

A Christmas Play 2003

The stage is empty, one side is a stable and a large sign saying "The Real Meaning of Christmas" and the other side is bare with a large sign saying "other traditions".

Narrator: Welcome everyone to our Christmas presentation. We are calling our play today "The Real Meaning of Christmas". Today I will need your help to find out what the real meaning of Christmas is. Tell me what happened long ago that we celebrate Christmas every year?

(Take answers that the birth of Jesus was the reason for Christmas).

Did you know that many of the wonderful things that we do at Christmas remind us of that first Christmas, God's gift of His Son Jesus? Many traditions, some very old, aren't part of the REAL reason we celebrate Christmas and today you're going to help me find out about some of our Christmas traditions. Let's think about a Christmas tradition to find out why they are important to Christmas and then we'll decide together. Over here are our "Christmas Traditions" and on this side is the "Real Meaning of Christmas". Are you ready? I'll start off, OK?

One of my favourite things we do in our family each year is putting up and decorating a Christmas tree. How many of you put up Christmas trees in your house at Christmas? *(show of hands)*. But where did the tradition of the Christmas tree begin? The best way to find out is to ask one. Do we have a Christmas tree here with us today?

Christmas Tree: Hello, I am very important to Christmas. In fact it wouldn't be Christmas without me!

Narrator: I wonder if that is true? Can you tell us about yourself so that we can decide?

Christmas Tree: Yes, of course, it would be my pleasure. I originated in Germany about 400 years ago. It was common then to decorate fir trees with apples, flowers and coloured paper. I was not widely used until about two hundred years ago. The custom of Christmas trees was established in 1841 by Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria, and they became very popular. Now you will find me in houses all over the world helping people to celebrate Christmas. I look so lovely covered with tinsel and beautiful ornaments. I am sure you will agree that I should be a part of the real meaning of Christmas.

Narrator: Well let's have a think about this. Let's think back to the very first Christmas and the birth of our Lord Jesus. Was there a Christmas tree on the very first Christmas? Do you know that in Judea where Jesus was born it was mostly desert and that there were not very many trees at all! And there is another clue. You began in Germany about 400 hundred years ago you say. Girls and boys, how long ago was Jesus born? Just over two thousand years ago. I am very sorry Christmas Tree but you do not belong to the real meaning of Christmas. So if you wouldn't mind standing over there under the sign, "Other Traditions".

Christmas Tree: Oh dear, oh dear, that is disappointing. *(Moving over to "Traditions")*

Narrator: Never mind, don't be sad. We still love to decorate you and your other tree friends. In fact you still make Christmas very special. We like Christmas trees don't we everyone?

Christmas Tree: Oooh, thank you everyone, that does make me feel better.

Narrator: Now let's think of something else. Who was there on that first Christmas night? Up in the hills looking after sheep, do you remember? I know, some shepherds. Do we have a shepherd here today?

Shepherd: Yes, yes here I am. I am sorry to be so dirty and smelly but it's very rough living out in the hills looking after sheep all day.

Narrator: Could you help us please? We are trying to find out about all the different Christmas traditions and which ones are from the real first Christmas. Could you tell us your story?

Shepherd: Yes, certainly, I would love to. It was very exciting you see, or perhaps it was more frightening. Well, my friends and I were gathered around our fire at night as usual, because it gets very cold up in the hills at night. All of a sudden there was a bright light in the sky. Well it was blinding actually and we had to cover our eyes. Talk about being terrified. We didn't know what was going to happen. Then an angel appeared and spoke to us, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy." (And do you know suddenly we felt better.) "Today in Bethlehem a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Well before we could even think a great host of angels filled the sky praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men." It was amazing; the most amazing thing we had ever seen. We were so excited. When the angels left we all started talking at once. "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this special child the Lord has told us about."

Narrator: Wow! That is so incredible, isn't it everyone? What happened then?

