

Christmas Bells

By

James E. Bogoniewski, Jr.

Theme:

This play uses different bells to tie together short scenes depicting a man's efforts to invite people around him to come to church on Christmas Eve and worship Christ in celebration of the true meaning of Christmas. He continually encounters people who are caught up with the traditions of the season who give excuses for not being able to come with him. Each scene is separated by the reading of a portion of the Bible or a the singing of a hymn. He ends up coming to church alone to celebrate the birth of Christ. The play ends with a call for us to keep our hearts and minds on the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of our Savior and King.

Biblical Reference:

The Christmas story.

Approximate Running Time:

45-60 minutes

Props:

The props for this series of plays provide a crucial element of the series. There is to be a number of different styles of bells which will need to be recorded in advance of the production. You will need the recordings of:

- A bell on the top of shop door.
- A doorbell.
- A cooking timer bell.
- A hand bell.
- A telephone bell (the old, ringing kind).
- A church bell.

You will also need to provide the following props:

- A shopping Bag.
- A football.
- A doll.
- A VCR tape.
- A dictionary and thesaurus set.
- An electric shaver (boxed).
- Some sort of a donation bin like what the Salvation Army uses.
- Full shopping bags.
- Brightly wrapped packages.
- A telephone.
- A nativity scene (with or without live people).

Cast of Characters:

- Bob: A man who is concerned about convincing those who are around him of the importance of taking time out to worship Christ on Christmas. He should appear genuinely concerned about those he comes into contact with.
- Narrator: There are three passages which need to be read. You may have one narrator to read all three, three narrators, or you may have two narrators and have Bob recite the final reading, or any combination of the above choices.
- Choir: The choir is to be dressed as carolers. They stand off to the side and sing the hymns. You may choose to involve the congregation in the singing of the hymns, but you will probably want the final hymn to be the carolers only.
- Woman: A neighbor of Bob's who is caught up in the hustle and bustle of Christmas. She can't take the time out of her busy schedule to go to church.
- Man: A man who attended Bob's church but who recently stopped attending. He is to be an offstage voice.
- Keeper: The friendly Christmas-time shop keeper. This part can be played by either a male or female.
- Shoppers: People dressed for the season who are out to do their Christmas shopping. They have no speaking roles. Choir members may double as shoppers.

Scene I
The Shop Bell

Scene:

Bob is walking into a shop to do some Christmas shopping. Make sure that the shop bell is ringing as he opens the door to both enter and leave the shop. The keeper is to appear cheerful.

Keeper: Merry Christmas.

Bob: Merry Christmas.

Keeper: Is there anything that I can help you with?

Bob: Sure. I'm looking for...*[searches his pockets for a list.]* Well, I know that it was here when I left the house. Just give me a minute and I should find it.

Keeper: Take your time. No need to be in a rush. Too many people in a rush these days. We need to slow down and take our time.

Bob: *[Still looking for the list.]* I agree. *[Finding it.]* Ah, here it is. I need...*[Reading]* a football for a little boy, a doll for a little girl, a dictionary for a mother, and a blank VCR tape for a father.

Keeper: All right. Is that it?

Bob: *[Turning over his list to read the back.]* I guess that's it. I don't see anything else here.

Keeper: A football, a doll, a dictionary, and a blank VCR tape? That's it?

Bob: Right.

Keeper: I don't mean to get too personal, but did you really write "a little boy, and a little girl" down on your list?

Bob: Yeah, that's what's on my list, but I didn't write the list.

Keeper: You didn't?

Bob: Actually, my wife wrote this list.

Keeper: I just find it hard to believe that she would refer to your son as a "little boy" and your daughter as a "little girl," that's all.

Bob: Oh, I see what you're thinking. This list isn't for my kids.

Keeper: Oh, I'm sorry. Well, if it isn't for your kids, then it must be for your niece and nephew? That still seems to be a bit impersonal to write down "little boy" and "little girl," don't you think?

Bob: Well, I don't know if you'll understand, but these presents aren't for anyone that I know. In fact, I won't be the one to deliver them, I won't know who gets them, and I won't know if they're what the people Even wanted for Christmas.

Keeper: Then why are you buying them? I mean, you have them on a list and Everything.

