

A Manger Mix-Up

A Reader's Theatre
Christmas Comedy

By Stuart B. MacMillan

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Howard Sinclair is ready to direct the church's outdoor manger pageant. Since the previous pageant done five years ago was a complete disaster, his wife Gladys wants to be especially careful that this year everything runs smoothly. But of course that doesn't happen!

First the rented animals are delivered a week early, but instead of a camel, a goat is sent and it promptly starts eating the neighbor's bushes. To appease their prickly neighbor, Howard agrees to let him play the part of a shepherd, even though another church member had been promised the role. Then there's the elderly Mrs. Quimby who fell off the donkey the last time, but once again wants to play Mary. And finally, the guys playing the wise men argue over who will carry the gold.

With all the bickering, how can this pageant even go on? Reverend Crosby helps them resolve their difficulties and the pageant turns out to be a medium for reconciliation, forgiveness and the healing of old wounds.

This play is ideal during the busy Christmas season because it is easy to rehearse and stage, but still reminds us to be thankful for God's great gift.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 2 w, 1-2 flexible)

HOWARD SINCLAIR: Director of this year's Christmas pageant.

GLADYS SINCLAIR: Wife of Howard.

REV. CROSBY: Minister of church. *(Role may be played by a woman, SARAH, or young man, JEROME.)*

MRS. QUIMBY: Member of church. About 65 years old.

BOB HARMON: Member of church.

JACK CARPENTER: Neighbor of the Sinclairs. He attends church only on holidays.

REGGIE CONNORS: Member of church.

GERTIE: *(Man or woman.)* Delivers animals. *(Role can be doubled with Reggie Connors or Mrs. Quimby.)*

SETTING: The living room of the Sinclair home.

PROPS: Shepherd's crook.

Rev. Crosby: A file of papers.

Gertie: Clipboard with papers.

Mrs. Quimby: Teenybopper outfit.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: GLADYS SINCLAIR and REV. CROSBY are having a conversation in the living room of the Sinclair home.)

REV. CROSBY: It seems just like yesterday that I was sent to this parish, but it's now been almost two years.

GLADYS: You've fit in quite nicely. Although many people didn't want a woman (or young) pastor, you've done such a good job that most of them have changed their mind.

REV. CROSBY: Thanks for the compliment. Too many people take pastors for granted not realizing that we are also human beings and can feel very alone and insecure at times.

GLADYS: You and I have always had a good working arrangement.

REV. CROSBY: I want to personally thank you again for taking over the job of Sunday School Superintendent. With you assuming that major responsibility, that left me more time to concentrate on my other duties.

GLADYS: It came at a good time for me. I have no more children at home and my job was terminated at the plant.

REV. CROSBY: Now that all these compliments are flowing back and forth, I have one more request to ask of you.

GLADYS: I saw that folder in your hands, and I hope it's not what I think it is.

REV. CROSBY: I was looking through the files and came across this old file involving a manger scene that was put on out in front of the church.

GLADYS: Unfortunately, that's what I thought it was.

REV. CROSBY: You don't seem too thrilled.

GLADYS: I was hoping that file would stay dead and buried and permanently forgotten.

REV. CROSBY: How come? All the details are in it, such as where you rent the animals. I wasn't here at the time, but it looks like the last one was done five years ago.

GLADYS: It didn't turn out too well. In fact it was an utter disaster and that's why it was discontinued.

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REV. CROSBY: (*Looking at folder.*) From these notes it looks like your husband was in charge.

GLADYS: He sure was, and he was the main cause of the problems. His intentions were good, but the result was a calamity.

REV. CROSBY: What happened?

GLADYS: He tried to get too theatrical. Instead of just putting on a regular, normal manger scene like everyone else, he had to act like a hotshot director and add what he called pizzazz to it. The actors revolted, the animals went wild, and we were the laughingstock of the community.

REV. CROSBY: We'd better think about it for a while before making any final decision.

GLADYS: Let's think about it for a long, long time.

