

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

A screenplay by

Howard W. Hallman

Based on a stageplay "Lead, Kindly Light"

by Howard W. Hallman c 1984

c 1996

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FADE IN:

EXT - STOCKYARD - DAY

ROY MCKEAN, a rancher, is directing his ranch hand, SMITTY (DENNIS SMITH, age 31), and his son, BUDDY (a.k.a. DAVID, ruddy face, a husky 14 year old), as they guide sheep down a ramp from a semi-trailer into pens of the stockyard. Overhead is a sign saying "Omaha Stockyards". A light snow is falling. A loudspeaker blares "The First Noel", played in a brassy, schmaltzy arrangement. As the ranchers are almost finished, one of the sheep escapes. Smitty runs after it, grabs it and carries it back. A couple of cowboys watch with amusement. One of them mouths, "Bah! Bah! Black sheep. Have you any wool?" Smitty pushes the wayward sheep into the stockyard pen and goes after the cowboy. They swing wildly at one another until the cowboy lands a blow on Smitty's face and knocks him to the ground. Buddy comes to his rescue and assumes a judo stance. When the cowboy advances on him, Buddy adroitly grabs his arm and tosses him to the ground. The other cowboy steps in, but when Roy moves between them, hands on hips with a look of authority, the cowboys retreat. Buddy stands by chuckling as Roy helps Smitty to his feet.

CUT TO:

INT - NIGHT CLUB

An all-female rock band is rehearsing on an empty stage of a small night club decorated in Christmas tinsel. MICHELE is lead guitar, VICKI plays bass guitar, LORETTA is at an electronic keyboard, HARRIET plays drums, and JENNY (nearly nine months pregnant) is

singing. The bass drum has "SEARCHING" inscribed on it. At the back of the hall CRAIG adjusts controls on the sound system. They are rehearsing a light rock Christmas song emphasizing presents and glitter rather than the birth of Jesus. Jenny bobbles the words. Michele stops the band to admonish her. Jenny holds her stomach as if it were to blame. Michele doesn't accept that excuse. She gives the beat as the band tries again. This time Jenny gets it right. Craig signals "OK" to her.

CUT TO:

EXT - UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Snow covered campus with light snow falling. CLOSE UP of sign saying "University of Nebraska".

CUT TO:

INT - LARGE LECTURE HALL

Hubbub as audience gets up to leave after a public forum. A large sign "Future of Space Symposium" is affixed to curtain at back of the stage. Two lecterns at 45° angle are on either side of the stage with a moderator seated in the middle. Amidst the hubbub DICK from one lectern and HANK (an African American) from the other approach the moderator and shake hands. SHIGERU YORIMOTO (Japanese) comes on stage. The moderator introduces him to Dick and Hank. They shake hands, converse, and walk off the stage together.

CUT TO:

INT - MOTEL LOBBY

A group of high school carolers is standing by a Christmas tree, singing "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing". HUGH, dressed in a business suit with collar unbuttoned and tie loosened, emerges slightly tipsy from the bar as the rock band enters from outside, carrying a couple of guitar cases and brushing light snow from their jackets. Hugh pushes through them and almost gets into a scuffle with Craig. REX, who is seated reading newspaper, recognizes Hugh and greets him, thus distracting him from Craig. As the carolers continue, Rex and Hugh go into the coffee shop, and the rock group heads for their room.

CUT TO:

EXT - ENTRANCE TO BASE OF STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND (SAC) - DAY

In heavy snow driven by a strong wind, a large civilian automobile approaches the guardhouse from inside the base. As the car stops, the driver, LT. BERNIE FRANCIS, hands his I.D. to the guard. The guard notices that GENERAL SLATTERLY, the base commander, is seated as a passenger in the front seat. The guard salutes the general, raises the gate, and waves the car forward into the driving storm.

CUT TO:

EXT - ALONG AN INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY

Roy, Smitty, and Buddy are in the cab of the semi-trailer, now empty

of sheep, driving through heavy snow. Some wrapped Christmas presents are piled behind them. They are listening to country western Christmas music. A radio announcer reports that a winter blizzard is covering all of Nebraska on this day before Christmas. Accumulation of 30 inches is expected in the western part of the state by midnight. The state highway patrol has advised motorists to avoid traveling on all secondary roads and to stay off I-80 if possible. Through the frosted windshield they see a sign for I-80 and then a sign saying next exit, the eating symbol, and Harry's Diner. They exit the interstate, make their way to the diner, park at the edge, get out, and trudge through the heavy snow.

CUT TO:

INT - HARRY'S DINER

LEE ANN, the waitress, is clearing dishes from the counter. A clock behind her shows 12:10. There is an open window counter into the kitchen, where HARRY, the proprietor, is busy at a grill. The diner is decorated for Christmas. "White Christmas" is playing on the jukebox. Roy, Smitty, and Buddy enter, brush snow off, remove their coats, and pile them on a coatrack. Smitty has a black eye. They slide into a booth with Roy on one side and Smitty in first on the other side, then Buddy. Each place has a coffee mug and flatware wrapped in a paper napkin. Rex and Hugh, in the next booth halfway through their meal, are the only other diners present. Lee Ann comes to the ranchers' booth with a steaming coffee pot and menus. As they talk, she hands them the menus and pours coffee for Roy and Smitty.

LEE ANN

Howdy, Roy. Haven't seen you for a

while.

ROY

Hi, Lee Ann. Good to see you.

LEE ANN

What brings you to these parts so late in the year?

ROY

We got way behind this year and didn't get our last load of sheep to market until yesterday. And now we've got to drive home in this frigging' blizzard.

Lee Ann starts to pour coffee for Buddy.

SMITTY

No coffee for him. He's just a boy.
Bring him some cocoa.

Buddy nudges Smitty.

BUDDY

Listen, Smitty, who you calling a boy?

SMITTY

Don't push me, Buddy.

Smitty pushes back so hard that Buddy falls out of the booth. He gets

up with fists cocked.

BUDDY

Want me to black your other eye, asshole?

Smitty comes out of the booth and raises his fists. Buddy switches to a judo stance.

ROY

Watch him, Smitty, or he'll throw you on your ass like he did that big cowboy who socked you yesterday at the stockyard in Omaha.

Buddy and Smitty feint.

LEE ANN

All right, boys, cut out the rough stuff, or I'll call Harry.

SMITTY

Oh, hell, I'll get you later, you little twerp.

They sit back in the booth, still jostling a little. Lee Ann fills Buddy's mug with coffee.

LEE ANN

So what ya goin' have?

ROY

I'll have a T-bone smothered with onions
and a heap of French fries.

LEE ANN

How do you want your steak?

ROY

Just tell Harry it's for Roy. He'll know
how to cook it.

SMITTY

Chili for me. And bring me some
vinegar and extra chili powder.

BUDDY

Ugh. A cheeseburger, fries, and steak
sauce.

Lee Ann leaves.

ROY

You'll hafta get Buddy to teach you that
judo stuff', Smitty, cause your fists is
wearin' out.

SMITTY

I still don't know why that cowboy was

makin' fun of our sheep.

ROY

*It's an old feud of the west. The
cattlemen think sheep ruin the grass.
But we got our rights, too.*

CUT TO:

HUGH

(Slightly tipsy)

*You really think we'll make it to your
house by nighttime, Rex?*

REX

*I hope so, Hugh. But this storm has
gotten lot worse since we left Omaha this
morning.*

HUGH

Where are we now?

REX

Just west of Grand Island.

CUT TO:

*Lee Ann returns with Smitty's chili, vinegar, chili powder, and steak
sauce.*

LEE ANN

Your steak and cheeseburger will be ready in a couple of minutes. Do you do through Ogallala, Roy?

ROY

We go near there, on the south side of the Platte.

LEE ANN

My folks moved there last year, and I was hopin' to visit them for Christmas. But old Harry won't let me off till nine, even though it's Christmas eve.

ROY

I thought you was hitched, Lee Ann. I ain't seen you here for a couple of years.

LEE ANN

I was, but my guy walked out on me last month. What a no-good he turned out to be.

ROY

Smitty, the first time I saw this little gal, she was wearin' her cheerleader uniform under her apron.

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LEE ANN

Yeah, I was in high school. You had a fair-haired helper along. He promised me a sheepskin jacket -- but never brought me one.

ROY

He's married now. Got two kids. Smitty here has been with me since last spring.

SMITTY

Baby, how's about it if I brought you a whole sheepskin coat?

LEE ANN

Promises, promises -- like all the other men.

Buddy laughs and pokes Smitty. Lee Ann walks away.

CUT TO:

HUGH

Rex, it sure was nice of you to invite me to spend Christmas with your family.

REX

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Glad to, Hugh.

HUGH

*Otherwise I'd have had a lonely
Christmas.*

CUT TO;

Harry comes out carry Roy's steak and Buddy's cheeseburger.

HARRY

*Roy, you old son-of-a-gun, Lee Ann told
me you were here, so I thought I oughta
serve you personally.*

ROY

*I've never missed stoppin' here, Harry.
Best food in Nebraska. This is my boy,
Buddy, and Smitty, who works for me.*

HARRY

(To Buddy)

*I ain't seen you since you was a little tyke.
Roy, he's goin' be bigger than you one of
these days.*

ROY

Seems like it.

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HARRY

So you're still raisin' sheep, Roy?

ROY

Yeah, but this may be the last year.

HARRY

The market?

ROY

Naw. It's those damn BLM regulations. They're cuttin' back on grazin' land and raisin' the fees. They're makin' it so's a fellow can't earn a decent livin' raisin' sheep.

HARRY

Yeah, I hear a lot of bitchin' about the BLM.

CUT TO:

HUGH

They're talking about you, Rex. You and the BLM.

REX

Shh!

HUGH

(Louder)

*But you're a big shot in the Bureau of
Land Management.*

REX

*Hold your tongue, Hugh. We don't want
to start trouble.*

CUT TO WIDER ANGLE

*Roy overhears this, gets up and goes over to Rex and Hugh. Harry
slips away.*

ROY

So you're one of them.

REX

In the regional office in Denver.

ROY

What's your name?

REX

Rex Hanover. I'm regional director.

ROY

*It's some one else who's tryin' to do me in.
But you tell 'em that Roy McKean of
Pathfinder, Wyoming intents to fight 'em
till the end.*

REX

*I'm sorry if our regulations have
inconvenienced you.*

ROY

*Inconvenienced, hell. You're puttin' me
outa business.*

REX

*We're just trying to protect the range
from overuse.*

ROY

*Then how come the oil and gas companies
are gettin' them leases.*

REX

It's all done through competitive bidding.

ROY

*Yeah. Rigged for the big boys. I've been
workin' on ranches since '66, and it's got
worse every year.*

Roy returns to his booth and cuts up his steak.

SMITTY

At least you own your own ranch, Roy.

ROY

The bank and me.

SMITTY

I could never save enough for my own place on what you pay me.

ROY

Oh hell, Smitty. If you'd quit drinkin' so much and chasin' after the broads you could.

SMITTY

Gotta get some fun outa life.

Lee Ann comes by with pie for Rex and Hugh. She takes away their dinner plates.

HUGH

You almost got it the face, Rex.

REX

Thanks to your big mouth. I can't figure out why they hate us so in the West.

HUGH

It's who you represent.

REX

Well, I worked in the Forest Service in New England and the South for 25 years. They don't like the feds in those parts either, but the feeling's not as intense as out here for the Bureau of Land Management.

HUGH

It's because you control so much of the land in the West. You just have to ignore them. It's like the little towns where my drug stores are. The local druggists hate us because we sell at discount, but the townspeople buy from me anyway. So I say, to hell with my competitors.

REX

It's not the same, Hugh. We're out here to protect the land, not to curtail free enterprise.

HUGH

Don't you see, Rex. They have a different view. They see you as an absentee landlord, and they hate you for it. You can't change them. So ignore 'em.

Hugh pours some "uncola" into a glass, pulls out a small flax from inside his coat jacket, takes off the top, and starts to pour it in the glass. Rex reaches over to stop him.

REX

I wish you'd lay off that stuff.

HUGH

I need it.

The outside door opens and in come Michele, Vicki, Loretta, Harriet, Jenny, and Craig. They brush off snow, take off their heavy coats, hang them up, push two tables together, and sit down. A couple of them have on jeans jacket with "SEARCHING" on the back. Smitty cranes his neck to get a look at the newcomers.

VICKI

Man, it's a cold, cold day.

LORETTA

It was never this cold back in Philly.

JENNY

Or in Louisville.

HARRIET

And certainly not in L.A.

Lee Ann comes over with menus.

MICHELE

(To Lee Ann)

We're in a hurry, honey. What's hot and ready.

LEE ANN

We've got some great chili. It's Harry's specialty.

MICHELE

Okay. Chili all around, and lots of crackers and coffee.

JENNY

No, not for me.

LEE ANN

We've got beef stew.

JENNY

Sounds good. And some milk.

LEE ANN

Harry, four chilies and a stew.

Hugh gets up and goes over the new arrivals, a little unsteady. During the ensuing conversation, Lee Ann serves the food.

HUGH

Well, look who's here. A band of female troubadours.

MICHELE

What makes you think so?

HUGH

I saw you at a motel in Omaha yesterday. Do you play that whiny country stuff or that loud rock that makes your stomach vibrate and busts your ear drums?

MICHELE

Neither. We play light rock with a new age message.

HUGH

Whatever that is.

VICKI

Don't bother with him, Michele. He's drunk.

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HUGH

The hell I am!

MICHELE

*I'm lead guitar. Vicki plays bass.
Loretta is our keyboard artist. Harriet
is on drums. And Jenny sings.*

HUGH

What about him?

MICHELE

That's Craig, our equipment manager.

HUGH

*Let's have a concert then. There's
nothing I like in Harry's jukebox.*

MICHELE

*We'd be glad to if we weren't in such a
hurry today. But come out to Vegas.
We open New Year's eve.*

HUGH

Are we going to Vegas, Rex?

Hugh returns to his booth.

REX

No, Hugh, just to my home in Denver.

HUGH

Sorry, ladies. And should I add little mother?

CRAIG

If you wanna fat lip, you lush.

LEE ANN

Knock it off. It's Christmas eve. Let's have peace and some happiness.

JENNY

I don't know if I'll make it to Vegas or not. This kid is due any day now, ya know.

CRAIG

It'll come when it wants to. You'll be all right, Jenny.

JENNY

I hope so, Craig.

Hugh gets up again and goes over to the rock group.

HUGH

You know, I own 28 drug stores between
Omaha and Boise. Bates Discount.
Here's my card.

VICKI

"Hugh Bates, President." You're a big
shot, man.

Rex gets up and guides Hugh back to their booth.

REX

You better have some more coffee, Hugh.

Craig goes over to the jukebox.

CRAIG

I wonder if that dude is right. Is there
any thing good in this thing?

He looks over the selection, puts in a coin, and plays a rock tune, such as
"Rock Around the Christmas Tree". He does some disco steps.

CRAIG

Hey, Jenny, wanna dance?

JENNY

After what you did to me, you creep?

LORETTA

Craig, that music is awful.

Loretta goes over, reaches behind the jukebox, and turns it off.

CRAIG

Hey, don't do that, Loretta.

Buddy and Smitty have finished eating while Roy is still working on his steak.

BUDDY

Dad, you got any change? I wanna play a video game while you're finishin'!

Roy reaches into his pocket and gives Buddy some quarters.

ROY

Okay, but don't get involved in a long game. We gotta hit the road again as soon as I've had a piece of Harry's apple pie.

SMITTY

I'll join you, Buddy.

They go over to a couple of video games and a pinball machine next to the jukebox. Craig returns to his place at the table.

During the next scenes Buddy plays a video game and Smitty the pinball machine in the background. Smitty flirts with Loretta, who ignores him, and then with Harriet, who after a while comes over to play a video game. She teases Smitty by paying attention to Buddy, who gets flustered.

OCCASIONALLY CUT TO Roy, Rex, and Hugh as they listen to the following conversation.

As Buddy drops a coin in the video machine, the outside door opens, and General Slatterly and Lieutenant Francis enter, covered with snow. They take off their coats as they talk.

GENERAL

It doesn't look too bad -- for a roadhouse.

LIEUTENANT

We're lucky to find any place open in this storm.

VICKI

Come in, general. It's not the officer's club, but it's homey.

The officers seat themselves in a booth near the rock group. Lee Ann brings coffee pot, mugs, and menus.

LEE ANN

Don't let these charmers bother you, General. We have the best food between

Omaha and Cheyenne.

They study the menu.

LEE ANN (Cont.)

You must be with SAC.

LIEUTENANT

Yes, how'd you know.

LEE ANN

*By your insignia. We get you folks
through here all the time.*

LIEUTENANT

*This is our base commander, General
Slatterly.*

GENERAL

I'll have the blue plate special and a beer.

LEE ANN

We don't serve beer.

GENERAL

Okay, black coffee, then.

LIEUTENANT

A steak sandwich for me, and some milk.

LEE ANN

Better have hot coffee, Lieutenant, to warm you up.

LIEUTENANT

No, it's bad for my ulcer. But you can make it hot chocolate.

LEE ANN

One special, one steak sandwich, Harry.

She pours coffee for General and leaves. Vicki gets up and comes over to the officers' booth. As conversation continues, Lee Ann makes hot chocolate and serves Lieutenant.

VICKI

So you're the big brave men who will push the buttons to wipe out a thousand cities and kill millions of people to save our way of life.

GENERAL

Listen, kid!

VICKI

Oh, is General Slaughter getting belligerent?

LIEUTENANT

Come off it. We came for food, not abuse.

Craig comes over.

CRAIG

Well, the soldier boy wants to be the peacemaker.

GENERAL

Our mission is peace.

CRAIG

Even if you have to go to war to preserve it.

LIEUTENANT

You don't understand.

CRAIG

No, you're the one who doesn't understand. How old are you?

LIEUTENANT

Twenty-four.

CRAIG

Same age as me. I can understand how this old guy can for that military jazz.

*But you're young enough to know better.
You'll get yourself shot up in Somalia,
Bosnia, or some place else no one's ever
heard of.*

GENERAL

*You'll be glad to have us if Russia
re-arms, North Korea starts trouble, or
Iraq acts up again.*

LIEUTENANT

*Frankly, the ROTC paid my way through
college. I made a contract to serve, and
I'm serving.*

VICKI

Forget it, man. Tell 'em to stuff it.

LIEUTENANT

I'm obligated.

VICKI

No one's obligated to anyone but himself.

GENERAL

Oh, the "me" generation is still around.

CRAIG

*Me, schmee. That's what I learned
growing up on Long Island. Everyone*

was out for number one.

LIEUTENANT

There oughta be a better way.

JENNY

If there is, ya know. I sure haven't found it.

Lee Ann brings a tray with food for the officers and a piece of pumpkin pie with whipped cream. Craig and Vicki return to their seats and finish eating.

LEE ANN

Gentlemen, here's your food.

Lee Ann serves the pumpkin pie to Jenny.

LEE ANN

Here's some pie for you, Jenny. It's on the house.

JENNY

Thanks. You're so kind.

LEE ANN

You deserve it. I hope you have a healthy baby.

JENNY

Me, too.

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LEE ANN

I wish I'd had a baby before my marriage busted.

JENNY

Well, to be honest I wish I wasn't havin' one so young, ya know. But these things happen. I wanna be free. Marriage, ya know, who needs it?

LEE ANN

(Motioning toward Craig)

What about him?

JENNY

He's a special friend at the moment, ya know, but basically I'm on my own. It's the only way, ya know.

LEE ANN

I've had it both ways. I prefer to have a man -- if you can count on him.

JENNY

You can't. My old man walked out on Mom and me when I was eight.

(Nodding toward Craig)

This one's a roadie, ya know, and I don't wanna be traveling' all the time.

CRAIG

Come on, Jenny. It's only till we make it big and can have a base.

JENNY

You say that, Craig. But it was Chicago last week. Vegas next. New Orleans in February.

MICHELE

It's where the business is.

JENNY

I'll do Vegas, if this kid hasn't come, but after that, ya know, you'd better find another singer.

CRAIG

Jenny, we need you. At least I do.

JENNY

Humph!

LORETTA

You're just depressed, Jenny. Once the baby's born, you'll feel better.

MICHELE

That pie looks good. Bring me a piece, will you, Lee Ann?

LEE ANN

Sure thing.

LORETTA

I'll have some, too, but hold the whipped cream.

The outside door opens. Hank, Dick, and Shigeru enter with a blast of snow behind them. They take off their coats, shake off the snow, and hang them up. They talk as they make their way to a booth beyond where General and Lieutenant sitting.

HANK

Whew! What a storm.

DICK

It's getting worse. We'll never make it to Colorado today. We should've stopped in Grand Island.

HANK

Maybe it'll let up west of here.

DICK

If you hadn't been so damned afraid of flying, Hank.

HANK

*Well, Dick, at least our families are snug
in Colorado.*

*Lee Ann appears with her coffee pot and menus. She pours coffee for
Hank and Dick and reaches for Shigeru's cup.*

LEE ANN

This'll warm you up, gentlemen.

SHIGERU

No, not for me, thank you. I prefer tea.

LEE ANN

I'll get it while you study the menu.

As she leaves, they look over the menu.

HANK

*I wonder if they're still serving breakfast.
I missed mine because of my last minute
Christmas shopping in Lincoln.*

DICK

Yes, and got us started late.

Lee Ann returns with Shigeru's tea.

LEE ANN

Here you are, sweetie. Do you want lemon?

SHIGERU

No, thank you.

HANK

Can I get a couple eggs over easy with sausage?

LEE ANN

Of course. With fried potatoes and toast?

HANK

Yes, please.

DICK

I'll have the chili and a serving of cole slaw.

SHIGERU

Please bring me some French toast. I have that whenever I can in America.

Lee Ann gathers up the menus and leaves. She serves them during the ensuing conversation.

SHIGERU

Yesterday when you invited me to travel with you, I had no idea the weather

would be like this.

HANK

No, me either. But I'm glad you came with us, Shigeru.

DICK

Well, Hank, at least this place proves that bringing the sun to earth can't succeed.

HANK

Sure it will.

DICK

It won't. With the blizzard blotting out the sun's rays, there can be no solar heating.

HANK

I never claimed one hundred percent, Dick. Just as much as possible. Anyway it's a surer bet that your power in the sky.

SHIGERU

His what?

DICK

The power satellite.

SHIGERU

Oh, yes. The one you were debating yesterday at the university.

HANK

It'll never work.

DICK

It will if the nation will make the investment.

HANK

For half the cost we could equip every home in America with a solar collector.

DICK

Oh, you and your damn "small is beautiful." Be practical.

HANK

Sure, like you, and be a tool of big government, big corporations, and big military.

DICK

So you're going to give me that "military-industrial complex" line again.

HANK

You know the greedy corporations want

billions for the power satellite, and the generals want to spend billions more for a satellite military base.

General overhears this and turns around.

GENERAL

Now hold on. It's not for ourselves. It's for national security.

HANK

Well, we have a general to speak for the military.

GENERAL

If we don't get a base in space soon, there's no telling when the Russians or even the Chinese might have one. Then we'll be in serious trouble.

CRAIG

(Seated)

Horseshit!

JENNY

Craig, stay out of this.

SHIGERU

If you'll excuse the views of an

astronomer, I don't think either are practical -- the power plant or the military base in space.

GENERAL

They are if we have the national will to spend the money necessary to develop them.

DICK

Sure, give us funds, and we space engineers can build anything.

HANK

If you had to choose, which would it be?

DICK

It really doesn't matter to me. That's for our leaders to decide.

CRAIG

No moral values? No judgment of whether the money might be better spent to feed hungry people?

DICK

Hell no! I'm an engineer, not a philosopher or a preacher.

LIEUTENANT

*Is there anything you wouldn't build?
Would you have constructed the A-bomb
in the forties?*

DICK

Sure, if told to.

Shigeru reacts adversely.

LIEUTENANT

You would?

DICK

*It's somebody else's decision how to use
what science makes.*

HANK

What's the matter, Shigeru?

SHIGERU

*I was a boy of ten in a village about eight
miles from Hiroshima when the first
A-bomb exploded. The mushroom cloud
was frightening, but worse was the sight
of the wounded streaming into our
village. I'll never forget it.*

GENERAL

*I regret it, but it had to be done. War is
war.*

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LIEUTENANT

But did it? Why didn't we bomb an uninhabited island to show them the power of our new weapon?

SHIGERU

Yes, I think we would have surrendered.

GENERAL

That's an old argument. President Truman considered that possibility but rejected it. He knew we had only the two bombs ready. If you hadn't surrendered, many more lives would've been lost in an invasion.

LIEUTENANT

We should've tried.

HANK

I've missed all the wars, but I've often wondered what combat is really like. The infantry, in the sky.

GENERAL

Well, I was a fighter pilot the last year of the Korean War. I piloted a B-52 based in the Philippines over Vietnam. I found plane-to-plane combat to be

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exhilarating. Long bombing runs, though, were usually boring. Almost like a day at the office.

CRAIG

What about the victims? Don't you ever think of them?

GENERAL

You don't see them, so you don't have to.

CRAIG

The same if you press the red button on your missiles.

GENERAL

The same.

LIEUTENANT

We're automatons.

HANK

Robots -- without souls.

GENERAL

Hey, what is this? A pacifist convention?

Waitress, what's for dessert?

LEE ANN

*Apple, pumpkin, and mince meat pie.
Carrot cake. Ice cream.*

GENERAL

Mince meat naturally and more coffee.

LIEUTENANT

Pumpkin, please.

LEE ANN

With whipped cream?

LIEUTENANT

Why not?

The outside door bursts open, and OFFICER CREJSEK [Cre'-shek] comes in, stomping her boots and brushing off snow.

LEE ANN

Officer Crejsek, you look frozen.

Lee Ann quickly pours coffee for Crejsek.

CREJSEK

I am, Lee Ann. The storm's getting worse. We ought to close the roads, but headquarters in Lincoln says to keep traffic moving as long as possible. They know people are trying to get home for

Christmas.

GENERAL

True, I'm trying to make my brother's house in Laramie. It was too bad to fly, so I'm driving. I'm dropping Lt. Francis to visit his parents in Cheyene.

CREJSEK

I wouldn't count on it. They say it's really bad from Ogallala on west.

DICK

How about the road to Denver?

CREJSEK

Pretty bad, too. Right now we're trying to organize convoys for safety. I'm supposed to lead a group at least as far as North Platte.

DICK

How far is that?

CREJSEK

About 100 miles. I see a semi on the lot, a van, and several cars. Whose are they?

ROY

The semi's mine. An empty sheep hauler.

MICHELE

The van's ours.

CREJSEK

I suppose the cars belong to the rest of you. Are you all headed west?

GENERAL, HANK, REX

Yes, ma'am. Sure are. Yes, we are.

CREJSEK

Then let's go.

They all get up to go, some grabbing a last bite. As they put on their coats and head for the door, Lee Ann goes into the kitchen.

CRAIG

God damned blizzard! We'll never reach Vegas.

JENNY

What if we're stranded.

CREJSEK

We'll be all right as long as we stay together. We're going to follow a snow

plow. I'll be second with the sheep truck behind me to break the wind for the rest of you. Anybody got a car phone? I want you last in line.

REX

I do.

GENERAL

We do, too. Better let us go last. That's a job for the military.

CREJSEK

Okay. You bring up the rear. If anything happens to any of the others, you can let me know. Dial pound-77. Everybody keep your headlights on low beam and stay in line.

They start filing out. Lee Ann comes out of the kitchen carrying a suitcase and her coat.

LEE ANN

Harry, the old sweetheart, says I can leave now if I can get a ride. He's goin' to close.

SMITTY

Come with us, Lee Ann. You and me could snuggle up in the bunk behind the seat.

ROY

Not with the boy along, Smitty.

LEE ANN

I'd never go any place with you.

JENNY

*We're a little tight in the van, but we
could squeeze you in.*

CREJSEK

*Ride with me, Lee Ann. I like company.
But my husband gets jealous when I give
rides to men. So I take only females.*

LEE ANN

*Helen, I accept. I've always wanted to
ride in patrol car.*

CREJSEK

Okay, let's hit the road.

*Lee Ann is the last to leave. She puts on her coat, goes to the jukebox,
puts in a coin, and calls into the kitchen.*

LEE ANN

*Hey, dollface, here's a Christmas carol for
you. And thanks for cleaning up out*

7

here.

"Carol of the Bells" starts playing as Lee Ann opens the door into the howling blizzard, leaving the diner empty with half-eaten food on a number of plates. Harry comes out with a container for dirty dishes.

CUT TO:

EXT - DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

The cars and trucks pull away from the diner in the blinding blizzard.

CUT TO:

PASTOR

No, we need soldiers.

LIEUTENANT

Will there ever be a time when we don't?

PASTOR

When I was young, I thought so, but now I'm doubtful. We Christians inescapably live surrounded by evil. It's who we are and what we do that matters.

Amelia returns from the sanctuary.

AMELIA

That girl's talented.

PASTOR

Yes, it's wonderful to hear such good organ playing.

AMELIA

I can't believe it. We're really having the pageant.

PASTOR

Yes, we really are.

AMELIA

I guess you can put me down for

Elizabeth. *But don't expect any miracle.*

PASTOR

The whole event is miraculous. A blessed miracle.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - FRONT OF CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is lit. It is still snowing. The entrance sidewalk has been cleared. People are entering the church.

CUT TO:

INT - CHURCH SANCTUARY

The sanctuary of modest size is becoming comfortably full. It has a center aisle with three steps up to the divided chancel. At the back of the chancel is a central altar with a pair of lighted candles on either side of a cross. The pulpit is on the left facing the congregation and the lectern on the right. Beside the lectern are a font and an unlit advent wreath with four outside candles burnt to unequal lengths and the center white candle not yet burnt. Choir pews face across opposite sides of the chancel. The organ console is on the pulpit side, and choir pews have been removed to make room for Michele, Loretta, and Harriet and their musical instruments. A small stool is positioned by the altar, and another small stool is accessible toward the front of the chancel. A manger is positioned out of sight with the musicians. A piano is on the sanctuary floor below the pulpit. The pulpit and

lectern have mikes.

There are side doors on each side of the chancel leading to small rooms, which also have doors out into the sanctuary and to the hallway leading to fellowship hall. The side rooms have metal chairs, and the one on the lectern side contains a pair of candelabra on stands.

"Searching", the musical group, is playing a medley of traditional Christmas carols with a rock beat: Michele on lead guitar, Vicki on bass, Harriet on drums, and Loretta at the organ. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet are wearing jackets or long shirts over shiny white dresses (could be covered with sequins and could be phosphorescent under a black light).

People are coming in from outside, taking off their coats and boots, and finding their seats. Ushers are handing out programs. TV cameras and their operators are in three locations. As the music continues, a young boy or girl wearing a white robe and serving as acolyte comes down the center aisle carrying a candlelighter and lights the candles on the altar and all five candles on the advent wreath.

Several of the stranded travelers in their regular clothes come in a side door at the front of the sanctuary and sit on the front pew, including General Slatterly, Lieutenant Francis, Lee Ann, Dick, Hank, Shigeru, Rex, and Hugh, who is drunk and helped by Rex. Pastor in a black robe and Jenny and Craig in their pageant costumes go from the rear hallway into the small room outside the pulpit side of the chancel. They are followed by Roy, Smitty, and Buddy in costumes. Jenny seems a little shaky as she sits down. Sam, Amelia, and Lee Ann in costumes go from the rear hallway into the small room on the lectern

side and sit down. Crejsek joins them wearing a choir robe over her state trooper uniform.

As the musicians wind down, Crejsek enters the chancel and takes a seat near the lectern. Pastor enters from the other side and steps to the pulpit. They leave the doors between the chancel and the side rooms slightly ajar. The musicians cease playing, and Michele and Vicki sit down.

As Pastor talks, CUT OCCASIONALLY to main characters on the front row, in the chancel, and in the side rooms. CUT ON CUE to a camera operator and to Dick, the skeptic.

PASTOR

I want to welcome all of you to the Christmas eve pageant at the Church of the Carpenter. Welcome to our faithful members and to friends from Muhlenberg and the surrounding area who on short notice have braved the storm to join our celebration. We are all proud of our county road crew for keeping Main Street plowed. (Cont.)

PASTOR (Cont.)

A special welcome to those who arrived by bus an hour ago. We're glad that we have enough space in fellowship hall and the Sunday School rooms to accommodate you, and plenty of food and bedding, thanks to our members and

friends.

We especially welcome the film crew that was on the bus. They were on their way to film the intercollegiate snowboard competition in Aspen and have decided to film our pageant. They intend to edit it for broadcast and to add subtitles to the hymns we will sing so that folks watching at home can join in.

We have an unusual cast tonight, as you can see from the program. But no more so that the remarkable collection of people who participated in the original drama of Jesus' birth.

Our pageant portrays the coming of Christ in three scenes. We first hear and see what Luke reveals to us, for he takes us back to the earliest part of the story. Then we turn to Matthew and finally to John. Each of these gospels considers Jesus' origin in its own distinct way.

This afternoon one of our skeptical guests grilled me unmercifully about the gospel accounts. "Are these stories really true?" he demanded. I would prefer to rephrase the question and inquire: Do the

*stories of Jesus' birth convey the truth?
God's truth. Watch and listen. Decide
whether they reveal God's truth for you.*

May the pageant begin.

Pastor sits down. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet rise. Michele strikes a chord on her guitar, and they sing in unison "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" (tune: "Picardy"). Loretta provides harmonic accompaniment.

*MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET
(Singing)*

[Chord]

*"Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand.
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessings in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand."*

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sit down. Officer Crejsek rises and goes to the lectern. She opens a New Testament and reads from Luke, as translated by the American Bible Society in Today's English Version, Good News for Modern Man.

CREJSEK

*"During the time when Herod was king of
the land of Israel, there was a priest
named Zechariah, who belonged to the
priestly order of Abujah."*

Sam as Zechariah and Amelia as Elizabeth enter the chancel from the door on the lectern side.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"His wife's name was Elizabeth. She also belonged to a priestly family."

Sam goes to the altar. Elizabeth stops part way and kneels to pray.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"They both lived good lives in God's sight, and obeyed fully all the Lord's commandments and rules. They had no children because Elizabeth could not have any, and she and Zechariah were very old.

"One day Zechariah was doing his work as a priest before God, taking his turn in the daily service."

Sam pantomimes lighting incense and other actions at the altar. As Crejsek continues, Michele rises and slips off her jacket, revealing her radiant white dress. She moves next to Sam at the altar.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar where the incense was burned."

As Michele as Gabriel approaches, Sam draws back in fear.

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Don't be afraid, Zechariah. God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John."

SAM (as Zechariah)

"How shall I know if this is so? I am an old man and my wife also is old."

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this good news. Because you have not believed you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true."

Sam mimics loss of speech. Michele returns to her seat. Sam and Amelia start for the lectern door. Loretta starts playing background music on organ to facilitate the transition.

CREJSEK

"Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and did not leave the

house for five months."

AMELIA (as Elizabeth)

"Now at last the Lord has helped me in this way. He has taken away my public disgrace."

Amelia and Sam leave through the lectern door. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee name Nazareth. Gabriel had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary."

Jenny as Mary enters from pulpit side and comes out to center of chancel. Michele as Gabriel rises and joins her.

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Peace be with you! The Lord is with you, and has greatly blessed you!"

CREJSEK

"Mary was greatly troubled by the angel's message..."

Jenny appears troubled.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...and she wondered what the words meant."

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Don't be afraid, Mary, because God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and
(Cont.)

MICHELE (as Gabriel) (Cont.)

you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God."

JENNY (as Mary)

"I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?"

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God."

JENNY (as Mary)

"I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said."

CREJSEK

"And the angel left her."

Michele returns to her seat. Loretta starts background music.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Soon afterward Mary got ready and hurried off to the hill country, to a town in Judea" to visit her relative Elizabeth.

Jenny crosses toward the lectern side.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth."

Amelia as Elizabeth enters, and Jenny greets her. Music ends.

CREJSEK

At that moment Elizabeth's "baby moved within her" and she "was filled with the Holy Spirit."

AMELIA (as Elizabeth)

"You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

*Vicki strikes a chord on her bass guitar and accompanies Jenny as she sings. [The following words are from the *Good News for Modern Man*, but another poetical version of "The Magnificat" is acceptable. The first stage presentation of this play, for example, used "My Soul Gives*

Glory", words by J.T. Mueller, music by Michael Joncas.)

JENNY (as Mary)

(Singing)

*"My heart praises the Lord;
My soul is glad because of God my Savior,
because he has remembered me, his
lowly servant!*

*From now on all people will call me
happy, because of the great things
the Mighty God has done for me.*

His name is holy;

*He shows mercy on those who fear him,
from one generation to another.*

*He stretched out his mighty arm and
scattered the proud with all their
plans.*

*He brought down mighty kings from their
thrones, and lifted up the lowly.*

*He filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away with empty
hands.*

*He kept the promise he made to our
ancestors, and he came to the help of
his servant Israel;*

*He remember to show mercy to Abraham
and to all his descendants forever!"*

As Crejsek continues, Loretta starts background music on the organ.

CREJSEK

"Mary stayed about three months with Elizabeth, and then went back home."

As Amelia exits through the lectern door, Jenny moves back across the chancel. As she walks, she has a labor pain and then moves out through the pulpit door. Music continues.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son."

In the side room Craig helps Jenny to a chair, and comforts her.

Sam as Zechariah and Amelia as Elizabeth enter the chancel through the lectern door. Amelia carries a doll baby in a blanket. Music continues.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"When the baby was a week old, they came to circumcise him." They named him John as the angel Gabriel had told them.

Sam and Amelia move toward the altar. Amelia sits on a stool.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Zechariah was filled with the Holy

Spirit" and regained his speech.

Sam faces the congregation. Music ends.

SAM (as Zechariah)

*"Let us praise the Lord, the God of
Israel!*

*He came to the help of his people and
set them free.*

*He has provided a mighty Savior for us,
who is a descendant of his servant
David."*

Sam takes the doll baby from Amelia.

SAM (as Zechariah) (Cont.)

(To doll baby)

*"You, my child, will be called a prophet
of the Most High God.*

You will go ahead of the Lord.

*to prepare his road for him;
to tell his people that they will be saved,
by having their sins forgiven.*

(To congregation)

"Our God is merciful and tender.

*He will cause the bright dawn of
salvation to rise on us,*

*and shine from heaven on all those who
live in the dark shadow of death,*

*to guide our steps into the path of
peace."*

As Crejsek continues, Sam with the doll baby and Amelia leave through the lectern door. Loretta commences background music.

CREJSEK

*"The child grew and developed in body
and spirit. He lived in the desert until
the day when he would appear to the
people of Israel."*

Loretta plays musical interlude as Vicki moves the manger to front of altar. In the side room Jenny experiences pain again. Background music continues as Crejsek speaks.

CREJSEK

*"At that time Emperor Augustus sent out
an order for all the citizens of the Empire
to register themselves for the census.
When this first census took place,
Quirinius was the governor of Syria.
Everyone, then, went to register himself,
each to his own town."*

As Crejsek continues, Craig as Joseph and Jenny as Mary enter the chancel through the pulpit door. Music continues until they are at center of chancel.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Joseph went from the town of Nazareth, in Galilee, to Judea, to the town named Bethlehem, where King David was born. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register himself with Mary..."

At this moment Jenny is stricken with a sharp pain and grasps her back.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant."

Jenny peels another stab of pain.

JENNY

Oh!

Lee Ann as innkeeper comes out from the lectern side. Craig and Jenny approach her.

CREJSEK

In Bethlehem "there was no room for them to stay in the inn."

Lee Ann shakes her head "No" and shrugs her shoulders to show no vacancy.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"And while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby."

Jenny is again stricken with pain.

JENNY

Ow! I think I am really going to have my baby. Right now.

CRAIG

You can't have it here.

Pastor comes out from by the pulpit. Amelia enters through the lectern door.

PASTOR

Quick! Go to the nursery room across the hall. There's a day bed there.

Craig puts his arm around Jenny and leads her toward the pulpit door as she has another pain. Pastor addresses the congregation.

PASTOR

Is there a doctor present?

No response. Jenny stops.

JENNY

That's okay. I'm prepared for natural childbirth.

Jenny has another pain.

PASTOR

{Pointing to Craig}

Is he trained to assist?

JENNY

No, he wouldn't take the course.

Crejsek comes over.

CREJSEK

I've had training in child delivery.

CRAIG

Good, will you help her?

CREJSEK

Of course.

Hugh rises from the front pew in the congregation, still drunk.

HUGH

What's happening?

Jenny continues toward the pulpit door. Amelia and Lee Ann follow.

AMELIA

I'll get some towels and blankets.

LEE ANN

I'll help you.

Jenny, Craig, Crejsek, Amelia, and Lee Ann go through the pulpit door. Hugh staggers toward the chancel. Rex starts after him.

HUGH

What's going on?

PASTOR

The young lady is about to have her baby.

HUGH

To hell with the baby! Let's get on with the show.

REX

Come on, Hugh. We better go to fellowship hall.

Rex guides Hugh out a door to the hallway. Pastor goes to the pulpit and faces the congregation.

PASTOR

My friends, you can see that our pageant has been interrupted by a real live drama.

But I heard Jenny whisper to Craig,
 "Have them go on with the pageant."
 They're in show business, you know.

While we're waiting to learn of the
 outcome, let me say something I wanted
 to mention later about Bethlehem and
 King David. Already we've heard
 David's name mentioned, and we'll hear
 of him again in Matthew's gospel. This is
 fitting because David was the greatest
 king the Jews ever had. They expected
 that the Messiah would be a descendant
 of David.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of a loud speaker above inside door of nursery with pastor's
 voice coming out. DRAW BACK to show Jenny lying on the day bed.
 Amelia is wiping her head with a cold cloth, and Crejsek is preparing to
 assist the baby be born. Jenny is moaning as she starts to deliver.
 Craig is pacing the floor. Lee Ann comes in with a basin of warm
 water.

PASTOR (Cont.) o.s.

We all have some knowledge of David.
 How he slew Goliath. About his romance
 with the beautiful Bathsheba, who was
 married to another man. What we
 forget about this spicy tale is that the

prophet Nathan had to the courage to reprove King David for his misdeed. David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Yes, though David had human flaws, throughout his life he tried to be obedient to the will of God.

CUT TO:

Pastor continues to speak from pulpit.

PASTOR

As king, David tried to rule justly. Indeed, the last words attributed to David are a poem on this theme -- for remember, David was also a musician.

(Looking at General in front pew)
General Slatterly, you said you find much to admire in the Old Testament. Maybe you would be willing to read this passage.

General rises and walks to chancel.

GENERAL

Sure, if you will show me the place.

As General approaches, Pastor takes a Bible from under the pulpit and leafs through it to find the place. Lee Ann comes in through the pulpit

door and whispers to Pastor.

PASTOR

(To congregation)

I know you're curious. Jenny has started to deliver. All is going well.

Jenny goes back out. General is now at the pulpit. Pastor hands him the opened Bible.

PASTOR

(Pointing)

Start here at verse two of chapter 23 in Second Samuel and read to verse 7.

As General starts reading, Pastor slips out through the pulpit door.