Shepherd: Well, of course, we went as fast as we could and found a baby boy asleep in a stable. His mother and father were there looking so happy. We knew at once that this was the child, lying in a manger just as the angel said. We all knelt down and praised God for the gift of our Saviour. We were the very first visitors to see the baby Jesus. Afterwards we told lots of people about what we had seen.

Narrator: Well, what do you think everyone? Where does our shepherd belong? Yes, of course, he was there at the very first Christmas and was so blessed to have seen Jesus and Mary and Joseph. Thank you Shepherd, you most definitely belong to the real meaning of Christmas. Do you know a beautiful Christmas carol was written all about you and your friends? "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night".

Shepherd: About me! How exciting! Could you sing it to me please?

Narrator: Certainly, come on everyone let's have a go.

(All sing "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night")

Narrator: Well that was great. Yes that's perfect; you are in exactly the right spot. Now let's see what other things we love about Christmas. Presents? Hands up who likes presents? Well that's just about everyone. Do we have a present with us today?

Present: Hello everyone. I am the most important thing about Christmas aren't I children?

Narrator: Well now, you are very beautifully wrapped, and we all love to receive gifts at Christmas but are you really a part of the very first Christmas?

Present: Well, not exactly but I am still really, really, important.

Narrator: Well perhaps you can tell us a little about yourself so that we can decide for ourselves, right children.

Present: Now let me see, it was a very long time ago, 1600 years ago actually. It all began with a man who was the Bishop of Myra, a small seaside town on the coast of Turkey. Bishop Nicholas, as he was called, used his wealth to help the needy people of his parish. He was a very good man and he especially loved children. He disguised himself and secretly visited the homes of the poor delivering food and clothes. The people didn't know where the gifts came from. After his death the people of Myra continued the custom of gift giving. Visiting sailors took the story of Saint Nicholas to Italy and then Germany. When he became known in Holland his name in the Dutch language was Sinter Klaus. Settlers brought the tradition to the New World, America where, in English, his name became Santa Claus. So now children all over the world receive gifts at Christmas. So that's how important I am!

Narrator: What a lovely story and what a wonderful man Saint Nicholas really was. But we still have to decide if you can be a part of the real meaning of Christmas. How long ago did you say Saint Nicholas lived?

Present: About 400AD, that's sooo long ago.

Narrator: Yes, it is but it does give us a very good clue. You see birth of God's son Jesus was over 2000 years ago. Saint Nicholas lived 400 hundred years after Jesus was born. Well, thank you that makes it all clear now. You are a wonderful tradition that we all enjoy at Christmas but you don't belong to the real Christmas story. Now you can stand right here next to our Christmas tree. There, you look just lovely.

Present: Ohhh thank you. Do I look all right? Well this is very nice.

Narrator: You know gifts did appear in the Christmas story if we think about it. The gifts of the wise men for the baby Jesus and the greatest gift of all, God's gift of Jesus to the world. OK everyone, what else can we think of? Oh I know, what about the people in the Bible story of Christmas? Now let's think... yes Mary, the mother of Jesus. Well she was definitely there. Are you here today Mary?

Mary: Hello boys and girls.

Narrator: We are trying to work out about all of the things we do at Christmas and which ones are parts of the real Christmas story. Could you tell us what happened?

Mary: Well, of course, I would be happy to. I was in my garden one day when suddenly an angel from God appeared. I was really frightened at first but he told me not to be afraid. Then he told me the most amazing news. God had chosen me to be the mother of His son. I couldn't believe that I of all women had been chosen for such an important job. I knew straight away that I would do whatever God asked. I told the angel that I was a servant of God's and would do His will. I was very worried about what Joseph, to whom I was engaged to be married, would say but God took care of

us both. We had to travel to Bethlehem at the time of the baby's birth but God blessed us and my son who I called Jesus was born safe and sound.

Narrator: Thank you Mary for sharing your story with us. Please let me show you your place.