(*HOWARD enters.*)

HOWARD: Hi, everybody. Business is so lousy at the plant that I am on an unpaid leave for the next two weeks. I'll have to find something to keep me busy or I'll go stir crazy.

GLADYS: At least you weren't laid off like so many of the others.

HOWARD: I'm much too valuable for that. (*Sees folder that the Reverend is holding.*) I see that you have resurrected my old file on the manger scene. I don't know why we quit doing it. We have the old set stored in the church basement, and I could have it up and running in a day.

REV. CROSBY: We really haven't decided yet. I found the file and wondered what it was all about.

HOWARD: I've got nothing going on the next two weeks. It would keep me busy. Why don't we just go ahead and do it?

GLADYS: Don't you remember? We had a lot of problems.

HOWARD: Nothing serious.

GLADYS: Are you kidding? How about when Mary fell off the donkey that you insisted she ride in on.

HOWARD: Old Mrs. Quimby was only bruised. It wasn't my fault that she made such a big fuss about it that some nitwit in the audience called the paramedics.

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HOWARD: (*Cont'd.*) Everybody knows that animals don't like to hear sirens, and they got a little restless.

GLADYS: A little restless? We almost had a stampede.

HOWARD: We were able to corral all of them before they got away.

GLADYS: Mrs. Quimby was sixty years old and should never have been put on that donkey.

HOWARD: I'll insist on getting a trained donkey this year.

REV. CROSBY: Why did you allow Mrs. Quimby to play Mary when we have plenty of young girls who would love the part?

GLADYS: The Quimbys paid for the original costumes, shepherd's crook and the stable set and that was part of the deal that she play Mary. Although Mr. Quimby died four years ago, I bet she'll still insist on playing Mary.

HOWARD: That was the only problem we had.

GLADYS: Are you kidding? Remember the day that you had Channel 7 come out to film it, and your shepherd and wise man almost got in a fistfight over who should hold the shepherd's crook, and you took it from them and gave it to Joseph, who held it upside down. We were the laughingstock of the whole city.

HOWARD: Because of his elaborate costume, Reggie Connors had the dumb idea that a wise man was more important than a lowly shepherd, so he grabbed the shepherd's crook. It was just unfortunate that Channel 7 was there filming it.

GLADYS: And Channel 7 still shows that fiasco every Christmas so that the whole community can laugh at us. And that's why we dropped the manger pageant.

HOWARD: Well, we all can learn from experience. (*Takes the folder from REV. CROSBY.*) I will do your Christmas manger pageant for you and give you a production you will be proud of.

End of Scene

Scene 2

(AT RISE: It is one week later. HOWARD is alone in the house when the doorbell rings. He opens the door to GERTIE who enters carrying a clipboard and papers.)

GERTIE: I just dropped off your animals in the backyard.
Sign here.

HOWARD: *(Looking at paperwork.)* You're a week early
and they were supposed to go to the church.

GERTIE: There was no one there so I brought them here.
What's the problem?

HOWARD: This is a zoned neighborhood. I can't have
animals like that in the backyard for a week.

GERTIE: Two weeks, Buster. I don't pick them up till after
New Year's. This is our vacation time. Rent out the goat.
People love them because they can eat anything. And
don't forget you can milk the goat. That will save you a lot
of money.

HOWARD: A goat! I didn't order any goat. I wanted a small
camel, a donkey and a sheep.

GERTIE: We only have one small camel and the Methodists
had first crack at him. They're regular customers. They
do this every year. Don't complain. Instead of a goat you
almost got a pig.

HOWARD: You can take the goat back.

GERTIE: No way, Buster. You ordered three animals. You
got three animals. Look at your contract.

HOWARD: What do I do with a goat in a manger scene?
They don't belong there.

GERTIE: Nobody knows what animals were in the manger.
And to the Jews the goat is a clean animal. There could
very well have been a goat there.

HOWARD: But it's not traditional to have a goat in a manger
scene.

GERTIE: Don't complain. You got the goat only because I
was able to pawn the pig off on the Episcopalians. Get a
near-sighted shepherd. He won't know the difference.

HOWARD: Did you leave feed for them?

End of Freeview

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