GENERAL

"The God of Israel has spoken;
 the protector of Israel said to me,
 'The king who rules with justice,
 who rules with reverence for God,
 is like the sun shining on a cloudless dawn,
 the sun that makes the grass sparkle after
 rain.'

CUT TO:

In nursery Jenny is proceeding with delivery as Pastor comes into the nursery. She looks at him with a weak smile. Pastor bows his head

in silent prayer. General voice comes over loudspeaker.

GENERAL (Cont.) o.s.

*"And that is how God will bless my
descendants,*

*because he has made an eternal covenant
with me,*

(Cont.)

GENERAL (Cont.) o.s.

*an agreement that will not be broken,
a promise that will not be changed.*

That is all I desire;

that will be my victory,

and God will surely bring it about."

CUT TO:

*At the pulpit, General continues reading. As he finishes, Pastor
returns, leaving the pulpit door open, and stands beside him.*

GENERAL (Cont.)

*"But godless men are like thorns
that are thrown away,*

no one can touch them barehanded.

*You must use an iron tool or a spear;
they will be burned completely."*

PASTOR

Indeed, Yahweh, who David served, was

one to fear but yet rewarded those who kept his covenant. Thank you, General.

General nods his acknowledgement and returns to his seat on the front pew of the congregation.

PASTOR

Yes, friends, delivery is proceeding normally. As we continue waiting, let me complete the connection between King David and Jesus.

David, the son of Jesse, was from the town of Bethlehem. Long after David's kingdom had fallen in disarray and the Jews subjugated, they looked for a great Messiah to liberate them from captivity.

CUT TO NURSERY

In nursery Jenny continues in delivery.

PASTOR (Cont.) o.s.

Many said that he would be a shoot of Jesse, and the prophet Micah predicted that he would be born in Bethlehem. And so he was, according to Luke and Matthew.

CUT TO PULPIT

Pastor continues speaking at pulpit.

PASTOR (Cont.)

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!" Yes, let's sing about Bethlehem. There are some great words by Phillips Brooks. It's number 87 in the hymnal. Let's sing the first and third verses. Will you rise as we sing?

(Looking into a camera)

And if our pageant is broadcast on television, would you home viewers join our singing?

Loretta plays "O Little Town of Bethlehem" through once. Michele and Vicki find their place and join in as Harriet improvises a drum beat. During the singing CUT TO various players, musicians, and the congregation.

ALL

(Singing)

*"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark street shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years*

Are met in thee tonight.

*"How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in."*

As they finish singing, we hear the cry of a new born baby through the pulpit door. Lee Ann rushes in.

LEE ANN

It's a boy! A lovely, little boy!

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet hug one another and bounce around. Loretta plays some joyous music (such as a bit of "For Unto Us Is Born" from Handel's "Messiah"). Lee Ann and Pastor hug, though with more restraint. Vicki hugs Lee Ann, and Michele hugs Pastor. On the front row General, Lieutenant, Hank, and Dick shake hands and pat one another on the back.

PASTOR

(To congregation)

We can all rejoice.

Some in the congregation express their joy by clapping and cheering.

After a bit Pastor raises his hand for quiet. Loretta quits playing.

LEE ANN

Pastor Ziegler, Jenny says she wants to complete the pageant.

PASTOR

These show people are hard to repress. Well, if that's what she wants, let's go on with it.

(To congregation)

Won't you be seated again, please? Let's see, where were we?

LEE ANN

I, the innkeeper, just turned away Mary and Joseph.

PASTOR

Oh, yes. Is Officer Crejsek finished?

LEE ANN

I'll go get her.

Lee goes out pulpit door.

PASTOR

Bear with us a moment, friends. Then we'll pick up where we left off. Loretta, can we have some music.

As Loretta starts playing "Away in the Manger" (tune "Cradle Song")
 CUT TO NURSERY where Jenny is nestling the baby with the carol
 coming over the loudspeaker. Lee Ann comes in and beckons to
 Crejsek, who is just rolling down her sleeves. Crejsek picks up her robe
 and goes out the door. After another moment with mother and child,
 CUT TO CHANCEL where Crejsek is coming through the pulpit door,
 still fastening her robe. As the music continues, Pastor speaks
 inaudibly to Crejsek, who crosses over to the lectern as Pastor takes his
 seat. Crejsek finds her place and starts reading.

CREJSEK

(Reading)

"While they were in Bethlehem, the time
 came for her to have her baby. She gave
 birth to her first son, wrapped him in
 cloths and laid him in a manger -- there
 was no room for them to stay in the inn."

Loretta plays interlude of joyous music (such as "What Child Is This";
 tune "Greensleeves") as Roy, Smitty, and Buddy, costumed as biblical
 shepherds, enter the sanctuary from the side door on the pulpit side
 and move to the bottom of the chancel steps. Music ends.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"There were some shepherds in that part
 of the country who were spending the
 night in the fields, taking care of their
 flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to
 them..."

Michele as an angel approaches them.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid."

The shepherds show fear.

MICHELE (as angel)

"Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's your Savior was born -- Christ the Lord! What will prove it to you is this: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

CREJSEK

"Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God."

Vicki and Harriet slip out of their jackets to reveal dazzling white dresses like Michele's. The three musicians sing the angels chorus, which could be a variation of the following words.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and

peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased!"

CREJSEK

Then "the angels went away from them back into heaven."

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet return to their places.

ROY (as shepherd)

"Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, that the Lord has told us." Come on, boys.

Loretta plays music (such as "Masters in This Hall") as Roy, Smitty, and Buddy proceed along a side aisle to the rear of the sanctuary and down the center aisle. As this occurs, Lee Ann summons Jenny and Craig and their baby from the nursery to the chancel. Vicki puts the manger near the altar and pulls out the stool. Craig helps Jenny to the stool as Lee Ann carries the baby and places him in the manger. Craig stands behind Jenny, and Lee Ann stands on the other side. The shepherds come up. The music ends.

CREJSEK

The shepherds "found Mary and Joseph, and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about this child."

0

Roy speaks inaudibly to Jenny and Craig.

CREJSEK

*"All who heard it were filled with wonder
at what the shepherds told them."*

Roy, Smitty, and Buddy step down from the chancel and speak inaudibly to General, Lieutenant, Hank, and Dick in the front pew, who show their wonder.

CREJSEK

*"Mary remember all these things and
thought deeply about them."*

As Crejsek continues, Loretta starts playing (such as "The First Noel" or "As Lately We Watched"), and Roy, Smitty, and Buddy proceed along the center aisle singing praises and exit at rear of the sanctuary.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

*"The shepherds went back, singing praises
to God for all they had heard and seen.
It had been just as the angel had told
them."*

As music continues and the shepherds exit, Craig helps Jenny to a stool toward the front of the chancel. Lee Ann picks the baby out of the manger and gives him to Craig. She then stands to one side as an observer. Pastor slips on a robe and headdress of a biblical priest. Music ends, and Crejsek starts reading.

CREJSEK

"The time came for Joseph and Mary to do what the Law of Moses commanded and perform the ceremony of purification. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present to the Lord, as written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be dedicated to the Lord.'"

Craig hands the baby to Pastor as priest. As Crejsek continues, Sam as Simeon enters from the lectern door.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Now there was a man living in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. He was a good and God-fearing man" who "had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple. Seeing the child, Simeon took him in his arms, and gave thanks to God."

Sam takes the baby from Pastor, who stands aside.

SAM (as Simeon)

"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,

*and you may let your servant go in
peace.*

*With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence
of all peoples;
A light to reveal your way to the Gentiles,
and bring glory to your people Israel."*

(To Jenny)

*"This child is chosen by God for the
destruction and the salvation of many in
Israel. He will be a sign from God which
many people will speak against, and so
reveal their secret thoughts. And
sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break
your heart."*

*Sam hands the baby to Jenny and goes to the altar where he kneels in
prayer. Pastor returns to chair next to pulpit. As Crejsek continues,
Amelia as Anna emerges from the lectern door. She looks at the baby
and gives thanks inaudibly. The she walks down the chancel steps and
speaks inaudibly to people in front pew.*

CREJSEK

*"There was a prophetess named Anna, an
old woman who had been married for
seven years, and then had been a widow
for eighty-four years. She never left the
temple; day and night she worshiped
God, fasting and praying. That very
same hour she arrived and gave thanks to*

God, and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to redeem Jerusalem."

Sam rises from praying at altar and starts to exit. Amelia heads for exit from sanctuary floor.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"When Mary and Joseph had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord..."

CRAIG

(Interrupting)

Pastor Ziegler, if we can interrupt the pageant again, we'd like you to baptize our baby right now."

Pastor comes out, still costumed as the priest. Amelia and Sam stop and watch what is happening.

PASTOR

Really?

JENNY

Yes, we would. We decided before we came back out.

PASTOR

Very well. Sam, will you get water from the font?

Sam goes to the font, opens it, takes out a baptismal basin containing water, and holds it for the pastor. Pastor removes his headdress, and Craig and Jenny push back their biblical headcoverings. Amelia returns to the chancel and stands next to Lee Ann to observe the baptism. Michele, Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, and Crejsek move where they can see. Pastor takes the baby from Jenny.

PASTOR

What name shall be given to this child?

CRAIG

Jonathan.

PASTOR

Jonathan. The Hebrew for "God has given."

JENNY

Yes, he has.

PASTOR

And what is the child's surname?

CRAIG

What?

PASTOR

His last name.

CRAIG

(Looking at Jenny)

Me and Jenny will have to talk about that later.

PASTOR

Very well.

Pastor takes water from the basin Sam is holding to baptize Jonathan.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Jonathan, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May your life be ever blessed. Amen.

SAM, AMELIA

Amen.

Pastor kisses Jonathan on the head and hands him back to Jenny. Pastor guides Jenny and Craig toward the pulpit door. He gestures Crejsek to read, then moves to the seat behind the pulpit and removes his priest costume. Sam and Amelia exit through the lectern door, and Lee Ann follows Jenny and Craig out the pulpit door. Michele, Vicki, Harriet, and Loretta return to their places. As Crejsek starts reading, Loretta starts background music which then becomes interlude

music.

CREJSEK

"When Mary and Joseph had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their home town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were with him."

Thus, says the Gospel according to Luke.

Crejsek closes her Bible and sits down. Music continues as the players disperse. General, Lieutenant, Dick, and Hank go out by a side door. In the side room on the pulpit side, Jenny and Craig rest on chairs. Lee Ann brings in a portable crib for Jonathan. As the music interlude draws to a close, Pastor rises and goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

So we have Luke's story of Jesus' birth -- and our own drama of Jonathan's birth. You may feel that this is enough for one night, but we have two more scenes to present. Besides, with the blizzard outside you have no place else to go.

Matthew's version is next. It is also placed in Bethlehem, but Matthew

doesn't describe the precise setting.
There are some different characters, and
you'll note that Joseph has a more
prominent role.

The author of the Gospel according to
Matthew was interested in linking Jesus'

(Cont.)

PASTOR (Cont.)

birth to Jewish prophecy. To get the
feel for the intense longing for the
Messiah, let us sing "O Come, O Come,
Immanuel." It is number 81 in the
hymnal. Please rise as we sing the first
and last verses. (To
camera)

Those of you viewing at home may join us.

Loretta plays the chorus as introduction. Michele and Harriet play as
the congregation sings. Vicki removes the manger and then plays bass
if she has time. Sam, Amelia, Roy, Smitty, and Buddy come out the
side door and sit on the front pew. Sam is dressed as a priest, Roy as
a teacher, Amelia remains in Anna's costume, but Smitty and Buddy
have on their ranch clothes.

ALL

(Singing)

"O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,

That mourns in lonely exile here
 Until the Son of God appear.
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
 Shall come to thee, O Israel.

"O come, Desire of Nations, bind
 All peoples in one heart and mind;
 Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
 Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
 Shall come to thee, O Israel."

When the singing ends, Pastor beckons the congregation to be seated.
 He sits down by the pulpit. Crejsek remains standing and goes to the
 lectern to read.

CREJSEK

This was the way Jesus Christ was born.
 His mother Mary was engaged to
 Joseph..."

Craig as Joseph comes out from the pulpit door and walks around the
 chancel in thought as Crejsek continues reading. He then sits down
 and dozes.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...but before they were married she found
 out that she was going to have a baby by
 the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she
 was engaged, was a man who always did
 what was right; but he did not want to

disgrace Mary publicly, so he made plans to break the engagement secretly. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream."

Vicki as angel comes out of the choir stall, goes to Craig, and wakes him.

VICKI (as angel)

Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus -- because he will save his people from their sins."

Vicki eases out back to her seat.

CREJSEK

"Now all this happened in order to make true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and he will be called Emmanuel' (which means, 'God is with us').

"So when Joseph woke up,..."

Craig as Joseph rises and leaves the chancel through the pulpit door.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do and married Mary. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

"Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem.

As the musicians play (such as "We Three Kings"), Hank, Dick, and Shigeru dressed as wisemen enter the rear of the sanctuary and walk down the center aisle. A star lights over the altar. As they reach the front pew, they turn to the players seated there. As Hank speaks, the music fades out.

HANK

"Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

As Crejsek continues the narration, Hank, Dick, and Shigeru remain in the aisle. Rex as Herod comes out from the pulpit door and goes to the middle of the chancel.

CREJSEK

"When King Herod heard about this, he

was very upset, and so was everyone else
in Jerusalem."

As Crejsek continues, Sam as chief priest and Roy as teacher come up
the steps to join Rex.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"He called together all the chief priests
and the teachers of the Law."

REX (as Herod)

"Where will the Messiah be born?"

SAM (as chief priest)

"In the town of Bethlehem, in Judea."

ROY (as teacher)

"This is what the prophet wrote,
`Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are by no means the least
among the rulers of Judah;
for from you will come a leader
who will guide my people Israel."

As Crejsek continues, Sam and Roy exit through the lectern door. Rex
beckons to Hank, Dick, and Shigeru. They come up to the chancel.
The four of them whisper among themselves.

CREJSEK

"So Herod called the visitors from the east

to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem."

REX (as Herod)

"Go and make a careful search for the child, and when you find him let me know, so that I may go and worship him too."

CREJSEK

"With this they left."

As the musicians play (such as "March of Turene"), Hank, Dick, and Shigeru walk down the steps. Rex exits through the lectern door. The wisemen take a side aisle to the rear of the sanctuary and walk down the center aisle. Jenny as Mary carrying her baby and Craig as Joseph come out through the pulpit door. Jenny sits on a stool at the front of the chancel. Harriet slips out for costume change. When the wisemen are halfway down the center aisle, the narration continues with music in background.

CREJSEK

"On their way they saw the star..."

Hank points to the star over the altar.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...the same one they had seen in the

east -- and it went ahead of them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. How happy they were, what joy was theirs, when they saw the star!"

Hank, Dick, and Shigeru show their happiness. As narration continues, they walk up the chancel steps. Music ends.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"They went into the house and saw the child with his mother Mary. The knelt down and worshiped him."

The wisemen kneel and then offer gifts.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Then they opened their bags and offered him presents: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

Hank, Dick, and Shigeru withdraw and descend the chancel steps. Vicki as angel comes out and stands over them. Jenny and Craig fall asleep.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they went back to their country by another road."

Hank, Dick, and Shigeru hurriedly leave the sanctuary by a side door.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph."

Vicki as angel goes to Craig and awakens him.

VICKI (as angel)

"Get up, take the child and his mother and run to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave. Herod will be looking for the child to kill him."

As Crejsek continues, Vicki returns to her place. Craig wakes Jenny, who is holding the baby, and hurriedly they exit through the pulpit door. Loretta plays background music. Turn off the star.

CREJSEK

"Joseph got up, took the child and the mother, and left during the night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died. This was done to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'I called my Son out of Egypt.'"

As music continues, Rex as Herod, Roy as teacher, and Sam as chief priest come out through lectern door. Roy and Sam speak inaudibly to Rex, who becomes agitated. Music ends.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"When Herod realized that the visitors from the east had tricked him, he was furious."

Rex as Herod rages. He beckons General and Lieutenant, who come out from the pulpit door, garbed as soldiers, carrying swords. After they reach Rex, Harriet and Lee Ann as young mothers carrying doll babies slip into the chancel through the respective pulpit and lectern doors.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger -- in accordance with what he had learned from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared."

General waves his sword aggressively. Lieutenant holds his gingerly.

LIEUTENANT

No! No! I can't do it!

GENERAL

You've got to. You agreed to play this part.

LIEUTENANT

No! I can't kill, or even pretend to kill!

Lieutenant throws down his sword and runs out the center aisle.

LIEUTENANT (Cont.)

I won't! I won't! I won't be a killer!

Smitty comes up from the front pew.

SMITTY

That lousy coward. I'll take his place.

Smitty picks up the sword and feels the blade. As this occurs, Harriet and Lee Ann with their doll babies move out farther into the chancel.

GENERAL

(To Crejsek)

Give us our cue again.

CREJSEK

Herod "gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger."

General and Smitty grab the doll babies which Harriet and Lee Ann are holding, throw them to the floor, and stab them. Harriet and Lee Ann fight back, scream, protest, and cry in anguish as their babies are slain. General and Smitty run down the chancel stairs, stab imaginary babies, and proceed along the center aisle, stabbing more babies, and exit at the rear of the sanctuary. As this occurs, Harriet and Lee Ann rush Rex as Herod and fall at his feet weeping. As their weeping abates, Crejsek continues, but the women still sob at Rex's feet. Loretta plays background music (such as "Coventry Carol").

CREJSEK

"In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true:

*`A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter crying and weeping.
Rachel weeps for her children;
she weeps and will not be comforted,
because they are all dead."*

Music continues as Rex, Harriet, and Lee Ann exit through the lectern door. Then Jenny carrying her baby and Craig enter through the pulpit door. They move next to the altar where Jenny sits on a stool and Craig lies on the floor nearby and falls asleep. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"After Herod had died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, in Egypt."

Vicki as angel goes to Craig as Joseph and awakens him.

VICKI (as angel)

*"Get up, take the child and his mother,
and go back to the land of Israel, because
those who tried to kill the child are dead."*

As narration continues, Craig picks up baby. He and Jenny walk down the chancel steps and to a side door out of the sanctuary. Loretta plays background music.

CREJSEK

*"So Joseph got up, took the child and his
mother and returned to Israel." They
went to the province of Galilee and made
(Cont.)*

CREJSEK (Cont.)

*their home in a town named Nazareth.
They "did this to make come true what
the prophets had said, 'He will be called a
Nazarene.'"*

Crejsek closes her Bible and sits down. Music continues until Craig and Jenny have left the sanctuary. Then Pastor steps to the pulpit. Harriet comes out with her young mother costume removed to join the other musicians.

PASTOR

There you have Matthew's version of Jesus's birth in its entirety, reminding us of the violent world in which he lived. It's no wonder that Luke's story is more often read in church.

The third version of the coming of Christ we offer you comes from the gospel of John. It has no baby, neither shepherds nor wisemen. So we will retire most of our players. We'll let Jenny and Jonathan rest in the nursery. I've asked the others to come as themselves and be our choir.

This fine musical group, called "Searching", which the storm blew in, will play for us as the assemble.

As the musicians play (such as "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright", first straight and then a rock variation), the players come up from the front row and out of the two chancel doors, except for Jenny, Craig, and Lieutenant, and take places in the choir stall. Most of them are in their regular clothes, but a few still are in their pageant costume or part of the costume. Rex helps Hugh, who is intoxicated. At one point CUT TO nursery where Jonathan is asleep in a crib, and Jenny is resting on the day bed as Craig holds her hand.

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When they are all assembled, the music ends and Pastor speaks. As he addresses the congregation, from time to time he turns to the people in the choir stall.

CUT OCCASIONALLY to different individuals among the players and once pan the congregation. During Pastor's discussion of Light, there is affirmative nodding. Have ONE CLOSE-UP of lighted advent wreath. When he talks of the Word, there may be some puzzlement but respectful attention. When he speaks of Love, there is more affirmative body language.

PASTOR

I believe we're all assembled now and can continue.

(Cont.)

PASTOR (Cont.)

Whereas Luke and Matthew depicted events transpiring in a period of two to three years, John chose the time frame of eternity. Instead of people, John deals in concepts, three in particular: The Word, or Logos, which is an abstract idea. Light, a physical phenomenon. And Love, a relationship. The Word, Light, and Love.

As Pastor continues, Buddy takes an unlit candle, lights it from a candle on the altar, and takes it to Pastor.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Of the three, the symbolism of Light is probably the most approachable. From ancient times, people have contrasted light and darkness. Thus, the creation story in Genesis describes an earth without form, covered with darkness. God said, "Let there be light."

Buddy hands Pastor the lighted candle.

PASTOR (Cont.)

And there was light. The Hebrew prophets -- especially Isaiah -- foresaw the Messiah as bringing light into the realm of darkness.

Pastor places the lighted candle in a candleholder on the pulpit.

Many pagan peoples had celebrations following the winter solstice as days begin to lengthen, suggesting the rebirth of the sun. The early Christian church recognized December 25, thought to be the day of solstice, as the date of Jesus' birth. This is fitting, for Christ is the Light of the world.

The Word, or Logos in the original Greek, is a little harder to understand. In using this term, the author of the Gospel of John brought together Hebrew and Hellenistic thought. For the Jews, Logos was the mind of God. For the Greeks, Logos was reason, the guiding force of an orderly universe.

I myself find it more useful to think of the Word as the Essence of God, that is, as God's true nature. The Word -- God's
(Cont.)

PASTOR (Cont.)

Essence -- pre-existed before the coming of Christ. In Jesus, the essential nature of God was manifested. It became flesh and dwelt among us.

What is God's essential nature? It is Love. An overwhelming love, seeking us out until it finds us. A forgiving love. An amazing grace.

God so loved the world that he gave us his Son. In Jesus the Christ we can perceive that the essence of God is Love. This is our beacon, a kindly light to show us the way. Through Love, we are able to tap

into eternity. But, my friends, without the Love of God, we dwell in darkness.

Pastor blows out candle next to him.

PASTOR (Cont.)

And now let us hear the words of John.

Pastor sits down behind the pulpit. Crejsek rises, goes to the lectern, and reads -- slowly.

CREJSEK

"Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God.

From the very beginning, the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him.

The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to man. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

Suddenly all the lights in the sanctuary and chancel go out, leaving only the two lighted candles on the altar and the five candles on the advent wreath. The people gasp. Pastor rises and goes to pulpit.

PASTOR

I guess the storm has taken down the power lines.

As Pastor continues talking, he takes the unlighted candle on the pulpit and lights it from the advent wreath next to the lectern.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Sam, go down and start the emergency generator while we get some more candles lit.

Pastor hands Sam the candle he has lighted, and Sam departs. Pastor reaches under the lectern.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Here are some more candles. And there are a couple of candelabra just outside that door if somebody will bring them in.

Pastor points toward the lectern door.

ROY

Rex, will you give me a hand?

REX

I'll be glad to help, Roy.

Roy and Rex go out. As dialogue continues, General, Hank, Buddy,

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and Lee Ann take candles from Pastor and light them. Roy and Rex return with the candelabra and place them on the sanctuary floor at either side of the chancel steps. Others light the candles on the candelabra.

PASTOR

Loretta, if you can make your way to the piano, we'll sing a carol while we're getting the candles lit.

LORETTA

What'll it be?

PASTOR

"Silent Night."

LORETTA

No problem. I'll play it in B flat. That's the best key for singing

GENERAL

I'll guide you, Loretta.

General with a lighted candle guides Loretta toward the piano on the sanctuary floor below the pulpit.

HUGH

(Rising)

Let me help, too.

PASTOR

I'm afraid you're too unsteady, my friend.

HUGH

Everybody else has had a part.

PASTOR

Sorry, maybe next year.

As candlelighting continues, Pastor with a lighted candle goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

Friends, let us sing "Silent Night" while we are getting candles lit. You all know it. The first and third verses. You may remain seated.

Loretta plays the last line of "Silent Night" as an introduction. General holds a candle for her as she plays, although she plays without music.

ALL

(Singing)

*"Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,*

*Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*"Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth."*

By the time they are finished singing, all the candles are lit. Lee Ann is standing next to Crejsek at the lectern, holding a candle so that she can read. Others have returned to their places in the choir stall. Some are holding lighted candles. Pastor is at the pulpit with his candle.

PASTOR

Now I believe we can pick up where we left off.

CREJSEK

"The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

"God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light."

Craig comes out the pulpit door, dressed in the rough clothing of John the Baptist, and stands on the top step, illuminated by a candelabra.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"He came to tell them, so that all should hear and believe. He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. This was the real light, the light that comes into the world and shines on all men."

Lieutenant, wearing a white robe, comes out the lectern door and stands on the top step, illuminated by the other candelabra.

CREJSEK

"The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth. This was the glory which he received as the Father's only son. John told about him."

CRAIG (as John the Baptist)

"This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'"

CREJSEK

"Out of fullness of his grace, he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. God gave the Law through Moses; but grace and truth came only through Jesus Christ."

LIEUTENANT (as Jesus)

"As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up on the cross so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

CREJSEK

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life."

CUT TO Lieutenant

CREJSEK (Cont.) o.s.

For God did not send his son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior. Whoever believes in the Son is not judged; whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in God's only Son.

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CUT BACK to Crejsek

CREJSEK (Cont.)

This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but men love the darkness rather than the light, because they do evil things. Anyone who does evil things hates the light and will not come to the light, because he does not want his evil deeds to be shown up. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, in order that the light may show that he did his works in obedience to God.

Crejsek closes the Bible.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

Thus says the Gospel of John.

Loretta plays a chord on the piano. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sing the "Dresden Amen" in three part harmony. As they do the chancel lights flicker and then come on.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

Amen, Amen.

Pastor goes to pulpit.

PASTOR

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Ah, we have electricity again, just as we have completed John's version of the coming of Christ. With the chancel lights on, the organ will work again, Loretta.

Loretta moves from the piano to the organ.

PASTOR (Cont.)

By the time you play through our closing hymn, Sam should have the lights for the sanctuary connected. It is "Lead, Kindly Light", number 369 in the hymnal. You may remain seated as you sing.

(Looking into camera)

And once again, you folks at home may join us.

Loretta plays through "Lead, Kindly Light" (tune: "Lux Benigna"). Michele, Vicki, and Harriet prepare to join in with their instruments when the congregation sings. Lieutenant and Craig move into the choir stall. The sanctuary lights flicker, then come on and gradually reach their full strength. During the singing, CUT TO various persons as they show their emotions in response to the words of the hymn.

ALL

(Singing)

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on!
 The night is dark, and I am far from home;
 Lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene -- one step enough for me.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
 Shouldst lead me on;
 I loved to choose and see my path, but now
 Lead Thou me on!
 I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
 Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on;
 O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone,
 And with the morn, those angels faces smile;
 Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!"

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sing a three part chant of "Nunc Dimittis",
 accompanied by Loretta on the organ.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant
 depart in peace according to Thy word.
 For my mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
 Which Thou has prepared before the face

of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles
and to be the glory of Thy people, Israel."
Amen.

PASTOR

The pageant is ended. Go in peace.
May the spirit of God's love fill your
hearts and light your way, this day and
for evermore. Amen.

"Searching" plays a musical postlude, such as rock version of less familiar Christmas carols. The congregation and the players disperse. As credits appear, show CLOSE-UPS of individuals and groups of players with names of the actors and actresses. The players form informal social groupings in the chancel area, such as Crejsek and Lee Ann talking with Sam and Amelia; General in conversation with Shigeru, Hank, and Dick; Rex helping Hugh to depart; Lieutenant going to talk with Loretta at organ as she plays; Roy and Buddy chatting with Pastor; Smitty watching the musicians play; Craig entering the nursery to be with Jenny and Jonathan. As further credits appear, Pastor hands Buddy a candle snuffer and has him put out the candles on the candelabra and on the Advent wreath. End with CLOSE UP of Jonathan sleeping in nursery. FADE OUT

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

A Screenplay

by

Howard W. Hallman

SYNOPSIS

Lead, Kindly Light depicts a group of earthy, skeptical, and mostly irreverent travelers stranded by a raging blizzard in a small church in the middle of Nebraska on Christmas eve. The pastor persuades them to put on the Christmas pageant in three segments: the versions of Luke, Matthew, and John. As a result, conflicts among the travelers are resolved and personal transformations occur.

The opening segment of *Lead, Kindly Light* shows a diverse group in their natural habitat: ranchers unloading a flock of sheep at a stockyard, a female rock band in rehearsal, a pair of scientists engaged in debate, a businessman and government official in a motel lobby, a general and lieutenant leaving a military base. We become acquainted with them as they filter into a diner part way across Nebraska on the day before Christmas with a raging blizzard outside. Conflicts emerge among them. A highway patrol officer arrives, and she leads them west in a convoy behind a snow plow. After 80 miles they take shelter in a small town church.

The pastor, after taking them in and having a parishioner call around for food and bedding, realizes that he has a potential cast for a Christmas eve pageant. At first many of the travelers resist, but finally all of them agree to participate. As they are cast in roles and begin to consider the Christmas story, personal transformation commences for several of them and conflict

among them begins to resolve. Then they present the story of Jesus' origin as told by Luke, Matthew, and John, each version in sequence with music by the rock band. Each version is interrupted by surprising occurrences that complete personal transformations.

A film crew that arrived on a bus films the pageant for later broadcast, at which time, so the pastor announces, subtitles will be added when carols and hymns are sung so that viewers may join in the singing. The intent is to bring in viewers as participants.

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January 29, 1996

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

A screenplay by

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c 1996

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FADE IN:

EXT - STOCKYARD - DAY

ROY McKEAN, a rancher, is directing his ranch hand, SMITTY (DENNIS SMITH, age 31), and Roy's son, BUDDY (a.k.a. DAVID, ruddy face, a husky 14 year old), as they guide sheep down a ramp from a semi-trailer into pens of the stockyard. Overhead is a sign saying "Omaha Stockyards". A light snow is falling. A loudspeaker blares "The First Noel", played in a brassy, schmaltzy arrangement. As the ranchers are almost finished, one of the sheep escapes. Smitty runs after it, grabs it and carries it back. A couple of cowboys watch with amusement. One of them mouths, "Baa! Baa! Black sheep. Have you any wool?" Smitty pushes the wayward sheep into the stockyard pen and goes after the cowboy. They swing wildly at one another until the cowboy lands a blow on Smitty's face and knocks him to the ground. Buddy comes to his rescue and assumes a judo stance. When the cowboy advances on him, Buddy adroitly grabs his arm and tosses him to the ground. The other cowboy steps in, but when Roy moves between them, hands on hips with a look of authority, the cowboys retreat. Buddy stands by chuckling as Roy helps Smitty to his feet.

INT - NIGHT CLUB

An all-female rock band is rehearsing on an empty stage of a small night club decorated in Christmas tinsel. MICHELE is lead guitar, VICKI plays bass guitar, LORETTA is at an electronic keyboard, HARRIET plays drums, and JENNY (nearly nine months pregnant) is singing. The bass drum has "SEARCHING" inscribed on it. At the

back of the hall CRAIG adjusts controls on the sound system. They are rehearsing a light rock Christmas song emphasizing presents and glitter rather than the birth of Jesus. Jenny bobbles the words. Michele stops the band to admonish her. Jenny holds her stomach as if it were to blame. Michele doesn't accept that excuse. She gives the beat as the band tries again. This time Jenny gets it right. Craig signals "OK" to her.

EXT - UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Snow covered campus with light snow falling. CLOSE UP of sign saying "University of Nebraska".

INT - LARGE LECTURE HALL

We hear hubbub as audience gets up to leave after a public forum. A large sign "Future of Space Symposium" is affixed to curtain at back of the stage. Two lecterns at 45° angle are on either side of the stage with a moderator seated in the middle. Amidst the hubbub DICK from one lectern and HANK (an African American) from the other approach the moderator and shake hands. HITOSHI MORIKAWA (Japanese) comes on the stage. The moderator introduces him to Dick and Hank. They shake hands, converse, and walk off the stage together.

INT - MOTEL LOBBY

Some high school carolers are standing by a Christmas tree, singing "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing". HUGH, dressed in a business suit with

collar unbuttoned and tie loosened, emerges slightly tipsy from the bar as the rock band enters from outside, carrying a couple of guitar cases and brushing light snow from their jackets. A couple of the jackets have "Searching" on the back. Hugh pushes through them and almost gets into a scuffle with Craig. REX, who is seated reading newspaper, recognizes Hugh and greets him, thus distracting him from Craig. As the carolers continue, Rex and Hugh go into the coffee shop, and the rock group heads for their rooms.

EXT - ENTRANCE TO AIR BASE - DAY

Heavy, driving snow is falling on a guardhouse and entrance/exit gates. Overhead a sign indicates:

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE

Headquarters: U.S. Strategic Command

A large civilian automobile approaches the guardhouse from inside the base. As the car stops, the driver, LT. BERNIE FRANCIS, hands his I.D. to the guard. The guard notices that BRIGADIER GENERAL SLATTERLY, the base commander, is seated as a passenger in the front seat. The guard salutes the general, raises the gate, and waves the car forward into the driving storm.

INT - CAB OF SEMI-TRAILER - DAY

Roy, Smitty, and Buddy are in the cab of their semi-trailer, now empty of sheep, driving through heavy snow. Some wrapped Christmas presents are piled behind them. They are listening to country western Christmas music on the radio. An announcer

interrupts the music.

RADIO ANNOUNCER O.S.

We interrupt this broadcast to give you the latest weather report. A severe winter storm is now covering all of Nebraska on this day before Christmas. Accumulation of 30 inches is expected in the western part of the state by midnight. The state highway patrol has advised motorists to avoid traveling on all secondary roads and to stay off Interstate 80 if possible."

Through the frosted window we see a sign for I-80.

ROY

Oh shit! It's goin' to be hard gettin' home for Christmas.

Music starts up again on the radio.

SMITTY

We gonna stop for lunch, Roy?

ROY

Yeah, Harry's Diner's at the next exit.

The truck exits the interstate and makes its way to the diner.

EXT - DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

In the parking lot of Harry's Diner, Roy, Smitty, and Buddy climb out of the truck into the blinding snow and trudge to the entrance.

INT - HARRY'S DINER

LEE ANN, the waitress, wearing a pin with her name on it, is clearing dishes from the counter. A clock behind her shows 12:10. There is an open window counter into the kitchen, where HARRY, the proprietor, is busy at a grill. The diner is decorated for Christmas. "White Christmas" is playing on the jukebox. Roy, Smitty, and Buddy enter, brush snow off, remove their coats, and pile them on a coatrack. Smitty has a black eye. They slide into a booth with Roy on one side and Smitty in first on the other side, then Buddy. Each place has a coffee mug and flatware wrapped in a paper napkin. The only other diners present are Rex and Hugh, seated in the next booth and halfway through their meal. Lee Ann comes to the ranchers' booth with a steaming coffee pot and menus. As they talk, she hands them the menus and pours coffee for Roy and Smitty.

LEE ANN

Howdy, Roy. Haven't seen you for a while.

ROY

Hi, Lee Ann. Good to see you.

LEE ANN

What brings you to these parts so late in the year?

ROY

We got way behind this year and didn't get our last load of sheep to market until yesterday. And now we've got to drive back to Wyoming in this frigging' blizzard.

Lee Ann starts to pour coffee for Buddy.

SMITTY

*No coffee for him. He's just a boy.
Bring him some cocoa.*

Buddy nudges Smitty.

BUDDY

Listen, Smitty, who you calling a boy?

SMITTY

Don't push me, Buddy.

Smitty pushes back so hard that Buddy falls out of the booth. He gets up with fists cocked.

BUDDY

Want me to black your other eye, asshole?

Smitty comes out of the booth and raises his fists. Buddy switches to a

judo stance.

ROY

Watch him, Smitty, or he'll throw you on your ass like he did that big cowboy who socked you yesterday at the stockyard in Omaha.

Buddy and Smitty feint.

LEE ANN

All right, boys, cut out the rough stuff, or I'll call Harry.

SMITTY

Oh, hell, I'll get you later, you little twerp.

They sit back in the booth, still jostling a little. Lee Ann fills Buddy's mug with coffee.

LEE ANN

So what ya goin' have?

ROY

I'll have a T-bone smothered with onions and a heap of French fries.

LEE ANN

How do you want your steak?

ROY

*Just tell Harry it's for Roy. He'll know
how to cook it.*

SMITTY

*Chili for me. And bring me some
vinegar and extra chili powder.*

BUDDY

*Ugh. A cheeseburger, fries, and steak
sauce.*

Lee Ann leaves.

ROY

*You'll hafta get Buddy to teach you that
judo stuff', Smitty, cause your fists is
wearin' out.*

SMITTY

*I still don't know why that cowboy was
makin' fun of our sheep.*

ROY

*It's an old feud of the west. The
cattlemen think sheep ruin the grass.
But we got our rights, too.*

In the next booth Hugh, slightly tipsy, looks worried.

HUGH

You really think we'll make it to your house by nighttime, Rex?

REX

I hope so, Hugh. But this storm has gotten lot worse since we left Omaha this morning.

HUGH

Where are we now?

REX

Just west of Grand Island.

Lee Ann returns with Smitty's chili, vinegar, chili powder, and steak sauce.

LEE ANN

Your steak and cheeseburger will be ready in a couple of minutes. Do you go through Ogallala, Roy?

ROY

We go near there, on the south side of the Platte.

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LEE ANN

My folks moved there last year, and I was hopin' to visit them for Christmas. But old Harry won't let me off till nine, even though it's Christmas eve.

ROY

I thought you was hitched, Lee Ann. I ain't seen you here for a couple of years.

LEE ANN

I was, but my guy walked out on me last month. What a no-good he turned out to be.

ROY

Smitty, the first time I saw this little gal, she was wearin' her cheerleader uniform under her apron.

LEE ANN

Yeah, I remember. You had a fair-haired helper along. He promised me a sheepskin jacket -- but never brought me one.

ROY

He's married now. Got two kids. Smitty here has been with me since last

1

spring.

SMITTY

Baby, how's about it if I brought you a whole sheepskin coat?

LEE ANN

Promises, promises -- like all the other men.

Buddy laughs and pokes Smitty. Lee Ann walks away. In the next booth Hugh sips coffee and puts the cup down.

HUGH

Rex, it sure was nice of you to invite me to spend Christmas with your family.

REX

Glad to, Hugh.

HUGH

Otherwise I'd have had a lonely Christmas.

REX

I just hope we don't get stuck in some little town.

Harry comes out carrying Roy's steak and Buddy's cheeseburger.

HARRY

Roy, you old son-of-a-gun, Lee Ann told me you were here, so I thought I oughta serve you personally.

ROY

I've never missed stoppin' here, Harry. Best food in Nebraska. This is my boy, Buddy, and Smitty, who works for me.

HARRY

(To Buddy)

I ain't seen you since you was a little tyke. Roy, he's goin' be bigger than you one of these days.

ROY

Seems like it.

HARRY

So you're still raisin' sheep, Roy?

ROY

Yeah, but this may be the last year.

HARRY

The market?

ROY

Naw. It's those damn BLM regulations.

They're cuttin' back on grazin' land and raisin' the fees. They're makin' it so's a fellow can't earn a decent livin' raisin' sheep.

HARRY

Yeah, I hear a lot of bitchin' about the BLM.

In the next booth Hugh looks around at Harry, then turns back to Hugh.

HUGH

They're talking about you, Rex. You and the BLM.

REX

Shh!

HUGH

(Louder)

But you're a big shot in the Bureau of Land Management.

REX

Hold your tongue, Hugh. We don't want to start trouble.

Roy overhears this, gets up and goes over to Rex and Hugh. Harry slips away.

ROY

So you're one of them.

REX

In the regional office in Denver.

ROY

What's your name?

REX

Rex Hanover. I'm regional director.

ROY

*It's some one else who's tryin' to do me in.
But you tell 'em that Roy McKean of
Pathfinder, Wyoming intents to fight 'em
till the end.*

REX

*I'm sorry if our regulations have
inconvenienced you.*

ROY

*Inconvenienced, hell. You're puttin' me
outa business.*

REX

*We're just trying to protect the range
from overuse.*

ROY

Then how come the oil and gas companies are gettin' them leases.

REX

It's all done through competitive bidding.

ROY

Yeah. Rigged for the big boys. I've been workin' on ranches since '66, and it's got worse every year.

Roy returns to his booth and cuts up his steak.

SMITTY

At least you own your own ranch, Roy.

ROY

The bank and me.

SMITTY

I could never save enough for my own place on what you pay me.

ROY

Oh hell, Smitty. If you'd quit drinkin' so much and chasin' after the broads you could.

SMITTY

Gotta get some fun outa life.

Lee Ann comes by with pie for Rex and Hugh. She takes away their dinner plates.

HUGH

You almost got it the face, Rex.

REX

Thanks to your big mouth. I can't figure out why they hate us so in the West.

HUGH

It's who you represent.

REX

Well, I worked in the Forest Service in New England and the South for 25 years. They don't like the feds in those parts either, but the feeling's not as intense as out here for the Bureau of Land Management.

HUGH

It's because you control so much of the land in the West. You just have to ignore them. It's like the little towns where my drug stores are. The local druggists hate us because we sell at discount, but the townspeople buy from me anyway. So I say, to hell with my

competitors.

REX

It's not the same, Hugh. We're out here to protect the land, not to curtail free enterprise.

HUGH

Don't you see, Rex. They have a different view. They see you as an absentee landlord, and they hate you for it. You can't change them. So ignore 'em.

Hugh pours some "uncola" into a glass, pulls out a small flask from inside his coat jacket, takes off the top, and starts to pour it in the glass. Rex reaches over to stop him.

REX

I wish you'd lay off that stuff, Hugh.

HUGH

I need it.

The outside door opens and in come Michele, Vicki, Loretta, Harriet, Jenny, and Craig. They brush off snow, take off their heavy coats, hang them up, push two tables together, and sit down. A couple of them have on jeans jacket with "SEARCHING" on the back. Smitty cranes his neck to get a look at the newcomers.

VICKI

Man, it's a cold, cold day.

LORETTA

It was never this cold back in Philly.

JENNY

Or in Louisville.

HARRIET

And certainly not in L.A.

Lee Ann comes over with menus.

MICHELE

(To Lee Ann)

We're in a hurry, honey. We've got a long ways to go today. What's hot and ready?

LEE ANN

We've got some great chili. It's Harry's specialty.

MICHELE

Okay. Chili all around, and lots of crackers and coffee.

JENNY

No, not for me.

LEE ANN

We've got beef stew.

JENNY

Sounds good. And some milk.

CRAIG

I'll have stew, too.

LEE ANN

Harry, four chilies and a couple of stews.

Hugh gets up and goes over the new arrivals, a little unsteady. During the ensuing conversation, Lee Ann serves the food.

HUGH

Well, look who's here. A band of female troubadours.

MICHELE

What makes you think so?

HUGH

I saw you at a motel in Omaha yesterday. Do you play that whiny country stuff or that loud rock that makes your stomach vibrate and busts your ear drums?

MICHELE

Neither. We play light rock with a new

age message.

HUGH

Whatever that is.

VICKI

Don't bother with him, Michele. He's drunk.

HUGH

The hell I am!