Mary: Well it was a pleasure to talk to you. Yes, yes this will be lovely, (*being shown her place in the Nativity scene*), thank you.

Narrator: Well, we didn't have to think too hard about that one did we? Now what will we do next? What other things do we love about Christmas? I know, Christmas carols! I love to sing carols at Christmas. Come out Christmas Carol.

Carol: Hello everyone, I'm a Christmas carol. (*French accent*)

Narrator: Welcome to our Christmas presentation today. We are trying to find out about the real Christmas story. Could you please tell us a little about yourself?

Carol: Oh certainly I will! Carol comes from the French word, "carole", meaning to dance in a ring. There were carols for many festive days. We mainly associate carols with Christmas but Christmas carols only date back to the fourth century, 1600 years ago; about the same time as Saint Nicholas. Carols were not originally hymns but popular ceremonial songs. Carols sung at Christmas became very popular and many of the most well loved carols we sing today like "Silent Night" and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" were written in the last 200 years.

Narrator: Well, how interesting. Do you know I think Christmas carols are just about my favourite part of Christmas but how many years ago did they begin boys and girls? Yes, 1600 years ago. And how long ago was Jesus born? Right, 2000 years ago. As much as we love you I am afraid that you were not a part of the very first Christmas. But before you go, "Silent Night" is one of my favourite carols. Do you think we could all sing it together now?

(All sing together "Silent Night")

Now who else was in the story of the first Christmas? Yes, of course, Joseph. Let's see if we can hear his story. Joseph, are you there?

Joseph: Hello everyone. So you'd like to hear about what happened on the very first Christmas. Well I was a simple carpenter engaged to marry a young girl named Mary. At first when Mary told me that she was going to have a baby I wasn't sure what to do. Then an angel appeared to me in a dream and told me to marry Mary and look after her as she was going to have God's Son. Naturally I obeyed God's wishes and we were married.

As the time for the baby to be born drew nearer we were told that we had to travel to Bethlehem for a census. I was so worried about how Mary would manage but I was able to borrow a donkey so least she wouldn't have to walk. When we arrived we couldn't find anywhere to stay. It was getting late and we were sure that the baby would be born very soon. A kind innkeeper took pity on us and offered us his stable, dry and warm with clean straw to stay in. Do you know Jesus was born that very night and we had no bed for Him so we lay him in a manger. Imagine, the Saviour of the whole world was born in a stable and laid in a manger!

Narrator: What a wonderful story! Thank you so much for coming to talk to us today. Well where does Joseph go? Right in the middle of the real Christmas story. OK now what else can we think of? What do we sometimes put on the top of the Christmas tree? An angel! Do we have any angels here today?

Angel 1: Hello, I am a messenger from God, or an angel.

Narrator: Well, we know you must be a part of the very first Christmas because Mary, the shepherd and Joseph all spoke about you. Could you please tell us about that first Christmas.

Angel 1: Certainly, it would be a pleasure. Well, first of all, as Mary told you, I came upon her in the garden and I am afraid I might have given her a bit of a fright. God had entrusted me with a special message for her. She was highly favoured by God. She would give birth to a son and He will be the Son of God. She took the news rather well I thought considering that it must have been a bit of a shock. My next job was to appear to Joseph in a dream and tell him that everything would be all right and that God would protect him and Mary. I think the best job of all was on Christmas night. I appeared with my friends here, to a group of shepherds in the hills above Jerusalem.

Angel 2: Boy, did they jump out of their skins when they saw us! They didn't know what was going on.

Angel 1: Then I made the big announcement, "I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord." Well then I told them about the baby lying in the manger. Then we all started to praise God saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all men".

Angel 2: That was the best time of all; the night God gave the gift of Jesus to the whole world.

