

SHELDON PLAYS

No. 1

THE STORY OF
CHRISTMAS
IN MIME

WITH BIBLE WORDS AND CAROLS

General Editor

E. MARTIN BROWNE

Hon. Director of the

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THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS
IN MIME

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THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS IN MIME

WITH BIBLE WORDS AND CAROLS

ARRANGED BY
E. MARTIN-BROWNE

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PREFACE

THIS representation of the Story of Christmas is to be acted in mime or "dumb-show": the characters show their thoughts and feelings by action alone, illustrating the narrative given by a Reader. This is a method requiring very careful rehearsal, because the actions must be exactly *timed* to correspond with the words they illustrate. Where detailed indications are given in this book they must be scrupulously followed. The Reader must attend all rehearsals, as he will have to keep an eye constantly on the players and space his phrases to suit them, also emphasizing the words on which actions are done. He should read as if the story were *new*, exciting and joyful.

The actors must remember that, as they do not speak, their *actions* must express everything; therefore they must be *bold* and clear in gesture and pose. In dumb-show you *hold* your pose until it is time to change to the next one, so as to avoid any movement that has no definite meaning.

The choir is as important as the actors: its words must be clear and its tempo brisk; and it must come in pat on cue. The music is chosen almost entirely from the *English Hymnal* (or *Hymns Ancient and Modern*) and the *Oxford Carol Book*. Single carols from the latter may be obtained.

Most of this music comes from mediæval England, and in an old church it is most suitable to treat the story as belonging to those times. Costumes for such

a production can be made by consulting Mary Kelly's *On English Costume* (Deane) or Hartley's *Mediaeval Costume and Life* (Batsford). If an oriental treatment is preferred Lucy Baston's *Costuming the Biblical Play* (Black) is a useful guide.

Lighting should be concentrated, using "spotlights" rather than "floodlights." Even two "spotlights" will light a platform in an average parish church adequately. The congregation had best be left in darkness except when they are to join in a hymn, but those who work the light must be carefully rehearsed.

The directions in this book are for a church having only a centre aisle. Where north and south aisles exist the action of the story may be made clearer by certain "journeys"—*e.g.*, that from Nazareth to Bethlehem—being made round the church. The priest's vestry is imagined at the north of the chancel, the choir vestry at the back of the nave, the main door of the church on the north, whence access is possible through the churchyard to the priest's vestry. It is intended that the producer alter the arrangement of the play to fit his own church; with a little imagination the architectural peculiarities of almost any church may be turned to gain.

E.M.B.

NOTE.—See further on all these problems the author's *Production of Religious Plays* (published by Philip Alan in 1932).

All music may be obtained from the S.P.C.K., London, or from its branch shops.

CHARACTERS

ISAIAH (Prologue) }
The READER } may be the same

GABRIEL

Four or more ANGELS

MARY

Her two HANDMAIDENS

ELISABETH

JOSEPH

The INNKEEPER

Two or more SHEPHERDS

The HIGH PRIEST

His ACOLYTES

SIMEON

ANNA

HEROD

His MESSENEGR

Three KINGS

To begin the drama-service the choir, which should be hidden from view, shall sing: "O come, O come, Emmanuel" (*A. & M.* 49, *E.H.* 8—verses 1, 2, 3).

PROLOGUE

During the last verse, Isaiah the Prophet, clad in sackcloth with a rope around his waist, shall appear from the back of the church, and mounting the platform shall with fervour address the people, saying:

¹ He stretches out his arm.

² He stretches wide both his arms.

³ He closes his arms upon his breast, bending forward as though to tell a secret, softly:

SCENE I

He goes away.

The Reader goes into the pulpit, as the choir begin:

PROLOGUE

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
¹ Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert an highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

² And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.³

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel—God with us.

SCENE I

"Came the Archangel to the Maid" (*O.C.B.* 52)
or "The Archangel Gabriel" (*O.C.B.* 37), 3 verses.

During the second verse Mary, in gown without cloak, appears from the priest's vestry and mounts the platform, and kneels in prayer facing slightly to the S. During the last verse she prays in ecstasy and in humility.