MICHELE

I'm lead guitar. Vicki plays bass. Loretta is our keyboard artist. Harriet is on drums. And Jenny sings.

HUGH

What about him?

MICHELE

That's Craig, our equipment manager.

HUGH

Let's have a concert then. There's nothing I like in Harry's jukebox.

MICHELE

We'd be glad to if we weren't in such a hurry today. But come out to Vegas.

We open New Year's eve.

HUGH

Are we going to Vegas, Rex?

Hugh returns to his booth.

REX

No, Hugh, just to my home in Denver.

HUGH

Sorry, ladies. And should I add little mother?

CRAIG

If you wanna fat lip, you lush.

LEE ANN

Knock it off. It's Christmas eve. Let's have peace and some happiness.

JENNY

I don't know if I'll make it to Vegas or not. This kid is due any day now, ya know.

CRAIG

It'll come when it wants to. You'll be all right, Jenny.

JENNY

I hope so, Craig.

Hugh gets up again and goes over to the rock group.

HUGH

*You know, I own 28 drug stores between
Omaha and Boise. Bates Discount.
Here's my card.*

VICKI

*"Hugh Bates, President." You're a big
shot, man.*

Rex gets up and guides Hugh back to their booth.

REX

You better have some more coffee, Hugh.

Craig goes over to the jukebox.

CRAIG

*I wonder if that dude is right. Is there
any thing good in this thing?*

*He looks over the selection, puts in a coin, and plays a rock tune, such as
"Rock Around the Christmas Tree". He does some disco steps.*

CRAIG

Hey, Jenny, wanna dance?

JENNY

After what you did to me, you creep?

LORETTA

Craig, that music is awful.

Loretta goes over, reaches behind the jukebox, and turns it off.

CRAIG

Hey, don't do that, Loretta.

Buddy and Smitty have finished eating while Roy is still working on his steak.

BUDDY

Dad, you got any change? I wanna play a video game while you're finishin'.

Roy reaches into his pocket and gives Buddy some quarters.

ROY

Okay, but don't get involved in a long game. We gotta hit the road again as soon as I've had a piece of Harry's apple pie.

SMITTY

I'll join you, Buddy.

They go over to a couple of video games and a pinball machine next to the jukebox. Craig returns to his place at the table.

During the next scenes Buddy plays a video game and Smitty the pinball machine in the background. Smitty flirts with Loretta, who ignores him, and then with Harriet, who after a while comes over to play a video game. She teases Smitty by paying attention to Buddy, who gets flustered.

OCCASIONALLY CUT TO Roy, Rex, and Hugh as they listen to the following conversation.

As Buddy drops a coin in the video machine, the outside door opens, and General Slatterly and Lieutenant Francis enter, covered with snow. They take off their coats as they talk.

GENERAL

It doesn't look too bad -- for a roadhouse.

LIEUTENANT

We're lucky to find any place open in this storm.

VICKI

Come in, general. It's not the officer's club, but it's homey.

The officers seat themselves in a booth adjacent the rock group's table. Lee Ann brings coffee pot, mugs, and menus.

LEE ANN

*Don't let these charmers bother you,
General. We have the best food between
Omaha and Cheyenne.*

They study the menu.

LEE ANN (Cont.)

You must be with SAC.

GENERAL

*It used to be called that. Now it's the
U.S. Strategic Command.*

LEE ANN

*Whatever. Folks from your base come
through here all the time.*

LIEUTENANT

*This is our base commander, General
Slatterly.*

GENERAL

I'll have the blue plate special and a beer.

LEE ANN

We don't serve beer.

GENERAL

Okay, black coffee, then.

LIEUTENANT

A steak sandwich for me, and some milk.

LEE ANN

Better have hot coffee, Lieutenant, to warm you up.

LIEUTENANT

No, it's bad for my ulcer. But you can make it hot chocolate.

LEE ANN

One special, one steak sandwich, Harry.

She pours coffee for General and leaves. Vicki gets up and comes over to the officers' booth. As conversation continues, Lee Ann makes hot chocolate and serves Lieutenant.

VICKI

So you're the big brave men who will push the buttons to wipe out a thousand cities and kill millions of people to save our way of life.

GENERAL

Listen, kid!

VICKI

Oh, is General Slaughter getting belligerent?

LIEUTENANT

*Come off it. We came for food, not
abuse.*

Craig comes over.

CRAIG

*Well, the soldier boy wants to be the
peacemaker.*

GENERAL

Our mission is peace.

CRAIG

*Even if you have to go to war to preserve
it.*

LIEUTENANT

You don't understand.

CRAIG

*No, you're the one who doesn't
understand. How old are you?*

LIEUTENANT

Twenty-four.

CRAIG

Same age as me. I can understand how this old guy can go for that military jazz. But you're young enough to know better. You'll get yourself shot up in Somalia, Bosnia, or some place else no one's ever heard of.

GENERAL

You'll be glad to have us if Russia re-arms, North Korea starts trouble, or Iraq acts up again.

LIEUTENANT

Frankly, the ROTC paid my way through college. I made a contract to serve, and I'm serving.

VICKI

Forget it, man. Tell 'em to stuff it.

LIEUTENANT

I'm obligated.

VICKI

No one's obligated to anyone but himself.

GENERAL

Oh, the "me" generation is still around.

CRAIG

Me, schmee. That's what I learned growing up on Long Island. Everyone was out for number one.

LIEUTENANT

There oughta be a better way.

JENNY

If there is, ya know. I sure haven't found it.

Lee Ann brings a tray with food for the officers and a piece of pumpkin pie with whipped cream. Craig and Vicki return to their seats and finish eating.

LEE ANN

Gentlemen, here's your food.

Lee Ann serves the pumpkin pie to Jenny.

LEE ANN

Here's some pie for you, Jenny. It's on the house.

JENNY

Thanks. I appreciate your kindness.

LEE ANN

You deserve it. I hope you have a healthy baby.

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JENNY

Me, too.

LEE ANN

I wish I'd had a baby before my marriage busted.

JENNY

Well, to be honest I wish I wasn't havin' one so young, ya know. But these things happen. I wanna be free. Marriage, ya know, who needs it?

LEE ANN

(Motioning toward Craig)

What about him?

JENNY

He's a special friend at the moment, ya know, but basically I'm on my own. It's the only way, ya know.

LEE ANN

I've had it both ways. I prefer to have a man -- if you can count on him.

JENNY

You can't. My old man walked out on

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Mom and me when I was eight.

(Nodding toward Craig)

*This one's a roadie, ya know, and I don't
wanna be traveling' all the time.*

CRAIG

*Come on, Jenny. It's only till we make it
big and can have a base.*

JENNY

*You say that, Craig. But it was Chicago
last week. Three days in Omaha.
Vegas next. New Orleans in February.*

MICHELE

It's where the business is.

JENNY

*I'll do Vegas, if this kid hasn't come, but
after that, ya know, you'd better find
another singer.*

CRAIG

Jenny, we need you. At least I do.

JENNY

Humph!

LORETTA

You're just depressed, Jenny. Once the baby's born, you'll feel better.

MICHELE

That pie looks good. Bring me a piece, will you, Lee Ann?

LEE ANN

Sure thing.

LORETTA

I'll have some, too, but hold the whipped cream.

The outside door opens. Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi enter with a blast of snow behind them. They take off their coats, shake off the snow, and hang them up. They talk as they make their way to the booth beyond where General and Lieutenant are sitting.

HANK

Whew! What a storm.

DICK

It's getting worse. We'll never make it to Colorado today. We should've stopped in Grand Island.

HANK

Maybe it'll let up west of here.

DICK

If you hadn't been so damned afraid of flying, Hank.

HANK

Well, Dick, at least our families are snug in Colorado.

Lee Ann appears with her coffee pot and menus. She pours coffee for Hank and Dick and reaches for Hitoshi's cup.

LEE ANN

This'll warm you up, gentlemen.

HITOSHI

No, not for me, thank you. I prefer tea.

LEE ANN

I'll get it while you look at the menu.

As she leaves, they examine the menu.

HANK

I wonder if they're still serving breakfast. I missed mine because of my last minute Christmas shopping in Lincoln.

DICK

Yes, and got us started late.

Lee Ann returns with Hitoshi's tea.

LEE ANN

*Here you are, sweetie. Do you want
lemon?*

HITOSHI

No, thank you.

HANK

*Can I get a couple eggs over easy with
sausage?*

LEE ANN

*Of course. With fried potatoes and
toast?*

HANK

Yes, please.

DICK

*I'll have the chili and a serving of cole
slaw.*

HITOSHI

Please bring me some French toast. I

have that whenever I can in America.

Lee Ann gathers up the menus and leaves. She serves them during the ensuing conversation. Craig turns his chair to listen.

HITOSHI

Yesterday when you invited me to travel with you, I had no idea the weather would be like this.

HANK

No, me either. But I'm glad you came with us, Hitoshi.

DICK

Well, Hank, at least this place proves that bringing the sun to earth can't succeed.

HANK

Sure it will.

DICK

It won't. With the blizzard blotting out the sun's rays, there can be no solar heating.

HANK

I never claimed one hundred percent, Dick. Just as much as possible.

Anyway it's a surer bet than your power
in the sky.

HITOSHI

His what?

DICK

The power satellite.

HITOSHI

Oh, yes. The one you were debating
yesterday at the university.

HANK

It'll never work.

DICK

It will if the nation will make the
investment.

HANK

For half the cost we could equip every
home in America with a solar collector.

DICK

Oh, you and your damn "small is
beautiful." Be practical.

HANK

Sure, like you, and be a tool of big government, big corporations, and big military.

DICK

So you're going to give me that "military-industrial complex" line again.

HANK

You know the greedy corporations want billions for the power satellite, and the generals want to spend billions more for a satellite military base.

General overhears this and turns around.

GENERAL

Now hold on. It's not for ourselves. It's for national security.

HANK

Well, we have a general to speak for the military.

GENERAL

If we don't get a base in space soon, there's no telling when the Russians or even the Chinese might have one. Then we'll be in serious trouble.

CRAIG

Horseshit!

JENNY

Craig, stay out of this.

HITOSHI

If you'll excuse the views of an astronomer, I don't think either are practical -- the power plant or the military base in space.

GENERAL

They are if we have the national will to spend the money necessary to develop them.

DICK

Sure, give us funds, and we space engineers can build anything.

HANK

If you had to choose, which would it be?

DICK

It really doesn't matter to me. That's for our leaders to decide.

Craig gets up and goes to their booth.

CRAIG

No moral values? No judgment of whether the money might be better spent to feed hungry people?

DICK

Hell no! I'm an engineer, not a philosopher or a preacher.

Lieutenant rises and stands next to Craig.

LIEUTENANT

Is there anything you wouldn't build?
Would you have constructed the A-bomb in the forties?

DICK

Sure, if told to.

Hitoshi reacts adversely.

LIEUTENANT

You would?

DICK

It's somebody else's decision how to use what science makes.

0

HANK

What's the matter, Hitoshi?

HITOSHI

I was a boy of ten in a village about eight miles from Hiroshima when the first A-bomb exploded. The mushroom cloud was frightening, but worse was the sight of the wounded streaming into our village. I'll never forget it.

GENERAL

I regret it, but it had to be done. War is war.

LIEUTENANT

But did it? Why didn't we bomb an uninhabited island to show them the power of our new weapon?

HITOSHI

Yes, I think we would have surrendered.

GENERAL

That's an old argument. President Truman considered that possibility but rejected it. He knew we had only the two bombs ready. If you hadn't surrendered, many more lives would've been lost in an invasion.

LIEUTENANT

We should've tried.

HANK

I've missed all the wars, but I've often wondered what combat is really like. The infantry, in the sky.

GENERAL

When I was a fighter pilot in Vietnam, I found plane-to-plane combat to be quite exhilarating. But I've talked with pilots who flew long-range, high-level bombing runs, and they said it was rather boring. Almost like a day at the office.

CRAIG

What about the victims? Don't you ever think of them?

GENERAL

You don't see them, so you don't have to.

CRAIG

The same if you press the red button on your missiles.

GENERAL

The same.

LIEUTENANT

We're automatons.

HANK

Robots -- without souls.

GENERAL

Hey, what's this? A pacifist convention?

Waitress, what's for dessert?

LEE ANN

*Apple, pumpkin, and mince pie. Carrot
cake. Ice cream.*

GENERAL

Mince meat naturally and more coffee.

LIEUTENANT

Pumpkin, please.

LEE ANN

With whipped cream?

LIEUTENANT

Why not?

Craig and Lieutenant return to their seats. The outside door bursts

open, and OFFICER CREJSEK [Cre'-shek] comes in, stomping her boots and brushing off snow.

LEE ANN

Officer Crejsek, you look frozen.

Lee Ann quickly pours coffee for Crejsek.

CREJSEK

I am, Lee Ann. The storm's getting worse. We ought to close the roads, but headquarters in Lincoln says to keep traffic moving as long as possible. They know people are trying to get home for Christmas.

GENERAL

True, I'm trying to make my brother's house in Laramie. It was too bad to fly, so I'm driving. I'm dropping Lt. Francis to visit his parents in Cheyenne.

CREJSEK

I wouldn't count on it. They say it's really bad from Ogallala on west.

DICK

How about the road to Denver?

CREJSEK

Pretty bad, too. Right now we're trying to organize convoys for safety. I'm supposed to lead a group at least as far as North Platte.

DICK

How far is that?

CREJSEK

About 100 miles. I see a semi on the lot, a van, and several cars. Whose are they?

ROY

The semi's mine. An empty sheep hauler.

MICHELE

The van's ours.

CREJSEK

I suppose the cars belong to the rest of you. Are you all headed west?

GENERAL

Yes, ma'am.

HANK

Sure are.

REX

Yes, we are.

CREJSEK

I know you have your own destinations,
but you'll never make it unless we travel
together. So let's go.

They all get up to go, some grabbing a last bite. As they put on their coats and head for the door, Lee Ann goes into the kitchen.

CRAIG

God damned blizzard! We'll never reach
Vegas.

JENNY

What if we're stranded.

CREJSEK

We'll be all right as long as we stay
together. We're going to follow a snow
plow. I'll be second with the sheep truck
Cont.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

behind me to break the wind for the rest
of you. Anybody got a car phone? I
want you last in line.

REX

I do.

GENERAL

We do, too. Better let us go last.

That's a job for the military.

CREJSEK

Okay. You bring up the rear. If anything happens to any of the others, you can let me know. Dial pound-77. Everybody keep your headlights on low beam and stay in line.

They start filing out. Lee Ann comes out of the kitchen carrying a suitcase and her coat.

LEE ANN

Harry, the old sweetheart, says I can leave now if I can get a ride. He's goin' to close.

SMITTY

Come with us, Lee Ann. You and me could snuggle up in the bunk behind the seat.

ROY

Not with the boy along, Smitty.

LEE ANN

I'd never go any place with you.

JENNY

We're a little tight in the van, but we could squeeze you in.

CREJSEK

Ride with me, Lee Ann. I like company. But my husband gets jealous when I give rides to men. So I take only females.

LEE ANN

Helen, I accept. I've always wanted to ride in a patrol car.

CREJSEK

Okay, let's hit the road.

Lee Ann is the last to leave. She puts on her coat, goes to the jukebox, puts in a coin, and calls into the kitchen.

LEE ANN

Hey, dollface, here's a Christmas carol for you. And thanks for cleaning up out here.

"Carol of the Bells" starts playing as Lee Ann opens the door into the howling blizzard, leaving the diner empty with half-eaten food on a

number of plates. As the door closes, Harry comes out with a container for dirty dishes and starts clearing the tables.

EXT - DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

The cars and trucks pull away from the diner in the blinding blizzard.

LEE ANN

Hey, dollface, here's a Christmas carol for you. And thanks for cleaning up out here.

"Carol of the Bells" starts playing as Lee Ann opens the door into the howling blizzard, leaving the diner empty with half-eaten food on a number of plates. As the door closes, Harry comes out with a container for dirty dishes and starts clearing the tables.

EXT - DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

The cars and trucks pull away from the diner in the blinding blizzard.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - CHURCH - DAY

Front of a white frame, unlighted church. Heavy snow. Howling wind. Ground covered with drifting snow.

EXT - SIDE VIEW OF CHURCH - DAY

Church has an attached, two-story wing containing an office, fellowship hall, and kitchen on ground level and Sunday School rooms on the second floor. Side entrances go to the office and fellowship hall, and a rear entrance goes to the kitchen. A light shows through window of office. Heavy snow is blowing.

INT - CHURCH OFFICE

Most of the furnishings are old: desk, swivel chair, typewriter, sofa, one easy chair, work table with several folding metal chairs around it, a small photocopier, supply cupboard, book shelf with hymnals, Bibles, and miscellaneous books. One door leads outside and another into a hallway. PASTOR PAUL DAVID ZIEGLER, SAM (an old man), and AMELIA (an old lady) are preparing church bulletins. Sam is standing at a small photocopier. Pastor and Amelia are seated at the work table.

SAM

Pastor, how many bulletins should I run for the Christmas service tomorrow?

PASTOR

Forty should be enough, Sam.

AMELIA

We only had a dozen last year on Christmas.

SAM

Yes, Amelia, but since Pastor Ziegler came last summer attendance has picked up.

AMELIA

In this storm do you think anyone will come?

SAM

Sure. Most everybody has four wheel drive. They're used to driving in weather like this.

AMELIA

I like the Christmas day service, but I'm sorry we're not having the Christmas eve pageant tonight like we did in the old days.

SAM

Yes, it's been at least ten years since we had one.

AMELIA

It got so there weren't enough people to play all the parts and still have much of an audience.

PASTOR

I tried to get some of our new members to help us out, but I couldn't find enough for a full cast.

AMELIA

Too bad they wouldn't.

PASTOR

I assure you, Amelia, I'd put on the pageant at the drop of a hat if we could find enough people willing to do so.

AMELIA

I was especially hoping for the pageant this year 'cause fifty years ago I played Mary.

PASTOR

Is that so?

AMELIA

My husband was Joseph, and we took our infant son to be the baby Jesus. He cried a little, not like in the song, but was so sweet.

PASTOR

I didn't know about your son, Amelia.

AMELIA

When the boy was twelve, Harold -- that was my husband -- took him on a fishin' trip to the Rockies. There was a

flashflood, and they both drowned.

PASTOR

I'm awfully sorry it happened.

AMELIA

Yes, it was a terrible time for me.

PASTOR

It must have been.

*How about you, Sam? Did you ever play
a part in the pageant.*

SAM

*Never! Once they tried to get me to be
a shepherd and another time a wiseman,
but I refused. But I like to watch it.*

PASTOR

*We'll have it again some day, I promise
you.*

*There is hard knocking on the outside door. Pastor Ziegler opens it,
letting in a burst of snow. Officer Crejsek enters, stomps her boots
and brushes off snow.*

PASTOR

Come in, my friend.

CREJSEK

I'm Officer Helen Crejsek of the state highway patrol. I'm leading a convoy west. We were trying to make North Platte, but the storm's so bad we can't go any farther. Can you offer us shelter?

PASTOR

Of course we can. How many are you?

CREJSEK

Must be 15 to 20.

PASTOR

We have plenty of room.

CREJSEK

Good. I'll go get them.

PASTOR

Have them use the next door into the fellowship hall. I'll turn on the lights.

Crejsek goes out into the raging storm.

AMELIA

But we just got fellowship hall cleaned up after the Christmas party.

PASTOR

All the better. Sam, get on the phone and call our people -- at least those who live nearby. Have them bring food, blankets, pillows, towels. Amelia, will you make some coffee? I believe there's some in the kitchen.

AMELIA

Yes, but it belongs to the women's society.

PASTOR

We can repay them later. After you get the coffee started, you can welcome our guests. And have them sign our guest register.

Pastor goes to the desk, takes the guest register from a drawer, and gives it and a pen to Amelia. Sam moves to the desk, sits down, and dials the phone. Amelia and Pastor exit through the door into fellowship hall.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL

Fellowship hall is a large multi-purpose room. At the center of one end is a counter connecting with the kitchen. Lift-up wooden doors are pulled down. There are swinging doors on either side of the counter leading into the kitchen. At the other end a corridor leads to restrooms, the office, stairway up to Sunday School rooms, and the sanctuary. Near the far corner at that end of fellowship hall, a door

leads to a storage room. The exterior door is in the middle between these two ends. A wardrobe chest stands in the corner at the office end of the hall. A decorated Christmas tree is centered along the wall opposite the outside door. A couple of folding tables are set up with metal folding chairs around them. More chairs are along the walls, some unfolded and others stacked. A couple of folded tables lean against a wall. A coatrack stands near the exterior door.

Pastor Ziegler comes in, turns on lights, and adjusts the thermostat to run up the heat. Amelia follows and walks through to the kitchen where she turns on the lights. Pastor then unlocks the exterior door and opens it as people start to enter. They are all those who left Harry's Diner in the convoy. Pastor stands by the open door, welcoming them as they enter. Some have suitcases, others duffelbags and backpacks. As they take off their coats and hats, some hang them on the coatrack while others toss them over chairs. They pile their luggage near their coats. The newcomers then disperse around fellowship hall. Officer Crejsek arrives first, followed by Lee Ann.

CREJSEK

Here's my hearty band.

PASTOR

They're all welcome.

LEE ANN

How nice of you to take us in.

PASTOR

Glad to help.

Dick, Hank, and Hitoshi enter.

PASTOR

Come in, my friends.

DICK

I'm Dick, and this is Hank, a couple of itinerant scientists.

PASTOR

Glad to have you.

HANK

And this is Dr. Hitoshi Morikawa, a distinguished astronomer from Japan.

PASTOR

You are most welcome to our little church. I'm Pastor Ziegler.

HITOSHI

So pleased to meet you.

PASTOR

Please make yourself at home.

Amelia emerges from the kitchen.

AMELIA

The coffee's started. It oughta be ready soon.

PASTOR

Good! Now you can get them to sign our register. And show them where the restrooms are.

Amelia approaches those who have already arrived and has them sign the guest register. She catches others as they appear and get their coats off.

Rex enters, supporting Hugh, who has had a few more nips. Hugh shades his eyes from the lights as he enters.

REX

Come on in, Hugh. Here's warm shelter for us.

PASTOR

Yes, do come in.

HUGH

Where are we?

PASTOR

You're in Muhlenberg.

HUGH

Oh, just a little town, too small for a drug

store.

REX

He's head of Bates Discount Drug.

HUGH

And he's head of the BLM.

REX

Just the Denver office. I'm Rex Hanover.

PASTOR

*Soon the coffee will be ready in the
kitchen for you and your friend.*

REX

He could use some, and so could I.

*Michele leads her group in: Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, and Craig
supporting Jenny.*

MICHELLE

*Have you room for a band of wayfaring
musicians?*

PASTOR

*We sure do. Come into our humble
abode. I'm Pastor Ziegler.*

VICKI

Please to meet you, Reverend.

HARRIET

Ah, any port in the storm.

LORETTA

We appreciate your hospitality.

PASTOR

You're most welcome.

CRAIG

Jenny, I told you everything would be all right.

JENNY

I didn't think we would every make it, Craig.

Pastor notices her condition.

PASTOR

How are you, my dear? There's a sofa in the office. Why don't you go there and rest a while. It's down that hallway, first door on the right.

CRAIG

I'll take you there, Jenny.

Craig and Jenny go to the office. Roy, Buddy, and Smitty enter.

PASTOR

Come in, my friends.

ROY

We're sheep ranchers headed for Wyoming. I'm Roy McKean and this here is Buddy and Smitty.

PASTOR

Please accept our shelter till the storm abates. Make yourselves at home.

ROY

We will. And next time we're through here I'll bring you a side of lamb.

PASTOR

That won't be necessary.

SMITTY

I see the music girls made it, and Lee Ann. I'd better go see how they are.

General and Lieutenant come in.

GENERAL

We're the last of the convoy. Everyone

made it safely.

PASTOR

Come in, come in, General. And you, too, Lieutenant. I'm Pastor Ziegler.

GENERAL

I'm General Slatterly, and this is Lt. Francis.

LIEUTENANT

How relieved I am we made it. I thought sure we'd be stranded.

GENERAL

I had no doubt we'd arrive safely.

LIEUTENANT

Is there a phone I can use? I want to call my mom and dad.

PASTOR

There's one in the office and an extension in the kitchen. You're welcome to use the phone as soon as Sam from our congregation finishes calling around for food and blankets.

Dick comes up.

DICK

And I'd like to call my wife in Vail to tell her we've been stranded. I've got a credit card.

LIEUTENANT

And I can call collect.

PASTOR

Come into the office, and we'll check if Sam is done. And don't worry about the charges.

Pastor turns to others standing nearby.

PASTOR

The rest of you make yourselves at home. We'll have food soon. And behind that door in the corner is a storage room with recreational equipment.

Pastor leads Lieutenant and Dick into the office.

OFFICE

Jenny is seated on the sofa with Craig beside her. They have removed their jackets. Sam is on the phone talking to parishioners. Pastor, Dick, and Lieutenant enter.

PASTOR

Are you comfortable, Jenny? Can I get you anything?

JENNY

No, I just want to sit here a while and warm up.

CRAIG

Where are we, anyway?

PASTOR

At the Church of the Carpenter in Muhlenberg -- about 20 miles east of North Platte.

CRAIG

Wow! We've come only 80 miles in three hours.

LIEUTENANT

How big is the town?

PASTOR

About four hundred now. It's an old German settlement. The settlers built this church themselves.

DICK

Have you heard anything about the road conditions?

PASTOR

The highway is closed for the next 150 miles to the west, both to Cheyenne and Denver.

CRAIG

You mean we're stuck in this dump?

LIEUTENANT

Darn, I won't be with my family on Christmas.

PASTOR

Don't worry. We can all have Christmas here together.

DICK

But I've got presents for my children.

JENNY

Lucky kids.

Amelia comes in with the register.

AMELIA

The coffee is ready. Do you want these folks to sign, too?

PASTOR

Of course.

Amelia hands the register to Lieutenant, who signs and then passes it on around to others for signing. The last to sign lays the register on the desk.

AMELIA

We want your name, address, and occupation.

PASTOR

How many do we have, Amelia?

AMELIA

There are fourteen in the other room, plus these in here.

SAM

Pastor, the Franklins are bringing in spiced ham, the Kruegers some homemade sausage, and the Andersons pressed veal.

AMELIA

Their Christmas specialties.

SAM

Plus homemade bread, pies and cookies, enough vegetables for everybody, and some milk. Also blankets, pillows, and

sleeping bags.

PASTOR

I knew they'd respond.

AMELIA

*I'll meet them in the kitchen so they don't
mess things up.*

Amelia leaves.

PASTOR

*Sam, would you believe it? The storm
has blown in the cast for our pageant:
eighteen guests, plus Amelia, you, and
me. That should be sufficient.*

LIEUTENANT

Pageant?

PASTOR

*Amelia says this church used to have a
Christmas pageant every year --
depicting the birth of Jesus.*

CRAIG

*Oh come off it, Reverend. You're not
going to get us to play your fairy tale of*

angels, a virgin, a bright star, and kings
from the East.

PASTOR

Why not? It's a beautiful story, full of
great truth. Besides, you're stuck
here -- in this dump, as you call it --
with nothing to do.

CRAIG

It'd be better for us to improvise a
concert.

PASTOR

We can work your music into the
pageant.

JENNY

Craig, it might be kinda fun, ya know.

CRAIG

No way, Jenny.

DICK

I can't speak for the others, but I'll have
no part in it. It's an outmoded
superstition. In this day of modern
science and precision engineering, these
old folk tales are hopelessly out of date.
Angel chorus -- that's a joke. And a

star standing still -- preposterous.

LIEUTENANT

But I've read somewhere that astronomers believe that there was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter during the last year of Herod's reign. Couldn't that have been the star of Bethlehem?

DICK

If there was, it only gave somebody material to write a fable. Lieutenant, we've been in space. There's no heaven. There's no God up there.

PASTOR

Maybe you're looking for God without when he's really within -- in the depth of being.

DICK

You're inventive, you ministers. You find a new expression every time an old one is proven false.

LIEUTENANT

But it's clear that Jesus was a historical figure. Herod's name appears in other writings besides the Bible. Maybe the exact details of Jesus' birth are

exaggerated, but I'm not ready to dismiss it entirely.

CRAIG

You're something, soldier boy. All this Jesus talk, but you're ready to bomb the hell out of the Russians, the Chinese, or anybody else you're told to.

JENNY

Craig, please.

CRAIG

It's the same hypocrisy like the churches back home. No more of this nonsense for me. I'm gonna go see if they brought any food yet.

Craig goes out to fellowship hall.

PASTOR

I'd still like to do the pageant.

SAM

In the old days sometimes we used to do Matthew's version one year, Luke the next.

PASTOR

What about John?

SAM

How could we? Nothing happens in John. There's the Word, whatever that is, and hardly any action.

PASTOR

It's Logos in the original Greek.

SAM

Even more obscure. And the Light? How can you act out the Word and the Light?

PASTOR

It's tremendous symbolism, especially the Light. Why don't we do all three in sequence? We've got plenty of time. Luke, Matthew, then John. There can be a part for everyone.

LIEUTENANT

I'm willing to help out.

Pastor picks up the guest register from the desk and looks it over.

PASTOR

Let's see. We've got three shepherds, three wisemen from the East, a mother-to-be and her husband. Sam, you can be Simeon, Amelia as Anna, and enough players for all the other roles.

DICK

I can't believe it. In the middle of Nebraska, it's like being back in the 19th century -- maybe even the middle ages. It'll take somebody more naive than me to be your wiseman. Come on, Lieutenant, let's find some chow. We can make our phone calls in the kitchen.

SAM

I'll go with you. Maybe Amelia needs some help.

Sam, Dick, and Lieutenant leave.

JENNY

Pastor, you'll have to forgive Craig. He's kind of jumpy these days.

PASTOR

That's all right, Jenny.

JENNY

I don't want to be rude, ya know. But I as I think about it, ya know, I don't really want to be in your pageant either.

PASTOR

You'd make a lovely Mary.

Amelia comes in with a ham sandwich on a plate and a glass of milk and offers them to Jenny.

AMELIA

Child, here's some food for you.

JENNY

Thank you. You're nice.

Amelia goes to the work table and starts folding bulletins.

AMELIA

Pastor, Sam says you're organizing the Christmas pageant.

PASTOR

Yes, we have an excellent cast.

AMELIA

We do? I don't think there's a church-goer among them, except maybe

that fellow from the BLM and the Negro scientist.

PASTOR

Well, most of the original cast weren't church-goers either: a bunch of grubby shepherds in the field, some itinerant astrologers, an innkeeper who wouldn't accommodate a pregnant woman, a puppet king subservient to Rome.

AMELIA

But Mary and Joseph were God-fearing folk.

PASTOR

True. But don't forget: Joseph needed a push. And what really do we know about Mary? Except that she was a Jewish village girl who became a teenage mother.

AMELIA

Who do you have to play Mary?

PASTOR

I've asked Jenny.

JENNY

No, Pastor Ziegler, I'm just too tired to

do it.

PASTOR

After you eat and rest a while, Jenny, you'll feel better. We can make it easy for you.

JENNY

It's not only that, ya know. It's that I have -- uh -- a different life style than the virgin Mary. I lost my own virginity at age 14 -- to the boy next door. In the 10th grade I dated the whole basketball team, if you know what I mean. At 16 my mom and me were arguing all the time, ya know, so I ran away from home. I took up with this rock group. It was, ya know, a relief to be with all girls. But then this roadie, Craig, came along, and he's been my boy friend for the past year. I am who I am with no regrets, ya know, but I'm not the one for your pageant.

PASTOR

Jenny, my dear, no one is here to judge your past. It's what you are now, and what you might become.

JENNY

*You see who I am. It's what I've been,
and what I will remain.*

PASTOR

God loves you.

JENNY

There is no God.

PASTOR

*There is. God exists whether we believe
or not. God's love is pervasive. I know
from my own life.*

JENNY

*Bull! It's easy for you to say that as a
minister, ya know. You have to believe
it. I go with my own experience, ya
know. It's a harsh world out there.*

PASTOR

*Yes, I know. Pastors are people, too.
We have our weaknesses. In the past I've
faltered, but the grace of God searched
me out and restored me. It can happen
to you.*

Michele enters with a mug of coffee and a cookie.

JENNY

I wish it were true -- but it isn't.

MICHELE

Wish what were true?

JENNY

A loving God.

MICHELE

Pay him no heed, Jenny. That's his mumbo, jumbo. But I didn't come to argue theology. Reverend, Craig says you want to put on a pageant, and I want to help you.

PASTOR

(Looking at his list)

You are?

MICHELE

Michele.

PASTOR

It's the Christmas story -- of God's love come to earth.

MICHELE

That's all right. The subject doesn't matter. We can join together, you and me, because we're both in the illusion

business.

PASTOR

Really?

MICHELE

Yeah. Six times a week we put on a show to make people feel better. You do it every Sunday. Yours is the old way, ours the new. Both help people escape their humdrum, dreary existence.

PASTOR

I can't speak for you, but what does on at church is hardly illusionary. It doesn't escape reality. It penetrates to Ultimate Reality.

MICHELE

Words, words.

PASTOR

Well, I accept you as you are, Michele. Join the pageant and let its meaning grab you -- if you're open.

MICHELE

I'm always open to new experience, man -- sober, drunk, or stoned.

PASTOR

I offer you sober exhilaration.

MICHELE

Far out, if you can do it.

PASTOR

We need music. Can any of you play the organ?

MICHELE

Loretta can play any keyboard instrument ever invented. She turned down a scholarship to Julliard to join our group.

PASTOR

Great! You, my friend, shall be the angel Gabriel. It's a 'he' in the scriptures, but I doubt that heaven has sexual differentiation.

MICHELE

Me an angel?

PASTOR

You'll do well as Gabriel because you're so full of pronouncements.

MICHELE

Well, why not?'

PASTOR

I've already chosen Jenny to be Mary.

MICHELE

(To Jenny)

And you consented?

JENNY

I guess so.

PASTOR

And Craig to be Joseph, if he'll do it.

MICHELE

He will if I tell him

PASTOR

And the others in your group can join in the angels' chorus.

MICHELE

What about costumes?

PASTOR

We have a closet full, left from celebrations years ago. They're out in a wardrobe in fellowship hall.

MICHELE

Then let's go look at them.

AMELIA

I'll go out with you and check the kitchen.

We can leave Jenny here to rest.

Jenny stretches out on the sofa as the others leave.

FELLOWSHIP HALL

As Pastor and Michele enter fellowship hall, they observe that the travelers have indeed made themselves at home. They have found a ping pong table and set it up. Vicki and Harriet are playing against Smitty and Buddy. None are very good, but the women are playing better as a team. Loretta and Lieutenant are watching. The lift-up doors over the counter are up, and we can see into the kitchen where Lee Ann and Crejsek are helping Amelia handle incoming food, brought in by some snow-covered men. Craig is munching a sandwich. Sam comes out of the kitchen carrying a load of blankets and pillows and piles them on a table. On the other side of the room Rex and Hugh are seated at a table, and Rex is encouraging Hugh to eat something. Another table has several table games piled on it. Roy, Dick, Hank, Hitoshi, and General are seated and standing around the game table, drinking coffee (except Hitoshi has tea) and eating from a plate of cookies. Hank is setting up a checkers game at the end of the table nearest the kitchen. Roy is telling a story and has each arm raised as if he were carrying a sheep on his shoulders.

ROY

And as I came around a bend in the trail with this lost lamb on my shoulders, I saw this big cougar stretched out in the sun. He looked at me, and I looked at him.

DICK

What did you do then?

ROY

Well, I thought of all the heroes in the movies I had seen and wondered what they would do. Then I said in a high voice, "I think I see a putty cat"

Chuckles.

HANK

Then what happened.

ROY

That big cat was so surprised that he took off down the hillside, and I never saw him again.

Laughter.

By now Hank has set up the checkers game.

HANK

Would anyone like to play checkers?

ROY

I haven't played since I was a boy, but I'm willing to give it a try.

HANK

We're not playing for money, Roy, so you don't have to hustle me.

Chuckles from the men.

At the wardrobe in the corner Pastor has started pulling out costumes and showing them to Michele. He has placed the guest register nearby on a small table, which also holds a couple of Bibles.

PASTOR

I believe this is for a wiseman -- one of our scientist friends.

MICHELE

Wow, way out! What threads! They're smashing!

PASTOR

And these are for the shepherds. We have real ones for the role.

MICHELE

Right, let's start with them.

(Picking up the register)

Hey, Roy, Smitty, Buddy, come over here, would ya?

Roy looks up from his checkers game with Hank, which has just started.

ROY

Excuse me, I'm bein' paged.

REX

I'll take his place if you don't mind.

HANK

Be my guest.

Rex takes Roy's place, and he and Hank re-set the checkers for a new game. Smitty and Buddy keep playing ping pong. Roy goes over to them.

ROY

Come on, boys, let's go see what the little lady wants.

Smitty and Buddy put their paddles on the ping pong table and go with Roy to the wardrobe.

LORETTA

Bernie, let's take their place. You can be

my partner.

LIEUTENANT

I'm not very good.

LORETTA

It doesn't matter.

Loretta and Lieutenant start playing against Vicki and Harriet. The shepherds arrive at the wardrobe.

MICHELE

Men, me and the pastor are puttin' on a pageant tonight, and we want you to be shepherds.

ROY

That's what we are.

PASTOR

Yes, I know. We're doing three versions of the coming of Christ. You'll be in Luke's.

SMITTY

The hell I will. I'm not gonna make a fool of myself. I ain't been in church since my sis got married ten years ago, and I ain't gonna break my record.

MICHELE

*Oh, Smitty, it'll be fine entertainment to
take our minds off the storm.*

SMITTY

*I don't know nothin' about the Jesus
story.*

ROY

*Maybe we should help out the pastor,
Smitty. He's given us shelter and food.
I was in one of these a long time ago
when I was a kid, and it was kinda fun.*

PASTOR

I'd be grateful.

ROY

What about you, Buddy?

BUDDY

I don't mind.

ROY

Smitty?

SMITTY

*If you tell me I have to, I will. But I
really don't want to.*

ROY

You have to.

Sam, who has been carrying in blankets and sleeping bags, notices what is happening and comes over.

SAM

*Pastor, let me help sort out the costumes.
I think I can find the crooks.*

Sam gets out their costumes and the crooks. Roy, Smitty, and Buddy try them on as the conversation continues.

PASTOR

(To Buddy)

Buddy's not your real name, is it?

BUDDY

Naw. It's David.

PASTOR

I might have known from your ruddy cheeks. David is my middle name -- in more ways than one.

Sam hands Buddy a costume.

SAM

I believe that this will fit you, David.

BUDDY

I prefer Buddy, or Dave, not David.

SAM

Okay, Dave.

PASTOR

(To Smitty)

Your last name is Smith, right?

SMITTY

Yeah. Dennis Smith. But don't dare call me Dennis.

Sam helps Smitty with his costume.

SAM

Smitty, would you believe that I was once like you?

SMITTY

You were?

SAM

Sure. I drifted from job to job till I was nearly 35. You must be around 30, right?

SMITTY

Thirty-one. But don't tell them girls I'm

that old.

SAM

I was angry all the time. Picked a lot of fights. We used knives in those days, I'm sorry to say.

SMITTY

My fists is my weapon.

SAM

Then I finally figured out I was mad mostly at myself. So I buckled down and worked hard, saved my money, and finally bought a filling station. I was my own boss. And I wasn't angry any more and wasn't fightin'.

SMITTY

Well, I see guys makin' it mostly through luck. Like in cards, or oil leases.

SAM

Some do. But most luck has hard work hidden in the background -- even if it's learnin' the odds at blackjack, or knowin' where oil's likely to be found.

SMITTY

Maybe so. But I think things is stacked against me.

MICHELE

(To the costumed shepherds)

You're lookin' great, men. Pastor, do they have spoken parts?

PASTOR

Yes, a few lines.

Pastor picks up a New Testament (*Good News for Modern Man*) from the nearby table.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Sam, would you please make fifteen copies of first two chapters of Matthew and Luke and five copies of the first and third chapters of John. Then I'll mark the parts for our actors.

SAM

Whatever you say.

Sam takes the New Testament and goes down the hallway to the office. The shepherds walk away. Smitty and Buddy return to the ping pong table to watch the game in process. Smitty takes off his costume and drapes it over a chair, but Buddy leaves his loosely fastened.

MICHELE

(To Pastor)

Do you think we ought to cover Smitty's black eye with make-up?

PASTOR

No, it'll add to the rough hewn look of shepherds.

Roy returns to the table where Hank and Rex are playing checkers.

REX

You don't mind that I took your place?

ROY

Not at all.

HANK

He's pretty good.

Roy slips out of his costume.

ROY

Boy, I'd hate to ride herd dressed like this.

Amelia comes out of the kitchen and approaches Pastor at the wardrobe.

AMELIA

Pastor, don't you think we ought to figure out where the women folk can have some privacy for sleeping?

PASTOR

Yes. How many are there?

AMELIA

Let me see. One, three more, plus two.
Six of 'em.

PASTOR

How about the junior high room upstairs?

AMELIA

That'll do.

Amelia goes to the ping pong table to get Vicki, Harriet, and Loretta.

AMELIA

If you girls will grab your things, some
blankets, and pillows, I'll show you where
you can sleep tonight.

They go for their backpacks, blankets, and pillows, and Sam hands out bedding. Amelia goes on to the kitchen. Michele and Pastor continue their casting.

MICHELE

Who's next?

PASTOR

How about the wisemen? Our scientists

friends.

MICHELE

Okay, I'll go get them.

Michele goes to the game table to get Dick, Hank, and Hitoshi.

KITCHEN

In the kitchen Amelia has approached Lee Ann and Crejsek.

LEE ANN

You go, Helen. I'll cover the kitchen.

FELLOWSHIP HALL

Crejsek comes out of the kitchen, picks up her duffelbag and a sleeping bag. She follows Amelia and the other women down the hallway to the stairs leading to the Sunday School rooms. Lieutenant goes along to help the women carry their things. As Dick, Hank, and Hitoshi leave the game table with Michele, Roy and Rex start a new game of checkers. General and Hugh watch. Craig comes out of the kitchen and goes over by the wardrobe. Smitty and Buddy drift into the kitchen to chat with Lee Ann. At the wardrobe Pastor holds up a wiseman's costume as Craig approaches.

CRAIG

I see you got the shepherds to play the

fool. Now you're after these fellows.
But you'll not get me.

PASTOR

You're free to join or refuse. If you
won't, we'll get somebody else to be
Joseph.

Pastor hands out the wisemen's costumes. Hank and Hitoshi try them on as the conversation continues. Dick resists. Craig stands around, watches, and listens. In the background Lieutenant returns from upstairs and joins the kibitzers at the game table. In a moment General leaves the table, goes to the kitchen, and makes a sandwich.

MICHELE

Gentlemen, how remarkable for us to
have three great scientists from the east.

HANK

Actually I grew up in California even
though I'm at M.I.T. now with my friend
Dick.

PASTOR

You'll be featured in Matthew's
presentation of Jesus birth.

DICK

You know, it's a little insulting to cajole
men of science into medieval pageantry.

MICHELE

How so? We have great theater in this century, too.

