1: "Well would you look at that!"

DARWIN:(Halley's Comet, 12bc)

[rewind noises]

MAGUS 2: "Well would you look at that!"

DARWIN:(Amazing triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn 7 bc. Not due again until 7541. Pretty good odds!)

[rewind noises]

MAGUS 3: "Well would you look at that!"

DARWIN: Bright Comet in Capricorn, 5bc)

[rewind noises]

MAGUS 2 "Well would you look at that!"

DARWIN: Historical record of a new star in the East 4bc)

Where is this getting us?

LADY WISDOM It might or might not have been any one of these.

All we really have is this, or something like it:

[rewind noises]

MAGUS 1: "Well would you look at that!"

MAGUS 2: What do the stars tell you?

MAGUS 1: Nothing. They're stars, stupid. They don't speak!

Ask me a better question.

MAGUS 2: All right: What should we make of what we've seen?

MAGUS 1: If we can see what I think we can see, there will be a new king... of the Hebrews.

MAGUS 3: They're stars. They don't care about kings.

And we are scholars.

We should just record what happens.

Not leap to conclusions.

Aren't the stars enough for you?

MAGUS 2: And if we proved you wrong?

MAGUS 3: Never!

MAGUS 2: You're afraid of learning.

[silent confrontation]

MAGUS 1: Get the caravan. Jerusalem!
Though from what I've heard,
the evidence is very very poor.

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**SCENE 6:
HEROD'S PALACE
TIME: THE WISE MEN VISIT:
HEROD'S 'SURGERY'
PLACE: JERUSALEM, JEWISH CAPITAL.**

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious 'jingle' e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

HEROD:.. Come on, come on, we haven't got all day!
(sees Magi advancing)
Give me strength!
Who let them in here? I'll have their...

MAGUS 1: Illustrious majesty. We are sorry.

HEROD: *[off his stride]* Sorry are you? I can arrange for that?

MAGUS 2: Your Majesty. We set out upon a scholarly quest. The movement of the stars must have led us astray. That, and our learning. We need to study more.

HEROD: *[to all]* What are these foreign eejits on about?

MAGUS 3: We came to see the new king of the Jews. To pay our respects.
We read it in the stars.... A new king....

HEROD:*[awkward silence].. [Herod stands]*... well, not that I **want** to pour scorn on your learning. But unless I'm a rather.... precocious *child*... the king you've found is not that.... new. I've been here a lifetime.
And *I've* learned that *men of learning* can always be persuaded of their error. you just need to appeal to the right authority.
Isn't that so, scribe? *[swipes at Scribe]*

Authority! That's what I've got in bucket-loads here.

Scribes and chief priests eating out of my hand.
Right. What have you got to *put these learned Gentlemen right*?

[Scribes fumble, scrolls, prophecy]

READER OR SCRIBE *“And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda,
art not the least among the princes of Juda:
for out of thee shall come a Governor,
that shall rule my people Israel.”*

[Scribe runs away]

HEROD: *[Aside]* (They did their job. That’s worrying.)

[to Magi] Bethlehem? I don’t believe it. That dump! Well, tell you what. If you can find a king in Bethlehem, you’re a better scholar than me. **[Evil laugh]**.

[patting Magi on back, a bit too heavily] Off you go, then, to Bethlehem, but tell you what - if you find him, be sure and tell me so I can pay respects in the appropriate manner!
GO!

[to soldier] - find that Scribe and make sure he “completes his education”. Then follow the nerdy foreigners. Softly-softly. Shouldn’t be hard. They stick out like a pig in the Temple. And since one child’s much like another...
In Bethlehem, be thorough.
Prove me completely right.
Conclusively.

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SCENE 7:

THE HOLY FAMILY HOUSE

TIME: JUST BEFORE HEROD’S MASSACRE OF THE BETHLEHEM CHILDREN.

PLACE: THE HOME OF JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH

[Display on screen: Jigsaw pieces falling into place, mysterious ‘jingle’ e.g. extract from Gnossienne no 1 by Satie]

MAGUS 1: Stars don’t travel. Stars don’t point.
We can be wrong, praise Light!
So very wrong we’re right!

MAGUS 2: How we found *you*, we can’t tell.
There are other children here.

MAGUS 3: Yet when you heard we’d come, you knew.
And made us royally welcome.

JOSEPH: You found your king, then?

MAGUS 1: We found a king and lost our way.
Jerusalem: It makes you weep.

MAGUS 2: Herod showed us how wrong we need to be
before we learn. Brothers...

MARY: Gifts ... you shouldn't...

MAGUS 3: Oh yes, we should. There's justice here, defying power.
We give you precious things
we would have wasted in the palace.
You will value them,
as we now value you.

MAGUS 1: Gold... the bribe, the blackmail, price of slaves:
For him to turn to good.

MAGUS 3: Incense - costly, holy smoke, concealing, and misleading:
For him, it will be prayer .

MAGUS 2: Myrrh - more precious still, so bitter, cleansing, disinfecting.
From his hands, death cannot claim the throne.

MAGUS 1: But now we go. There's a king on our trail.
Though we'd love to stay and dream.

ANGEL: No dream - a nightmare's on the way.

JOSEPH: What do you mean?

ANGEL: Joseph. Your work's not over. That's the way with **good** men.
If they ever stop, the evil catches up.
God knows, and God is grateful; one day you'll be glad.
But now: up sticks. To Egypt. Now. Keep safe.
Save Jesus. Save the world.

LADY WISDOM: And what came next? No cosy end.
The soldiers came and children died
in Bethlehem
to prove a tyrant right.

DARWIN

It still goes on. How can you face it Lady Wisdom?
How can you go on?
How foolish can you be?

LADY WISDOM: Not by what I see today
Not by lies, made up as comfort
Not by vengeance hunger or by hatred.
But by the wisdom, born of trust
that **you** are loved
and **you** are valued
just as much
as God's own Son.

Have we seen proof?...
Perhaps. No more. Perhaps.

LADY WISDOM:

My friend: **(to all)** My friends:
A child is born,
A child was born,
and we've been given
all we need
to be convinced
of God.

CHRISTMAS BELLS SONG