The Angel Gabriel comes from the Priest's vestry.

¹ Gabriel mounts the platform to the S. side.

² He genuflects, holding out his lily.

³ Mary draws away from him in wonder.

⁴ He rises. Mary is reassured.

⁵ Mary bends forward enquiringly.

READER: And in the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ¹ And the angel came in unto her, and said, ² "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." And when she saw him, ³ she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, ⁴ "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Then said Mary unto the angel, ⁵ "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,

⁶ With his arms, Gabriel overshadows Mary.

⁷ Indicating that she is off stage to S.

⁸ Folding his arms over his breast.

⁹ She spreads out her hands, offering herself.

The choir sing: "A great and mighty wonder" (*E.H.* 19), 2 verses, or "Of the Father's Love" (*A. & M.* 56), verses 1 and 4.

Gabriel genuflects. At the end of four lines of the hymn he rises, and gives his lily to Mary, who rises and receives it graciously. At the end of the verse, the Reader speaks, and the angel departs.

Mary stands in ecstasy till line 4 of the second verse, when two maidens come to her from the vestry and put upon her a blue cloak. She sits. Kneeling at either side of her, they sing alternate verses of "I sing of a maiden" (*O.C.B.* 183, other settings elsewhere).

During the last verse, which they sing together, they raise her and lead her down the church.

SCENE II

Meanwhile, Elisabeth comes from the priest's vestry on to the platform.

⁶ and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. ⁷ And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. ⁸ For with God nothing shall be impossible." And Mary said, ⁹ "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

PAUSE

And the angel departed from her.

SCENE II

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into the city of Juda;

Mary and her maidens return; ¹ Mary mounts the platform and ² kisses Elisabeth.

³ Amazed, her eyes alight, she draws back to regard Mary.

⁴ She blesses Mary.

⁵ She lays her hands upon Mary's shoulders.

⁶ They kiss.

⁷ Mary, or a woman's voice for her, sings the Magnificat, Mary standing in exaltation.

⁸ After "and holy is his Name," Mary descends from the platform and with her maidens retires to the side of the nave.

SCENE III

Meanwhile Joseph comes from the back of the church on to the platform, the choir singing: "When righteous Joseph wedded was" (*O.C.B.* 41), 1 verse.

He sits, in troubled thought.

¹ The choir sing the first half of the second verse of "When righteous Joseph." Joseph, giving up the problem, lies down on the floor and sleeps.

¹ and entered into the house of Zacharias, and ² saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, ³ the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, ⁴ "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁵ And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."⁶ And Mary said:⁷

⁸ And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

SCENE III

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

¹ PAUSE.

But when he had thought on these things,

² Gabriel comes from priest's vestry on to platform.

³ Gabriel retires, Joseph awakes, Mary comes forward, as choir sing second half of verse 2. Joseph holding out his hands to her, she ascends platform, they kiss, and go off down the church while choir sing verse 3.

SCENE IV

Choir change immediately to "No room in the Inn" (*O.C.B.* 114). While they sing verse 1, the Innkeeper comes from the priest's vestry, mounts the platform and sits down. Joseph and Mary slowly approach the platform, while the Reader says the second verse :

¹ Joseph knocks on the platform.

² Joseph knocks again; the Innkeeper rises, Joseph beseeches.

³ Innkeeper shakes his head.

⁴ Joseph again calls Innkeeper's attention, showing Mary, who droops wearily.

⁵ Innkeeper makes gesture of dismissal, and goes away as he came. Joseph and Mary stand stricken.

² behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife : for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS : for he shall save his people from their sins."³

SCENE IV

They sought entertainment, but none could they find,

Great numbers of strangers had fillèd the inn;

¹ They knockèd and callèd all this at the door,

But found not a friend where in kind they had store;

² Their kindred accounted they come were too soon;

³ "Too late," said the Innkeeper, "here is no room."

Amongst strangers and kinsfolk cold welcome they find—

From the rich to the poor they are mostly unkind.