DICK

It's the ideas you're conveying. The superstition. The belief in a God who doesn't exist.

HITOSHI

That may be your feelings, Dick, but not mine.

DICK

Hitoshi, I thought you, more than anybody, would know there is no God. You're peered billions of light years and seen nothing but light and matter.

HITOSHI

The more I look and study, the greater my awe. The Hubble telescope in space has enabled us to probe deeper into the vastness of the universe than ever before. We have found regions in our own galaxy where stars are now being born. We live in a very dynamic universe. Although some things appear chaotic, there is a sense of order

indicating that an underlying intelligence is present.

DICK

But have you seen God out there?

HITOSHI

What you westerners call God is not something you see with your eyes. In Asia we meditate deeply to experience the true sense of life. In that way we discover the eternal entering the finite. We know that the universal spirit is alive even if some of the old concepts of God are dead.

HANK

Hitoshi, I couldn't express it as well, but I say, Amen, Amen. It's true for me.

Hitoshi and Hank are now costumed. Sam returns with copied pages and hands them to Pastor.

SAM

Here you are, Pastor.

PASTOR

Thanks, Sam. Just put them on the table.

Sam puts the pages on the table near the wardrobe.

SAM

Only two wisemen?

PASTOR

The other one hasn't decided yet.

DICK

I'll have to think about it.

PASTOR

That's all right. Matthew doesn't give any number. It's tradition that says three.

Amelia returns. Sam goes to the kitchen.

AMELIA

The girls are getting settled upstairs.

(Looking over the two wisemen)

Well, the wisemen's costume are as gorgeous as ever. I always liked them the best. Who's next?

PASTOR

It's time for the holy couple.

AMELIA

I'll go get the girl.

Amelia heads for the office.

HANK

Dick, you and I need to have a private conversation. Let's get coffee and find a corner where we can talk.

DICK

If you say so.

Hank and Dick go to the kitchen. Pastor, Michele, Hitoshi, and Craig remain at the wardrobe.

PASTOR

(To Hitoshi)

I wish I had your insights on God's creation.

HITOSHI

I wish I had your composure and sense of God's love.

PASTOR

It hasn't come easy.

HITOSHI

Nothing of value does.

KITCHEN

As Hank and Dick enter the kitchen, they find General in the midst of telling a war story to Smitty, Buddy, and Lee Ann. He is using his hands as planes.

GENERAL

There I was flying 100 feet above the jungle. Suddenly two migs swooped down on me -- one on my right tail, one on the left. I turned on my afterburner, climbed steeply, and banked hard to the right. They must've got their wings tangled because as I climbed toward the clouds and circled back, I could see two columns of black smoke rising.

BUDDY

It must be terrific being a fighter pilot.

FELLOWSHIP HALL

Amelia and Jenny arrive at the wardrobe. Hitoshi slips away and goes to the table where Rex and Roy are still engaged in their checkers match.

JENNY

*You still want me to be Mary, Pastor?
Even if you know who I am?*

PASTOR

Yes, I do.

Amelia helps Jenny with her costume as the conversation continues.

AMELIA

You know, Jenny, I was Mary fifty years ago.

JENNY

Really? Probably more deserving than me.

AMELIA

Oh, I was chaste at marriage, but not perfect by a long shot. As I sat there with my own baby lying in the manger, the pastor read how Mary pondered the events in her heart.

Cont.

AMELIA (Cont.)

Ponder. I like that word better than the new-fangled version.

I pondered a lot. I settled down, and I think I was a good mother for the twelve

years my son lived. Yet I retained my feeling that life could be fun.

JENNY

I wish I had known you then.

AMELIA

I've watched other girls play the part of Mary through the years. For a few it brought out a sense of sin and shame because the comparison was so shocking. It took them two or three years to recover. But for most girls, being Mary was a renewal, a gift to cherish. When you say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," it really can.

Jenny is now garbed as Mary. Pastor pulls from the wardrobe costumes for Craig and Amelia.

CRAIG

You do look lovely, Jenny.

PASTOR

Yes, you do.

JENNY

How about you, Craig? Will you be Joseph?

CRAIG

Well, uh. I don't know.

PASTOR

A reluctant Joseph.

CRAIG

Oh, what the hell. I might as well.

PASTOR

You will make a fine couple. Here's your costume.

Pastor hands the costume to Craig, who holds it over his arm.

PASTOR

Amelia, I want you to be Anna.

Pastor hands costume to Amelia. She holds it out at arm's length.

AMELIA

Once a young mother, 50 years later a wrinkled widow.

PASTOR

But younger than the biblical widow, who was over 100.

Suddenly Jenny grabs her back as she feels pain.

JENNY

Oh!

CRAIG

What's the matter?

JENNY

A sharp pain.

AMELIA

Could be false labor pains. They sometimes come before real labor begins.

JENNY

I think I better go back to the office and lie on the sofa. I feel shaky, ya know.

AMELIA

I'll look after you.

CRAIG

I'll stay with you, too.

Amelia puts an around Jenny's shoulder as they walk toward the door.

JENNY

Why are you so kind to me?

AMELIA

Because I think you're special, Jenny.

JENNY

That's what my grandmother used to tell me.

Jenny, Craig, and Amelia go down the hallway to the office.

MICHELE

What about the rest of my group? You got angel clothes?

PASTOR

Let me look.

MICHELE

I'll go get them.

Michele goes down the hallway to the stairs. Pastor rummages through the wardrobe. At the checkers game Roy makes a series of jumps to defeat Rex.

REX

That was a quick finish. Reminds me of the way John Elway was always coming from behind.

ROY

He sure was. Do you remember the time he led the Broncos down the field 87 yards in the last two minutes to beat

the Chargers?

REX

Which time?

ROY

How about a snack?

REX

*Sounds good to me. Will you join us,
Hitoshi?*

HITOSHI

*Yes, I'd love to have some more tea, and a
bite to eat.*

Roy, Rex, and Hitoshi go into the kitchen. At the wardrobe Pastor pulls out some faded white robes and tattered wings. Michele returns with Vicki, Loretta, and Harriet. Crejsek is with them and goes on to the kitchen.

VICKI

*Oh, come on, man. You can't expect me
to wear those trashy wings.*

HARRIET

Me, either.

LORETTA

Or me.

MICHELE

*You're going to play the organ, Loretta.
Vicki's right, Reverend. These won't do.
We've got better threads in the van.
Vicki and Harriet, get somebody to help
you bring in our wardrobe trunk.*

HARRIET

Out in the cold, are you crazy?

VICKI

*I'll get that sweet-talking ranch hand to
help us. And Buddy, too.*

LORETTA

*Are you kidding? That's the rancher's
kid. His daddy'll never let him go out to
van with you.*

VICKI

*You'll see. I'll get them while you get our
jackets, Harriet.*

Harriet goes off for their jackets, and Vicki goes into the kitchen.

KITCHEN

In the kitchen Smitty and Buddy are still listening to General's stories. Dick and Hank are conversing in a corner. Roy and Rex are making sandwiches.

VICKI

(To Smitty)

Hey there, sugar plum, I've got a favor to ask you.

SMITTY

Anything you say, sweetness.

VICKI

And you can bring Buddy with you.

Buddy looks at his dad, who offers no objections. Smitty and Buddy follow Vicki out of the kitchen.

FELLOWSHIP HALL

At the wardrobe Michele and Pastor remain in conversation.

MICHELE

And later on Craig can bring in our instruments and the sound equipment.

PASTOR

Yes, we would like to have your music.

MICHELE

But we'll take care of the costumes first.

Vicki arrives with Smitty and Buddy, who have picked up their jackets.

VICKI

See, I told you.

Harriet has returned with her jacket on. She gives Vicki her jacket, which she puts on. Smitty and Buddy button their coats.

HARRIET

I'm goin' hate this.

BUDDY

Me, too.

Buddy, Smitty, Vicki, and Harriet go out into the howling blizzard.

LORETTA

It sounds like it's getting worse.

PASTOR

I'm not surprised....Let's see, we still need Herod, soldiers, an innkeeper, and a priest.

MICHELE

I'll round up the rest of the men.

Michele goes into the kitchen to get the men. Pastor takes out additional costumes, looks them over, and has Loretta hold a couple of

them.

PASTOR

Do you know "Lead, Kindly Light?" I'm thinking of using it in the pageant.

LORETTA

Never heard of it. But if you've got the music, I can play.

PASTOR

It's in the hymnal. It goes --

(Singing)

"Lead, kindly light,
amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on.
The night is dark
and I am far from home...."

Michele comes up with Sam, General, Lieutenant, and Hugh helped by Rex. Hugh is tipsier than before. Sam pulls up a chair for him. Loretta eases off to the kitchen.

REX

Your costumes are splendid, Pastor.

PASTOR

A little worn, some moth holes, but serviceable. Here's the one for Simeon, Sam.

Sam drapes his costume over his body.

SAM

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word."

PASTOR

We're going to use a more modern translation, Sam. You'll have to learn some new words.

SAM

Do I have to?

PASTOR

Yes. And now for the hardest part -- casting Herod.

SAM

Yes, while no one is pure enough for Mary, no one is bad enough for Herod -- at least we hope not.

MICHELE

(Pointing to Hugh)

What about this fellow? He claims he

controls a wide territory.

HUGH

From Omaha to Boise.

PASTOR

No, if he's like this now, we don't know what condition he'll be in tonight. That leaves these officers and you, Rex Hanover. Herod was a civilian rule, not a military man. I guess the mantle falls to you, Rex.

REX

That's not fair.

PASTOR

It's only a pageant. It doesn't necessarily reflect what you are in real life.

Pastor gives Rex his costume.

MICHELE

That's not what Roy McKean says about Rex.

PASTOR

I don't accept his judgment.

REX

Besides, Roy and I are friends now.

PASTOR

*We'll let the general and the lieutenant be
the soldiers.*

As the conversation continues, Pastor hands out soldier costumes.

GENERAL

*Well, frankly, I was expecting a larger
role.*

REX

I'll yield Herod to you.

GENERAL

*No, that's not me. I prefer the Old
Testament generals. Like Joshua.*

LORETTA

Who "fit" the battle of Jericho?

GENERAL

Yes. Or Joab.

MICHELE

Who?

PASTOR

King David's leading general.

GENERAL

There was a superior warrior.

PASTOR

It's the wrong testament.

GENERAL

*Well, I'll go along anyway. Out of duty
to our host.*

*By now Lieutenant has put on a tunic. General proceeds to put on his
costume.*

LIEUTENANT

This doesn't seem to fit me.

MICHELE

The tunic is just your size.

LIEUTENANT

No, I mean the role.

GENERAL

*He's a computer expert, one of our best.
Bernie, you had basic training. Just
recall what it's like to be a foot soldier.*

General has now put on his costume. Crejsek and Lee Ann come up.

CREJSEK

You're casting everybody but us. Why are we being excluded?

HUGH

I don't have a part, either.

PASTOR

Sorry, my friend. Not in your condition.

GENERAL

Bates, you look like you could use some more coffee. And I could, too.

General helps Hugh toward the kitchen. Lieutenant follows them. In the background we see him renewing his conversation with Loretta. By now Roy, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi have returned with food to the game table in fellowship hall. At the end nearest the kitchen Hank is setting up checkers for a game with Roy. At the other end of the table Hitoshi has taken a Go game board from his suitcase, unfolded it, put out the pieces, and is trying to explain it to Dick. Rex goes from the wardrobe to watch them.

PASTOR

(To Crejsek)

You see, Helen, the original story comes from an earlier era, and there aren't a lot of female roles. But you could be narrator.

CREJSEK

I get it, a traditional role for me.

PASTOR

Not at all. Usually the pastor is narrator, but you can do it instead.

CREJSEK

Me, a pastor? Ha! Well, I'll do my best.

*From the nearby table Pastor picks up a copy of *Good News for Modern Man* and opens it to the gospels. As he talks, he marks some passages, turns down page corners, and hands the volume to Crejsek.*

PASTOR

We're going to use this translation. In Matthew we'll start after the genealogy and go to the end of chapter two. In Luke we'll begin after the introduction and go most of the way through the second chapter. For John I'd like to take selected passages from chapters one and three. I'll mark them for you later.

CREJSEK

That much? Then I'd better find a quiet place to read it through.

Crejsek leaves and goes to a far corner of fellowship hall to read.

LEE ANN

What about me?

PASTOR

You can be the innkeeper.

LEE ANN

I suppose I'll do it. It's an easier job than waitress.

PASTOR

I'll appear as the priest in Luke's story. That's everybody except Zechariah and Elizabeth if we do all of chapter one of Luke.

MICHELE

Who are they?

PASTOR

The parents of John the Baptist -- their first child, who came when they were quite old.

MICHELE

What about Sam and Amelia? They could play two parts.

PASTOR

Well, I don't know. I've heard that lots of folks have tried to play matchmaker with them.

Sam shakes his head negatively.

MICHELE

Sam, it's theater. You look like a natural actor.

SAM

I dunno.

MICHELE

It's pretend. You'll be great.

SAM

Well, if the pastor wants me to, I'll go along with it. If Amelia will.

PASTOR

I'll sound her out.

Vicki, Harriet, Smitty, and Buddy enter from the outside. There is a blast of snow behind them. The men are carrying a trunk with "SEARCHING" on it. Vicki has a sign under arm. Loretta and Lieutenant come from the kitchen to join them. Sam wanders over from the game table.

HARRIET

Man, it's freezing out there.

PASTOR

"Searching". What's that?

MICHELE

It's the name of our group. We're
"Searching".

LIEUTENANT

Aren't we all?

VICKI

Who's gonna be the innkeeper. I got a sign
I lifted from a motel.

Vicki holds up a "NO VACANCY" sign.

LEE ANN

I am.

PASTOR

I don't think it's authentic.

LORETTA

I could write it in Hebrew.

PASTOR

That won't be necessary.

We hear the crackling of a radio message. Crejsek responds with her hand-held two-way radio.

RADIO O.S.

Roadblock to Crejsek. Roadblock to Crejsek.

CREJSEK

Come in, roadblock.

RADIO O.S.

We just got word that a bus is headed our way. It may arrive within a half an hour. Do you have room at your shelter?

CREJSEK

How many passengers?

RADIO

About 25, I think.

CREJSEK

Pastor, can you accommodate another 25 people?

PASTOR

Certainly.

CREJSEK

Roadblock, we can handle them. Send them up when they arrive.

PASTOR

We'll need more food and blankets. I'd better call Father O'Reilly at St. Mary's and somebody from the Grange and see if they can help out.

Pastor goes to the office.

LEE ANN

Open your trunk, Vicki. I want to see your costumes.

MICHELE

No, let's take them to our room upstairs where we can spread them out.

VICKI

Smitty, can you move this again?

SMITTY

Whatever you say, sugar.

LIEUTENANT

Let me give you a hand.

Smitty and Lieutenant carry the trunk away, followed by Michele,

Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, Lee Ann, and Buddy. Crejsek goes back in her corner to read the gospels some more. General helps Hugh out of the kitchen to another table where Hugh sits down, puts his head on folded arms, and falls asleep. General notices the Go board and goes to the game table.

GENERAL

What's going on out here?

DICK

Hitoshi is trying to teach me to play Go, but I don't understand it.

GENERAL

May I give it a try?

DICK

Sure, if you want to. Do you know how to play?

GENERAL

Yes. I took up the game during my two tours of duty in Japan.

HITOSHI

Please join me, General Slatterly.

GENERAL

It will be my pleasure, Professor Morikawa.

General sits down and starts playing Go. Craig comes out from the office and goes to the game table.

CRAIG

It's amazing how that old buzzard can cajole these folks into bringing food for people they don't even know. In this blizzard yet. And he's inviting them to come to the pageant tonight.

SAM

It's not cajoling. They do it with pleasure. All you do is ask.

REX

What I don't understand, Sam, is why a man with his talents is serving such a small congregation out in the....

(Hesitating)

SAM

Go ahead, say it -- the boondocks.

REX

Well, yes.

SAM

No offense. We're lucky to have him. You see, he's starting over in the ministry.

REX

How's that?

SAM

He used to be head pastor of a big church in Minneapolis. Had a couple of assistant pastors under him, a budget well over half a million. Had a television program and was on the radio three times a week.

As Sam continues, Pastor comes out of the office and stands a little ways behind Sam and Craig, who don't notice his presence.

SAM (Cont.)

He was a big shot, and I guess he knew it. But he got carried away, broke the seventh commandment, not once but regularly.

CRAIG

Cut out the riddles. I don't know the god damned numbers of the commandments.

SAM

You just broke the third. For Pastor Ziegler, it was adultery.

CRAIG

Adultery! Why the old lecher!

PASTOR

I'm glad you're telling them about my sordid past, Sam. They should know what a sinner they're dealing with.

SAM

You've been open with us.

Sam, chagrined for revealing the pastor's secret, retreats a little.

PASTOR

After my wife divorced me and the church board fired me, I drifted for a while, took odd jobs, roamed the beaches of California.

HANK

Whereabouts?

During the following soliloquy OCCASIONALLY SHOW REACTION SHOTS of the Pastor's listeners.

PASTOR

Around Monterey. One day in my second winter there was a terrific storm.

When it finally quit raining, I went for a walk along the beach. The surf was still angry, but the moon was breaking through the clouds. I rounded a huge boulder and saw a clear, smooth stretch of sand. Suddenly I realized, "God forgives." Simply that. No still small voice like Elijah heard. No rushing winding as at Pentecost. Only a realization that God forgives. I was aglow with an inner light. It was as if that boulder had fallen from my shoulders.

CRAIG

I knew a fellow who saw lights when he as on PCP.

PASTOR

No, it wasn't like that at all. I know, because I tried drugs when I was drifting. Then you're not yourself. On the shore, and since, I had my full, natural consciousness, but much more. I was stirred to the depth of my soul, uplifted, refreshed by the presence of God. For the first time in my life, I truly understood what grace is -- even though I used to preach about it all the time.

(Looking at Craig)

God loves us, regardless of who we are or what we do. The worse we are, the harder God searches for us. Grace is God's searching love.

(Turning toward Rex)

Well, to make a long story short, I re-entered the ministry by seeking a church which needed me rather than what I needed to fulfill my ego. And one that

Cont.

PASTOR (Cont.)

would accept all I had been. So I came to the Church of the Carpenter in Muhlenberg.

REX

You should talk to Hugh.

DICK

Yes, what's with him?

REX

This is his first Christmas alone since his family left him.

PASTOR

I suppose he has my flaw.

REX

No, his only mistress was his business. It was his obsession to have the biggest drugstore chain in the northern plains. He was on the road all the time and completely neglected his family.

CRAIG

Sounds like my old man, except he's a lawyer.

REX

I know him through Rotary. I'm taking him to my home for Christmas.

PASTOR

Good for you. Christmas is a melancholy time for those who are alone.

SAM

Unless you're part of a church family, like me.

HANK

Maybe some of us should help cheer up Hugh.

REX

That would be great. But let him sleep for now.

General and Hitoshi resume Go with Pastor watching. Roy and Hank go back to checkers. Sam and Craig walk off together toward the kitchen. Hank notices their departure and overhears their conversation.

CRAIG

Did he really have that experience on the beach?

SAM

I'm sure he did.

CRAIG

Did he really change?

SAM

Yep.

CRAIG

And you folks really accept him in spite of his past?

SAM

We sure do.

CRAIG

That's amazing. Simply amazing.

Crejsek comes up to the game table with an opened New Testament.

While she is talking, Michele and Loretta come in from the hallway and join them.

CREJSEK

Pastor, I've read through the chapters you told me in Matthew and Luke. I can see that it's great material for a pageant. But for the life of me, I don't seek what you're going to do with John.

PASTOR

John is important for the deep meaning it conveys: the Word becoming Flesh, and Light coming into darkness.

CREJSEK

Yes, that's what John writes about it. But how do you portray it?

PASTOR

I'll show you when we have our rehearsal in a little bit.

MICHELE

I was just going to ask you about that, Reverend. When do we rehearse?

PASTOR

As soon as we round out our cast.

MICHELE

Who's left?

PASTOR

*The part of Elizabeth and
(Looking at Dick)
perhaps another wiseman.*

DICK

All right, I'll do it. Hank convinced me.

MICHELE

You haven't asked Amelia yet?

PASTOR

No, she's been taking care of Jenny.

MICHELE

I'll get her.

Michele goes to the office. At the game table Hank makes a final move at checkers to defeat Roy.

ROY

You're pretty good.

HANK

Just lucky.

ROY

Want another game?

HANK

Not just now. There's somebody I want to talk to.

Hank goes into the kitchen.

ROY

How about you, Dick?

DICK

I'll give it a try.

As they set up checkers, in the background in the kitchen Hank pours himself some coffee and begins a conversation with Craig. Pastor and Loretta leave the game table and stroll toward the wardrobe.

LORETTA

Reverend, if I'm going to play the organ tonight, I'd better try it out.

PASTOR

I'll have Amelia show you where it is in a minute.

LORETTA

What about music?

PASTOR

There's some by the organ. And I'm expecting the others in your group to play, also.

LORETTA

You'll have to talk with Michele about that.

When they arrive at the wardrobe, Pastor reaches in for Elizabeth's costume. Amelia and Michelle come in from the hallway.

AMELIA

The child's sleeping now.

PASTOR

That's good.

AMELIA

What's this about wanting me to play the part of Elizabeth?

PASTOR

Will you do it? Here's the costume.

AMELIA

You've already got me as Anna.

PASTOR

The two are in different scenes.

AMELIA

And who's Zechariah?

PASTOR

Sam said he would.

AMELIA

Married to that old goat?

LORETTA

(Laughing)

It's only a pageant, Amelia.

AMELIA

I'll think about it.

PASTOR

*While you're thinking, would you please
take Loretta to the organ?*

AMELIA

(To Loretta)

This way.

Amelia and Loretta go down hallway to sanctuary.

PASTOR

Michele, I'm hoping your group will play

*some numbers as part of the pageant --
in your own style.*

MICHELE

Really? In church?

PASTOR

*Over the ages many different styles of
music have been part of church life.*

MICHELE

*In that case we'll work up something I
think you'll like. You got a script?*

PASTOR

*I've got to mark the parts on the pages
Sam copied.*

*Pastor sits down at the table where Sam left the copied pages. He
picks up a marker and starts marking.*

KITCHEN

Hank and Craig are at the end of a counter, engaged in conversation.

CRAIG

*Yeah, sometimes I do think about doing
something else. But sound systems is
what I do best.*

HANK

There are other ways to use your skills in electronics.

CRAIG

Like what?

HANK

Like in alternate energy. You know: solar heating, windmill generators, experiments with new approaches.

CRAIG

But I don't have a college degree. I dropped out 'cause I hated classroom confinement.

HANK

I know a company in California that's offbeat but very creative. They're always looking for good technicians, and they don't worry about credentials.

CRAIG

Well, I am getting a little tired of traveling all the time.

HANK

*I'll give you their name and address.
You can use my name when you write
them.*

*From his pockets Hank takes out a pen, calling card, and address book.
He looks up a name and address and writes it on the back of the card.*

FELLOWSHIP HALL

*Pastor continues marking parts. Michele is nearby. In the distance
the organ plays the opening of J.S. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D
Minor, a pause, the start of the fugue, then being modified to a rock
beat. As conversation continues, the organ switches to a familiar
Christmas carol with a rock beat.*

MICHELE

Are you about ready for the rehearsal?

PASTOR

*As soon as I finish marking the parts.
Would you pass the word that we'll
assemble in the sanctuary in fifteen
minutes?*

*Michele goes off kitchen to announce the rehearsal. Lieutenant comes
in from the hallway and approaches Pastor.*

LIEUTENANT

Pastor Ziegler, are you sure you want me in the pageant? I'm no actor.

PASTOR

Neither are the others. We're all just folks.

LIEUTENANT

But couldn't I have some other part?

PASTOR

No, we need soldiers.

LIEUTENANT

Will there ever be a time when we don't?

PASTOR

When I was young, I thought so, but now I'm doubtful. We Christians inescapably live surrounded by evil. It's who we are and what we do that matters.

Amelia returns from the sanctuary.

AMELIA

That girl's talented.

PASTOR

Yes, it's wonderful to hear such good organ playing.

AMELIA

*I can't believe it. We're really having the
pageant.*

PASTOR

Yes, we really are.

AMELIA

*I guess you can put me down for
Elizabeth. But don't expect any miracle.*

PASTOR

*The whole event is miraculous. A blessed
miracle.*

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - FRONT OF CHURCH - NIGHT

*The church is lit. It is still snowing. The entrance sidewalk has been
cleared. People are entering the church.*

PASTOR

When I was young, I thought so, but now I'm doubtful. We Christians inescapably live surrounded by evil. It's who we are and what we do that matters.

Amelia returns from the sanctuary.

AMELIA

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PASTOR

The whole event is miraculous. A blessed miracle.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - FRONT OF CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is lit. It is still snowing. The entrance sidewalk has been cleared. Heavily-clothed people are entering the church.

INT - CHURCH SANCTUARY

The sanctuary of modest size is becoming comfortably full. It has a center aisle with three steps up to the divided chancel. At the back of the chancel is a central altar with an unlighted candle on each side of a central cross. The pulpit is on the left facing the congregation and the lectern on the right. Beside the lectern are a font and a stand holding an advent wreath with the traditional five candles, now unlit (the four around the circle have burnt to unequal lengths; the white candle in the center is new). Choir pews on the lectern side face across the chancel. The organ console is on the pulpit side, and choir pews have been removed to make room for Michele, Vicki, and Harriet and their musical instruments. A small stool is positioned by the altar, and another small stool is accessible toward the front of the chancel. A manger is positioned out of sight with the musicians. A piano is on the sanctuary floor below the pulpit. The pulpit and lectern have mikes.

There are doors on each side of the chancel leading to side rooms (each with a door to an outer hallway. A pair of candelabra on stands are stored in the side room on the lectern side. At floor level at the front of the sanctuary are doors on each side, leading out to a hallway.

"Searching", the musical group, is playing a medley of traditional Christmas carols with a rock beat: Michele on lead guitar, Vicki on bass, Harriet on drums, and Loretta at the organ. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet are wearing suit jackets that hide shiny white dresses (could be covered with sequins and could be phosphorescent under a black light).

People are coming in from outside, stomping their boots, brushing off snow, taking off their coats and boots, and finding their seats. Ushers are handing out programs. TV cameras and their operators are in three locations. As the music continues, a YOUNG BOY OR GIRL wearing a white robe and serving as acolyte comes down the center aisle carrying a candlelighter and lights the candles on the altar and all five candles on the advent wreath.

General Slatterly, Lieutenant Francis, Lee Ann, Dick, Hank, Hitoshi, Rex, and Hugh, dressed in their regular clothes, come in a door at the front of the sanctuary and sit on the front pew. Rex helps Hugh, who is fairly intoxicated.

INT - HALLWAY

Pastor in a black robe and Jenny and Craig in their pageant costumes walk down a hallway behind the chancel and enter the room on the pulpit side of the chancel. Jenny seems a little shaky as she walks. Sam, Amelia, and Lee Ann in costumes walk down rear hallway and enter the small room on the lectern side. They are followed by Crejsek, who is wearing a choir robe over her state trooper uniform. Roy, Smitty, and Buddy in costumes appear and stand by a door leading to the floor of the sanctuary. We faintly hear the music of

"Searching".

SANCTUARY

As the musicians wind down, Crejsek enters the chancel and takes a seat near the lectern. Pastor enters from the other side and steps to the pulpit. They leave the doors between the chancel and the side rooms slightly ajar. The musicians cease playing, and Michele and Vicki sit down.

As Pastor talks, PAN the congregation, including the players sitting on the front pew.

PASTOR

I want to welcome all of you to the Christmas eve pageant at the Church of the Carpenter. Welcome to our faithful members and to friends from Muhlenberg and the surrounding area who on short
Cont.

PASTOR (Cont.)

notice have braved the storm to join our celebration. We are all proud of our county road crew for keeping Main Street plowed. A special welcome to those who arrived by bus an hour ago. We're glad that we have enough space in fellowship hall and the Sunday School rooms to

accommodate you, and plenty of food and bedding, thanks to our members and friends.

ANGLE ON
CAMERA
OPERATOR

We especially welcome the film crew that was on the bus. They were on their way to film the intercollegiate snowboard competition in Aspen and have decided to film our pageant. They intend to edit it for broadcast and to add subtitles to the hymns we will sing so that folks watching at home can join in.

ANGLE ON
PASTOR

We have an unusual cast tonight, as you can see from the program. But no more so that the remarkable collection of people who participated in the original drama of Jesus' birth.

Our pageant portrays the coming of Christ in three scenes. We first hear and see what Luke reveals to us, for he takes us back to the earliest part of the story. Then we turn to Matthew and finally to John. Each of these gospels considers Jesus' origin in its own distinct way.

ANGLE ON
DICK

This afternoon one of our skeptical guests grilled me unmercifully about the gospel accounts. "Are these stories really true?"

he demanded. I would prefer to rephrase

ANGLE ON
PASTOR the question and inquire: Do the stories of Jesus' birth convey the truth? God's truth. Watch and listen. Decide whether they reveal God's truth for you.

May the pageant begin.

Pastor sits down. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet rise. Michele strikes a chord on her guitar, and they sing a capella in unison "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" (tune: "Picardy").

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET
(Singing)

[Chord]

"Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand.
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessings in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand."

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sit down. Officer Crejsek rises and goes to the lectern. She opens a New Testament and reads from Luke, as

*translated by the American Bible Society in Today's English Version,
Good News for Modern Man.*

CREJSEK

*"During the time when Herod was king of
the land of Israel, there was a priest
named Zechariah, who belonged to the
priestly order of Abijah."*

*Sam as Zechariah and Amelia as Elizabeth enter the chancel from the
door on the lectern side.*

CREJSEK (Cont.)

*"His wife's name was Elizabeth. She also
belonged to a priestly family."*

Sam goes to the altar. Elizabeth stops part way and kneels to pray.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

*"They both lived good lives in God's sight,
and obeyed fully all the Lord's
commandments and rules. They had no
children because Elizabeth could not have
any, and she and Zechariah were very
old.*

*"One day Zechariah was doing his work
as a priest before God, taking his turn in
the daily service."*

Sam pantomimes lighting incense and other actions at the altar. As Crejsek continues, Michele rises and slips off her jacket, revealing her radiant white dress. She moves next to Sam at the altar.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar where the incense was burned."

As Michele as Gabriel approaches, Sam draws back in fear.

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Don't be afraid, Zechariah. God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John."

SAM (as Zechariah)

"How shall I know if this is so? I am an old man and my wife also is old."

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this good news. Because you have not believed you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true."

Sam mimes loss of speech. Michele returns to her seat. Sam and Amelia start for the lectern door. Loretta starts playing background music on organ to facilitate the transition.

CREJSEK

"Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and did not leave the house for five months."

AMELIA (as Elizabeth)

"Now at last the Lord has helped me in this way. He has taken away my public disgrace."

Amelia and Sam leave through the lectern door. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee name Nazareth. Gabriel had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary."

Jenny as Mary enters from pulpit side and comes out to center of chancel. Michele as Gabriel rises and joins her.

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Peace be with you! The Lord is with

you, and has greatly blessed you!"

CREJSEK

"Mary was greatly troubled by the angel's message..."

Jenny appears troubled.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...and she wondered what the words meant."

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Don't be afraid, Mary, because God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God."

JENNY (as Mary)

"I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?"

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God."

JENNY (as Mary)

"I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said."

CREJSEK

"And the angel left her."

Michele returns to her seat. Loretta starts background music.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Soon afterward Mary got ready and hurried off to the hill country, to a town in Judea" to visit her relative Elizabeth.

Jenny crosses toward the lectern side.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth."

Amelia as Elizabeth enters, and Jenny greets her. Music ends.

CREJSEK

At that moment Elizabeth's "baby moved within her" and she "was filled with the Holy Spirit."

AMELIA (as Elizabeth)

"You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

Vicki strikes a chord on her bass guitar and accompanies Jenny as she sings. [The following words are from the *Good News for Modern Man*, but another poetical version of "The Magnificat" is acceptable, such as "My Soul Gives Glory", words by J.T. Mueller, music by Michael Joncas.]

JENNY (as Mary)

(Singing)

"My heart praises the Lord;
 My soul is glad because of God my Savior,
 because he has remembered me, his
 lowly servant!
 From now on all people will call me
 happy, because of the great things
 the Mighty God has done for me.

His name is holy;
 He shows mercy on those who fear him,
 from one generation to another.
 He stretched out his mighty arm and
 scattered the proud with all their
 plans.
 He brought down mighty kings from their
 thrones, and lifted up the lowly.
 He filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away with empty
 hands.
 He kept the promise he made to our
 ancestors, and he came to the help of
 his servant Israel;
 He remembered to show mercy to

Abraham

and to all his descendants forever!"

As Crejsek continues, Loretta starts background music on the organ.

CREJSEK

"Mary stayed about three months with Elizabeth, and then went back home."

As Amelia exits through the lectern door, Jenny moves back across the chancel. As she walks, she has a labor pain, grabs her back, and then moves out through the pulpit door. Music continues.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son."

SIDE ROOM

Jenny enters the side room on the pulpit side. Craig helps Jenny to a chair and comforts her.

SANCTUARY

Sam as Zechariah and Amelia as Elizabeth enter the chancel through the lectern door. Amelia carries a doll baby in a blanket. Music continues.

CREJSEK

"When the baby was a week old, they came to circumcise him." They named him John as the angel Gabriel had told them."

Sam and Amelia move toward the altar. Amelia sits on a stool.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit" and regained his speech.

Sam faces the congregation. Music ends.

SAM (as Zechariah)

"Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel!

He came to the help of his people and set them free.

He has provided a mighty Savior for us, who is a descendant of his servant David."

Sam takes the doll baby from Amelia.

SAM (as Zechariah) (Cont.)

(To doll baby)

"You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God.

You will go ahead of the Lord.

to prepare his road for him;

*to tell his people that they will be saved,
by having their sins forgiven."*

(To congregation)

*"Our God is merciful and tender.
He will cause the bright dawn of
salvation to rise on us,
and shine from heaven on all those who
live in the dark shadow of death,
to guide our steps into the path of
peace."*

*As Crejsek continues, Sam with the doll baby and Amelia leave through
the lectern door. Loretta commences background music.*

CREJSEK

*"The child grew and developed in body
and spirit. He lived in the desert until
the day when he would appear to the
people of Israel."*

*Loretta plays musical interlude as Vicki moves the manger to front of
altar.*

SIDE ROOM

*In the side room Jenny rises to re-enter the chancel and experiences
pain again. We hear Loretta's music in background.*

SANCTUARY

Loretta's background music continues as Crejsek speaks.

CREJSEK

"At that time Emperor Augustus sent out an order for all the citizens of the Empire to register themselves for the census. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own town."

As Crejsek continues, Craig as Joseph and Jenny as Mary enter the chancel through the pulpit door. Music continues until they are at center of chancel.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Joseph went from the town of Nazareth, in Galilee, to Judea, to the town named Bethlehem, where King David was born. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register himself with Mary..."

At this moment Jenny is stricken with a sharp pain and grasps her back.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

*"...who was promised in marriage to him.
She was pregnant."*

Jenny feels another stab of pain.

JENNY

Oh!

Lee Ann as innkeeper comes out from the lectern side. Craig and Jenny approach her.

CREJSEK

*In Bethlehem "there was no room for
them to stay in the inn."*

*Lee Ann shakes her head "No" and shrugs her shoulders to show no
vacancy.*

CREJSEK (Cont.)

*"And while they were in Bethlehem, the
time came for her to have her baby."*

Jenny is again stricken with pain.

JENNY

*Ow! I think I really am going to have my
baby. Right now.*

CRAIG

You can't have it here.

Pastor comes out from his place by the pulpit. Amelia enters through the lectern door.

PASTOR

Quick! Go to the nursery room across the hall. There's a day bed there.

Craig puts his arm around Jenny and leads her toward the pulpit door as she has another pain. Pastor addresses the congregation.

PASTOR

Is there a doctor present?

No response. Jenny stops.

JENNY

That's okay. I'm prepared for natural childbirth.

Jenny has another pain.

PASTOR

{Pointing to Craig}

Is he trained to assist?

JENNY

No, he wouldn't take the course.

Crejsek comes over.

CREJSEK

I've had training in child delivery.

CRAIG

Good, will you help her?

CREJSEK

Of course.

Hugh rises from the front pew in the congregation, still drunk.

HUGH

What's happening?

Jenny continues toward the pulpit door. Amelia and Lee Ann follow.

AMELIA

I'll get some towels and blankets.

LEE ANN

I'll help you.

Jenny, Craig, Crejsek, Amelia, and Lee Ann go through the pulpit door. Hugh staggers toward the chancel. Rex starts after him.

HUGH

What's going on?

PASTOR

The young lady is about to have her baby.

HUGH

To hell with the baby! Let's get on with the show.

REX

Come on, Hugh. We better go to fellowship hall.

Rex guides Hugh out a door to the hallway. Pastor goes to the pulpit and faces the congregation.

PASTOR

My friends, you can see that our pageant has been interrupted by a real live drama. But I heard Jenny whisper to Craig, "Have them go on with the pageant." They're in show business, you know.

While we're waiting to learn of the outcome, let me say something I wanted to mention later about Bethlehem and King David. Already we've heard David's name mentioned, and we'll hear of him again in Matthew's gospel. This is fitting because David was the greatest king the Jews ever had. They expected that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

NURSERY

ANGLE ON a loud speaker above inside door of nursery with pastor's voice coming out. *ANGLE ON* Jenny lying on the day bed. Amelia is wiping her head with a cold cloth, and Crejsek is preparing to assist the baby be born. Jenny is moaning as she starts to deliver. Craig is pacing the floor. Lee Ann comes in with a basin of warm water.

PASTOR (Cont.) O.S.

We all have some knowledge of David. How he slew Goliath. About his romance with beautiful Bathsheba, who was married to another man. What we forget about this spicy tale is that the prophet Nathan had the courage to reprove King David for his misdeed. David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Yes, though David had human flaws, throughout his life he tried to be obedient to the will of God.

SANCTUARY

Pastor continues to speak from pulpit.

PASTOR

As king, David tried to rule justly.
Indeed, the last words attributed to
David are a poem on this theme -- for
remember, David was also a musician.

(Looking at General in front pew)
General Slatterly, you said you find much
to admire in the Old Testament. Maybe
you would be willing to read this passage.

General rises and walks to chancel.

GENERAL

Sure, if you will show me the place.

As General approaches, Pastor takes a Bible from under the pulpit and
leafs through it to find the place. Lee Ann comes in through the pulpit
door and whispers to Pastor.

PASTOR

(To congregation)

I know you're curious. Jenny has
started to deliver. All is going well.

Lee Ann goes back out. General is now at the pulpit. Pastor hands
him the opened Bible.

PASTOR

(Pointing)

Start here at verse two of chapter 23 in

Second Samuel and read to verse 7.

As General starts reading, Pastor slips out through the pulpit door.

GENERAL

*"The God of Israel has spoken;
 the protector of Israel said to me,
 'The king who rules with justice,
 who rules with reverence for God,
 is like the sun shining on a cloudless dawn,
 the sun that makes the grass sparkle after
 rain.'*

NURSERY

In nursery Jenny is proceeding with delivery as Pastor comes into the nursery. She looks at him with a weak smile. Pastor bows his head in silent prayer. General voice comes over loudspeaker.

GENERAL (Cont.) O.S.

*"And that is how God will bless my
 descendants,
 because he has made an eternal covenant
 with me,
 an agreement that will not be broken,
 a promise that will not be changed.
 That is all I desire;
 that will be my victory,*

and God will surely bring it about."

SANCTUARY

At the pulpit, General continues reading. As he finishes, Pastor returns, leaving the pulpit door open, and stands beside him.

GENERAL (Cont.)

*"But godless men are like thorns
that are thrown away,
no one can touch them barehanded.
You must use an iron tool or a spear;
they will be burned completely."*

PASTOR

*Indeed, Yahweh, who David served, was
one to fear but yet rewarded those who
kept his covenant. Thank you, General.*

*General nods his acknowledgement and returns to his seat on the front
pew of the congregation.*

PASTOR

*Yes, friends, delivery is proceeding
normally. As we continue waiting, let
me complete the connection between
King David and Jesus.*

Cont.

PASTOR (Cont.)

David, the son of Jesse, was from the town of Bethlehem. Long after David's kingdom had fallen in disarray and the Jews subjugated, they looked for a great Messiah to liberate them from captivity.

NURSERY

In nursery Jenny continues in delivery.

PASTOR (Cont.) O.S.

Many said that he would be a shoot of Jesse, and the prophet Micah predicted that he would be born in Bethlehem. And so he was, according to Luke and Matthew.

SANCTUARY

Pastor continues speaking at pulpit.

PASTOR (Cont.)

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!" Yes, let's sing about Bethlehem. There are some great words by Phillips Brooks. It's number 87 in the

hymnal. Let's sing the first and third
 verses. Will you rise as we sing?
 (Looking into a camera)
 And if our pageant is broadcast on
 television, would you home viewers join
 our singing?

Loretta plays "O Little Town of Bethlehem" through once. Michele and Vicki find their place and join in as Harriet improvises a drum beat. During the singing the words appear as subtitles on the screen.

VARIOUS ANGLES ON players, musicians, and congregation.

ALL

(Singing)

"O little town of Bethlehem,
 How still we see thee lie!
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
 The silent stars go by.
 Yet in thy dark street shineth
 The everlasting Light;
 The hopes and fears of all the years
 Are met in thee tonight."

ALL (Cont.)

(Singing)

"How silently, how silently

*The wondrous gift is given!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 The blessings of His heaven.
 No ear may hear His coming,
 But in this world of sin,
 Where meek souls will receive Him still,
 The dear Christ enters in."*

*As they finish singing, we hear the cry of a new born baby through the
 pulpit door. Lee Ann rushes in.*

LEE ANN

It's a boy! A lovely, little boy!

*Michele, Vicki, and Harriet hug one another and bounce around.
 Loretta plays some joyous music (such as a bit of "For Unto Us Is Born"
 from Handel's "Messiah"). Lee Ann and Pastor hug, though with more
 restraint. Vicki hugs Lee Ann, and Michele hugs Pastor. On the front
 row General, Lieutenant, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi shake hands and pat
 one another on the back.*

PASTOR

(To congregation)

We can all rejoice.

*Some in the congregation express their joy by clapping and cheering.
 After a bit Pastor raises his hand for quiet. Loretta quits playing.*

LEE ANN

Pastor Ziegler, Jenny says she wants to

complete the pageant.

PASTOR

*These show people are hard to repress.
Well, if that's what she wants, let's go on
with it.*

(To congregation)

*Won't you be seated again, please? Let's
see, where were we?*

LEE ANN

*I, the innkeeper, just turned away Mary
and Joseph.*

PASTOR

Oh, yes. Is Officer Crejsek finished?

LEE ANN

I'll go get her.

Lee goes out pulpit door.

PASTOR

*Bear with us a moment, friends. Then
we'll pick up where we left off. Loretta,
can we have some music.*

Loretta starts playing "Away in the Manger" (tune "Cradle Song").