Narrator: Wow, how fantastic to have been a part of the first true Christmas. Thank you so much for telling us all about it. Well and where does our angel go? That wasn't hard to figure out was it? Now let's keep going. Christmas is a very busy time for the postman isn't it? Yes, Christmas cards. Hands up who has ever given or received a Christmas card. Look at that, everybody! Let's find out about where Christmas cards fit into our story. Do we have a Christmas card with us today?

Christmas Card: Hello everyone. I am very busy at Christmas and billions of cards are sent to loved ones and friends at Christmas.

Narrator: Yes we know but could you tell us how and when Christmas cards began.

Christmas Card: I would love, to thank you very much. Well it all started about 120 years ago in the second half of the eighteenth century. School children began to produce a decorated sheet of paper with polite greetings of the season which they presented to their parents. Also, some adults wrote poems for their friends on highly ornamented paper and from these two ideas came the Christmas card. In 1843 a man named J. C. Horsley designed a picture Christmas card for his friend Henry Cole. People liked the idea so much that three years later a thousand copies were mass produced and sold for one shilling. Thus began the multi-billion dollar greeting card industry.

Narrator: How fascinating! I wonder how many billions of Christmas cards will be sent this Christmas? Thank you. Well where does the Christmas card belong? Yes, quite right. You are another of the wonderful traditions that we have at Christmas. Thank you for coming today and please stand over there next to our beautiful Christmas tree. Well now we must be getting near the end of our Christmas story. But wait a minute; didn't Jesus have some other visitors? Yes the wise men. Hello, Wise Men.

Wise Man 1: Hello everyone, how are you all today?

Narrator: Well we wanted to find out about the true meaning of Christmas. You three were there weren't you?

Wise Man 1: Yes we were. It happened like this. My friends and I study the sky and the stars. One night we saw a star in the east and that meant that a king of the Jews had been born. We decided to follow that star to come and worship him. We came from the east to Jerusalem. Well King Herod heard about our journey and our search for a new king. He called us to him and asked lots of questions about when exactly we had seen the star. He asked us to tell him if we found the child.

Wise Man 2: After we left the king and travelled on our way the star we had seen in the east went before us and stooped over the place where the child was. We were overjoyed. We saw the child with his mother, Mary and bowed down and worshipped him. Then we presented him with our gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. It was the wonderful moment of our lives. Then afterwards we were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod so we returned back home by another route.

Narrator: What an exciting adventure you had. How amazing to have seen the baby Jesus. Do you know we have a special song about you too?

Wise Men: *(Together)* Really, may we hear it?

Narrator: Do you know the song I mean? "We Three Kings". Let's sing it all together!

(All sing "We Three Kings")

Narrator: Let's just check to see we have everyone so that the real meaning of Christmas is complete. Right now, Mary, Joseph, Shepherd, Angel and the Wise Man. Yes all finished. We haven't forgotten anyone have we?
(Hopefully the children will notice that baby Jesus is missing. Narrator goes behind set and comes out with baby and gives baby to Mary to lay in the manger).

The real meaning of Christmas is, of course, Jesus and He is the reason we celebrate Christmas. Let us finish our Christmas presentation with the words from John's gospel "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life". Let's all sing "Away in a Manger" that beautiful Christmas carol which reminds us of the great gift of Jesus.

(All sing "Away in a Manger")

The End

Directions

The narrator is ideally a link person talking to the children and acknowledging their answers from time to time. This role is best performed by a confident person with a clear voice who is comfortable with interacting with the audience.

We have tried to get the various traditions to act in character. The Christmas tree for instance is pompous and full of a sense of his or her importance to the story. The present is very vain and concerned that he/she looks pretty. The Christmas card is very informative almost like a teacher delivering a lesson. The Christmas carol has a French accent which can be hammed up to quite a degree.

For both the Christmas card and Christmas carol we used a sandwich board (made of thick cardboard) with an old Christmas card design on it and for the carol a design of sheet music with "Silent Night" using old English calligraphy in the title. These were relatively easy to put together and worked well.

Good Luck!