Good Joseph was troubled, ⁴but most for his dear,

For her blessed burden whose time now drew near;⁵

⁶ Joseph and Mary go away to the side.

The choir sing "While shepherds watched"
(*A. & M.* 62, *E.H.* 30), 4 verses.

SCENE V

During this, Shepherds appear from back of church and make their way, one by one, as if in the darkness, to the platform, which is now dimly lit. They sit and lie to one side of platform. They eat and drink; ¹ one, raising his head to drink, sees a star and shows his fellows.

² They rise, and see Gabriel, who has appeared on the platform; they sink to their knees or bow down.

³ Gabriel makes gesture of reassurance.

⁴ Pointing down the nave.

⁵ Upward gesture.

⁶ Depicting His lowly situation.

⁷ On the screen or around Gabriel appear angels blowing trumpets and miming song.

⁸ Choir, immediately on cue, sing: "Gloria in excelsis Deo" (from "When the crimson sun had set") or part of "Glory to God" ("Messiah").

As this ends, all the angels depart or are veiled in darkness.

His heart with true sorrow was sorely afflicted
That his virgin spouse was so rudely neglected.
He could get no house-room who houses did
frame,

⁶ But Joseph and Mary must go as they came.
For little is the favour the poor man can find—
From the rich to the poor they are mostly
unkind.

SCENE V

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ¹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: ² and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, ³ "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day ⁴ in the city of David a Saviour, which is ⁵ Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, ⁶ lying in a manger."

⁷ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,⁸

⁹ The Shepherds make suggestions one to another.

The Shepherds depart down the church, the first verse of "In Dulci Jubilo" (*O.C.B.* 86) being sung by them, or the men of the choir for them.

SCENE VI

During this song, a company of angels bring the manger-crib, having the Holy Child concealed in it, solemnly on to the platform; the lights are dimmed, if possible, for the mystery. The angels stand reverently around the crib, hiding it from view. Mary follows them and kneels by it. After a long silence, the Reader speaks :

¹ The choir sing Alleluia, bells peal, the angels reveal Mary worshipping the Child as the choir begin "This Endris Night" (*O.C.B.* 39), 2 verses. During verse 1, the angels adore : during verse 2, Joseph comes on and adores. Then follows verse 2 of "In Dulci Jubilo" as the Shepherds mount the platform.

² The Shepherds adore the Child and offer gifts—a pipe, a loaf, a fleece, a ball, a little bell, or such things.

³ During this, the Shepherds may go down into the congregation, and call up any members of it—*e.g.*, Sunday School children—to adore the Child and offer gifts; the whole congregation may follow, bowls being held by the Shepherds for

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, ⁹ that 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."

SCENE VI

And Mary brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.¹

² And the shepherds came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

³ And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

alms—or they may collect in the usual way. The choir shall sing: “O come, all ye faithful” (*A. & M.* 59, *E.H.* 614), as many verses as are needed.

⁴ At the conclusion thereof, the Shepherds go down to the back of the church, having made obeisance to the Child.

⁵ Mary comes round to the front of the manger and very reverently lifts the Child, and bears Him after Joseph into the priest’s vestry.

Here, if it be desired, a pause may be made with the singing of hymns or carols by the congregation.

SCENE VII

The choir singing Psalm lxxxiv, the Acolytes place upon the platform a Jewish altar and a seven-branched candle-stick and light it. (N.B.—In some churches it may be desirable to use the High Altar for this scene.) Then they go down the church, and return with the High Priest to the platform. At the end of the Psalm, the Reader begins.

¹ Mary carrying the Child, Joseph carrying two doves in a cage, and Mary’s handmaidens come from the priest’s vestry on to the platform.

² Mary presents the Child to the High Priest, who genuflects, takes Him and offers Him over the altar, and returns Him to His mother.

³ Joseph’s doves are laid on the altar by an Acolyte.

⁴ And the Shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things which they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. . . .

⁵ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

SCENE VII

¹ And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, ² to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”); and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, ³ “A pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.”

⁴ Simeon comes from the back of the church.

⁵ Simeon mounts the platform.