NURSERY

Jenny nestles the baby as the carol comes over the loudspeaker. Craig holds Jenny's hand and looks lovingly at the baby. Lee Ann comes in and beckons to Crejsek, who is just rolling down her sleeves. Crejsek picks up her robe and goes out the door. Show another moment with mother, father, and child.

SANCTUARY

On the chancel Crejsek comes through the pulpit door, still fastening her robe. As the music continues, Pastor speaks inaudibly to Crejsek, who crosses over to the lectern. Pastor takes his seat. As the music comes to an end, Crejsek finds her place and starts reading.

CREJSEK

(Reading)

"While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger -- there was no room for them to stay in the inn."

Loretta plays interlude of joyous music (such as "What Child Is This"; tune "Greensleeves") as Roy, Smitty, and Buddy, costumed as biblical shepherds, enter the floor of the sanctuary from the door on the lectern side and move to the bottom of the chancel steps. Music ends.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"There were some shepherds in that part

of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them..."

Michele as an angel approaches them.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid."

The shepherds show fear.

MICHELE (as angel)

"Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's your Savior was born -- Christ the Lord! What will prove it to you is this: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

CREJSEK

"Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God."

Vicki and Harriet off their jackets to reveal dazzling white dresses like Michele's. The three musicians sing the angels chorus, which could be a variation of the following words.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased!"

CREJSEK

Then "the angels went away from them back into heaven."

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet return to their places.

ROY (as shepherd)

"Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, that the Lord has told us." Come on, boys.

Loretta plays music (such as "Masters in This Hall") as Roy, Smitty, and Buddy proceed along a side aisle to the rear of the sanctuary. As this occurs, Vicki puts the manger near the altar and pulls out the stool. Pastor and Lee Ann go out the pulpit door.

NURSERY

Pastor, followed by Lee Ann, pushes a wheel chair into the nursery. Music is heard over the loudspeaker. Lee Ann holds the baby while Craig helps Jenny into the wheel chair. Lee Ann gives baby to Jenny. Craig pushes the wheel chair out the door, across the hall, and into the side room on the pulpit side

SANCTUARY

The shepherds are now walking down the center aisle toward the chancel. The music continues. Pastor enters the chancel, followed by Jenny supported by Craig, and Lee Ann carrying the baby. Craig helps Jenny to the stool beside the manger and then stands behind her. Lee places the baby in the manger and stands on the other side. The shepherds come up. The music ends.

CREJSEK

The shepherds "found Mary and Joseph,
and saw the baby lying in the manger.
When the shepherds saw him, they told
them what the angel had said about this
child."

Roy speaks inaudibly to Jenny and Craig.

CREJSEK

"All who heard it were filled with wonder
at what the shepherds told them."

Roy, Smitty, and Buddy step down from the chancel and speak inaudibly to General, Lieutenant, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi in the front pew, who show their wonder.

CREJSEK

"Mary remembered all these things and
thought deeply about them."

As Crejsek continues, Loretta starts playing (such as "The First Noel" or "As Lately We Watched"), and Roy, Smitty, and Buddy proceed along the center aisle singing praises and exit at rear of the sanctuary.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen. It had been just as the angel had told them."

As music continues and the shepherds exit, Craig helps Jenny to a stool toward the front of the chancel. Lee Ann picks the baby out of the manger and gives him to Craig. She then stands to one side as an observer. Pastor slips on a robe and headdress of a biblical priest. Music ends, and Crejsek starts reading.

CREJSEK

"The time came for Joseph and Mary to do what the Law of Moses commanded and perform the ceremony of purification. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present to the Lord, as written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every first born male shall be dedicated to the Lord.'"

Craig hands the baby to Pastor as priest. As Crejsek continues, Sam as Simeon enters from the lectern door.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Now there was a man living in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. He was a good and God-fearing man" who "had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would

Cont.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple. Seeing the child, Simeon took him in his arms, and gave thanks to God."

Sam takes the baby from Pastor, who stands aside.

SAM (as Simeon)

"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,
and you may let your servant go in
peace.

With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence
of all peoples;

A light to reveal your way to the Gentiles,
and bring glory to your people Israel."

(To Jenny)

"This child is chosen by God for the
destruction and the salvation of many in

Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against, and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your heart."

Sam hands the baby to Jenny and goes to the altar where he kneels in prayer. Pastor returns to chair next to pulpit. As Crejsek continues, Amelia as Anna emerges from the lectern door. She looks at the baby and gives thanks inaudibly. Then she walks down the chancel steps and speaks inaudibly to people in front pew.

CREJSEK

"There was a prophetess named Anna, an old woman who had been married for seven years, and then had been a widow for eighty-four years. She never left the temple; day and night she worshiped God, fasting and praying. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God, and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to redeem Jerusalem."

Sam rises from praying at altar and starts to exit. Amelia heads for exit from sanctuary floor.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"When Mary and Joseph had finished doing all that was required by the law of

the Lord..."

CRAIG

(Interrupting)

Pastor Ziegler, if we can interrupt the pageant again, we'd like you to baptize our baby."

Pastor comes out, still costumed as the priest. Amelia and Sam stop and watch what is happening.

PASTOR

Really? Right now?

JENNY

Yes, we would. We decided before we came back out.

PASTOR

Are you certain? Don't you want to wait and have him baptized with your family present?

JENNY

You are our family.

(Looking especially at Amelia.)

All of you.

PASTOR

Very well. Sam, will you get water from the font?

Sam goes to the font, opens it, reaches below for a bottle of spring water, opens the bottle and pours water in the baptismal basin, lifts the basin out of the font, and holds it for the pastor. Pastor removes his headdress, and Craig and Jenny push back their biblical headcoverings. Amelia returns to the chancel and stands next to Lee Ann to observe the baptism. Michele, Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, and Crejsek move where they can see. Pastor takes the baby from Jenny.

PASTOR

What name shall be given to this child?

CRAIG

Jonathan.

PASTOR

Jonathan. The Hebrew for "God has given."

JENNY

Yes, he has.

PASTOR

And what is the child's surname?

CRAIG

What?

PASTOR

His last name.

CRAIG

(Looking at Jenny)

Me and Jenny will have to talk about that later.

JENNY

(Looking at Craig)

We'll work it out.

PASTOR

Very well.

Pastor takes water from the basin Sam is holding to baptize Jonathan.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Jonathan, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May your life be ever blessed. Amen.

SAM, AMELIA

Amen.

Pastor kisses Jonathan on the head and hands him back to Jenny. Pastor guides Jenny and Craig toward the pulpit door. Lee Ann follows them, Pastor gestures to Crejsek to read, then moves behind

the pulpit, removes his priest costume, and sits down. Sam and Amelia exit through the lectern door, and Michele, Vicki, Harriet, and Loretta return to their places. As Crejsek starts reading, Loretta starts background music which then becomes interlude music.

CREJSEK

"When Mary and Joseph had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their home town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were with him."

Thus, says the Gospel according to Luke.

Crejsek closes her Bible and sits down. Music continues as the players disperse. General, Lieutenant, Dick, Hank, and Hitoshi go out through a door leading to the hallway behind the sanctuary.

SIDE ROOM OFF CHANCEL

In the side room on the pulpit side, Jenny sits in the wheel chair, holding Jonathan with Craig beside her. Lee Ann brings in a portable crib for Jonathan, takes him from Jenny, and places him in the crib. Lee Ann then goes out through the door to the hall. Loretta's music is

heard in the background. Jenny and Craig look at Jonathan.

JENNY

He's a beautiful baby

CRAIG

Yes, he is.

JENNY

You do love me, don't you, Craig?

CRAIG

Yes, I do -- deeply.

JENNY

Then don't ever leave me.

CRAIG

I won't. We're a family now.

Craig kisses Jenny on the forehead and strokes her hair.

SANCTUARY

As the music interlude draws to a close, Pastor rises and goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

So we have Luke's story of Jesus' birth --

and our own drama of Jonathan's birth and baptism. You may feel that this is enough for one night, but we have two more scenes to present. Besides, with the blizzard outside you have no place else to go.

Matthew's version is next. It is also placed in Bethlehem, but Matthew doesn't describe the precise setting. There are some different characters, and you'll note that Joseph has a more prominent role.

The author of the Gospel according to Matthew was interested in linking Jesus'

birth to Jewish prophecy. To get the feel for the intense longing for the Messiah, let us sing "O Come, O Come, Immanuel."

Cont.

PASTOR (Cont.)

It is number 81 in the hymnal. Please rise as we sing the first and last verses.

(To camera)

Those of you viewing at home may join us.

Loretta plays the chorus as introduction. Michele and Harriet play as

the congregation sings. The words appear as subtitles on the screen. Vicki removes the manger and then plays bass if she has time. Sam, Amelia, Roy, Smitty, and Buddy come out a door on the sanctuary floor and sit on the front pew. Sam is dressed as a priest, Roy as a teacher, Amelia remains in Anna's costume, but Smitty and Buddy have on their ranch clothes.

ALL

(Singing)

*"O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*"O come, Desire of Nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel."*

When the singing ends, Pastor beckons the congregation to be seated. He sits down by the pulpit. Crejsek goes to the lectern, opens her Bible, and reads.

CREJSEK

*This was the way Jesus Christ was born.
His mother Mary was engaged to*

Joseph..."

Craig as Joseph comes out from the pulpit door and walks around the chancel in thought as Crejsek continues reading. He then sits down and dozes.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...but before they were married she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a man who always did what was right; but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly, so he made plans to break the engagement secretly. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream."

Vicki as angel comes out of the choir stall, goes to Craig, and wakes him.

VICKI (as angel)

Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus -- because he will save his people from their sins."

Vicki eases back to her seat.

CREJSEK

"Now all this happened in order to make true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and he will be called Emmanuel' (which means, 'God is with us').

"So when Joseph woke up,..."

Craig as Joseph rises and leaves the chancel through the pulpit door.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do and married Mary. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

"Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem."

As the musicians play (such as "We Three Kings"), Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi dressed as wisemen enter the rear of the sanctuary and walk down the center aisle. A star lights over the altar. As they reach the front pew, they turn to the players seated there. As Hank speaks, the music fades out.

HANK

"Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

As Crejsek continues the narration, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi remain in the aisle. Rex as Herod comes out from the pulpit door and goes to the middle of the chancel.

CREJSEK

"When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem."

As Crejsek continues, Sam as chief priest and Roy as teacher come up the steps to join Rex.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law."

REX (as Herod)

"Where will the Messiah be born?"

SAM (as chief priest)

"In the town of Bethlehem, in Judea."

ROY (as teacher)

"This is what the prophet wrote,
 `Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
 you are by no means the least
 among the rulers of Judah;
 for from you will come a leader
 who will guide my people Israel."

As Crejsek continues, Sam and Roy exit through the lectern door. Rex beckons to Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi. They come up to the chancel. The four of them whisper among themselves.

CREJSEK

"So Herod called the visitors from the east
 to a secret meeting and found out from
 them the exact time the star appeared.
 Then he sent them to Bethlehem."

REX (as Herod)

"Go and make a careful search for the
 child, and when you find him let me
 know, so that I may go and worship him
 too."

CREJSEK

"With this they left."

As the musicians play (such as "March of Turene"), Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi walk down the steps. Rex exits through the lectern door. The wisemen take a side aisle to the rear of the sanctuary and walk down the center aisle. Jenny as Mary, carrying Jonathan, and Craig as

Joseph come out through the pulpit door. Jenny sits on a stool at the front of the chancel. Harriet slips out for costume change. When the wisemen are halfway down the center aisle, the narration continues with music in background.

CREJSEK

"On their way they saw the star..."

Hank points to the star over the altar.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...the same one they had seen in the east -- and it went ahead of them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. How happy they were, what joy was theirs, when they saw the star!"

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi show their happiness. As narration continues, they walk up the chancel steps. Music ends.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"They went into the house and saw the child with his mother Mary. They knelt down and worshiped him."

The wisemen kneel and then offer gifts.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Then they opened their bags and offered him presents: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi withdraw and descend the chancel steps. Vicki as angel comes out and stands over them. Jenny and Craig fall asleep.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they went back to their country by another road."

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi hurriedly leave the sanctuary by a door leading to the hallway behind the sanctuary.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph."

Vicki as angel goes to Craig and awakens him.

VICKI (as angel)

"Get up, take the child and his mother and run to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave. Herod will be looking for the child to kill him."

As Crejsek continues, Vicki returns to her place. Craig wakes Jenny, takes Jonathan, and they exit through the pulpit door. Loretta plays

background music. Turn off the star.

CREJSEK

"Joseph got up, took the child and the mother, and left during the night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died. This was done to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'I called my Son out of Egypt.'"

As music continues, Rex as Herod, Roy as teacher, and Sam as chief priest come out through lectern door. Roy and Sam speak inaudibly to Rex, who becomes agitated. Music ends.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"When Herod realized that the visitors from the east had tricked him, he was furious."

Rex as Herod rages. He beckons General and Lieutenant, who come out from the pulpit door, garbed as soldiers, carrying swords. After they reach Rex, Harriet and Lee Ann as young mothers carrying doll babies slip into the chancel through the respective pulpit and lectern doors.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger -- in

accordance with what he had learned from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared."

General waves his sword aggressively. Lieutenant holds his gingerly.

LIEUTENANT

No! No! I can't do it!

GENERAL

You've got to. You agreed to play this part.

LIEUTENANT

No! I can't kill, or even pretend to kill!

Lieutenant throws down his sword and runs out the center aisle.

LIEUTENANT (Cont.)

I won't! I won't! I won't be a killer!

Smitty comes up from the front pew.

SMITTY

That lousy coward. I'll take his place.

Smitty picks up the sword and feels the blade. As this occurs, Harriet and Lee Ann with their doll babies move out farther into the chancel.

GENERAL

(To Crejsek)

Give us our cue again.

CREJSEK

Herod "gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger."

General and Smitty grab the doll babies which Harriet and Lee Ann are holding, throw them to the floor, and stab them. Harriet and Lee Ann fight back, scream, protest, and cry in anguish as their babies are slain. General and Smitty run down the chancel stairs, stab imaginary babies, and proceed along the center aisle, stabbing more babies, and exit at the rear of the sanctuary. As this occurs, Harriet and Lee Ann rush Rex as Herod and fall at his feet weeping. As their weeping abates, Crejsek continues, but the women still sob at Rex's feet. Loretta plays background music (such as "Coventry Carol").

CREJSEK

"In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true:

*`A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter crying and weeping.
Rachel weeps for her children;
she weeps and will not be comforted,
because they are all dead.'"*

Music continues as Rex, Harriet, and Lee Ann exit through the lectern door. Then Jenny, carrying Jonathan, and Craig enter through the pulpit door. They move next to the altar where Jenny sits on a stool and Craig lies on the floor nearby and falls asleep. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"After Herod had died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, in Egypt."

Vicki as angel goes to Craig as Joseph and awakens him.

VICKI (as angel)

"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead."

As narration continues, Craig picks up Jonathan. He and Jenny walk down the chancel steps and to a side door out of the sanctuary. Loretta plays background music.

CREJSEK

"So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and returned to Israel." They went to the province of Galilee and made their home in a town named Nazareth. They "did this to make come true what the prophets had said, 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

Crejsek closes her Bible and sits down. Music continues until Jenny, Craig, and Jonathan have left the sanctuary. Then Pastor steps to the pulpit. Harriet comes out with her young mother costume removed to join the other musicians.

PASTOR

There you have Matthew's version of Jesus's birth in its entirety, reminding us of the violent world in which he lived. It's no wonder that Luke's story is more often read in church.

The third version of the coming of Christ we offer you comes from the gospel of John. It has no baby, neither shepherds nor wisemen. So we will retire most of our players. We'll let Jenny and Jonathan rest in the nursery. I've asked the others to come as themselves and be our choir.

This fine musical group, called "Searching", which the storm blew in, will play for us as they assemble.

As the musicians play (such as "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright", first straight and then a rock variation), the players come up from the front row and out of the two chancel doors, except for Jenny, Craig, and Lieutenant, and take places in the choir stall. Most of them are in

their regular clothes, but a few still are in their pageant costume or part of the costume. Rex helps Hugh, who is intoxicated. Among others, Smitty sits on the front row in the choir stall.

NURSERY

Jonathan is asleep in a crib, Jenny is resting on the day bed, and Craig sits beside her and holds her hand. Music is heard over the speaker.

JENNY

Yes, we really are a family, Craig.

CRAIG

And always will be.

SANCTUARY

The players are all assembled in the choir stall. The music ends. As Pastor addresses the congregation, he turns to the players in the choir stall from time to time. SHOW ANGLES of individual response.

PASTOR

I believe we're all assembled now and can continue.

Whereas Luke and Matthew depicted events transpiring in a period of two to

three years, John chose the time frame of eternity. Instead of people, John deals in concepts, three in particular: The Word, or Logos, which is an abstract idea. Light, a physical phenomenon. And Love, a relationship. The Word, Light, and Love.

As Pastor continues, Buddy takes an unlit candle, lights it from a candle on the altar, and takes it to Pastor.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Of the three, the symbolism of Light is probably the most approachable. From ancient times, people have contrasted light and darkness. Thus, the creation story in Genesis describes an earth without form, covered with darkness. God said, "Let there be light."

Buddy hands Pastor the lighted candle.

PASTOR (Cont.)

And there was light. The Hebrew prophets -- especially Isaiah -- foresaw the Messiah as bringing light into the realm of darkness.

Pastor places the lighted candle in a candleholder on the pulpit.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Many pagan peoples had celebrations following the winter solstice as days begin to lengthen, suggesting the rebirth of the sun.

ANGLE ON
recognized

The early Christian church

ADVENT WREATH December 25, thought to be the day of solstice, as the date of Jesus' birth. This is fitting, for Christ is the Light of the world.

ANGLE ON
Greek,

The Word, or Logos in the original

PASTOR

is a little harder to understand. In using this term, the author of the Gospel of John brought together Hebrew and Hellenistic thought. For the Jews, Logos was the mind of God. For the Greeks, Logos was reason, the guiding force of an orderly universe.

I myself find it more useful to think of the Word as the Essence of God, that is, as God's true nature. The Word -- God's Essence -- pre-existed before the coming of Christ to Earth. In Jesus, the essential nature of God was manifested.

It became flesh and dwelt among us.

As Pastor continues, ANGLE ON players in the choir listening intently.

PASTOR (Cont.)

*What is God's essential nature? It is
Love. An overwhelming love, seeking us
out until it finds us. A forgiving love.
An amazing grace.*

As Pastor continues, PAN congregation. Some nod affirmatively.

PASTOR (Cont.)

*God so loved the world that he gave us
his Son. In Jesus the Christ we can
perceive that the essence of God is Love.
This is our beacon, a kindly light to show
us the way. Through Love, we are able
to tap into eternity.*

*ANGLE ON
of God,*

But, my friends, without the Love

PASTOR

we dwell in darkness.

Pastor blows out candle next to him.

PASTOR (Cont.)

And now let us hear the words of John.

Pastor sits down behind the pulpit. Crejsek rises, goes to the lectern,

and reads -- slowly.

CREJSEK

"Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God.

"From the very beginning, the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him."

Cont.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to man. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has never put it out."

Suddenly all the lights in the sanctuary and chancel go out, leaving only the two lighted candles on the altar and the five candles on the advent wreath. The people gasp. Pastor rises and goes to pulpit.

PASTOR

I guess the storm has taken down the power lines.

As Pastor continues talking, he takes the unlighted candle on the pulpit and lights it from the advent wreath next to the lectern.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Sam, go down and start the emergency generator while we get some more candles lit.

Pastor hands Sam the candle he has lighted, and Sam departs. Pastor reaches under the lectern.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Here are some more candles. And there are a couple of candelabra just outside that door if somebody will bring them in.

Pastor points toward the lectern door.

ROY

Rex, will you give me a hand?

REX

I'll be glad to help, Roy.

Roy and Rex go out. As dialogue continues, General, Hank, Buddy, and Lee Ann take candles from Pastor and light them. Roy and Rex return with the candelabra and place them on the sanctuary floor at either side of the chancel steps. Others light the candles on the candelabra.

PASTOR

Loretta, if you can make your way to the piano, we'll sing a carol while we're getting the candles lit.

LORETTA

What'll it be?

PASTOR

"Silent Night."

LORETTA

*No problem. I'll play it in B flat. That's
the best key for singing*

GENERAL

I'll guide you, Loretta.

*General with a lighted candle guides Loretta toward the piano on the
sanctuary floor below the pulpit.*

HUGH

(Rising)

Let me help, too.

PASTOR

I'm afraid you're too unsteady, my friend.

HUGH

Everybody else has had a part.

PASTOR

Sorry, maybe next year.

As candlelighting continues, Pastor with a lighted candle goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

Friends, let us sing "Silent Night" while we are getting candles lit. The first and third verses. You all know the first verse. The third verse begins: "Silent night, holy night; Son of God loves pure light." You may remain seated.

Loretta plays the last line of "Silent Night" as an introduction. General holds a candle for her as she plays, although she plays without music. Candlelighting continues during the singing. Words appear on the screen as subtitles.

ALL

(Singing)

*"Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*"Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,*

*Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth."*

By the time they are finished singing, all the candles are lit. Lee Ann is standing next to Crejsek at the lectern, holding a candle so that she can read. Others have returned to their places in the choir stall. Some of them, including Smitty, are holding lighted candles. Pastor is at the pulpit with his candle.

PASTOR

Now I believe we can pick up where we left off.

CREJSEK

"The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

"God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light."

Craig comes out the pulpit door, dressed in the rough clothing of John the Baptist, and stands on the top step, illuminated by a candelabra.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"He came to tell them, so that all should hear and believe. He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light.

This was the real light, the light that comes into the world and shines on all men."

Lieutenant, wearing a white robe, comes out the lectern door and stands on the top step, illuminated by the other candelabra.

CREJSEK

"The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth. This was the glory which he received as the Father's only son. John told about him."

CRAIG (as John the Baptist)

"This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'"

CREJSEK

"Out of fullness of his grace, he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. God gave the Law through Moses; but grace and truth came only through Jesus Christ."

LIEUTENANT (as Jesus)

"As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a

pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up on the cross so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

CREJSEK

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

ANGLE ON
the

For God did not send his son into

LIEUTENANT

world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior.

TWO SHOT OF
CRAIG AND
LIEUTENANT

Whoever believes in the Son is not judged; whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in God's only Son.

ANGLE ON
the light

This is how the judgment works:

CREJSEK

has come into the world, but men love the darkness rather than the light, because they do evil things.

ANGLE ON
the

Anyone who does evil things hates

SMITTY

light and will not come to the light,

*lights on, the organ will work again,
Loretta.*

Loretta moves from the piano to the organ.

PASTOR (Cont.)

By the time you play through our closing hymn, Sam should have the lights for the sanctuary connected. It is "Lead, Kindly Light", number 369 in the hymnal. You may remain seated as you sing.

(Looking into camera)

And once again, you folks at home may join us.

Loretta plays through "Lead, Kindly Light" (tune: "Lux Benigna"). Michele, Vicki, and Harriet prepare to join in with their instruments when the congregation sings. Lieutenant and Craig move into the choir stall. The sanctuary lights flicker, then come on and gradually reach their full strength.

During the singing, SHOW ANGLES of various persons as they reveal their emotions in response to the words of the hymn. The words appear on the screen as subtitles.

ALL

(Singing)

*"Lead, Kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;*

Lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene -- one step enough for me.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
 Shouldst lead me on;
 I loved to choose and see my path, but now
 Lead Thou me on!
 I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
 Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on;
 O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone,
 And with the morn, those angels faces smile;
 Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!"

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sing a three part chant of "Nunc Dimittis",
 accompanied by Loretta on the organ.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant
 depart in peace according to Thy word.
 For my mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
 Which Thou has prepared before the face
 of all people;
 To be a light to lighten the Gentiles

and to be the glory of Thy people, Israel."
Amen.

PASTOR

*The pageant is ended. Go in peace.
May the spirit of God's love fill your
hearts and light your way, this day and
for evermore. Amen.*

"Searching" plays a musical postlude, such as rock version of less familiar Christmas carols. The congregation and the players disperse. As credits appear, VARIOUS ANGLES of individuals and groups of players with names of the actors and actresses. The players form informal social groupings in the chancel area, such as Crejsek and Lee Ann talking with Sam and Amelia; General in conversation with Hitoshi, Hank, and Dick; Rex helping Hugh to depart; Lieutenant going to talk with Loretta at organ as she plays; Roy and Buddy chatting with Pastor; Smitty watching the musicians play; Craig entering the nursery to be with Jenny and Jonathan. As further credits appear, Pastor hands Buddy a candlesnuffer and has him put out the candles on the candelabra and the advent wreath. End with CLOSE SHOT of Jonathan sleeping in nursery.

FADE OUT

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

A screenplay by

Howard W. Hallman

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FADE IN

EXT - MUHLENBERG COMMUNITY CHURCH - DAY

A light snow is falling as a man (mid-30s) and a woman (about 30) enter a side door of the education wing at rear of the sanctuary. Snow is just beginning to cover the sidewalk and parking lot, which holds several vehicles. It is late afternoon two days before Christmas.

INT - CHURCH FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Fellowship hall is decorated for Christmas, including a Christmas tree. A tape of Christmas carols plays on a boom box. SANTA CLAUS (SAM in costume) says goodbye MOS to a dozen elementary-age children. The man and woman enter from the outside and join two other women (in their 30s) as they help their children get bundled up to leave.

PASTOR PAUL DAVID ZIEGLER (in his 50s), dressed casually, outgoing, serene as one who has surmounted personal crisis, bids goodbye MOS to the children and their parents. AMELIA (70), crackling, opinionated, but kindly, beams happily as she watches the children leave and says a few words MOS to parents as they depart.

Amelia then begins cleaning up the refreshments table. SAM, terse of speech, still strong and able at 75 after years of hard work, takes off Santa's cap, glasses, and beard, opens the jacket and removes a pillow. Pastor helps Amelia as they talk.

AMELIA

How wonderful to have the children's Christmas party again.

SAM

Yeah, it's been three or four years since we had one.

PASTOR

What's Christmas without children?

SAM

It wouldn't have happened, Pastor, if you hadn't got the Sunday School goin' again after you came here last summer.

PASTOR

It wasn't all that hard, Sam. There are some nice young families in Muhlenberg who were just waiting to be invited.

AMELIA

Pastor, I'm ready to admit that I wasn't thrilled when the church board called you to serve our church, what with your background and all. But now that I'm

gettin' used to you, I'm glad you've come.

PASTOR

Thanks, Amelia. That means a lot coming from you.

AMELIA

I just wished we could have the pageant tomorrow night on Christmas eve like we used to.

PASTOR

I didn't know this church ever put on the Christmas pageant.

SAM

It's been at least ten years since we had one.

AMELIA

We had a pastor who disapproved of "theater", as he called it. Said it was too worldly.

PASTOR

I love theater. I was even in some plays at college.

SAM

Then we started losin' members, so as we didn't have enough people for a cast and

an audience both.

PASTOR

If I'd know you wanted a pageant, I'd have tried to get some folks from St. Mary's to help out, or maybe from the Grange.

AMELIA

Oh, I don't know about gettin' outsiders. They might not have the right spirit.

PASTOR

I'd put on the pageant at the drop of a hat if we could find the players.

The refreshments table is now clear. Pastor and Sam carry it over to a side wall.

EXT - SHEEP-HAULER SEMI-TRAILER ALONG INTERSTATE HIGHWAY
- DAY

The truck, empty of sheep, plunges through heavy, blowing snow along an interstate highway. Both lanes of the highway are plowed, but snow continues to accumulate.

INT - TRUCK CAB - DAY

ROY, a 50 year old rancher, drives. He is weathered, self-assured, used to being in charge, but not overhearing. His son, BUDDY, a husky 14 year old with ruddy cheeks, a boy becoming a man, sits in the middle. SMITTY (31), a ranch hand, nervous with surface cockiness that masks underlying insecurity, is on the outside. Smitty has a black eye. Some wrapped Christmas presents are piled behind them. Country western Christmas music plays on the radio. Snow pounds against the windshield.

SMITTY

Wow! Look at it blow. How can you see the road, Roy?

ROY

Oh, I can see all right.

(beat)

How's your eye, Smitty?

SMITTY

It's better.

Buddy nudges Smitty and laughs.

BUDDY

That cowboy at the stockyard yesterday sure whopped you a good one.

SMITTY

I'd've got him first if he hadn't ducked.

He shouldn't have made fun of our sheep.

ROY

You're new to ranching, Smitty. It's an old feud of the west. The cattlemen think sheep ruin the grass. But we got our rights, too.

An announcer interrupts the music on the truck radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We interrupt this broadcast to give you the latest weather report. A severe storm is now covering all of Nebraska on this day before Christmas. Accumulation of 30 inches is expected in the western part of

Cont.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(Cont.)

the state by midnight. The state highway patrol has advised motorists to avoid traveling on all secondary roads and to stay off Interstate 80 if possible.

Through the frosted window a sign for I-80.

ROY

It's goin' to be hard gettin' home for Christmas.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

*We now return you to our regularly
scheduled program.*

Music starts again on the radio.

BUDDY

What if we don't make it, Dad?

SMITTY

You're not skeered, are you, Buddy-boy?

ROY

*We'll make it, son. I've driven in worse
storms than this.*

*An extra strong blast of snow hits the windshield. Smitty puts up his
arm reflexively.*

INT - INSIDE A FULL SIZE SEDAN - DAY

*HANK ROYAL (45), an African American, casually dressed, drives at
moderate speed along the interstate through the raging blizzard. Hank is
outgoing, accomplished, a natural reconciler even though he likes to argue
with his friend, Dick. HITOSHI MORIKAWA (62), calm, self-contained
but sociable, sits beside Hank on the front seat. DICK STUART (45), a
brilliant thinker with a skeptical outlook, sits in back. Hitoshi and Dick
wear suit and tie under their overcoats.*

A bag of Christmas presents is beside Dick. The car radio plays a tape of a black gospel choir singing Christmas music, such as "Go Tell It to the Mountain".

HANK

It seems to be getting worse.

HITOSHI

Yesterday at the University when you invited me to travel with you, I had no idea the weather would be like this.

HANK

No, me either.

DICK

If it wasn't for your damn fear of flying, Hank, we could've left Lincoln yesterday evening. We'd be in Vail with our families right now.

HANK

Well, Dick, we could've driven several hours last night if you hadn't wanted to do last minute Christmas shopping.

HITOSHI

At any rate, I'm looking forward to an

American Christmas with you and your families.

DICK

If we get there. We should've stopped in Grand Island until the storm lets up, like I said.

HANK

Whatever happens, I'm glad you came with us, Dr. Morikawa. I'll give us a chance to learn more about your work in space astronomy.

HITOSHI

And I want to hear more about the issues you were debating at the Space Technology Forum.

DICK

This storm proves my point that Hank's push for solar heating is impractical.

HANK

I never claimed one hundred percent, Dick. Just as much as possible. Anyway it's a surer bet than your power in the sky.

HITOSHI

His what?

DICK

The power satellite.

HANK

It'll never work.

DICK

It's a better way to go than your "small is beautiful" approach.

HITOSHI

Do you gentlemen argue like this all the time?

HANK

Just like brothers.

A mini-bus passes them on the left. "SEARCHING" is painted on its side.

DICK

There's a foolish driver.

The minibus eases into the right lane and splashes their car.

INT - MINIBUS - DAY

The six passengers are members of a rock group known as "Searching". Craig (25), equipment manager, shaggy and aggressive, drives. The others are Michele (24), sleek, brash but accomplished, as leader on the bossy side; Vicki (22), pert, assertive, mischievous; Loretta (21), an intellectual, shiest of the group; Harriet (23, an African American, very steady, outgoing; and Jenny (19), almost nine months pregnant, fatigued and tense but a lovely countenance.

Rock music plays on the tape deck. Vicki has an unconnected electric guitar and improvises lightly with the music.

JENNY

I wish you wouldn't drive so fast, Craig.
It makes me awfully nervous.

CRAIG

I know what I'm doing, Jenny.

VICKI

Where do you think we'll get today?

CRAIG

We've got motel reservations in Cheyenne.

HARRIET

I'm going to hate being on the road for
the second Christmas in a row. I miss
my family this time of year.

VICKI

I know what you mean, Harriet. It's the best time of year for our family back home.

CRAIG

Not for mine. We usually spend the holidays bickering.

LORETTA

I've already missed Hanukkah with my folks.

JENNY

Christmas was great when I was a kid. But I haven't had a good Christmas in six years.

MICHELE

Like it or not, if we're going become the most famous rock band in America, we've got to go where the business is. If we don't get to Vegas by the 27th, we'll lose our next gig.

JENNY

I'll do Vegas, Michele, if this kid hasn't come. But after that you'll have to get another singer.

MICHELE

You gonna stay in Vegas?

JENNY

Yes, I think so. I figure I can get a job singing with some house band.

Michele gestures toward Craig.

MICHELE

And is he gonna stay with you?

CRAIG

I haven't decided.

JENNY

He's just a roadie. I can make it on my own.

LORETTA

I can see there's trouble ahead.

Craig passes a car with "U.S. Government" on the door.

VICKI

Take it easy, Craig. I'd rather be tardy than absent.

Craig continues at the same speed.

INT - INSIDE U.S. GOVERNMENT SEDAN - DAY

REX HANOVER (55), regional director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), a solid citizen, friendly and caring underneath a gruff exterior, drives along the interstate through the blizzard. HUGH BATES (about 60), president of a drug store chain, obsessive for business success, troubled, a borderline alcoholic, sits beside him. Rex wears a flannel shirt under a heavy jacket. Hugh has a loosened tie under his overcoat. The car radio plays light-pop Christmas music.

As the "Searching" minibus passes them, it splashes snow and ice on their windshield.

HUGH

What kind of crazy driver is that?

REX

Probably somebody trying to get home for Christmas.

HUGH

What about us, Rex? Are we going to make it to your house by nighttime?

REX

Lots of times I've driven from Omaha to Denver in a day, Hugh. But this time, I'm not so sure.

HUGH

It was sure nice of you to invite me for Christmas. Since none of my family will have me.

REX

I'm sorry about that, Hugh. When I ran into you in the hotel lobby last night, I could see that you were lonely.

Hugh takes out a pocket flask and starts to take a sip. Rex reaches over to stop him.

REX

You'd better lay off that stuff. It's not good for you.

Hugh brushes off Rex's hand and takes a drink from the flask.

HUGH

It helps kill the pain.

Hugh wipes his mouth.

HUGH (Cont.)

You don't know how rough it is in the business world, Rex. You and your government job.

REX

It's not as easy as you think. Half the people in the west hate us in the BLM, and the other half couldn't care less. We catch a lot of flak in the regional office.

HUGH

It's because you control so much of the land. You just have to ignore 'em. Like I do the small town druggists who hate the competition from Bates Discount Drugs.

REX

It's not the same, Hugh. We're out here to protect the land, not curtail free enterprise.

HUGH

They see you as an absentee landlord and despise you for it. You'll never change that.

REX

I'd like to try.

Rex drives on as Hugh slumps into silence.

EXT - BRIGHT RED SPORTS COUPE ALONG INTERSTATE HIGHWAY -
DAY

Two occupants sit in the front seat as the car struggles through the raging blizzard. The road is getting worse.

INT - INSIDE SPORTS COUPE - DAY

AIR FORCE MAJOR BOOMER SLATTERLY (35), handsome and trim, very macho, drives. LIEUTENANT BERNIE FRANCIS (25), ill at ease as a soldier but basically a nice guy, sits beside him. Both are dressed in military uniforms with topcoats.

As they drive along the interstate, the windshield wiper works at high speed but can barely keep up with the falling snow. The car radio plays light rock of the '80s.

BERNIE

Boomer, I believe that this is the worse stuff I've ever traveled in. And I grew up in Wyoming.

BOOMER

Me, too, Bernie. It makes me long for my old base in Saudi Arabia.

BERNIE

During the Gulf War, you mean?

BOOMER

Yeah. I had 17 missions.

BERNIE

I'm glad I'm in communications. I don't think I would like to fly in combat.

BOOMER

It's not much. After we knocked out all of their air defense, it was sorta like practice runs.

BERNIE

What does your wife think about it? Doesn't she worry?

BOOMER

You thinking of getting married?

BERNIE

If I can find the right girl.

BOOMER

I suppose she worries. But she's an army brat. Her father was in Vietnam. So she's used to it.

BERNIE

So was my dad. Air Force.

BOOMER

Then you'll have lots to talk about when I drop you with your folks in Cheyenne.

BERNIE

I hope you get to Laramie before the roads close down.

BOOMER

Me, too. I'm glad my wife and kids got a two day start and are already there with my parents.

Ahead OFFICER HELEN CREJSEK (36) of the Nebraska Highway Patrol waves a flashlight lantern and motions them to stop. Beyond her are a snowplow, her patrol car, the ranchers' semi-trailer, the "Searching" minibus, Hank's and Rex's vehicles.

Boomer stops his car and rolls down the window as Crejsek approaches.

CREJSEK

Hello, I'm Officer Crejsek of the Highway Patrol. We're forming a convoy to follow a snowplow from here to North Platte.

BOOMER

How far's that?

CREJSEK

About 60 miles. The road's pretty bad, but headquarters in Lincoln says to keep traffic moving as long as possible.

BOOMER

I'm glad for that. We're trying to get home for Christmas.

CREJSEK

Lots of folks are. You all have your own destinations, but you'll never survive unless we travel together.

BOOMER

You don't have to tell me that. It's basic military doctrine.

CREJSEK

I'm in charge. Okay?

BOOMER

Okay.

CREJSEK

I'm going to follow the snowplow. The semi's next to break the wind for the rest of you. You can bring up the rear. Got a car phone?

BOOMER

Of course.

Boomer holds up his car phone.

CREJSEK

*If anything happens to any of the others,
let me know. You can dial pound-77.*

BOOMER

Will do.

CREJSEK

Okay. Let's go.

*Crejsek trudges off past the other cars and heads for the patrol car.
Boomer rolls up the window.*

EXT - ALONG INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY

*With the snowplow leading the way, the procession of patrol car, semi,
minibus, and cars creep forward.*

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - MUHLENBERG COMMUNITY CHURCH - DAY

*Howling snow slams against the church, now surrounded by a foot of snow.
Mounds of snow are piled around the parking lot. On the lot are a pickup
truck with snowplow attached and a sports utility vehicle.*

Sam is pushing a snowblower along the sidewalk leading to a side door. A pair of lighted windows are next to the door.

INT - CHURCH OFFICE - DAY

Most of the furnishings are old. One door leads outside, and another into the church interior. Amelia places a typed sheet of paper onto a small photocopier. Pastor, wearing a plaid flannel shirt, sits at a work table.

PASTOR

It was brave of you to come over this afternoon, Amelia.

AMELIA

I've been doing the bulletin for 19 years without missin' a week. Anyway Sam gave me a lift.

PASTOR

He's doing a heroic job keeping the parking lot plowed and the sidewalks cleared.

AMELIA

The younger men oughta be doin' that.

PASTOR

Sam insists.

AMELIA

Pastor, how many bulletins should I run?

PASTOR

Fifty should be enough.

AMELIA

Do you think that many will come tomorrow on Christmas morning in this weather?

PASTOR

The storm ought to be over by then. Anyway most everybody has four wheel drive. They thrive on the challenge.

Amelia enters the number on the photocopier and presses the print button. Copies start coming from the machine.

The outside door opens, and Sam enters, covered with snow. He stomps his boots, brushes snow from his jacket, takes off his hat and jacket, and throws them on a chair.

PASTOR

I don't what we'd do without you, Sam.

SAM

If I don't plow every hour or so, we could

*never get the lot plowed for church
tomorrow.*

AMELIA

It sounds like it's gettin' worse.

SAM

*I think it's the last hard blast before the
end.*

PASTOR

Let's hope so.

SAM

*As I was comin' in, a patrol car pulled
into our lot.*

AMELIA

I wonder what that's about?

There is heavy knocking on the outside door.

PASTOR

We'll soon find out.

*Pastor opens the door, letting in a burst of snow. Officer Crejsek enters,
stomps her boots, and brushes off snow.*

PASTOR

Come in, my friend.

CREJSEK

I'm Officer Helen Crejsek of the state highway patrol. I'm leading a convoy west. We were trying to make North Platte, but the snow's so deep we can't go any farther.

SAM

I'm not surprised.

CREJSEK

There's no room for them at the motel out by the interstate. Can you offer us shelter?

PASTOR

Of course we can. How many are you?

CREJSEK

Must be 15 to 20.

PASTOR

We have plenty of room.

CREJSEK

Good. I'll let them know.

Crejsek takes a mobile phone from her jacket and dials a number.

CREJSEK

Roadblock, this is Officer Crejsek. I've found a church where we can stay. Send them up Main Street. They'll see my flashing lights in the church parking lot. Better tell the semi to park on the street.

PASTOR

They can use the next door into the fellowship hall. I'll turn on the lights.

CREJSEK

I'll meet them on the parking lot.

Crejsek goes out into the raging storm.

AMELIA

But we just got fellowship hall cleaned up after the Christmas party.

PASTOR

All the better. Sam, get on the phone and call our people -- at least those who live nearby. Have them bring food, blankets, pillows, towels.

SAM

Right away.

Sam goes to the desk, sits down, and starts dialing the phone.

PASTOR

Amelia, will you make some coffee? I believe there's some in the kitchen.

AMELIA

Yes, but it belongs to the women's society.

PASTOR

We can repay them later.

Amelia and Pastor exit through the door into the hallway.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Pastor Ziegler and Amelia enter fellowship hall. Pastor turns on lights, adjusts the thermostat to turn up the heat, and unlocks the exterior door. Amelia walks through fellowship hall to the kitchen at the opposite end, enters, and turns on the lights.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Amelia takes a large coffee urn from the counter, puts in water and coffee, and plugs it in.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL

Crejsek opens the door from the outside, enters, and tosses a duffelbag against the wall. Pastor stands nearby, and Amelia watches from the kitchen doorway.

CREJSEK

Here's my hearty band.

PASTOR

They're all welcome.

Crejsek stands near the door. Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi enter.

PASTOR

*Come out of the cold and darkness into
light and warmth.*

Hitoshi bows.

HITOSHI

Thank you kindly.

Pastor bows awkwardly. Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi carry suitcases across fellowship hall.

Rex enters, supporting Hugh, who is a little unsteady from drinking.

PASTOR

(to Rex)

May I help?

REX

No, I've got him.

Hugh staggers slightly as he and Rex cross the hall with their suitcases and locate next to Dick, Hank, and Hitoshi.

The rock group enters: Michele, Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, and Jenny supported by Craig. They carry backpacks and duffelbags. Amelia comes out farther from the kitchen doorway.

JENNY

*I didn't think we would ever make it,
Craig.*

CRAIG

I told you we would, Jenny.

Pastor notices Jenny's condition.

PASTOR

*How are you, my dear? There's a sofa in
the office if you'd like to lie down.*

JENNY

Yes, I believe I would.

PASTOR

Amelia, would you show her where it is?

AMELIA

Come with me, child.

Amelia leads Jenny toward the hallway connecting with the office. Craig follows, carrying their luggage.

JENNY

Craig, you don't have to stay with me.

CRAIG

I want to, Jenny.