⁶ He genuflects, and takes the Child in his arms.

⁷ Simeon, or a male voice for him, sings the Nunc Dimittis (to a plainsong tone, or "Tonus Peregrinus," without Gloria).

⁸ Simeon gives back the Child. Joseph and Mary are filled with wonder.

⁹ Simeon holds up his hands in blessing over the Holy Family.

¹⁰ Anna comes from the priest's vestry on to the platform.

¹¹ She genuflects to the Child and stands looking at Him.

¹² Headed by the Acolytes, the company passes down the church in procession, each one except Mary receiving a lighted candle from a person stationed at the foot of the platform. All sing "God rest you merry, gentlemen" (*O.C.B.* 12), as many verses as may be needful. The procession reaching the

⁴ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ⁵ And he came by the Spirit into the temple, when his parents brought in the child Jesus. ⁶ Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said: ⁷

⁸ And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. ⁹ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

¹⁰ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. ¹¹ And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. ¹²

bottom of the church, those who were denizens of the Temple disperse whence they came. The Holy Family with the Handmaidens return to the priest's vestry, the choir singing: "Kings in Glory" (O.C.B. 194) or "Why, impious Herod" (E.H. 38).

SCENE VIII

During the first two verses, the Acolytes take away altar and candlestick, and bring on a throne covered with a red cloth. During the last two verses, the Kings are coming from the back of the church, pointing out to one another the star in front of them. (N.B.—A star should be hung for these scenes if possible. In larger churches the Kings may come from different places and meet during their walk up the nave.)

¹ Herod, preceded by his Messenger, comes from the priest's vestry on to the platform. The Kings come up, with much bowing.

² They address Herod.

³ Herod turns away perplexed.

⁴ He commands Messenger to summon the Kings close to him, and asks urgent questions.

⁵ He points their way down the church.

⁶ Herod dismisses them with a low bow, which they return: they descend from the platform.

⁷ Gabriel comes swiftly from the priest's vestry and warns them with uplifted hand: they stand amazed while the Reader speaks, then take counsel together

SCENE VIII

¹ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying,² "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him." When Herod the king had heard these things, ³ he was troubled. ⁴ And when he had privily called the wise men, he enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. ⁵ And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." ⁶ When they had heard the king, they departed.

⁷ But being warned of God that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

and go down the nave, while the choir sing "Unto us a Boy is born" (*O.C.B.* 92). Herod watches for two verses: during the third he breaks out in fury and storms down the nave; the Messenger removes the red cloth from the throne and follows. During the other two verses, Mary with the Child returns and sits in the throne, and Joseph lies on the ground beside her. Gabriel remains until they are thus in repose, and then addresses Joseph.

SCENE IX

¹ Gabriel bends over Joseph, and indicates the direction of flight.

² The angel departs. Joseph rises and begins to show Mary that they must go away when he is interrupted by "We Three Kings of Orient are" (*O.C.B.* 195), sung by the Kings (or three male voices for them) as they advance from the back of the church with gifts (and attendants if desired). At the end of the first verse (chorus sung by the choir and congregation) the Reader speaks as the procession continues:³

⁴ The Kings mount the platform, and genuflect to the Child.

⁵ The second, third and fourth verses are sung, while the Kings at the appropriate times present a cup of gold, a burning censer or incense-boat, and a casket of myrrh.

SCENE IX

¹ Behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."²

³ And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

⁴ And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him.⁵

During the last verse, all the other characters of the play group themselves round the platform. (In a church with a screen the Angels should reappear above, and the niches of the screen may be filled with the patron Saints of the church and its organizations.)

A final hymn—"Hark, the herald angels sing" (*A. & M.* 60, *E.H.* 24) or "Ye watchers and ye holy ones" (*E.H.* 519)—may be sung by everyone. During the last verse, the characters disperse, the Holy Family last, going out through the main door of the church.

The Reader descends from the pulpit.

(The congregation stand)

READER : Praise be to God, who so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoso believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. As our Saviour Christ hath commanded and taught us, we are bold to say :

ALL : Our Father . . .

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