JENNY

That's not what you said a while ago.

CRAIG

I do for now.

JENNY

You think you can choose whether to come or go. Just like my old man.

Jenny, Amelia, and Craig enter the hallway. Loretta notices a piano in the middle of the end wall near the hall doorway. She leads Michele, Vicki, and Harriet there. They throw their gear next to the piano.

Boomer and Bernie come in, followed by Roy, Buddy, and Smitty.

BOOMER

See, Bernie, I told you we'd make it.

PASTOR

Make yourselves at home.

Boomer, Bernie, Roy, Buddy, and Smitty toss their duffelbags against a wall.

CREJSEK

That's the last of 'em.

Pastor goes to center of room.

PASTOR

(To all)

*I would like to welcome all of you to the
Muhlenberg Community Church. I'm
Pastor Paul Ziegler.*

ROY

We shore appreciate your shelter.

PASTOR

*I know its tough on you getting stranded
the day before Christmas, but we'll do our
best to make you comfortable.*

HANK

We're just glad we got here safely.

PASTOR

*We have coffee perking in the kitchen.
We're calling members to bring in food
and bedding.*

BUDDY

(To Smitty)

I sure could use something to eat.

PASTOR

*Please make yourselves at home. The
restrooms are down the hall. You can
use the phone in the office if you want to.
If anyone needs anything special, please
let me know.*

The travelers unfold chairs, take off their outer garments, and settle in.

*Crejsek slumps onto a chair near the door and stares at the floor. Pastor
goes over to her.*

PASTOR

*Officer Crejsek, don't look so
downhearted. You just led all these folks
to safety.*

CREJSEK

*I was thinking of my family back in
Grand Island. The road is closed to the
east as well as westbound. I won't get
home for Christmas.*

PASTOR

I'm awfully sorry. Do you have children?

CREJSEK

A daughter age seven and a four year old boy. My husband will have to be Santa alone.

PASTOR

They'll miss you as much as you'll miss them. Though it won't be the same, we'll celebrate Christmas here together.

Loretta tries out the piano with scales, arpeggios, and some light rock. She and Harriet have "Searching" on the back of their jeans jackets.

Smitty saunters over to the musicians, and Buddy follows him. Smitty sits next to Loretta on the piano bench and flirts with her. While still playing, Loretta slides along the bench and nudges him off. Buddy laughs.

Pastor observes this as he goes through the doorway leading to the hallway and the office.

INT - CHURCH OFFICE - DAY

Jenny sits on the sofa with Craig beside her. Amelia sits nearby. Sam is at the desk, completing a phone call MOS and writing on a notepad. Pastor enters.

PASTOR

Are you comfortable, Jenny? Can I get you anything?

JENNY

No, thank you. I just want to sit here a while and warm up.

CRAIG

Where are we, anyway?

PASTOR

In Muhlenberg -- about 20 miles east of North Platte.

CRAIG

Wow! We've come only 40 miles in two hours.

(beat)

Have you heard anything about the road conditions?

PASTOR

The highway is closed for the next 150 miles to the west, both to Cheyenne and Denver. Also, eastbound.

CRAIG

You mean we're stuck in this dump?

JENNY

Craig, that's not very polite.

PASTOR

Looks like it. We'll do our best to make it a happy Christmas for you.

JENNY

That'd be a change.

PASTOR

How's that?

JENNY

Like last year. On Christmas our band played a job in a crummy bar in Phoenix.

CRAIG

That was my third month as sound engineer.

JENNY

The year before, just before I became vocalist with the band, I was alone in L.A.

AMELIA

Alone?

JENNY

Yeah. I'd run away from home 'cause
Mom and me were arguing all the time.

AMELIA

Where did you stay?

JENNY

Here and there.

PASTOR

What about your dad?

JENNY

Oh, when I was 13, he walked out on
Mom and me and my younger brother.
Ran off with a younger woman.

PASTOR

What a shame. That must've been
difficult for all of you.

JENNY

It was.

AMELIA

This Christmas will be better. I promise.

JENNY

I hope so.

Sam picks up his notepad.

SAM

*Pastor, the Franklins are bringing in
spiced ham, the Kruegers some
homemade sausage, and the Andersons
pressed veal.*

AMELIA

Their Christmas specialties.

SAM

*Plus homemade bread and cookies,
vegetables, and milk. Also blankets,
pillows, and sleeping bags.*

PASTOR

That's great.

SAM

They'll be here soon.

AMELIA

*I'd better meet them in the kitchen so
they don't mess things up.*

Amelia gets up and heads for the door.

PASTOR

*Keep on calling, Sam. I'll check whether
the folks out there need anything.*

Pastor rises and follows Amelia to the door. They depart.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

*Amelia and Pastor enter from the hall and pause in the doorway.
They see the travelers dispersed around fellowship hall.*

*Nearby clustered around the piano are Smitty, Buddy, Michele, Vicki,
Harriet, and Loretta, who continues playing ditties.*

*On the far side of the room Roy and Rex stand together talking. Hugh
sits nearby, looking around bleary-eyed. Beyond them in the far
corner Dick, Hank, Hitoshi, Boomer, Bernie, and Crejsek sit around a
table (pulled out from the wall where Pastor and Sam left it).*

PASTOR

*What do you think, Amelia? It looks like
the storm blew in the cast for our
pageant.*

AMELIA

An unlikely bunch.

*Amelia walks to the kitchen. Pastor strolls past the young folks around
the piano. They pay him little heed.*

SMITTY

(to Vicki)

*Sweetie, how about you and me exploring
the rest of the building?*

VICKI

I'd rather stay where I'm safe.

*Pastor smiles as he passes. He walks on toward the table where Dick,
Hank, Hitoshi, Boomer, Bernie, and Crejsek sit.*

*Dick has loosened his tie but still wears a suit jacket. Hitoshi remains in
suit and tie. The officers wear military dress uniforms with name tags
("Major Slatterly" and "Lt. Francis"). Boomer has a pilot's badge and
three rows of ribbons, Bernie one row.*

HANK

*Oh, come on, Boomer, you can't be
serious about a military base in space.*

BOOMER

*I'm totally serious. We better get one
before the Russians or Chinese do.*

PASTOR

*Sorry to interrupt, but I wonder how you
folks are doing.*

HANK

We're warm again.

PASTOR

*Food is on the way. Coffee's perking.
Do you need anything else?*

DICK

Not now, thank you.

On beyond them inside the kitchen Amelia raises the doors over the serving counter between the kitchen and fellowship hall.

PASTOR

You folks came in so fast, I didn't catch your names except for Officer Crejsek.

CREJSEK

Helen's the name now that we're inside.

BOOMER

I'm known as Boomer. The lieutenant is Bernie.

DICK

I'm Richard Stuart, and this is Henry Royal. We're from MIT. And this is Dr. Hitoshi Morikawa, a distinguished astronomer from Japan.

HANK

*Dick and I are on a national tour
debating approaches to outer space.*

DICK

*I favor a manned space station and
sending men to Mars.*

CREJSEK

Don't leave out women.

DICK

Sure, if they can qualify.

HANK

*I prefer unmanned satellites and robot
landings -- neuter general.*

CREJSEK

*We use communication satellites to cover
the state.*

BOOMER

*If we had a base in space, I'd love to fly a
space fighter.*

CREJSEL

Star Wars Luke!

PASTOR

And what about you, Dr. Morikawa.

HITOSHI

You can call me Hitoshi, as people do in the States.

PASTOR

Fine, Hitoshi.

HITOSHI

As an astronomer, I love the Hubble space telescope. I wish we had another one even more powerful. But I don't see a need for men in space.

BERNIE

I weigh in for small scale projects. It's the big projects that get us in trouble. Like the A-bomb. It should've never been built.

BOOMER

How can you say that, Bernie? Our mission is nuclear deterrence.

Hitoshi lowers his head and rubs his forehead.

HANK

What's the matter, Hitoshi?

HITOSHI

I was a boy of ten living about eight miles from Hiroshima when the first A-bomb exploded. The mushroom cloud, the wounded streaming into our village, I'll never forget.

BOOMER

*It was regretful, but it had to be done.
War is war.*

BERNIE

But did it? Why didn't we bomb an uninhabited island to show them the power of our new weapon?

HITOSHI

Yes, I think our leaders would have surrendered.

BOOMER

That's an old argument. We learned at the Academy that President Truman considered that possibility but rejected it. He knew we had only the two bombs ready.

(to Hitoshi)

If you hadn't surrendered, many more lives would've been lost in an invasion.

BERNIE

We should've tried.

CREJSEK

When I think of my children, I wish we could get rid of all the bombs and missiles in the world.

BOOMER

We can't. We have to be concerned about Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and future outlaw nations.

PASTOR

Well, it seems I've walked into a hornet's nest.

HANK

We're not the only ones having heated discussion.

Hank points toward Roy and Rex, standing not far away, engaged in vociferous argument.

REX

And I say it isn't so.

Pastor rises.

PASTOR

I guess I better go see what that's about.

Beyond the serving counter, two men come in carrying provisions through the outside kitchen door as snow blows in. Amelia directs them to put their load on a counter. Crejsek notices this happening.

CREJSEK

Looks like some food's arriving. I'd better see if the lady needs some help.

Crejsek goes into the kitchen.

Pastor approaches Roy and Rex. Hugh sits nearby and is a little out of it.

ROY

Howdy, Pastor. I'm Roy McKean of Pathfinder, Wyoming.

PASTOR

I figured you live west of here.

ROY

Rex and I were having a good talk about huntin' and fishin' and the mountains. Then I found out that he's a big shot in the BLM.

REX

I'm Rex Hanover, regional director in Denver.

ROY

He's the one who's tightening the screws on me with all of those damn regulations and cutting back on grazing land.

REX

I'm sorry if our regulations have inconvenienced you, Roy.

ROY

Inconvenienced, hell. You're puttin' me outa business.

REX

We're just trying to protect the range from overuse.

ROY

Then how come the oil and gas companies are gettin' them leases.

REX

It's all done through competitive bidding.

ROY

Yeah. Rigged for the big boys. I've been workin' on ranches since '68, and it's got worse every year.

PASTOR

I'm fairly new around here, but I have had heard a lot of talk about the Bureau of Land Management.

REX

We're doing what Congress tells us to do.

ROY

We're goin' change that.

HUGH

(Sluggishly)

Change what?

REX

We're just talking a politics, Hugh.

(beat)

Pastor, this is Hugh Bates. He's head of Bates Discount Drugs.

PASTOR

Please to meet you, Hugh. I've been in your store in North Platte. You've got good prices.

HUGH

The lowest and best.

PASTOR

Would you like some coffee, Hugh? It's ready now in the kitchen.

HUGH

Yes, I believe I would.

REX

Me, too. What about you, Roy?

ROY

No, not just now.

Rex and Hugh, a little unsteady on his feet, go to the kitchen. Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi follow them. Beyond the serving counter Amelia serves them coffee.

Pastor remains with Roy.

PASTOR

Was that your son who came in with you, Roy?

ROY

Yep. He goes as Buddy. The other one's Smitty, my ranch hand, the one with the shiner.

The young people on the other side of fellowship hall burst out with laughter.

PASTOR

*I've only been in these parts six months,
but I'm coming to like the wide open
space.*

ROY

It's the best place to live.

PASTOR

Good place to raise a family.

ROY

*I suppose. But I still worry about my
boy. There's lots can harm a youngster
these days.*

Roy looks over at Buddy and the musicians.

PASTOR

He seems like a good kid.

ROY

*He can take care of himself with the guys.
It's the gals I'm concerned about.*

Pastor looks over at the young people.

PASTOR

*I bet they'd like to play pingpong and
some other games.*

ROY

Yeah. That'd keep 'em occupied.

Pastor and Roy walk to where Michele, Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, Smitty, and Buddy are gathered around the piano. Pastor speaks to them MOS, then leads Smitty and Buddy to the door of the storage room. He opens the door and turns on the light as they enter.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Boomer and Bernie enter from fellowship hall. Crejsek, Hank, Dick, Hitoshi, Rex, and Hugh are there, drinking coffee. Amelia hands a mug of coffee to Boomer. She starts filling a another mug for Bernie.

BERNIE

No coffee for me, thank you. It's bad for my ulcer.

AMELIA

We've got some milk in the refrigerator. Would you like some?

BERNIE

Yes, please.

Amelia takes milk from the refrigerator and pours a glass for Bernie.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Harriet and Vicki stand near the door to the storage room. Roy is nearby. Smitty and Buddy carry a folded pingpong table out of the storage room and set it up. Pastor comes out with the net, paddles, and balls. Smitty and Buddy attach the net.

HARRIET

(to Smitty and Buddy)

Vicki and I challenge you to a game.

SMITTY

I ain't played for a long time. But you're on.

They start playing. Harriet and Vicki are better than Smitty and Buddy, who keep getting in each other's way.

Pastor and Roy watch. Michele and Loretta come over from the piano to join them.

PASTOR

Hello, I didn't catch your names when you came in.

MICHELE

I'm Michele. I play lead guitar with our band.

LORETTA

She's the boss.

ROY

I'm Roy. Buddy's dad.

LORETTA

Nice to meet you.

Michele gestures to Loretta standing next to her.

MICHELE

This is Loretta, our keyboard artist.

ROY

I figured that.

Michele points first to Vicki and then to Harriet.

MICHELE

Vicki plays bass and Harriet drums.

PASTOR

What do you play? I mean, what's your style.

LORETTA

I call it light rock with a new age message.

Harriet hits a hard smash past Buddy.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Boomer and Bernie look out over the serving counter into fellowship hall, across to the pingpong game.

BOOMER

Bernie, shall we join them out there?

BERNIE

Sure, but I'm not very good at table tennis.

BOOMER

I just want to talk to the girls.

They exit the kitchen.

INT -FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Boomer and Bernie come out of the kitchen. As they walk across the room toward the pingpong table, Boomer slips off his wedding ring and puts it in his pocket. They come up to Pastor, Roy, Michele, and Loretta. Roy slips away to the kitchen.

BOOMER

Hi, ladies, Pastor. May we join you?

PASTOR

(to Boomer)
Of course. This is Michele and Loretta.
(to the young women)
These officers go by Boomer and Bernie.

Boomer slides close to Michele.

MICHELE
Hi. You're certainly well decorated,
Boomer.

Michele runs her fingers over Boomer's row of ribbons.

BOOMER
I've seen action in a fighter-bomber.

Boomer points to several ribbons.

BOOMER (Cont.)
This one's for service in Korea. This one
is for the Gulf War. And this one
represents the distinguished flying cross.

LORETTA
What about you, Bernie?

BERNIE
I'm in communications.

He runs a finger over his ribbons.

BERNIE (Cont.)

These are just for basic training stuff, like marksmanship.

BOOMER

Would you girls like some coffee? There's some food in there, too.

MICHELE

I'm ready for something.

LORETTA

Me, too.

Michele and Boomer, Loretta and Bernie walk in pairs to the kitchen.

Amelia comes out of the kitchen carrying a glass of milk and a sandwich on a plate. She walks by Pastor.

AMELIA

I'm taking these to Jenny.

PASTOR

I'm glad you're looking after her. I wonder if she would play Mary in the pageant.

AMELIA

You're sure you want these folks to put on the pageant? As far as I can tell, there ain't a church-goer among them. Except maybe that fellow they call Rex and the Negro.

PASTOR

Well, most of the original cast weren't church-goers either: a bunch of grubby shepherds in the field, some itinerant astrologers, an innkeeper who wouldn't accommodate a pregnant woman, a puppet king subservient to Rome.

AMELIA

But Mary and Joseph were God-fearing folk.

PASTOR

True. But don't forget: Joseph needed a push. And what really do we know about Mary? Except that she was a Jewish village girl who became a teenage mother.

AMELIA

I'm not impressed with this Craig, if you're thinking of him as Joseph.

PASTOR

We'll have to see.

Amelia, carrying the milk and sandwich, walks on to the hallway leading to the office. Pastor goes to storage room.

Crejsek comes out of the kitchen with a coffee mug and goes to the pingpong table where Vicki, Harriet, Smitty, and Buddy play.

Roy, Dick, Hank, Hitoshi, Rex, and Hugh come out of the kitchen with mugs of coffee and sandwiches on plates. They sit at the table where they were previously. Pastor comes up with a pile of boxes containing checkers, dominoes, and Chinese checkers.

PASTOR

If you're interested in some light recreation, here's some games for you.

HANK

Good idea, after we finish our snack.

Pastor goes into kitchen.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Pastor enters. Michele and Boomer, getting quite chummy, make sandwiches together. Loretta and Bernie also make sandwiches but are more diffident in their relationship. Craig comes in.

CRAIG

Amelia says food has arrived.

PASTOR

Please help yourself.

Craig gets coffee from the urn and starts making a sandwich. Vicki enters.

VICKI

Helen took my place. I've been delegated to get something cold to drink.

PASTOR

There's some punch in the refrigerator, left over from yesterday's children's party.

VICKI

That should do.

Vicki takes a partially filled gallon of punch from the refrigerator, finds five glasses, fills them with punch, and puts the glasses on a tray. Pastor fills a mug with coffee and finds a stool to sit on.

CRAIG

(to Boomer and Bernie)

So you guys are Air Force. Where's your base?

BERNIE

Offutt, near Omaha.

BOOMER

*We're part of the U.S. Strategic
Command. Used to be known as SAC,
the Strategic Air Command.*

CRAIG

*Isn't that the outfit that chooses targets
for nuclear bombs?*

BOOMER

That's part of our job.

VICKI

*So you're the big brave men who will push
the buttons to wipe out a thousand cities
and kill millions of people to save our way
of life.*

BOOMER

I wouldn't describe it quite like that.

VICKI

*But just the same, Major Slaughter, you'd
drop the H-bomb if they told you to.*

BOOMER

The name's Slatterly.

VICKI

Oh, sorry.

BOOMER

Our mission is peace.

CRAIG

Even if you have to go to war to preserve it.

BOOMER

You'll be glad to have us if Russia rearms, North Korea starts trouble, or Iraq acts up again.

CRAIG

What about you, Lieutenant? You're awfully quiet.

BERNIE

The truth is, the ROTC paid my way through college. I made a contract to serve, and I'm serving.

VICKI

Forget it, man. Tell 'em to stuff it.

BERNIE

I'm obligated.

VICKI

No one's obligated to anyone but himself.

BOOMER

Oh, a representative of the "me" generation.

CRAIG

Me, schmee. That's what I learned growing up on Long Island. Everyone was out for number one.

BERNIE

There oughta be a better way.

CRAIG

If there is, I sure haven't found it.

PASTOR

Maybe a better way is out there searching for you right now.

VICKI

That doesn't make sense.

Vicki leaves the kitchen, carrying the tray with glasses of punch.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Dick, Hitoshi, Rex, Hugh, and Roy sit at the table, finishing their snack. Hank sets up a checkers board at the end nearest the kitchen.

HANK

Would anyone like to play checkers?

ROY

I haven't played since I was a boy, but I'm willing to give it a try.

HANK

We're not playing for money, Roy, so you don't have to hustle me.

Chuckles from the men. Roy takes a chair opposite Hank, and they start playing checkers.

Michele and Boomer, arm in arm, and Loretta come out of the kitchen. Loretta goes to the piano and starts playing again. Michele and Boomer go to the pingpong table and take the place of Buddy and Smitty. Vicki and Crejsek are partners at the other end. Harriet watches.

Sam comes out from the hallway with a paper in his hand and crosses fellowship hall to the kitchen.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Pastor, Craig, and Lieutenant sit around a counter, drinking coffee and sharing a plate of cookies. Sam enters and hands Pastor the paper.

SAM

Pastor, here's the rest of the list of food and bedding that's coming.

PASTOR

You've done a good job, Sam.

SAM

Mrs. Schmidt is coming in about ten minutes with a casserole, pie, and sleeping bags. She doesn't want to get out of her car, so she'll honk when she gets here.

PASTOR

That's okay. I'll recruit somebody to go out and meet her.

Dick comes in with his coffee mug and fills it from the urn.

CRAIG

Pastor Ziegler, Amelia told Jenny that

you want us to put on a Christmas pageant for you. Is that right?

PASTOR

This church used to have a pageant every year on Christmas eve -- depicting the birth of Jesus. But it's been ten years.

(beat)

As you folks came in a while ago, I thought maybe there's the making of a good cast.

CRAIG

Oh come off it, Reverend. You're not going to get us to play your fairy tale of angels, a virgin, a bright star, and kings from the East.

PASTOR

Why not? It's a beautiful story, full of great truth. Besides, you're stuck here -- in this dump, as you call it -- with nothing to do.

CRAIG

It'd be better for our group to improvise a concert.

PASTOR

We can work your music into the pageant.

DICK

You're going to ask us to be in your pageant?

PASTOR

That's what I've been thinking.

DICK

I can't speak for the others, but I'll have no part in it.

SAM

Why not?

DICK

The Christmas story is an outmoded superstition.

PASTOR

It remains a beautiful story for our age.

DICK

How can you say that? In this day of modern science and precision engineering, these old folk tales are hopelessly out of date. Angel chorus -- that's a joke. And a star standing still -- preposterous.

BERNIE

But I've read somewhere that astronomers believe that there was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter during the last year of Herod's reign. Couldn't that have been the star of Bethlehem?

DICK

If there was, it only gave somebody material to write a fable. Lieutenant, we've been in space. There's no heaven. There's no God up there.

PASTOR

Maybe you're looking for God without when God is really within -- in the depth of being.

DICK

You're inventive, you ministers. You find a new expression every time an old one is proven false.

BERNIE

But it's clear that Jesus was a historical figure. Herod's name appears in other writings besides the Bible. Maybe the exact details of Jesus' birth are exaggerated, but I'm not ready to dismiss it entirely.

CRAIG

You're something, soldier boy. All this Jesus talk, but you serve in an outfit that's ready to bomb the hell out of the Russian, the Chinese, or anybody else you're told to.

PASTOR

Craig, aren't you being a little harsh?

CRAIG

It's the same hypocrisy like the churches back home. None of this nonsense for me.

Craig stomps out to fellowship hall.

DICK

Likewise. Here in the middle of Nebraska, it's like being back in the 19th century -- maybe even the middle ages. It'll take somebody more naive than me take a role in your pageant, Pastor Ziegler.

Dick goes into fellowship hall.

PASTOR

Sam, it may be harder putting together a

cast than I thought.

SAM

*If you don't, Amelia will be disappointed.
You've got her hopes up.*

BERNIE

If it's any help, I'm willing to take a part.

PASTOR

*Thanks, Bernie. It'll take quite a few
more.*

Pastor exits into fellowship hall, followed by Bernie.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Pastor enters from the kitchen. He goes to where Roy and Hank are playing checkers and watches the game in progress. Dick, Hitoshi, and Rex play Chinese checkers at the other end of the table. Hugh watches them and sneaks a drink from his flask.

Harriet comes over from the pingpong table to the game table where Pastor stands.

HARRIET

(to Hank)

Hello, brother. Nice to see you.

HANK

Hi ya, soul sister.

HARRIET

Pastor, I just want to say thank you for taking us in. I don't know what we'd have done without you.

PASTOR

You're quite welcome, Harriet.

HARRIET

If there's anything I can do to help, please let me know.

PASTOR

I sure will.

Harriet walks away toward the pingpong table.

ROY

It's rare these days to see a young'un with nice manners.

HANK

Yes, I'm afraid that's so.

Roy moves a checker.

Across fellowship hall at the pingpong table Harriet rejoins Bernie, Craig, Buddy, and Smitty watching Vicki and Crejsek compete against Michele

and Boomer. Crejsek and Boomer are both strong players.

As the players complete a game, Crejsek lays her paddle on the table and walks away. Smitty reaches for the paddle, but Buddy grabs it first. Smitty pushes Buddy, who drops the paddle to the floor. As Smitty reaches to retrieve it, Buddy pushes Smitty, who tumbles to the floor. Smitty comes up with his fists cocked. Buddy raises his fists.

BUDDY

Want me to black the other one?

SMITTY

Just try.

They feint but make no contact.

Across the hall at the table, Hank and Roy look up from their checkers game to watch Smitty and Buddy spar.

HANK

Aren't you going to stop them, Roy?

ROY

Naw. They're just fightin' over who gets to play with Miss Vicki. Let them settle it.

At the pingpong table Craig picks up the paddle from the floor and becomes Vicki's partner. Crejsek steps between Buddy and Smitty, who sulk away in opposite directions.

At the table across the hall, Hank and Roy return to their checkers game. Hank's three kings drive Roy's two kings toward a double corner. Pastor watches them. Rex plays Chinese checkers with Dick and Hitoshi at the other end of the table.

PASTOR

You're a patient man, Roy.

ROY

Them two's always scufflin'.

PASTOR

I've a favor to ask of you, Roy, and you, too, Rex.

ROY

What's that?

PASTOR

A lady's coming in a few minutes with some food and bedding. Would the two of you grab your coats and go out and meet her?

ROY

It's all right with me.

REX

Sure, I'll do it.

PASTOR

*Sam's in the kitchen. He'll tell you when
and where to go.*

Roy brushes the checker pieces off the board.

ROY

*I concede, Hank. You've got me
cornered.*

Roy and Rex get their coats and go into the kitchen.

HANK

*Would you like to take Roy's place,
Pastor?*

PASTOR

*No, I think I'll go see how Jenny's getting
along.*

Pastor walks toward door into the hallway.

HANK

What about you, Hugh?

HUGH

(slurred)

Whash you say?

HANK

Oh, never mind.

Hank starts resetting the checkers anyway.

INT - OFFICE -DAY

Pastor enters. Amelia is at the work table folding bulletins. Jenny is stretched out on the sofa but sits up as Pastor comes in.

PASTOR

(to Jenny)

How you feeling now, Jenny?

JENNY

Much better thank you. I'm warm. I was glad for the food Amelia brought me.

AMELIA

Any more food arrived in the kitchen?

PASTOR

It keeps coming in. Roy and Rex are helping receive it.

JENNY

Pastor Ziegler, Amelia says you want us to help put on your Christmas pageant.

PASTOR

I'm hoping so.

JENNY

Well, at first I thought it would be kinda fun.

PASTOR

Yes, those involved usually enjoy it.

JENNY

Now I'm not so sure.

(beat)

She said you want me to be Mary.

PASTOR

*Yes, you'd be lovely. I'd like you to sing,
too.*

JENNY

I'm too tired.

PASTOR

We can make it easy for you.

JENNY

*It's not only that. It's that I have --
uh -- a different life style than the virgin
Mary.*

(beat)

Cont.

JENNY (Cont.)

*You see, I lost my own virginity at age
14 -- to the boy next door.*

PASTOR

I'm not asking for a confession.

JENNY

In the 10th grade I dated the whole basketball team, if you know what I mean.

PASTOR

You can spare us the details.

JENNY

After I left home I took up with this rock group. It was a relief to be with all girls.

PASTOR

Yes, group life has advantages.

JENNY

Then this roadie, Craig, came along. He's been my boy friend for the past year.

Jenny rubs her stomach.

JENNY (Cont.)

And this happened.

(beat)

I am who I am with no regrets, but I'm not the one for your pageant.

PASTOR

Jenny, my dear, no one is here to judge your past. It's what you are now, and what you might become.

JENNY

You see who I am. It's what I've been, and what I will remain.

PASTOR

God loves you.

JENNY

There is no God.

PASTOR

There is. God exists whether we believe or not. God's love is pervasive. I know from my own life.

JENNY

Bull! It's easy for you to say that as a minister. You have to believe it. I go with my own experience. It's a harsh world out there.

PASTOR

Yes, I know. Pastors are people, too. We have our weaknesses. In the past I've faltered, but the grace of God searched

*me out and restored me. It can happen
to you.*

Michele enters with a mug of coffee and a cookie.

JENNY

I wish it were true -- but it isn't.

MICHELE

Wish what were true?

JENNY

*A loving God. That's what the pastor
claims.*

MICHELE

*Pay him no heed, Jenny. That's his
lingo.*

PASTOR

Michele, let me explain it to you.

MICHELE

*No, Reverend, I didn't come to discuss
theology. Craig says you want to put on
a pageant, and I want to help you.*

PASTOR

*It's the Christmas story -- of God's love
come to earth.*

MICHELE

That's all right. The subject doesn't matter. We can join together, you and me, because we're both in the illusion business.

PASTOR

Really?

MICHELE

Yeah. Six times a week we put on a show to make people feel better. You do it every Sunday.

PASTOR

I can't speak for you, Michele, but what does on at church is hardly illusionary. It doesn't escape reality. It penetrates to Ultimate Reality.

MICHELE

Words, words.

PASTOR

Well, I accept you as you are, Michele. Join the pageant and let its meaning grab you -- if you're open.

MICHELE

I'm always open to new experience,

man -- sober, drunk, or stoned.

PASTOR

I offer you sober exhilaration.

MICHELE

Far out, if you can do it.

PASTOR

*You, my friend, shall be the angel Gabriel.
It's a "he" in the scriptures, but I doubt
that heaven has sexual differentiation.*

MICHELE

Me an angel?

PASTOR

*You'll do well as Gabriel because you're so
full of pronouncements.*

MICHELE

Well, why not?

PASTOR

I've already chosen Jenny to be Mary.

MICHELE

(To Jenny)

And you consented?

JENNY

I haven't decided.

AMELIA

*I wish you would, Jenny. I had the part
50 years ago. I'd like you to play the
role this year.*

JENNY

*I don't know. -- Well, maybe. -- Oh, I
guess I'll do it.*

PASTOR

*That's wonderful. We can ask Craig to
be Joseph.*

AMELIA

Are you sure?

PASTOR

Yes, he's the right one.

MICHELE

*I don't think he'll do it, the way he was
talking.*

JENNY

Let me talk with him.

PASTOR

Yes, please do.

(beat)

Michele, the others in your group can join in the angels' chorus that sings to the shepherds.

MICHELE

Need an organist? I can offer Loretta. She turned down a scholarship to Julliard to join our group.

PASTOR

Excellent. The rest of you can play, too.

AMELIA

But, Pastor, they probably play rock-and-roll, not church music.

PASTOR

That's all right. It's not the style but the spirit that counts.

MICHELE

What about costumes?

AMELIA

We have a closet full, left from celebrations years ago. They're out in a wardrobe in fellowship hall.

MICHELE

Then let's go look at them.

JENNY

I'd like to see them, too.

AMELIA

*Pastor, you show them. I want to check
the kitchen.*

Amelia piles the bulletins she has folded into a neat stack. Pastor opens the door for Michele, Jenny, and Amelia as they all exit into the hallway.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Amelia, Jenny, Michele, and Pastor enter. Pastor leads Jenny and Michele to a wardrobe in the corner. Amelia goes on through to the kitchen.

Beyond the serving counter, a man comes into the kitchen from outside with parcels of food, followed by another man with blankets and pillows. Both are covered with snow. Sam, Rex, and Roy receive the items. Amelia comes into view in the kitchen and directs where the food should be placed.

At the pingpong table Bernie and Loretta play as partners against Buddy and Smitty. Harriet, Vicki, Craig, Crejsek, and Boomer watch. Craig notices that Jenny has come into the room and goes over to join her. He

hugs her. She responds ambiguously.

*Pastor opens the wardrobe closet as Michele, Jenny, and Craig look on.
Pastor pulls out a radiant, multi-colored costume.*

PASTOR

I believe this is for a wiseman.

MICHELE

Wow, way out!

PASTOR

*I'd like to present the versions of Matthew
and Luke separately, and do something
with John, too.*

MICHELE

Whatever you say.

PASTOR

*The wisemen are in Matthew. We can
use our scientists.*

*Pastor drapes the wiseman's costume over a chair and pulls out a plainer
costume.*

PASTOR

*And this is for a shepherd -- in Luke.
The ranchers will be natural for the role.*

MICHELE

Right, let's start with them.

Roy and Sam come out of the kitchen with loads of blankets, pillows, and sleeping bags.

MICHELE

Roy, will you come over here? I've got something I want you to do.

Roy and Sam put the bedding in a corner. Roy walks toward the wardrobe, and Sam follows him.

MICHELE

Hey, Smitty, Buddy. I need you guys.

Smitty and Buddy put down their paddles and walk toward the wardrobe.

SMITTY

Sure thing, sweetheart.

JENNY

(to Craig)

Craig, I'd like something more to eat.

CRAIG

Me, too. Let's see what's new in the kitchen.

Craig and Jenny go to the kitchen. Roy and Sam, Smitty and Buddy come up to the wardrobe.

MICHELE

Men, me and the pastor are puttin' on a pageant tonight, and we want you to be shepherds.

ROY

That's what we do: herd sheep.

PASTOR

Yes, I know.

SAM

Pastor, let me help you with the costumes. I think I can find the crooks.

Sam starts rummaging in the wardrobe.

PASTOR

(to the ranchers)

We're doing three versions of the coming of Christ. You'll be in Luke's.

SMITTY

Oh no, not me. I'm not gonna make a fool of myself.

PASTOR

We're not asking you to look foolish.

Just take part in the pageant.

SMITTY

No way. I ain't been in church since my sis got married ten years ago. I ain't gonna break my record now.

MICHELE

Oh, come on, Smitty. It'll be fine entertainment.

SMITTY

I don't know nothin' about the Jesus story.

ROY

Maybe we should help out the pastor, Smitty. He's given us shelter and food.

SMITTY

Are you gonna do it, Roy.

ROY

Sure. I was in one of these a long time ago when I was a kid. I'm willin' to do it for the Pastor and Miss Michele.

Pastor hands Roy a costume, which he starts putting on.

MICHELE

What about you, Buddy?

BUDDY

Naw, I don't want to either.

PASTOR

We really need you.

BUDDY

Why don't you get somebody else, like those soldier guys?

PASTOR

There are other roles for them.

MICHELE

Buddy, Vicki's going to be an angel who serenades the shepherds.

Buddy hesitates.

BUDDY

Well, maybe I will then.

Sam gives Buddy a costume, which he starts putting on.

MICHELE

Smitty?

SMITTY

Not even with Vicki.

Sam pulls a couple of crooks from the wardrobe.

PASTOR

(To Buddy)

Buddy's not your real name, is it?

BUDDY

Naw. It's David.

PASTOR

I might have known from your ruddy cheeks. David is my middle name -- in more ways than one.

Buddy now has the costume on. Sam hands him a crook.

SAM

Here's a crook for you, David.

BUDDY

I prefer Buddy, or Dave, not David.

SAM

Okay, Dave.

Roy is now garbed. Sam hands him a crook. Roy looks at himself in the wardrobe mirror and laughs. Smitty laughs with him.

ROY

Well, it's better than the bathrobes we

used to use at our church.

PASTOR

(to Smitty)

*You sure you won't change your mind,
Smitty?*

SMITTY

Never.

BUDDY

*You can call him Dennis, if you like.
That's his real name.*

SMITTY

Don't you dare.

MICHELE

(to Roy and Buddy)

You're lookin' great, men.

(to Pastor)

Pastor, do they have spoken parts.

PASTOR

Yes, a few lines. I'll provide them later.

ROY

Can we go now?

MICHELE

I guess so.

Roy, still in costume, heads to the game table. Buddy loosens his costume but leaves it on. He and Smitty go back to the pingpong table.

Pastor goes to a nearby bookshelf and pulls out a copy of the New Testament. He hands it to Sam.

PASTOR

Sam, I want to use this translation. Would you please make fifteen copies of first two chapters of Matthew and Luke and five copies of the first and third chapters of John. Later I'll mark the parts for our actors.

SAM

Sure, right away.

PASTOR

And Sam, would you have a talk with Smitty? I have a feeling you can get through to him.

SAM

I'll give it a try when I get a chance.

Sam takes the New Testament and exits through the hallway leading to

the office.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Jenny and Craig sit on stools in the kitchen at serving counter connecting with fellowship hall. Jenny drinks milk and eats a cookie. Craig drinks coffee and has a sandwich. They look into fellowship hall.

JENNY

Craig, if those ranchers are willing to be in the pageant, I don't see why you won't.

CRAIG

If they want to make fools of themselves, that's up to them. Not me.

Craig takes a big bite from his sandwich.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

At one end of the game table Hitoshi spreads pieces next to an unfolded Go game board as Dick watches. A completed Chinese checkers game is nearby on the table. Hugh sleeps head down at mid-table. At the other end Rex plays checkers with Hank. Roy approaches the game table.

ROY

What ya playin', Hitoshi?

HITOSHI

It's called Go. A favorite in Japan.

Roy slips out of his costume.

ROY

Boy, I'd hate to ride herd dressed like this.

At the wardrobe Pastor pulls out two more wisemen's costumes as Michele watches. The other costume for a wiseman remains on a chair.

PASTOR

Why don't we do the wisemen next?

MICHELE

Sure. What are their names?

PASTOR

The African American is Hank. The others are Dick and Hitoshi.

MICHELE

Hey, Dick, Hitoshi, Hank. Would you guys come over here, please?

At the game table Dick and Hitoshi look across toward Michele.

HITOSHI

I wonder what she wants of us?

DICK

I think I know, and I don't like it.

HITOSHI

We better go see anyway.

Hitoshi and Dick rise and start for the wardrobe.

At the other end of the table Hank, playing checkers with Rex as Roy watches, looks toward the wardrobe then back to Rex.

HANK

Excuse me, Rex. I'm being paged.

(beat)

Roy, why don't you take my place?

REX

Yes, please do.

ROY

It's all right with me.

Hank rises, and Roy slips into his chair.

Hank goes to the wardrobe and joins Dick, Hitoshi, Michele, and Pastor, who holds two wisemen's costumes.

MICHELE

*Gentlemen, we've got a great role for you
in the Christmas pageant we're putting*

on tonight. You'll be the wisemen.

DICK

Don't count on it.

PASTOR

*You'll be featured in Matthew's
presentation of Jesus' birth.*

HANK

*I see you got Roy to be a shepherd. If
he's willing to be in it, I will, too. Give
me a costume.*

MICHELE

That was easy.

Pastor hands Hank a costume, and he starts putting it on.

PASTOR

What about you, Hitoshi?

HITOSHI

I've never done anything like this before.

MICHELE

*You have Nō plays and Kabuki theater in
Japan.*

HITOSHI

That's for experts.

PASTOR

Christmas pageants always rely on amateurs.

HITOSHI

But I don't speak very good English.

PASTOR

Yes, you do. Besides you won't have a speaking part.

HITOSHI

But I'm not a Christian.

PASTOR

Neither were the original wisemen. They were probably Zoroastrians.

HANK

I'd like you to join me, Hitoshi?

HITOSHI

Well, all right.

Pastor hands Hitoshi a costume, which he starts putting on.

PASTOR

(to Hitoshi)

Thank you.

Michele takes the other wiseman's costume from the chair and offers it to Dick.

MICHELE

(to Dick)

Here's your costume, Dick. You'll be our third wiseman.

Dick repulses the costume.

DICK

With all due respects, I don't think you should cajole men of science into medieval pageantry.

PASTOR

Medieval? The tradition is ancient, but the Christmas pageant tells a story that's fresh for each new generation.

DICK

It's the ideas you're conveying, Pastor. The superstition. The belief in a God who doesn't exist.

HITOSHI

That may be your feelings, Dick, but not

mine.

DICK

Hitoshi, I thought you, more than anybody, would know there is no God. You're peered billions of light years and seen nothing but light and matter.

HITOSHI

The more I look and study, the greater my awe.

PASTOR

How so?

HITOSHI

With the Hubble telescope in space we are probing deeper into the vastness of the universe than ever before. We have found regions in our own galaxy where stars are now being born. We live in a very dynamic universe.

HANK

We certainly do.

HITOSHI

Although some things appear chaotic, there is a sense of order indicating that an underlying intelligence is present.

DICK

But have you seen God out there?

HITOSHI

What you westerners call God is not something you see with your eyes. Taught by eastern religions, I have learned through meditation to experience the deeper sense of life. In that manner I have discovered the eternal entering the finite.

DICK

But is that God?

HITOSHI

It is for me. Clearly the universal spirit is alive even if some of the old concepts of God are dead.

HANK

Hitoshi, I couldn't express it as well, but I say, Amen, Amen. It's true for me.

Hitoshi and Hank are now costumed. Sam returns with copied pages and hands them to Pastor.

SAM

Here you are, Pastor.

PASTOR

Thanks, Sam. Just put them on the table.

Sam puts the pages on a small table near the wardrobe.

SAM

Only two wisemen?

PASTOR

The other one hasn't decided yet.

DICK

You'll have to find somebody else, or get by with two.

PASTOR

That's all right. Matthew doesn't give any number. It's tradition that says three.

(beat)

But I haven't given up on you, Dick.

Dick returns to the game table. Hank and Hitoshi remove their costumes. Sam searches the wardrobe for other costumes as Michele watches.

PASTOR

(To Hitoshi)

*I wish I had your insights on God's
creation.*

HITOSHI

*I wish I had your composure and sense of
God's love.*

PASTOR

It hasn't come easy.

HITOSHI

Nothing of value does.

*Hitoshi and Hank walk toward the game table with their costumes over
their arms.*

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

*Sitting at the serving counter, Jenny and Craig watch Hank and
Hitoshi walk to the game table.*

JENNY

*Craig, I can see right through your refusal
to be Joseph.*

CRAIG

What do you mean?

JENNY

Just another case of your unwillingness to make a commitment.

CRAIG

Oh, come on, Jenny.

JENNY

It's true. You drift from job to job.

CRAIG

I've been with your group 15 months.

JENNY

From what you've told me, that's the longest job you've ever held.

CRAIG

It's because of you.

JENNY

But you won't commit yourself to stay with me after our baby is born.

CRAIG

I haven't said I won't. Besides, you're the one who always says, "Marriage, who needs it?"

JENNY

I'm not interested in a license or wedding ring, just a lasting commitment.

CRAIG

Yeah? How many times have I heard you say, "I can make it on my own"?

JENNY

I have to be prepared for that.

CRAIG

I do love you, Jenny.

JENNY

Humph!

CRAIG

But it's hard for me to settle down.

JENNY

You won't even play the role for 30 minutes in a lousy little Christmas pageant.

Michele comes up on the other side of the serving counter.

MICHELE

Hey, you two. We've got your costumes ready. Come on.

Jenny and Craig get off their stools and exit the kitchen.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

At the game table Roy makes a series of jumps to defeat Rex in checkers as Hank watches.

REX

That was a quick finish. Reminds me of the way John Elway is always coming from behind.

ROY

He sure does. Do you remember the time he led the Broncos down the field 87 yards in the last two minutes to beat the Chargers?

REX

Which time?

ROY

How about a snack?

REX

Sounds good to me. Will you join us, Hank?

HANK

No, Hitoshi's teaching Dick how to play

Go. I want to learn, too.

Hank slides down to the other end of the table where Hitoshi and Dick are just beginning to play Go. Hugh remains asleep, slumped over the middle of the table.

At the wardrobe Michele, Jenny, Craig, and Pastor watch Sam pull out the costume for Mary. Amelia comes out of the kitchen and joins them.

AMELIA

Can I help you with the holy couple?

SAM

Sure, here's Mary's robe.

Sam hands the costume to Amelia.

JENNY

You still want me to be Mary, Pastor?

Even if you know who I am?

PASTOR

Of course, I do.

JENNY

Then I better see if the costume fits me.

Amelia hands Jenny her costume and helps her put it on.

AMELIA

Jenny, when I was Mary fifty years ago,

my husband was Joseph, and our infant son was the baby Jesus. He cried a little, not like in the song, but was so sweet.

JENNY

Then your son is 50 now. Does he still live around here?

AMELIA

When the boy was twelve, Harold -- that was my husband -- took him on a fishin' trip to the Rockies. There was a flashflood, and they both drowned.

PASTOR

I didn't know that, Amelia. I'm awfully sorry it happened.

AMELIA

Yes, it was a terrible time for me.

PASTOR

It must have been.

JENNY

(to Amelia)

I'm sure you were more deserving than me to be Mary.

AMELIA

Oh, I was chaste at marriage, but not perfect by a long shot. As I sat there with my own baby lying in the manger, the pastor read how Mary pondered the events in her heart.

Ponder. I like that word better than the new-fangled version.

I pondered a lot. I settled down, and I think I was a good mother for the twelve years my son lived. Yet I retained my feeling that life could be fun.

JENNY

I wish I had known you then.

AMELIA

I've watched other girls play the part of Mary through the years. For a few it was hard to do because of the comparison with their own lives. But for most girls, being Mary was a renewal, a gift to cherish. When you say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," it really can.

Jenny is now garbed as Mary.

CRAIG

You look lovely, Jenny.

PASTOR

Yes, you do.

Sam hands Pastor the costume for Joseph.

SAM

Here's the one for Joseph.

PASTOR

How about it, Craig? Will you be Joseph?

CRAIG

Before I decide, tell me more about him.

PASTOR

From the birth stories in Luke and Matthew, we know that Joseph was an honorable man, but a little reluctant at first. Just like you.

CRAIG

What else?

JENNY

You're stalling, Craig.

PASTOR

Later in Matthew's Gospel some one asks of Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" So we assume that Joseph was a skilled tradesman, a steady provider for his family.

MICHELE

So do it, Craig.

CRAIG

Well, uh. I just don't know.

PASTOR

Why don't you give it a try? You may discover that role fits you well.

JENNY

Please, Craig.

CRAIG

Oh, what the hell. I might as well. But just for this one performance.

PASTOR

You will make a fine couple. Here's your costume.

Pastor hands the costume to Craig, who holds it over his arm. Jenny puts her arm around Craig.

JENNY

Thank you, Craig.

PASTOR

(to Sam)

Sam, is there a costume for Anna?

(to Amelia)

Amelia, I want you to play that role.

Sam rummages in the wardrobe.

AMELIA

Once a young mother, 50 years later a wrinkled widow.

PASTOR

But younger than the biblical widow, who was over 100.

Sam hands a costume to Amelia.

SAM

Here you are, Amelia.

Amelia holds the costume at arm's length and examines it.

Suddenly Jenny grabs her back as she feels pain.

JENNY

Oh!

CRAIG

What's the matter?

JENNY

I don't know....It hurts.

AMELIA

Let's go to the office. You can lie down
on the sofa.

JENNY

Yeah. Okay.

CRAIG

I'll go with you.

Amelia puts an around Jenny's shoulder as they walk toward the hallway door. Craig follows.

JENNY

(to Amelia)

Why are you so kind to me?

AMELIA

Because I think you're special, Jenny.

JENNY

That's what my grandmother used to tell
me.

Jenny, Craig, and Amelia go down the hallway to the office.

At the pingpong table Vicki and Buddy win a game against Harriet and Smitty. Boomer, Bernie, Loretta, and Crejsek watch.

VICKI

We win! Who's next?

BOOMER

Enough of this doubles stuff. I challenge anyone to a game, one on one.

VICKI

You're too good for me.

BOOMER

Where's Craig? I'd like to take him on.

LORETTA

He just went out with Jenny.

BOOMER

*How about you, Bernie? Smitty?
Buddy?*

CREJSEK

I'll call you, Boomer.

HARRIET

Yeah. You show him, Helen.

BOOMER

I didn't expect a woman to challenge me.

CREJSEK

Pick your end of the table.

Pastor, Michele, and Sam come over to watch. Hank comes from the game table.

MONTAGE: Boomer wins the first two points, then Crejsek scores. Lots of cheering. All the women cheer for Crejsek, except Michele who roots for Boomer. Smitty and Buddy cheer for Boomer, but the other men are neutral. Crejsek goes ahead 8-7. Boomer has the lead 13-11. Crejsek pulls even at 13-13. Crejsek serves and wins a hard fought point. Cheers.

VICKI

Come on, Helen. Win it for the women.

Crejsek serves and wins as Boomer hits the ball into the net. The women cheer. Crejsek walks to Boomer's end of the table and extends her hand to Boomer.

CREJSEK

Good game, Boomer.

Boomer shakes hands weakly.

BOOMER

Yeah.

Harriet and Vicki hug Crejsek. Bernie comes up to Boomer.

BERNIE

You can't win 'em all, Boomer

BOOMER

Who asked you?

Bernie picks up a paddle from the table and turns to Loretta.

BERNIE

Loretta, let's be partners again.

Loretta takes a paddle. At the other end of the table Vicki and Harriet take paddles.

Michele returns to the wardrobe. Pastor takes Hank aside.

PASTOR

Hank, I've a concern I want to share with you.

HANK

What's that?

PASTOR

It's Craig. He's on the edge of fatherhood but not quite ready to take on

the responsibility.

HANK

Why tell me?

PASTOR

You have a good feel for people. Maybe you could offer him some advice.

HANK

I have no magic wand, but I'm willing to talk with him when I get chance.

PASTOR

Thanks.

Pastor rejoins Michele and Sam at the wardrobe.

MICHELE

What about the rest of my group? You got angel clothes?

PASTOR

What have you used in the past, Sam?

Sam reaches into wardrobe.

MICHELE

Vicki, Harriet. We're ready for you now.

Vicki and Harriet put down their paddles and go to the wardrobe. As they come up, Sam pulls out some faded white robes and tattered wings.

SAM

How about these?

VICKI

Oh, come on, man. You can't expect us to wear those trashy things.

HARRIET

I should say not.

MICHELE

Vicki's right, Reverend. These won't do. We've got better threads in the bus.

Where's Craig?

PASTOR

He went in with Jenny.

MICHELE

Vicki, get a couple of the guys to help you bring in our wardrobe trunk.

VICKI

Out in the storm, are you crazy?

MICHELE

It's got to be done.

Vicki looks toward the pingpong table where Boomer, Bernie, Loretta, Crejsek, Smitty, and Buddy are standing around.

VICKI

Boomer, I've a favor to ask. Will you help carry in a trunk from our bus? Maybe Bernie can help, too.

BOOMER

I'm sweating too much. It wouldn't be good for me.

SMITTY

I'll help you, sweetie. I'm used to working outside in winter.

BUDDY

I'll go, too.

SMITTY

(to Buddy)

You little twerp, why do you always have to tag along?

HARRIET

(to Vicki)

Maybe I'd better go with you for

protection. I'll get our jackets.

Harriet goes off for their jackets. Smitty and Buddy go for theirs.

At the wardrobe Sam continues to sort costumes. Michele and Pastor stand together.

MICHELE

Later on Craig can bring in our instruments and the sound equipment if you really want us to play.

PASTOR

Yes, we would like to have your music.

MICHELE

But we'll take care of the costumes first.

Harriet returns with her jacket on. She gives Vicki her jacket, which she puts on. Smitty and Buddy zip up their coats.

HARRIET

I'm goin' hate this.

BUDDY

Ain't nothing.

Buddy, Smitty, Vicki, and Harriet go out into the howling blizzard.

PASTOR

The storm continues to rage.

MICHELE

What if nobody can get out tonight for the pageant? I'd hate to prepare and have nobody come.

SAM

I think its one of those 24 hour storms.

PASTOR

Then it should be over by 4:30 or 5:00.

MICHELE

*So who else do we need in our cast.
Pastor?*

PASTOR

Let's see. We still need Simeon, Herod, soldiers, an innkeeper, and a priest.

MICHELE

Sounds like roles for men. I'll round 'em up.

Michele goes around fellowship hall to collect Boomer, Bernie, Rex, and Hugh. Pastor turns to Sam.

PASTOR

Sam, I'd like you to take the role of Simeon in Luke's story.

SAM

Me? I ain't never been in one of these.

PASTOR

Never?

SAM

No, never. Once they tried to get to be shepherd and another time a wiseman, but I refused. I just like to watch.

PASTOR

This year we need you. You know who Simeon is, don't you?

SIMEON

Sure, he's that old codger who comes into the temple, sees the baby Jesus, and says, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word."

PASTOR

You've got it! Except we're going to use a more modern translation, Sam.

SAM

So I have to learn some new words, too?

PASTOR

I know you can do it. If we're going to have a pageant tonight, everybody's got to pitch in.

SAM

I guess I'll do it. As a personal favor to you, Pastor.

PASTOR

I appreciate it.

Michele comes up with Boomer, Bernie, and Rex helping Hugh. Hugh is tipsier than before. Sam pulls up a chair for him.

REX

Your costumes are splendid, Pastor.

PASTOR

A little worn, some moth holes, but serviceable. We hope that you gentlemen will be willing to take part in our pageant.

BOOMER

Like what?

PASTOR

First of all we need someone to be King Herod in the Matthew story.

MICHELE

(Pointing to Hugh)

What about this fellow? I've heard him say he controls a wide territory.

HUGH

From Omaha to Boise.

PASTOR

No, if he's like this now, we don't know what condition he'll be in tonight.

MICHELE

How old is Herod?

PASTOR

The Bible doesn't say, but he died a few years after Jesus birth.

MICHELE

Then how about Rex? He has a regal bearing.

REX

Did you ever work for the government, Michele? Your flattery sounds like someone seeking a promotion.

PASTOR

I know you're not as wicked as Herod,

Rex, but I hope you'll consent.

REX

Well, my new friends, Roy and Hank, are cooperating, so I might as well go along, too.

PASTOR

Excellent. Sam, do you have a costume for Herod?

Sam hands Rex his costume.

SAM

Here it is.

Rex takes the costume and starts putting it on.

PASTOR

We'll ask our two military officers to serve as soldiers.

Sam hands soldiers' tunics to Boomer and Bernie. Boomer drapes the costume over his arm while Bernie starts putting on a tunic.

BOOMER

Well, frankly, I was expecting a larger role.

REX

I'll yield Herod to you.

BOOMER

No, that's not me. I prefer the Old Testament generals. Like Joshua.

MICHELE

Who "fit" the battle of Jericho?

BOOMER

Yes. Or Joab.

MICHELE

Who?

PASTOR

King David's leading general.

BOOMER

There was a superior warrior.

PASTOR

It's the wrong testament.

BOOMER

Well, I'll go along anyway. Out of duty to our host.

Lieutenant has on his tunic. Boomer starts putting on his costume.

BERNIE

This doesn't seem to fit me.

MICHELE

The tunic is just your size.

BERNIE

No, I mean the role.

BOOMER

He's a communications expert, one of our best. Bernie, you had basic training. Just recall what it's like to be a foot soldier.

Boomer now has on his costume. Crejsek comes up.

CREJSEK

You seem to be casting everybody but me. Why am I being excluded?

HUGH

I don't have a part, either.

PASTOR

Sorry, my friend. Not in your condition.

BOOMER

Hugh, you look like you could use some more coffee. And so could I.

Boomer helps Hugh toward the kitchen. Rex goes back to the game table. Bernie wanders over by the pingpong table and renews conversation with Loretta.

MICHELE

Let's see, we need an innkeeper and a priest. Who else?

PASTOR

A narrator. And there's Zechariah and Elizabeth if we do all of chapter one of Luke.

MICHELE

Who are they?

PASTOR

The parents of John the Baptist -- their first child, who came when they were quite old.

MICHELE

What about Sam and Amelia?

PASTOR

Amelia is already Anna, and I've got Sam to be Simeon.

MICHELE

Why can't they could play two parts?

PASTOR

Well, I don't know. I've heard that lots of folks have tried to play matchmaker with them.

SAM

Don't press your luck, Pastor. One part is more than I ever intended to play.

MICHELE

Sam, you can do it. You look like a natural actor.

SAM

I dunno.

MICHELE

You'll be great.

SAM

I'll have to think about it

MICHELE

Reverend, I suppose you should be the priest.

PASTOR

I guess I can't duck out.

MICHELE

So, Helen, do you want to be the innkeeper?

CREJSEK

I think Pastor Ziegler ought to take that part, too. He's obviously an accomplished innkeeper.

PASTOR

How about Harriet from you group, Michele? The innkeeper appears before she comes on as an angel. There'd be time to slip off the innkeeper's costume.

MICHELE

Okay. I'll tell her when she comes back in.

PASTOR

(To Crejsek)

You have a really nice voice, Helen. So

why don't you be our narrator?

CREJSEK

Would I have to wear a costume?

PASTOR

Not a biblical costume. But we could give you a choir robe.

CREJSEK

Well, all right. Provided that I can look it over in advance.

From the nearby table Pastor picks up a copy of the material Sam provided earlier. As he talks, he marks some passages and hands the copy to Crejsek.

PASTOR

Here's what we're using. In Matthew start after the genealogy and go to the end of chapter two. In Luke begin after the introduction and go most of the way through the second chapter. In John I want to use selected passages from chapters one and three. I'll mark them for you later.

CREJSEK

That much? Then I'd better find a quiet place to read it through.

Crejsek leaves and goes to a far corner of fellowship hall to read.

MICHELE

How about it, Sam? Have you decided to be Zechariah.

SAM

Well, if the pastor wants me to, I'll go along with it. If Amelia will.

PASTOR

I'll sound her out.

The outside door opens. Vicki, Harriet, Smitty, and Buddy enter with a blast of snow behind them. The men carry a trunk with "SEARCHING" on it. Vicki has a sign under her arm. Loretta and Bernie come over from the pingpong table.

HARRIET

Man, it's freezing out there.

PASTOR

"Searching". What's that?

MICHELE

It's the name of our group. We're "Searching".

BERNIE

Aren't we all?

VICKI

Who's gonna be the innkeeper?.

MICHELE

Harriet, but I haven't told her yet.

HARRIET

Come on, Michele. We're off duty. You can't boss me now.

PASTOR

Let me ask you then, Harriet. Would you please consider being the innkeeper in our pageant?

HARRIET

Sure. Since you asked me so nicely.

VICKI

(to Harriet)

Then you can use this sign I lifted from a motel.

Vicki holds up a "NO VACANCY" sign.

PASTOR

I don't think it's authentic.

LORETTA

I could write it in Hebrew.

PASTOR

That won't be necessary.

BERNIE

Open your trunk, Vicki. I want to see your costumes.

MICHELE

No, let's take them to some place where we can spread them out.

PASTOR

Why don't you use the junior high room upstairs? That's where I'm going to have you women sleep tonight.

HARRIET

Okay, just point us the way.

PASTOR

Down the hallway, then left up the stairs. The room is marked.

VICKI

Smitty, can you move this again?

SMITTY

Whatever you say, sugar.

BERNIE

Let me give you a hand.

Smitty and Bernie carry the trunk away, followed by Michele, Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, and Buddy.

In the corner where Crejsek is studying her script, a radio crackles. Crejsek responds with her hand-held two-way radio.

VOICE (V.O.)

Roadblock to Crejsek. Roadblock to Crejsek.

CREJSEK

Come in, roadblock.

VOICE (V.O.)

We just got word that a bus is headed our way. It may arrive within a half an hour. Do you have room at your shelter?

CREJSEK

How many passengers?

VOICE (V.O.)

About 25, I think.

CREJSEK

*Pastor, can you accommodate another
25 people?*

PASTOR

Certainly.

CREJSEK

*Roadblock, we can handle them. Send
them up when they arrive.*

VOICE (V.O.)

Okay. Over and out.

PASTOR

*We'll need more food and blankets. I'd
better call Father O'Reilly at St. Mary's
and somebody from the Grange and see if
they can help out.*

*Pastor goes to the office. Crejsek goes back in her corner to read the
script some more.*

*Boomer helps Hugh out of the kitchen to a chair along the wall where
Hugh sits down, slumps, and falls asleep. Boomer goes to the game*

table where Hitoshi and Dick play Go. Hank and Roy play checkers at the other end of the table, and Rex looks on.

BOOMER

What's going on out here?

DICK

Hitoshi is trying to teach me to play Go, but I don't understand it.

BOOMER

May I give it a try?

DICK

Sure, if you want to. Do you know how to play?

BOOMER

Yes. I took up the game during a tour of duty in Japan.

HITOSHI

Please join me, Major Slatterly.

BOOMER

It will be my pleasure, Professor Morikawa.

Boomer sits down and starts playing Go with Hitoshi.

Bernie and Loretta come in from the hallway, holding hands. They sit together on the piano bench facing outward.

BERNIE

Your friends are sure plain spoken,
Loretta. Vicki especially has a sharp
tongue.

LORETTA

Actually Vicki's quite goodhearted, and a
tremendous guitarist. She'd like to play
lead, but Michele is even better. And
Michele's the boss.

BERNIE

I've noticed that. I suppose that's why
Michele got Boomer's attention instead of
Vicki.

LORETTA

Yeah, Michele always seems to land the
majors and Vicki the ranch hands.

BERNIE

Of course, Boomer's married.

LORETTA

Oh yeah? That frequently happens to
Michele, too.

(beat)

And what about you, Bernie?

BERNIE

What do you mean?

LORETTA

You seem so -- how can I say it -- so hesitant.

BERNIE

You mean about my role in the pageant?

LORETTA

Yes, but it seems to go beyond that. Do you like the Air Force?

BERNIE

No, not really. I'm in 'cause my dad wanted me to join.

LORETTA

How's that?

BERNIE

He was an Air Force sergeant and wanted me to become an officer. I respect him, so I joined the ROTC.

LORETTA

Why the doubts now?

BERNIE

Because of my grandpa on my mom's side. He was medic in World War II, a religious objector who refused to bear arms.

LORETTA

A Quaker?

BERNIE

No, a Methodist. He never pressured me, but I loved him and admired him.

LORETTA

That's how I feel about my grandparents.

BERNIE

After he died last year, I got to thinking of my own values. Do I really want to be in the killing business? That's what the armed forces are about ultimately.

LORETTA

Yes, I can see that's a dilemma for you.

Bernie and Loretta look up and see Craig coming from the hallway. He walks to the game table where Hitoshi and Boomer play Go, Hank and Roy play checkers, and Dick, Rex, and Sam watch.

SAM

How's Jenny getting' along, Craig?

CRAIG

She's okay.

REX

I suppose the pastor's lining up more provisions.

CRAIG

Yeah, it's amazing how that old buzzard can get these folks to bring food for people they don't even know. In this blizzard yet.

SAM

That's the way people are in Muhlenberg.

CRAIG

And he's inviting them to come to the pageant tonight.

REX

What I don't understand, Sam, is why a man like him is serving a small congregation out in the....

(Hesitating)

SAM

Go ahead, say it -- the boondocks.

REX

Well, yes.

SAM

*No offense. We're lucky to have him.
You see, he's starting over in the ministry.*

REX

How's that?

SAM

*He used to be head pastor of a big church
in Cincinnati. Had a couple of
assistant pastors under him, a budget
well over half a million. Had a television
program and was on the radio three
times a week.*

*As Sam continues, Pastor comes out of the office and stands a little
ways behind Sam and Craig, who don't notice his presence.*

SAM

*He was a big shot, and I guess he knew it.
But he got carried away, broke the
seventh commandment, not once but
regularly.*

CRAIG

*Cut out the riddles. I don't know the
god damned numbers of the
commandments.*

SAM

*You just broke the third. For Pastor
Ziegler, it was adultery.*

CRAIG

Adultery! How about that!

Pastor steps up.

PASTOR

*I'm glad you're telling them about my
sordid past, Sam. They should know
what a sinner they're dealing with.*

SAM

You've been open with us.

Sam covers his face with his hands and retreats a little.

PASTOR

*After my wife divorced me and the
church board fired me, I drifted for a
while, took odd jobs, roamed the beaches
of California.*

HANK

Whereabouts?

PASTOR

Around Monterey. There I had an experience of a lifetime.

REX

What happened?

PASTOR

In late January a terrific storm battered the shore for three nights and days. When it finally quit raining, I went for a walk along the beach. The surf was still angry, but the moon was breaking through the clouds. I rounded a huge boulder and saw a clear, smooth stretch of sand. Suddenly I realized, "God forgives." Simply that. No still small voice like Elijah heard. No rushing winding as at Pentecost. Only a realization that God forgives. I was aglow with an inner light. It was as if that boulder had fallen from my shoulders.

CRAIG

I knew a fellow who saw lights when he as on PCP.

PASTOR

No, it wasn't like that at all. I know, because I tried drugs when I was drifting. Then you're not yourself. On the shore, and since, I had my full, natural consciousness, but much more. I was stirred to the depth of my soul, uplifted, refreshed by the presence of God. For the first time in my life, I truly understood what grace is -- even though I used to preach about it all the time.

Pastor looks at Craig.

PASTOR (Cont.)

God loves us, regardless of who we are or what we do. The worse we are, the harder God searches for us. Grace is God's searching love.

Pastor turns toward Rex.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Well, to make a long story short, I

re-entered the ministry by seeking a church which needed me rather than what I needed to fulfill my ego. And one that would accept all I had been. So I came to the Community Church of Muhlenberg.

REX

You should talk to Hugh.

DICK

Yes, what's with him?

REX

This is his first Christmas alone since his family left him.

PASTOR

I suppose he has my flaw.

REX

No, his only mistress was his business. It was his obsession to have the biggest drugstore chain in the northern plains. He was on the road all the time and completely neglected his family.

CRAIG

Sounds like my old man, except he's a lawyer.

REX

I know him through Rotary. I'm taking him to my home for Christmas.

PASTOR

Good for you. Christmas is a melancholy time for those who are alone.

SAM

Unless you're part of a church family, like me.

HANK

You think we could try to help him?

REX

At least try to cheer him up. But let him sleep for now.

Boomer and Hitoshi resume Go with Dick and Pastor watching. Roy and Hank go back to checkers. Sam and Craig walk off together toward the kitchen. Hank notices their departure and overhears their conversation.

CRAIG

Did he really have that experience on the beach?

SAM

I'm sure he did.

CRAIG

Did he really change?

SAM

Yep.

CRAIG

And you folks really accept him in spite of his past?

SAM

We sure do.

CRAIG

That's cool.

Sam and Craig go into the kitchen.

Vicki, Harriet, Michele, Loretta, Bernie, Smitty, and Buddy reenter fellowship hall from the hallway.

VICKI

Hey, why is it so somber in here? Did somebody die?

HANK

You know how us old folks just like to sit around a chew the fat.

MICHELE

How about a pingpong tournament, the young versus the old.

PASTOR

Instead of being competitive, why don't we all do something together?

MICHELE

Like what?

ROY

How about line dancing?

VICKI

Let's do the macarena.

BOOMER

Yeah, the macarena.

Loretta goes to the piano and plays the tune. Sam and Craig come out of the kitchen. Vicki gets everybody to stand in three lines and leads the song and motions. The young people quickly get into the groove. So does Hank, and Roy, too, after he learns what to do. Pastor is willing but a little awkward. At first Sam holds back but then enters in.

Hitoshi looks on in amazement, then tries it. Dick stands with arms folded over his chest until Harriet comes over, unfolds his arm, and encourages him to participate. Amelia and Jenny come in from the hallway. Jenny sits in a chair and does the arm motions. At first Amelia looks on with disdain, but then can't help laughing. But she

doesn't try to join in. Hugh sleeps through it all.

Finally they stop. Some fall exhausted on chairs. A happy buzz fills the room. Loretta takes Michele aside and talks with her MOS. Michele tightens her fists and clenches her jaw in contained rage.

Amelia comes up to Pastor.

AMELIA

Well, Pastor, you got it worked out for the pageant?

PASTOR

It's coming along, but they're some loose ends to tidy up.

Amelia looks across the serving counter into the kitchen.

AMELIA

I'd say the same thing about the kitchen.

Amelia walks toward the kitchen.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

Amelia enters, gathers up dirty dishes, puts them next to a sink, runs hot water, pours in detergent, and starts washing the dishes. Harriet comes in.

HARRIET

May I help, Amelia?

AMELIA

Sure. You can dry. There's towels in that drawer.

Harriet finds a towel and starts drying dishes. Hank comes in.

HARRIET

Hi, Hank. Did you come in to help?

HANK

No, I came to ask about your friend, Craig. He seems so alienated.

HARRIET

He's okay. The best sound man I ever worked with. It's just that he'd like to be an electronics engineer, but he can't stand school.

HANK

Oh, so that's it.

AMELIA

(to Hank)

Young man, if you're goin' to stand

around talkin', you might as well dry, too.

HANK

Sorry, ma'am. That's where I draw the line.

AMELIA

Typical man.

HARRIET

I'm surprised, Hank. You seem so cooperative.

HANK

I've struggled a long time to get out of the kitchen, so to speak. So I'm not willing to go back in.

HARRIET

Where are you from?

HANK

L.A. The Watts area.

HARRIET

I've been there.

HANK

We were the first to revolt in the '60s. I was one of the hellraisers.

HARRIET

But you're not now. How come?

HANK

*Got old. (beat) No, more than that.
A black preacher taught me nonviolence.
And a white aerospace engineer tutored
me and opened doors of oppportunity.*

HARRIET

You were lucky.

HANK

*And my wife. She's a steadying
influence in my life.*

HARRIET

Tell that to Craig.

HANK

I will.

*Amelia takes a bowl from the sink, rinses it, and puts in in the dish
drainer.*

AMELIA

This is the last one for now.

Harriet picks up the bowl and dries it.

INT - FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

Michele goes up to Boomer, who is playing Go with Hitoshi. Roy and Rex play checkers at the other end of the game table.

MICHELE

Boomer, is it true you're married?

BOOMER

Who told you? Bernie?

MICHELE

No, a friend.

BOOMER

It was just a harmless flirtation.

MICHELE

Thanks a lot.

Michele stomps off. There is rumble overhead and a crash outside the nearby wall. Rex looks up.

REX

Sounds like an avalanche from the roof.

ROY

You don't suppose Miss Michele caused that?

They both laugh. Rex makes a move at checkers.

Pastor and Dick sit together near the Christmas tree.

PASTOR

Dick, I know you believe the story of the wisemen is nothing but a fable.

DICK

Of course, it's just made up.

PASTOR

There are other legends about these same wisemen. I guess they're made up, too, but they carry messages worth listening to.

DICK

Like what?

PASTOR

One legend tells how three young men each on his own started searching for a portentous star that would herald a great event. They didn't know where the star would arise or what the event would be, but they knew they would recognize it when they saw.

*After many years their paths crossed,
and they continued their search together.
Finally they saw a great star rising in the
east. They knew this was their star. So
they followed it to Jerusalem and on to
Bethlehem to the cradle of the new-born
baby.*

DICK

Why are you telling me this?

PASTOR

*For each of us there is a star in the east
that will lead us along new paths in the
journey of life. For me it was moonlight
shimmering on a storm-washed beach.
For others it's something else.
Sometimes all you have to do is open your
eyes, and there it is.*

DICK

*I'm sorry, Pastor. I see things as a
scientist, not as a poet.*

PASTOR

Then I'm sorry for you.

Lights flicker, dim, then come on bright again.

PASTOR

Let's hope we don't lose power.

Pastor rises and heads for the table near the wardrobe.

Near the pingpong table Smitty, Buddy, Vicki, Michele, Loretta, and Bernie stand around and talk MOS. Sam comes up.

SAM

Smitty, can I have a word with you?

SMITTY

I guess so.

Sam and Smitty step over to a quiet spot.

SAM

(to Smitty)

What's this I hear about you not wanting to take a part in the pageant?

SMITTY

That's sissy stuff, plus being in church to boot.

SAM

Aw, come on, Smitty. Do you take me for a sissy?

SMITTY

No.

SAM

Or Boomer?

SMITTY

Certainly not Boomer.

SAM

Well, Boomer and I are both in it. I even have two parts.

SMITTY

You do?

SAM

Roy's in it, too.

SMITTY

I know, but he does lots of funny things.

Sam takes hold of Smitty's arm playfully.

SAM

Now Smitty, I could twist your arm until you say, "Yes, I'll be a shepherd." Or you could just say, "Yes, Sam, I'll be glad to do it because you asked me so nicely."

Smitty laughs.

SMITTY

Oh, all right, Sam. You convinced me.

SAM

Good! I'll tell the pastor.

Sam releases Smitty's arm. The lights flicker again.

Pastor marks parts at the table near the wardrobe.

PASTOR

(singing)

"Lead, Kindly Light,
amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark,
and I am far from home...."

Sam approaches.

SAM

Pastor, Smitty will be a shepherd.

PASTOR

How did you persuade him?

SAM

Let's just say I twisted his arm.

Sam goes off. Michele and Loretta come up to Pastor.

MICHELE

Reverend, is it time to start rehearsing?

PASTOR

As soon as we round out our cast.

MICHELE

Who's left?

PASTOR

The part of Elizabeth and perhaps another wiseman.

MICHELE

You haven't asked Amelia yet?

PASTOR

No, I haven't.

MICHELE

I'll go get her.

Michele goes toward the kitchen.

LORETTA

Reverend, if I'm going to play the organ tonight, I'd better try it out.

PASTOR

I'll have Amelia show you where it is in a minute.

LORETTA

What about music?

PASTOR

There's some by the organ.

Pastor reaches in for Elizabeth's costume and holds it out. Amelia and Michelle come in from the kitchen.

AMELIA

What's this about wanting me to play the part of Elizabeth?

PASTOR

Will you do it? Here's the costume.

AMELIA

You've already got me as Anna.

PASTOR

The two are in different scenes.

AMELIA

And who's Zechariah?

PASTOR

Sam said he would.

AMELIA

Married to that old goat?

LORETTA

(Laughing)

It's only a pageant, Amelia.

AMELIA

I'll think about it.

PASTOR

*While you're thinking, would you please
take Loretta to the organ?*

AMELIA

(To Loretta)

This way.

Amelia and Loretta go down hallway to sanctuary.

*At the other end of fellowship hall Hank and Craig sit in a couple of
chairs. Craig straddles his chair backwards.*

HANK

So you're about to become a father, Craig.

CRAIG

Seems like it.

HANK

Greatest thing can happen to a man. I know. I've got a son and two daughters.

CRAIG

You do?

HANK

Sure. And a great wife.

(beat)

So are you ready to settle down?

CRAIG

Sometimes I think about it. But sound systems for rock groups is what I do best, and that requires travel.

HANK

What about something else in electronics?

CRAIG

Such as?

HANK

Like in alternate energy. You know:

solar heating, windmill generators,
experiments with new approaches.
There's a great future.

CRAIG

I don't have a college degree so that limits
my possibilities.

HANK

I know a company in California that's
offbeat but very creative. They're
always looking for good technicians, and
they don't worry about credentials.

CRAIG

Jenny would like it if I hooked up with
something like that. Maybe I would, too.

HANK

I'll give you their name and address.
You can use my name when you write
them.

From his pockets Hank takes out a pen, calling card, and address book.
He looks up a name and address and writes it on the back of the card.

Pastor continues marking parts at the table near the wardrobe. Michele looks at the costumes remaining in the wardrobe. In the distance the organ plays the opening of J.S. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, a pause, the start of the fugue, then being modified to a rock beat.

PASTOR

(to Michele)

I never expected to hear music like that.

MICHELE

I told you she can play everything. She's had classical training but prefers rock and Latino music.

The organ switches to a familiar Christmas carol with a calypso beat.

PASTOR

As soon as I finish marking the parts, we'll start rehearsal. You can ask everybody to start gathering in the sanctuary.

Michele goes off to announce the rehearsal. Bernie comes up to the wardrobe. Loretta's background playing continues.

Momentarily some of the players walk by in the background on their way to the hallway leading to the sanctuary: Vicki, Harriet, Roy, Rex, Hitoshi, Crejsek, Sam, Boomer, Buddy, Smitty, Michele.

BERNIE

Pastor Ziegler, are you sure you want me in the pageant? I'm no actor.

PASTOR

None of us are. We're all just folks.

BERNIE

But couldn't I have some other part?

PASTOR

We need soldiers, Bernie.

BERNIE

Will there ever be a time when we don't?

PASTOR

When I was young, I thought so, but now I'm not sure. We Christians inescapably live in a world filled with strife. It's who we are and what we do that matters.

BERNIE

What do you do if you don't believe in fighting, in killing?

PASTOR

Go with your conscience, Bernie. Do what's right for you.

Suddenly a cipher occurs in the organ.

PASTOR

Sounds like a cipher.

BERNIE

What's that?

PASTOR

*Air leaking through a pipe that's not
suppose to sound.*

BERNIE

I bet Craig can fix it.

*Bernie goes to where Craig and Hank are sitting and speaks MOS to Craig.
Craig goes to the hallway leading to the sanctuary. Hank and Bernie go
to the table where Pastor marks parts.*

HANK

*Well, Pastor. It looks like Murphy's Law
is starting to afflict your pageant.*

PASTOR

What's that?

HANK

*It's an engineering principle that says, "If
anything can go wrong, it will go wrong."
The organ's squeaking. The lights are
flickering. Who knows what'll happen*

next.

There is rumble overhead and a crash outside the entrance door. Hank goes to the door, tries to open it, but can't.

HANK

Now we really are snowbound.

PASTOR

I think Sam's snowblower is just outside the door, too.

BERNIE

Do you have shovels?

PASTOR

There are some in the storage room.

Bernie goes to the storage room. Amelia returns from the sanctuary.

AMELIA

I can't believe it. We're really having the pageant.

PASTOR

Yes, we really are.

AMELIA

I guess you can put me down for Elizabeth. But don't expect any miracle.

PASTOR

The whole event is miraculous.

Boomer comes storming out of the hallway and goes to Pastor.

BOOMER

Pastor, I'm resigning from the pageant.

PASTOR

What's the matter?

BOOMER

Michele's too bossy. I don't need that.

Vicki, also agitated, comes from the hallway.

VICKI

If Boomer's quitting, so am I.

PASTOR

Relax. I'm directing the rehearsal.

We'll work it out.

Hank laughs.

HANK

Looks like Murphy's law is entering the human domain. I bet we're in for more

surprises tonight.

PASTOR

*That's possible. But don't forget what
the poet wrote:*

*"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonder to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."*

HANK

We'll see who wins: Murphy or the poet.

PASTOR

Or God.

*Bernie comes from the storage room with two snow shovels. Michele
comes out from the hallway.*

BERNIE

*Come on, Boomer. The Air Force can
clear the path to the door.*

MICHELE

No, we need you guys at rehearsal.

BOOMER

In that case I'll go with you, Bernie.

PASTOR

That's all right. You're in Matthew, and we're starting with Luke.

HANK

Okay, let's get this show on the road before something really calamitous happens.

Pastor, Amelia, Michele, Vicki, and Hank start for the door to the hallway. Boomer and Bernie with their shovels put on their overcoats and head for the kitchen door to outside.

DISSOLVE TO:

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DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - FRONT OF MUHLENBERG COMMUNITY CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is lit. It has ceased snowing. Piles of snow line the cleared sidewalk. Heavily-clothed people enter the church.

INT - CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

The sanctuary of modest size is becoming comfortably full. There is a center aisle and a divided chancel. The organ console is on the pulpit side of the chancel, and choir pews have been removed.

"Searching", positioned in the choir loft on the pulpit side with Loretta at the organ, plays a medley of traditional Christmas carols with a rock beat. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet wear outer garments over "angel" costumes.

People come in from outside, stomp their boots, brush off snow, take off their coats and boots, and find their seats. Some of them carry blankets and sleeping bags, which they deposit on a back pew. Ushers hand out programs.

TV cameras and their operators are in three locations.

INT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Two doors on one side are labeled "SANCTUARY", and a single door on the other side is designated "NURSERY". Jenny, dressed as Mary, calmly watches Craig, dressed as Joseph, pace nervously back and forth. Pastor, wearing a black gown and clerical collar, is with them. "Searching's" music is faintly heard.

PASTOR

It's going to be all right, Craig.

CRAIG

What if I forget my lines?

JENNY

You'll remember them.

Amelia, dressed as Elizabeth, comes along the hall, followed by Sam, dressed as Zechariah.

AMELIA

Thank you, Pastor, for bringing this off.

PASTOR

We'll hope it all goes well.

JENNY

It will.

Amelia hugs Jenny. Amelia and Sam go through one of the sanctuary doors.

Hank and Hitoshi, dressed as wisemen, and Dick with suit and tie come along the hallway.

HANK

(to Pastor)

It's all right, isn't it, for us to watch the first part from the sanctuary?

PASTOR

Yes, seats are reserved on the front row for you.

HANK

(to Craig)

Go well, young man.

PASTOR

(to Dick)

*It's not too late to change your mind,
Dick.*

DICK

No way.

Hank, Hitoshi, and Dick go through the other sanctuary door.

Roy, Buddy, and Smitty, dressed as shepherds, come into the hallway. Smitty is ill at ease. They go through the door that Amelia and Sam entered.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Boomer and Bernie, in their uniforms, sit in a front pew. Music continues. Hank, Hitoshi, and Dick join them. Rex enters with Hugh, who is fairly intoxicated, and they join the others. Roy, Buddy, and Smitty enter and sit in the front pew on the other side. The sanctuary is now full.

A boy serving as acolyte comes down the center aisle carrying a candlelighter and lights a pair of candles on the altar and the five candles of an advent wreath.

INT - BACKROOM ON LECTERN SIDE - NIGHT

Crejsek, dressed in choir robe, stands next to door leading into chancel. Amelia and Sam sit on chairs. Sam reads from a 3x5 card.

SAM

*"Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel!
He came to help his people and..."*

AMELIA

(Interrupting)

Sam, you'll do all right. Don't worry.

Sam puts his card down and smiles weakly at Amelia.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Crejsek comes out a side door of the chancel and sits near the lectern. Pastor comes out a door on the other side and steps to the pulpit. Music fades.

PASTOR

*I want to welcome all of you to our
Christmas eve pageant. A special
welcome to those who arrived by bus an
hour ago. We're glad that we have
enough space in fellowship hall and the
Sunday School rooms to accommodate*

*you, and plenty of food and bedding,
thanks to our members and friends.*

*We also welcome the film crew that
was on the bus....*

A camera operator waves.

PASTOR (Cont.)

*...They have decided to film our pageant
and edit it for broadcast. They intend
to add subtitles to the carols we will sing
so that folks watching at home can join
in.*

*Our pageant portrays the coming of
Christ in three scenes. We first hear and
see what Luke reveals to us, for he takes
us back to the earliest part of the story.
Then we turn to Matthew and finally to
John. Each of these gospels considers
Jesus' origin in its own distinct way.*

*This afternoon one of our skeptical guests
grilled me unmercifully about the gospel
accounts....*

Dick fidgets uncomfortably in the pew.

PASTOR (Cont.)

..."Are these stories really true?" he demanded. I would prefer to rephrase the question and inquire: Do the stories of Jesus' birth convey the truth? God's truth.

I invite you to watch with fresh eyes. Listen as if you were hearing these stories for the first time. Decide whether they reveal God's truth for you.

May the pageant begin.

Pastor sits down. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet rise. Michele strikes a chord on her guitar, and they sing a capella in unison "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" (tune: "Picardy").

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET
(Singing)

[Chord]

"Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand.
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessings in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand."

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sit down. Officer Crejsek rises and goes to the lectern. She opens a New Testament and reads from Luke, as translated by the American Bible Society in Today's English Version, *Good News for*

Modern Man.

CREJSEK

"During the time when Herod was king of the land of Israel, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah."

Sam as Zechariah and Amelia as Elizabeth enter the chancel from the door on the lectern side.

CREJSEK

"His wife's name was Elizabeth. She also belonged to a priestly family."

Sam goes to the altar. Elizabeth stops part way and kneels to pray.

CREJSEK

"They both lived good lives in God's sight, and obeyed fully all the Lord's commandments and rules. They had no children because Elizabeth could not have any, and she and Zechariah were very old.

"One day Zechariah was doing his work as a priest before God, taking his turn in the daily service."

Sam pantomimes lighting incense and other actions at the altar. As

Crejsek continues, Michele rises and slips off her outer garment, revealing a radiant white dress. She moves next to Sam at the altar.

CREJSEK

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar where the incense was burned."

As Michele as Gabriel approaches, Sam draws back in fear.

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Don't be afraid, Zechariah. God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John."

SAM (as Zechariah)

"How shall I know if this is so? I am an old man and my wife also is old."

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this good news. Because you have not believed you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true."

Sam mimes loss of speech. Michele returns to her seat. Sam and Amelia start for the lectern door. Loretta plays background music.

CREJSEK

"Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and did not leave the house for five months."

Sam and Amelia pause.

AMELIA (as Elizabeth)

"Now at last the Lord has helped me in this way. He has taken away my public disgrace."

Amelia and Sam move on toward the lectern door. Music continues.

INT - BACKROOM ON PULPIT SIDE - NIGHT

Jenny and Craig sit with door to chancel slightly ajar. Craig reads the script. Jenny is nervous. Background music is heard.

CRAIG

(to Jenny)

You're on next.

JENNY

I've never performed in a church before.

CRAIG

I believe in you, Jenny.

Jenny smiles at Craig. She rises and steps near the door. Music ends.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Crejsek stands at the lectern.

CREJSEK

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee name Nazareth. Gabriel had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary."

*Jenny as Mary enters from pulpit side and comes out to center of chancel.
Michele as Gabriel rises and joins her.*

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Peace be with you! The Lord is with you, and has greatly blessed you!"

CREJSEK

"Mary was greatly troubled by the angel's message..."

Jenny appears troubled.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...and she wondered what the words meant."

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"Don't be afraid, Mary, because God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God."

JENNY (as Mary)

"I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?"

MICHELE (as Gabriel)

"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God."

JENNY (as Mary)

"I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said."

CREJSEK

"And the angel left her."

Michele returns to her seat. Loretta plays background music.

CREJSEK

"Soon afterward Mary got ready and hurried off to the hill country, to a town in Judea" to visit her relative Elizabeth.

Jenny crosses toward the lectern side.

CREJSEK

"She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth."

Amelia as Elizabeth enters, and Jenny greets her. Music ends.

CREJSEK

At that moment Elizabeth's "baby moved within her" and she "was filled with the Holy Spirit."

AMELIA (as Elizabeth)

"You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

Vicki strikes a chord on her bass guitar and accompanies Jenny as she sings. [The following words are from *Good News for Modern Man*, but another poetical version of "The Magnificat" is acceptable, such as "My Soul Gives Glory", words by J.T. Mueller, music by Michael Joncas.]

JENNY (as Mary)

(Singing)

"My heart praises the Lord;

*My soul is glad because of God my Savior,
because he has remembered me, his
lowly servant!*

*From now on all people will call me
happy, because of the great things
the Mighty God has done for me.*

His name is holy;

*He shows mercy on those who fear him,
from one generation to another.*

*He stretched out his mighty arm and
scattered the proud with all their
plans.*

*He brought down mighty kings from their
thrones, and lifted up the lowly.*

*He filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away with empty
hands.*

*He kept the promise he made to our
ancestors, and he came to the help of
his servant Israel;*

*He remembered to show mercy to
Abraham
and to all his descendants forever!"*

Loretta plays background music.

CREJSEK

*"Mary stayed about three months with
Elizabeth, and then went back home."*

Amelia exits through the lectern door, and Jenny moves back across the chancel. As she walks, she has grabs her back in pain. Pastor eyes her anxiously as she heads for the pulpit door. Jenny exits, and Pastor follows her. Music continues.

INT - BACKROOM ON PULPIT SIDE - NIGHT

Jenny enters the side room on the pulpit side, holding her back and perspiring. Craig helps her to a chair. Pastor comes in. Music is heard in background.

PASTOR

Are you all right, Jenny?

JENNY

That's the worst pain I ever felt.

Craig reaches under his costume, takes out a fresh handkerchief from his pocket, and wipes Jenny's brow. She looks at him fondly.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

At the lectern Crejsek reads.

CREJSEK

"The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son."

Sam as Zechariah and Amelia as Elizabeth enter the chancel through the

lectern door. Amelia carries a doll baby in a blanket. Sam has a 3x5 card in his hand. Music continues.

CREJSEK

"When the baby was a week old, they came to circumcise him." They named him John as the angel Gabriel had told them.

Sam and Amelia move toward the altar. Amelia sits on a stool.

CREJSEK

"Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit" and regained his speech.

Sam faces the congregation. Music ends.

SAM (as Zechariah)

"Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel!

He came to the help of his people and set them free.

He has provided a mighty Savior for us, who is a descendant of his servant David."

Sam takes the doll baby from Amelia. He glances at the 3x5 card.

SAM (as Zechariah) (Cont.)

(To doll baby)

*"You, my child, will be called a prophet
of the Most High God.*

You will go ahead of the Lord.

*to prepare his road for him;
to tell his people that they will be saved,
by having their sins forgiven."*

Sam glances at the 3x5 card.

(To congregation)

"Our God is merciful and tender.

*He will cause the bright dawn of
salvation to rise on us,*

*and shine from heaven on all those who
live in the dark shadow of death,*

*to guide our steps into the path of
peace."*

As Crejsek continues, Sam with the doll baby and Amelia leave through the lectern door. Loretta commences background music.

CREJSEK

*"The child grew and developed in body
and spirit. He lived in the desert until
the day when he would appear to the
people of Israel."*

*Crejsek takes a drink of water as Loretta starts a musical interlude.
Harriet slips out the pulpit door.*

INT - BACKROOM ON LECTERN SIDE - NIGHT

Sam slumps onto a chair. Amelia stands nearby. Music is heard in background.

AMELIA

You did it, Sam. I knew you could.

Sam holds up the 3x5 card.

SAM

Yes, with a little help from a friend.

Sam heaves a big sigh of relief.

INT - BACKROOM ON PULPIT SIDE - NIGHT

Pastor helps Harriet put on innkeeper costume. Music is heard in background.

Jenny rises and is a little shaky. Craig stands beside her. Jenny gasps as she experiences pain.

PASTOR

Jenny, are you sure you feel well enough

to go out again?

JENNY

I can do it.

Jenny winces with pain as she moves to stand by the door into the chancel.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Crejsek reads with Loretta's music continuing in the background.

CREJSEK

"At that time Emperor Augustus sent out an order for all the citizens of the Empire to register themselves for the census. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own town."

As Crejsek continues, Craig as Joseph and Jenny as Mary enter the chancel through the pulpit door. Pastor follows and sits near pulpit. Craig and Jenny walk to center of chancel. Music stops.

CREJSEK

"Joseph went from the town of Nazareth, in Galilee, to Judea, to the town named Bethlehem, where King David was born. Joseph went there because he was a

descendant of David. He went to register himself with Mary..."

At this moment Jenny is stricken with a sharp pain and grasps her back.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant."

Jenny feels another stab of pain.

JENNY

Oh!

Harriet as innkeeper comes out from the pulpit side. Craig and Jenny approach her.

CREJSEK

In Bethlehem "there was no room for them to stay in the inn."

Harriet shakes her head "No" and shrugs her shoulders to show no vacancy.

CREJSEK

"And while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby."

Jenny is again stricken with pain.

JENNY

Ow! I think I really am going to have my baby. Right now.

CRAIG

You can't have it here.

Pastor comes out from his place by the pulpit. Amelia enters through the lectern door.

PASTOR

Quick! Go to the nursery across the hall.

Craig puts his arm around Jenny and leads her toward the pulpit door as she has another pain. Pastor addresses the congregation.

PASTOR

Is there a doctor present?

No response. Crejsek comes over.

CREJSEK

I've had training in child delivery.

PASTOR

Good, will you help her?

CREJSEK

Of course.

The congregation buzzes with excitement. Hugh rises from the front pew

in the congregation, still drunk.

HUGH

What's happening?

Jenny continues toward the pulpit door. Amelia and Crejsek follow.

AMELIA

I'll get some towels and blankets.

HARRIET

I'll help you.

Jenny, Craig, Crejsek, Amelia, and Harriet hurry through the pulpit door.

Hugh staggers toward the chancel. Rex starts after him.

HUGH

What's going on?

PASTOR

The young lady is about to have her baby.

HUGH

To hell with the baby! Let's get on with the show.

REX

Come on, Hugh. We better go to

fellowship hall.

Rex guides Hugh toward a door to the hallway. The congregation is still stirring with excitement. Pastor goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

(to congregation)

My friends, you can see that our pageant has been interrupted by a real live drama. But I heard Jenny whisper to Craig, "Have them go on with the pageant." They're in show business, you know.

While we're waiting to learn of the outcome, why don't we sing some of our favorite Christmas carols that aren't in the pageant.

Pastor takes a hymnal from under the pulpit.

PASTOR (Cont.)

Let's start with "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing." It's number 94 in the hymnal.

Loretta plays through the first and last line of "Hark the Herald". Pastor slips out through pulpit door.

ALL

(singing)

*"Hark! the herald angels sing,
`Glory to the new born King....*

INT- NURSERY - NIGHT

Singing continues (V.O.) through a loud speaker above the nursery door. Jenny lies on a day bed. Amelia wipes her head with a cold cloth, and Crejsek (with choir robe removed and shirt sleeves rolled up) prepares to deliver the baby. Harriet (with innkeeper costume removed) comes in with a basin of warm water. Jenny moans as she starts to deliver. Craig paces the floor. Pastor looks in for a moment and then leaves.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

As the congregation completes "Hark the Herald", Pastor reenters the chancel and goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

(To congregation)

I can report that Jenny has started to deliver her baby. All is going well.

Let's continue our singing with "O Come, All Ye Faithful" -- number 101.

MONTAGE: In SANCTUARY the congregation starts singing "O Come All Ye Faithful".

In NURSERY delivery proceeds. Singing of third verse of "O Come All Ye Faithful" comes through loudspeaker (V.O.). Pastor comes in. Jenny looks at him with weak smile. Pastor bows his head in silent prayer.

In SANCTUARY congregation sings part of "Angels We Have Heard on High".

In NURSERY delivery proceeds. Singing of "It Came upon the Midnight Clear" comes through loudspeaker (V.O.).

In SANCTUARY congregation sings part of "Joy to the World." Pastor is at pulpit.

INT - NURSERY - NIGHT

Final stage of delivery occurs. Singing of "There's a Song in the Air" commences through loudspeaker (V.O.). At end of second line with the words "and a baby's low cry", the new born baby cries.

Singing continues (V.O.) as Crejsek completes the delivery and gives the baby to Jenny to hold. Craig comes close to admire him. Craig looks lovingly into Jenny's eyes, and she responds with sparkling eyes. Amelia and Harriet stand by and share the happiness. Harriet exits.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Pastor stands at the pulpit as the congregation sings the last two lines of "There's a Song in the Air". Loretta is at the organ. Michele and Vicki sit with their instruments in the choir stall. They sing from hymnals but

do not play.

ALL

(singing)

*"Ay! we shout to the lovely evangel
they bring,
and we greet in his cradle
our Savior and King!.*

*Harriet bursts into the chancel from the pulpit door and approaches
Pastor at pulpit.*

HARRIET

It's a boy! A lovely, little boy!

*Harriet, Michele, and Vicki hug one another and bounce around. Loretta
plays a burst of "For Unto Us A Child Is Born" from Handel's "Messiah"
followed by improvisation of other joyous music. Harriet hugs Pastor.
So do Michele and Vicki. Sam comes out the lectern door, crosses over,
and joins in the hugging.*

PASTOR

(To congregation)

We can all rejoice.

*At the front pew on one side Boomer, Bernie, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi
shake hands and pat one another on the back. On the other side Roy,
Buddy, and Smitty do likewise. Others in the congregation express their
joy by clapping and cheering. After a bit Pastor at the pulpit raises his
hand for quiet. Loretta quits playing. People take their seats. Sam*

returns to the backroom on the lectern side.

HARRIET

Pastor Ziegler, Jenny says she wants to complete the pageant.

PASTOR

Are you sure? I don't know how she can do it.

HARRIET

Yes, she insists.

PASTOR

These show people are hard to repress. Well, if that's what she wants, let's go on with it.

Cont.

PASTOR (Cont.)

(To congregation)

As we settle down, let's sing a carol that was scheduled for later in the program: "O Little Town of Bethlehem." It's number 105 in the hymnal. We'll sing the first and third verse. Will you rise as we sing?

(Looking into a camera)

And if our pageant is broadcast on television, would you home viewers join our singing?

Loretta plays "O Little Town of Bethlehem" through once. Michele and Vicki find their place in hymn books and play their guitars. Harriet improvises a drum beat. Pastor stands at pulpit. During the singing the words appear as subtitles on the screen.

ALL

(Singing)

*"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark street shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

*"How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in."*

PASTOR

(to congregation)

Won't you be seated again, please?

The congregation sits down. Pastor remains standing at pulpit.

PASTOR

Now we can resume the pageant. Let's see, where were we?

HARRIET

I, the innkeeper, just turned away Mary and Joseph.

PASTOR

Oh, yes. Is Officer Crejsek finished?

HARRIET

I'll go get her.

Harriet goes out pulpit door.

PASTOR

(to congregation)

Bear with us another moment, friends. Then we'll pick up where we left off.

(to Loretta)

Loretta, can we have some interlude music.

Loretta plays "Away in the Manger" (tune "Cradle Song").

INT - NURSERY - NIGHT

Jenny nestles the baby as the carol comes over the loudspeaker. Craig holds Jenny's hand and looks lovingly at the baby. Amelia is straightening things, and Crejsek is rolling down her sleeves.

Harriet comes in and beckons to Crejsek, who picks up her robe and goes out the door with Harriet. Amelia follows them with a pile of dirty towels and linen.

JENNY

Craig, were you baptized as a baby?

CRAIG

I think so.

JENNY

Me, too. Why don't we have our baby baptized by Pastor Ziegler? He's been so nice to us.

CRAIG

Give me some time to think about it.

JENNY

I don't want to make a federal case out of it.

CRAIG

You're right. I should quit giving you a hard time over everything.

(beat)

Okay. Let's do it.

JENNY

You said I could pick the name. I choose Jonathan.

CRAIG

Jonathan. I like that.

Craig kisses Jenny on the forehead.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Harriet is in her place with "Searching". Crejsek stands at the lectern. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She in gave birth to her first son, wrapped him cloths and laid him in a manger -- there was no room for them to stay in the inn."

At that time "there were some shepherds

in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks."

Roy, Smitty, and Buddy as shepherds come out of the front row pew and move to the bottom of the chancel steps.

CREJSEK

An angel of the Lord appeared to them..."

Michele as an angel approaches them.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid."

The shepherds show fear.

MICHELE (as angel)

"Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born -- Christ the Lord! What will prove it to you is this: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

CREJSEK

"Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing

praises to God."

Vicki and Harriet remove their outer garments to reveal dazzling white dresses like Michele's. The three musicians sing the angel chorus, which could be a variation of the following words.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased!"

CREJSEK

Then "the angels went away from them back into heaven."

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet return to their places.

ROY (as shepherd)

"Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, that the Lord has told us." Come on, boys.

Loretta plays music (such as "Masters in This Hall") as Roy, Smitty, and Buddy proceed along a side aisle to the rear of the sanctuary. As this occurs, Vicki places a manger and a stool in front of the altar. Pastor and Harriet (with outer garment in hand) go out the pulpit door.

INT - NURSERY - NIGHT

Pastor, followed by Harriet wearing her outer garment, pushes a wheelchair into the nursery. Music is heard over the loudspeaker. Harriet holds the baby while Craig helps Jenny into the wheelchair. Harriet gives baby to Jenny. Craig pushes the wheelchair out the door.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

The shepherds walk down the center aisle toward the chancel. Music continues.

INT - BACKROOM ON PULPIT SIDE - NIGHT

Jenny in wheelchair hands baby to Harriet. With Craig's help she gets out of wheelchair. Pastor leads them into chancel. Music is heard in background.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

With music continuing Pastor enters the chancel through the pulpit door, followed by Jenny supported by Craig, and Harriet carrying the baby. Craig helps Jenny to the stool beside the manger and then stands behind her. Harriet places the baby in the manger and stands on the other side. The shepherds come up. Crejsek stands at lectern. Music ends.

CREJSEK

*The shepherds "found Mary and Joseph,
and saw the baby lying in the manger.
When the shepherds saw him, they told
them what the angel had said about this
child."*

Roy speaks MOS to Jenny and Craig.

CREJSEK

*"All who heard it were filled with wonder
at what the shepherds told them."*

*Roy, Smitty, and Buddy step down from the chancel and speak MOS to
Boomer, Bernie, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi in the front pew, who show their
wonder.*

CREJSEK

*"Mary remembered all these things and
thought deeply about them."*

*As Crejsek continues, Loretta starts playing (such as "The First Noel" or "As
Lately We Watched"). Roy, Smitty, and Buddy proceed along the center
aisle singing praises MOS and exit at rear of the sanctuary.*

CREJSEK

*"The shepherds went back, singing praises
to God for all they had heard and seen.
It had been just as the angel had told
them."*

As music continues, the shepherds exit into the narthex.

Craig helps Jenny to a stool toward the front of the chancel. Harriet picks the baby out of the manger and gives him to Craig. She then stands to one side as an observer.

Pastor slips on a robe and headdress of a biblical priest. Amelia as Anna enters from lectern door, goes to the altar, and kneels in prayer. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"The time came for Joseph and Mary to do what the Law of Moses commanded and perform the ceremony of purification. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present to the Lord, as written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every first born male shall be dedicated to the Lord.'"

Craig hands the baby to Pastor as priest. As Crejsek continues, Sam as Simeon enters from the lectern door. He has a 3x5 card.

CREJSEK

"Now there was a man living in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. He was a good and God-fearing man" who "had

been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple. Seeing the child, Simeon took him in his arms, and gave thanks to God."

Sam takes the baby from Pastor, who stands aside.

SAM (as Simeon)

"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace.

With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples;

A light to reveal your way to the Gentiles, and bring glory to your people Israel."

Sam glances at a 3x5 card.

SAM

(to Jenny)

"This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against, and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break

your heart."

Sam hands the baby to Jenny and goes to the altar where he kneels in prayer beside Amelia. Pastor returns to chair next to pulpit.

CREJSEK

"There was a prophetess named Anna, an old woman who had been married for seven years, and then had been a widow for eighty-four years. She never left the temple; day and night she worshiped God, fasting and praying."

Amelia as Anna goes from altar to where Jenny holds the baby. She looks at the baby and gives thanks MOS.

CREJSEK

"That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God, and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to redeem Jerusalem."

Amelia as Anna walks down the chancel steps and speaks MOS to people in front pew. Amelia heads for exit from sanctuary floor.

CREJSEK

"When Mary and Joseph had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord...."

CRAIG

(Interrupting)

Pastor Ziegler, if we can interrupt the pageant again, we'd like you to baptize our baby.

Pastor comes out, still costumed as the priest. Amelia stops her exit and Sam at the altar turns around to watch what is happening.

PASTOR

Really? Right now?

JENNY

Yes, we would. We decided before we came back out.

PASTOR

Are you certain? Don't you want to wait and have him baptized with your family present?

JENNY

You are our family.

Jenny looks around, especially at Amelia.

JENNY (Cont.)

All of you.

PASTOR

Very well. Sam, will you get water from the font?

Sam brings water in a basin from the font. Pastor removes his headdress. Craig and Jenny push back their biblical headcoverings.

Amelia returns to the chancel and stands next to Sam to observe the baptism. Michele, Vicki, Harriet, Loretta, and Crejsek move to where they can see. Pastor takes the baby from Jenny.

PASTOR

What name shall be given to this child?

CRAIG

Jonathan.

PASTOR

Jonathan. The Hebrew for "God has given."

JENNY

Yes, he has.

PASTOR

And what is the child's surname?

CRAIG

What?

PASTOR

His last name.

CRAIG

(Looking at Jenny)

Me and Jenny will have to talk about that later.

JENNY

(Looking at Craig)

We'll work it out.

PASTOR

Very well.

Pastor takes water from the basin Sam is holding to baptize Jonathan.

PASTOR

Jonathan, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May your life be ever blessed. Amen.

SAM, AMELIA

Amen.

Pastor kisses Jonathan on the head and hands him to Jenny. Sam and Amelia exit through the lectern door. Michele, Vicki, Harriet, and Loretta return to their places.

Pastor gestures to Crejsek to read, then moves behind the pulpit, removes his priest costume, and sits down.

CREJSEK

"When Mary and Joseph had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their home town of Nazareth."

Loretta plays background music. Jenny, carrying Jonathan, and Craig exit through the pulpit door. Pastor follows them out.

CREJSEK

"The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were with him."

Thus, says the Gospel according to Luke.

Crejsek sits down. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet join Loretta in interlude music as the players disperse. Boomer, Bernie, Dick, Hank, and Hitoshi go out through a door leading to the hallway behind the sanctuary.

INT - BACKROOM ON PULPIT SIDE - NIGHT

With music in background, Jenny sits in the wheelchair, holding Jonathan with Craig beside her. Pastor brings in a portable crib for Jonathan, takes him from Jenny, and places him in the crib. Pastor then goes out through the door to the hall.

Jenny and Craig look at Jonathan.

JENNY

He's a beautiful baby

CRAIG

Yes, he is.

JENNY

You do love me, don't you, Craig?

CRAIG

Yes, I do -- deeply.

JENNY

Then don't ever leave me.

CRAIG

I won't. We're a family now.

Craig strokes Jenny's hair.

INT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pastor and Hitoshi watch Hank, dressed as a wiseman, help Dick put on a wiseman's costume. Interlude music is faintly heard.

PASTOR

When did you decide, Dick?

DICK

*When I saw the star in the east shining in
Jenny's eyes as she looked at her baby.*

Pastor smiles and nods.

INT - SANCTUARY NIGHT

As interlude music continues, Pastor enters chancel through pulpit door and goes to pulpit. The manger is gone from in front of the altar. Seated in a front pew are Sam (dressed as a priest), Roy (dressed as a teacher), Amelia (remaining in Anna's costume), and Smitty and Buddy in their ranch clothes.

The music interlude comes to a close.

PASTOR

(to congregation)

*So we have Luke's story of Jesus' birth --
and our own drama of Jonathan's birth
and baptism.*

*Matthew's version is next. It is also
placed in Bethlehem, but Matthew
doesn't describe the precise setting.
There are some different characters, and
you'll note that Joseph has a more
prominent role.*

The author of the Gospel according to Matthew was interested in linking Jesus'

birth to Jewish prophecy. To get the feel for the intense longing for the Messiah, let us sing "O Come, O Come, Immanuel."

It is number 81 in the hymnal. Please rise as we sing the first and last verses.

(To camera)

Those of you viewing at home may join us.

Loretta plays the chorus as introduction. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet play as the congregation sings. The words appear as subtitles on the screen.

ALL

(Singing)

"O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

"O come, Desire of Nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel."

Pastor beckons the congregation to be seated. He sits down by the pulpit. Crejsek goes to the lectern.

CREJSEK

*"This was the way Jesus Christ was born.
His mother Mary was engaged to
Joseph..."*

Craig as Joseph comes out from the pulpit door and walks around the chancel in thought as Crejsek continues reading. He then sits down and dozes.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...but before they were married she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a man who always did what was right; but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly, so he made plans to break the engagement secretly. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream."

Vicki as angel comes out of the choir stall, goes to Craig, and wakes him.

VICKI (as angel)

Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For

it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus -- because he will save his people from their sins."

Vicki eases back to her seat.

CREJSEK

"Now all this happened in order to make true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and he will be called Emmanuel' (which means, 'God is with us')."

"So when Joseph woke up,..."

Craig as Joseph rises and leaves the chancel through the pulpit door.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do and married Mary. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Cont.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem."

As the musicians play (such as "We Three Kings"), Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi dressed as wisemen enter the rear of the sanctuary and walk down the center aisle. A star lights over the altar. As they reach the front pew, they turn to the players seated there. Music fades out.

HANK

"Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi remain in the aisle. As Crejsek continues, Rex as Herod comes out from the pulpit door and goes to the middle of the chancel.

CREJSEK

"When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem."

As Crejsek continues, Sam as chief priest and Roy as teacher come up the steps to join Rex.

CREJSEK

*"He called together all the chief priests
and the teachers of the Law."*

REX (as Herod)

"Where will the Messiah be born?"

SAM (as chief priest)

"In the town of Bethlehem, in Judea."

ROY (as teacher)

*"This is what the prophet wrote,
`Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are by no means the least
among the rulers of Judah;
for from you will come a leader
who will guide my people Israel."*

As Crejsek continues, Sam and Roy exit through the lectern door. Rex beckons to Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi. They come up to the chancel. The four of them whisper MOS among themselves.

CREJSEK

*"So Herod called the visitors from the east
to a secret meeting and found out from
them the exact time the star appeared.
Then he sent them to Bethlehem."*

REX (as Herod)

"Go and make a careful search for the child, and when you find him let me know, so that I may go and worship him too."

CREJSEK

"With this they left."

As the musicians play (such as "March of Turene"), Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi walk down the steps. Rex exits through the lectern door. The wisemen take a side aisle to the rear of the sanctuary and walk down the center aisle.

Jenny as Mary, carrying Jonathan, and Craig as Joseph come out through the pulpit door. Jenny sits on a stool at the front of the chancel. Michele and Harriet slip out through the pulpit door.

When the wisemen are halfway down the center aisle, the narration continues with music in background.

CREJSEK

"On their way they saw the star..."

Hank points to the star over the altar.

CREJSEK (Cont.)

"...the same one they had seen in the east -- and it went ahead of them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. How happy they were,

what joy was theirs, when they saw the star!"

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi mime their happiness. As narration continues, they walk up the chancel steps. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"They went into the house and saw the child with his mother Mary. They knelt down and worshiped him."

The wisemen kneel and then offer gifts.

CREJSEK

"Then they opened their bags and offered him presents: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi withdraw and descend the chancel steps. Vicki as angel comes out and stands over them. Jenny and Craig fall asleep.

CREJSEK

"God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they went back to their country by another road."

Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi hurriedly leave the sanctuary by a door leading to the hallway.

CREJSEK

"After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph."

Vicki as angel goes to Craig and awakens him.

VICKI (as angel)

"Get up, take the child and his mother and run to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave. Herod will be looking for the child to kill him."

As Crejsek continues, Vicki returns to her place. Craig wakes Jenny, takes Jonathan, and they exit through the pulpit door. Loretta plays background music. Turn off the star.

CREJSEK

"Joseph got up, took the child and the mother, and left during the night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died. This was done to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 'I called my Son out of Egypt.'"

As music continues, Rex as Herod, Roy as teacher, and Sam as chief priest come out through lectern door. Roy and Sam speak MOS to Rex, who becomes agitated. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"When Herod realized that the visitors from the east had tricked him, he was

furious."

Rex as Herod rages. He beckons Boomer and Bernie, who come out from the pulpit door, garbed as soldiers, carrying swords. After they reach Rex, Harriet and Michele garbed as young mothers carrying doll babies slip into the chancel through the respective pulpit and lectern doors.

CREJSEK

"He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger -- in accordance with what he had learned from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared."

Boomer waves his sword aggressively. Bernie holds his gingerly.

Bernie

No! No! I can't do it!

BOOMER

You've got to. You agreed to play this part.

Bernie

No! I can't kill, or even pretend to kill!

Bernie throws down his sword and runs out the center aisle.

Bernie

I won't! I won't! I won't be a killer!

Smitty comes up from the front pew.

SMITTY

That lousy coward. I'll take his place.

Smitty picks up the sword and feels the blade. As this occurs, Harriet and Michele with their doll babies move out farther into the chancel.

BOOMER

(To Crejsek)

Give us our cue again.

CREJSEK

Herod "gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger."

Boomer and Smitty grab the doll babies which Harriet and Michele are holding, throw them to the floor, and stab them. Harriet and Michele fight back, scream, protest, and cry in anguish as their babies are slain.

Boomer and Smitty run down the chancel stairs, stab imaginary babies, and proceed along the center aisle, stabbing more babies, and exit at the rear of the sanctuary. Bernie stands in the narthex and watches them come up the aisle.

As this occurs, Harriet and Michele rush Rex as Herod and fall at his feet weeping. As their weeping abates, Crejsek continues, but the women still

sob at Rex's feet. Loretta plays background music (such as "Coventry Carol").

CREJSEK

"In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true:

'A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter crying and weeping.
Rachel weeps for her children;
she weeps and will not be comforted,
because they are all dead.'"

Crejsek looks up from her reading.

EXT - CHURCH ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Boomer dressed in his costume steps outside, leans over a pile of snow, and vomits.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Music continues as Rex, Harriet, and Michele exit through the lectern door. Jenny, carrying Jonathan, and Craig enter through the pulpit door. They move next to the altar where Jenny sits on a stool and Craig lies on the floor nearby and falls asleep. Music ends.

CREJSEK

"After Herod had died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, in

Egypt."

Vicki as angel goes to Craig as Joseph and awakens him.

VICKI (as angel)

*"Get up, take the child and his mother,
and go back to the land of Israel, because
those who tried to kill the child are dead."*

*As narration continues, Craig picks up Jonathan. He and Jenny exit
through pulpit door. Loretta plays background music.*

CREJSEK

*"So Joseph got up, took the child and his
mother and returned to Israel." They
went to the province of Galilee and made
their home in a town named Nazareth.
They "did this to make come true what
the prophets had said, 'He will be called a
Nazarene.'"*

*This ends Matthew's account of the birth
of Jesus.*

Crejsek sits down.

INT - NARTHEX - NIGHT

Boomer comes back inside, wiping his mouth with a handkerchief.

Bernie, still wearing the tunic, and Smitty come up to him.

BERNIE

Are you all right, Boomer?

BOOMER

I know it was play acting, but it's so personal. Not like releasing bombs from 5,000 feet.

SMITTY

Don't matter to me. I know it weren't real. Anyways when I was in the army I did what they told me to do.

BERNIE

You just don't get it, do you, Smitty?

Bernie shakes his head negatively.

INT - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Pastor steps to the pulpit. Harriet and Michele come out with their young mother costumes removed and take their places with Vicki.

PASTOR

There you have Matthew's version of Jesus's birth in its entirety, reminding us of the violent world in which he lived. It's no wonder that Luke's story is more

often read in church.

The third version of the coming of Christ we offer you comes from the gospel of John. It has no baby, neither shepherds nor wisemen. So we will retire most of our players. We'll let Jenny and Jonathan rest in the nursery. I've asked the others to come as themselves and be our choir.

This fine musical group, called "Searching", which the storm blew in, will play for us as they assemble.

As the musicians play (such as "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright", first straight and then a rock variation), the players come up from the front row, down the center aisle, and out of the two chancel doors, except for Jenny, Jonathan, Craig, and Bernie, and take places in the choir stall.

Most of them are in their regular clothes, but a few still are in their pageant costume or part of the costume. Rex helps Hugh, who is intoxicated. Among others, Smitty sits on the front row in the choir stall.

INT - NURSERY - NIGHT

Jonathan is asleep in a crib, Jenny is resting on the day bed, and Craig sits beside her and holds her hand. Music is heard over the loudspeaker.

JENNY

Yes, we really are a family, Craig.

CRAIG

We always will be. And I'll be the provider, I promise.

Jenny squeezes Craig's hand.

INT - SANCTUARY NIGHT

Music ends as all the players find seats in the choir stall. As Pastor addresses the congregation from the pulpit, he turns to the players in the choir stall from time to time.

PASTOR

I believe we're all assembled now and can continue with John's story of the coming of Christ.

Whereas Luke and Matthew depicted events transpiring in a period of two to three years, John chose the time frame of eternity. Instead of people, John deals in concepts, three in particular: The Word, or Logos, which is an abstract idea. Light, a physical phenomenon. And Love, a relationship. The Word, Light,

and Love.

Earlier this evening I had conversation with Dr. Hitoshi Morikawa, a distinguished astronomer who played a wiseman in Matthew's story, about symbolism of light. I've asked him to say a few words on this topic.

Hitoshi goes to the lectern. As he talks, Pastor takes an unlit candle and walks to the advent wreath.

HITOSHI

I was telling Pastor Ziegler that from ancient times, people have contrasted light and darkness. This is reflected in the creation story in Genesis, which describes an earth without form, covered with darkness. God said, "Let there be light."

Pastor lights his candle from advent wreath.

HITOSHI

And there was light.

PASTOR

(to congregation)

I might add that later in the Bible the

Hebrew prophets -- especially Isaiah -- foresaw the Messiah as bringing light into the realm of darkness.

As Hitoshi continues, Pastor carries the lighted candle back to pulpit.

HITOSHI

Many ancient peoples had ceremonies dealing with the sun, the moon, and light itself. Most common were celebrations at the time of the winter solstice as days begin to lengthen. For them this symbolized the rebirth of the sun.

Indeed, the early Christian church recognized December 25, thought to be the day of solstice, as the date of Jesus' birth.

PASTOR

This is fitting, for Christ is the Light of the world.

Thank you, Dr. Morikawa.

Hitoshi returns to the choir loft. Pastor places the lighted candle in a stand next to the pulpit.

PASTOR

Harder for us to understand is what John

calls "the Word". In the original Greek the term is "Logos".

Scholars tell us that author of this gospel was trying bring together Hebrew and Hellenistic thought. For the Jews, Logos was the mind of God. For the Greeks, Logos was reason, the guiding force of an orderly universe.

As a pastor, I find it more helpful to think of the Word as the Essence of God. That is, God's true nature.

The Word -- God's Essence -- pre-existed before the coming of Christ to Earth. In Jesus, the essential nature of God was manifested. It became flesh and dwelt among us.

Cont.

PASTOR (Cont.)

What is God's essential nature? It is Love. An overwhelming love, seeking us out until it finds us. A forgiving love. An amazing grace.

God so loved the world that he gave us his Son. In Jesus the Christ we can perceive that the essence of God is Love. This is our beacon, a kindly light to show us the way. Through Love, we are able to tap into eternity.

But, my friends, without the Love of God, we dwell in darkness.

Pastor blows out candle next to him.

PASTOR (Cont.)

And now let us hear the words of John.

Pastor sits down behind the pulpit. Crejsek rises and goes to the lectern.

CREJSEK

"Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God.

"From the very beginning, the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him.

"The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to man. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has never put it out."

Suddenly all the lights in the sanctuary and chancel go out, leaving only the two lighted candles on the altar and the five candles on the advent wreath. The people gasp. Pastor rises and goes to pulpit.

PASTOR

I guess wind and snow have taken down
the power line.

Pastor takes the unlighted candle on the pulpit and lights it from the advent wreath next to the lectern.

PASTOR

Sam, go down and start the emergency
generator while we get some more
candles lit.

Pastor hands Sam the lighted candle, and Sam exits. Pastor reaches under the lectern and pulls out candles.

PASTOR

Here are some more candles. And there
are a couple of candelabra just outside
that door if somebody will bring them in.

Pastor points toward the lectern door.

ROY

Rex, will you give me a hand?

REX

I'll be glad to help you, Roy.

Roy and Rex go out. As dialogue continues, Boomer, Hank, Buddy, and Smitty take candles from Pastor and light them. Roy and Rex return with the candelabra and place them on the sanctuary floor at either side of the chancel steps. Others light the candles on the candelabra.

PASTOR

Loretta, if you can make your way to the piano, we'll sing a carol while we're getting the candles lit.

LORETTA

What'll it be?

PASTOR

"Silent Night."

LORETTA

No problem.

BOOMER

I'll guide you, Loretta.

Boomer with a lighted candle guides Loretta toward the piano on the sanctuary floor below the pulpit.

HUGH

(Rising)

Let me help, too.

PASTOR

I'm afraid you're too unsteady, my friend.

HUGH

It's not fair.

PASTOR

*We'll talk about it in the morning after
you've slept.*

As candlelighting continues, Pastor with a lighted candle goes to the pulpit.

PASTOR

*Friends, let us sing "Silent Night" while we
are getting candles lit. The first and
third verses. You all know the first
verse. The third verse begins: "Silent
night, holy night; Son of God loves pure
light." You may remain seated.*

*Loretta plays the last line of "Silent Night" as an introduction.
Candlelighting continues during the singing. Boomer moves to the
lectern with his candle. Vicki, Michele (in the middle with a candle), and
Harriet sing together with tender radiance. Words appear on the screen
as subtitles.*

ALL

(Singing)

*"Silent night, holy night!
 All is calm, all is bright
 Round yon virgin mother and child.
 Holy infant, so tender and mild,
 Sleep in heavenly peace.
 Sleep in heavenly peace."*

Tears stream down Michele's face.

ALL (Cont.)

*"Silent night, holy night!
 Son of God, love's pure light
 Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
 With the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.
 Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth."*

By the time the carol is over, all the candles are lit. Pastor is at the pulpit with his candle. Boomer stands next to Crejsek at the lectern, holding a candle so that she can read. All others are in the choir stall. Some of them, including Smitty, hold lighted candles.

PASTOR

*Now I believe we can pick up where we
 left off.*

CREJSEK

*"The Word was the source of life, and this
 life brought light to men. The light
 shines in the darkness, and the darkness*

has never put it out.

"God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light."

Craig comes out the pulpit door, dressed in the rough clothing of John the Baptist, and stands on the top step, illuminated by a candelabra.

CREJSEK

"He came to tell them, so that all should hear and believe. He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. This was the real light, the light that comes into the world and shines on all men."

Bernie, wearing a white robe, comes out the lectern door and stands on the top step, illuminated by the other candelabra.

CREJSEK

"The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth. This was the glory which he received as the Father's only son. John told about him."

CRAIG (as John the Baptist)

"This is the one I was talking about when I

said, 'He comes after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'

CREJSEK

"Out of fullness of his grace, he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. God gave the Law through Moses; but grace and truth came only through Jesus Christ."

BERNIE (as Jesus)

"As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up on the cross..."

Bernie extends his arms as if on a cross.

BERNIE (as Jesus) (Cont.)

...so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

CREJSEK

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

"For God did not send his son into the

world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior."

Bernie reaches out his arms with open palms.

CREJSEK

"Whoever believes in the Son is not judged; whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in God's only Son.

"This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but men love the darkness rather than the light, because they do evil things."

Smitty scowls.

CREJSEK

"Anyone who does evil things hates the light and will not come to the light, because he does not want his evil deeds to be shown up.

"But whoever does what is true comes to the light..."

Craig beams with happiness and looks at Bernie (as Jesus).

CREJSEK (Cont.)

...in order that the light may show that he did his works in obedience to God."

"The one whom God has sent speaks God's words, because God gives him the fullness of his Spirit."

Bernie with arms along his sides smiles confidently.

CREJSEK

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will never have life, but God's wrath will remain on him forever."

Thus says the Gospel of John.

Loretta plays a chord on the piano. Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sing the "Dresden Amen" in three part harmony. As they do the chancel lights flicker and then come on.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

Amen, Amen.

Pastor goes to pulpit.

PASTOR

Ah, we have electricity again, just as we

have completed John's version of the coming of Christ. With the chancel lights on, the organ will work again, Loretta.

Loretta moves from the piano to the organ.

PASTOR

(to congregation)

By the time she plays through our closing hymn, the lights for the sanctuary should be connected. It is "Lead, Kindly Light", number 369 in the hymnal. You may remain seated as you sing.

(Looking into camera)

And once again, you folks at home may join us.

Loretta plays through "Lead, Kindly Light" (tune: "Lux Benigna"). Michele, Vicki, and Harriet prepare to join with their instruments when the congregation sings. Bernie and Craig move into the choir stall.

The sanctuary lights flicker, then come on and gradually reach their full strength.

During the singing, the players in the choir loft and Pastor at the pulpit reveal their emotions to phrases of the hymn. Sam joins them half way through. Words appear on the screen as subtitles.

ALL

(Singing)

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home;

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene -- one step enough for me.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;

I loved to choose and see my path, but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on;

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone,

And with the morn, those angels faces smile;

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!"

Michele, Vicki, and Harriet sing a three part chant of "Nunc Dimittis",
accompanied by Loretta on the organ.

MICHELE, VICKI, HARRIET

(Singing)

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant

depart in peace according to Thy word.

For my mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
 Which Thou has prepared before the face
 of all people;
 To be a light to lighten the Gentiles
 and to be the glory of Thy people, Israel."
 Amen.

PASTOR

The pageant is ended. Go in peace.
 May the spirit of God's love fill your
 hearts and light your way, this day and
 for evermore. Amen.

"Searching" plays a musical postlude, such as rock version of less familiar Christmas carols. Michele, Vicki, Harriet, and Loretta reveal serene happiness in their faces.

Members of the congregation move toward exits and out the doors.

At the top of the chancel steps Pastor stands between Craig and Bernie, puts his arm around them, and says a few words MOS. After he releases them, Amelia comes up and hugs the Pastor.

Rex shakes hands with Roy and Buddy and then helps Hugh out the lectern door. Sam pats Smitty on the back and speaks to him MOS. Smitty then steps over to watch the musicians play. Sam converses with Amelia MOS.

Boomer seeks out Bernie, gives him a brotherly hug, and then goes to the

lectern to chat MOS with Crejsek at the lectern. Bernie crosses over and sits with Loretta on the organ bench.

Dick starts to shake hands with Hank, but Hank gives him a bear hug. Pastor comes up to Dick, shakes hands with him, and says a few words MOS. Pastor shakes hands with Hitoshi. Hitoshi then chats MOS with Dick and Hank.

Pastor hands Buddy a candlesnuffer. Buddy starts putting out the candles on the candelabra.

INT - NURSERY - NIGHT

Craig enters and greets Jenny, who is resting on the day bed. They look fondly at Jonathan, who sleeps in a crib.

FADE OUT

PASTOR

Do you know "Lead, Kindly Light?" I'm thinking of using it in the pageant.

LORETTA

Never heard of it. But if you've got the music, I can play.

PASTOR

It's in the hymnal. It goes --

(Singing)

"Lead, kindly light,
amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on.
The night is dark
and I am far from home...."

By now Roy, Hank, Dick, and Hitoshi have returned with food to the game table in fellowship hall. At the end nearest the kitchen Hank is setting up checkers for a game with Roy. At the other end of the table Hitoshi has taken a Go game board from his suitcase, unfolded it, put out the pieces, and is trying to explain it to Dick. Rex goes from the wardrobe to watch them.

Crejsek comes up to the game table with an opened New Testament.

While she is talking, Michele and Loretta come in from the hallway and join them.

CREJSEK

Pastor, I've read through the chapters you told me in Matthew and Luke. I can see that it's great material for a pageant. But for the life of me, I don't seek what you're going to do with John.

PASTOR

John is important for the deep meaning it conveys: the Word becoming Flesh, and Light coming into darkness.

CREJSEK

Yes, that's what John writes about it. But how do you portray it?

PASTOR

I'll show you when we have our rehearsal in a little bit.

Hank goes into the kitchen.

ROY

How about you, Dick?

DICK

I'll give it a try.

Roy and Dick set up checkers and start playing. As seen from fellowship hall, in the kitchen Hank pours himself some coffee and begins a conversation with Craig.

Michele goes to the office. Hank makes a final move at checkers to defeat Roy.

ROY

You're pretty good.

HANK

Just lucky.

ROY

Want another game?

HANK

Not just now. There's somebody I want to talk to.

PASTOR

Michele, although Amelia may not like it, I do want your group to play some numbers in the pageant -- in your own style.

MICHELE

In that case we'll work up something I think you'll like. You got a script?

PASTOR

I've got to mark the parts on the pages Sam copied.

Pastor sits down at the table where Sam left the copied pages. He picks up a marker and starts marking.

Roy tells a story and has each arm raised as if carrying a sheep on his shoulders.

ROY

And as I came around a bend in the trail with this lost lamb on my shoulders, I saw this big cougar stretched out in the sun. He looked at me, and I looked at him.

DICK

What did you do then?

ROY

Well, I thought of all the heroes in the movies I had seen and wondered what they would do. Then I said in a high voice, "I taut I taw a puddy tat."

Chuckles.

REX

Then what happened.

ROY

That big cat was so surprised that he took off down the hillside, and I never saw him again.

Laughter.

Hank has the checkers board set up.

A woman rises in the congregation.

WOMAN

Pastor Ziegler, a while ago when they said there was no place for Mary and Joseph in the inn, I wondered why no one in Bethlehem would take them in.

Then I thought that it's a shame for these good folks putting on the pageant have to sleep on the floor here at our church. I've got room for three I can offer.

A man arises.

MAN

That's a good idea. We can take four if someone doesn't mind sleeping on a sofa bed.

Sam comes out from the lectern door.

SAM

Why didn't I think of this? Pastor, I'll take the three ranchers.

PASTOR

Remember, we have 25 who came in on the bus.

Others rise in the congregation. Some raise their hands.

SECOND WOMAN

We can handle 'em. I'll take four.

SECOND MAN

Give us three.

THIRD WOMAN

I've got a double bed for a married couple.

VOICES

We'll take three. I have space for four. Give me two. Also, two. Three for us.

Hubbub continues for a few moments and then subsides.

PASTOR

(to congregation)

Who says there's no room in the inn in Muhlenberg. Will all who volunteered please go into fellowship hall after the pageant for assignments.

(beat)

PASTOR

Earlier this evening I had conversation with Dr. Hitoshi Morikawa, a distinguished astronomer who played a wiseman in Matthew's story, about symbolism of light. I've asked him to share his insights with us.

Hitoshi goes to the lectern.

HITOSHI

I was telling Pastor Ziegler that from ancient times, people have contrasted light and darkness. This is reflected in the creation story in Genesis, which describes an earth without form, covered with darkness. God said, "Let there be light."

And there was light.

PASTOR

Later in the Bible the Hebrew prophets -- especially Isaiah -- foresaw the Messiah as bringing light into the realm of darkness.

HITOSHI

Many ancient peoples had ceremonies dealing with the sun, the moon, and light itself. Most common were celebrations at the time of the winter solstice as days begin to lengthen. For them this symbolized the rebirth of the sun.

PASTOR

Indeed, the early Christian church recognized December 25, thought to be the day of solstice, as the date of Jesus' birth. This is fitting, for Christ is the Light of the world.

Thank you, Dr. Morikawa.