Bob: You see, Every year at Christmas-time my family gets in touch with a church that works with needy families who can't afford to buy Christmas presents. We're given a list of presents and age groups and that's just about all we Ever know.

Keeper: That's all that you Ever find out?

Bob: Well, sometimes we get a thank you letter, or something like that, but it always comes through the church that we're working with so we never really know who gets the presents that we send.

Keeper: Doesn't that seem weird to you?

Bob: Not at all. You see, Every year we give presents to all of our loved ones, just like Everyone else. A few years back I realized that we weren't giving a present to the one person who really deserves a present at this time of year.

Keeper: And who is that?

Bob: Jesus.

Keeper: Jesus?

Bob: Yeah, after all, Christmas is His birthday.

Keeper: Yes it is.

Bob: So this is a way that my family can give something to Jesus.

Keeper: How is this a way that you can give a gift to Jesus?

Bob: Matthew 25 talks about how the Lord will separate the sheep from the goats. Do you remember that part of the Bible?

Keeper: Yeah, I think so. That's when the Lord will separate people depending on what good things they have done for other people. Right?

Bob: Well, kinda. That portion of scripture emphasizes the fact that when we do good things for people in Jesus name we are actually doing it for Him. And when we don't do it for other people in Jesus name then we are ignoring Him.

Keeper: Oh yeah.

Bob: So Every year me and my family give Christmas presents to a needy family in Jesus name.

Keeper: I get it. You're giving gifts to the needy is just like you're giving gifts to Jesus.

Bob: That's it.

Keeper: So, some needy boy wanted a football?

Bob: That's what it says here.

Keeper: So, what kind of football are you gonna' get him?

Bob: The best one you got. This football is for Jesus.

Keeper: All right. [*Puts the football into a bag.*] And some little needy girl wanted a doll?

Bob: Yeah. Give her the best one you got too. That doll is for Jesus.

Keeper: You bet. [*Puts the doll into the bag.*] And you wanted a dictionary?

Bob: Yeah. What kinda' dictionaries do you have?

Keeper: Well, we've got this entire desktop references set. You want that?

Bob: Yeah. Give her the best set you got. That set is for Jesus, too.

Keeper: I agree. [*Puts them into the bag. He questions the last item on the list.*] And a blank VCR tape for the guy?

Bob: That's what this the list says.

Keeper: Come on? Do you think that a blank VCR is all that that guy wants for Christmas?

Bob: I wouldn't think so.

Keeper: Me either. [*Pause.*] Well, what did you ask for Christmas this year?

Bob: A new electric shaver.

Keeper: Ooooh. That sounds nice. Don't you think that a needy man could use a new shaver too?

Bob: I know that Jesus would have. You know, I'm gonna' add that to the list. But pack that along with the VCR tape so that the packages don't get separated.

Keeper: [*He puts them into the bag and rings up the purchase. Pausing to look at Bob.*] Man, I'll tell, I've been workin' at this shop this time of year for quite a few years and I've never run across someone like you.

Bob: Thanks. Sorry to hear that.

Keeper: [*Handing him the bag.*] Me too. [*Slight pause.*] But, I hope that you have a merry Christmas.


Bob: I hope that Jesus does too, if you know what I mean.

Keeper: I do know what you mean.

Bob: [*Exiting.*] Have a merry Christmas, and I hope that you take the time to celebrate the real meaning of the season.

Keeper: Merry Christmas. [*Bob exits. The shop bell is heard as the door is opened and closed.*] I doubt I'll see another customer like him again.

- CURTAIN -

A decorative flourish consisting of a central horizontal line with a small, symmetrical, scroll-like ornament in the middle, extending outwards to the left and right.

Reading I
Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And Everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Scene II
The Doorbell

Scene:

Bob is approaching the door of a neighbor he hardly ever sees. She is practically a stranger to him. He needs to be well spoken and very polite.

The scene begins just as he is pressing the doorbell in. A doorbell is heard ringing once, then twice. The doorbell should be a church bell chime type of a doorbell, or the type that rings as a telephone does.

Woman: [*Opening the door.*] Hello. May I help you?

Bob: Hello, and uh, Merry Christmas.

Woman: [*Friendly.*] Well, merry Christmas to you too. [*Abruptly.*] May I help you?

Bob: I'm Bob Peterson. I live around the corner. I've been going door to door asking my neighbors if they'd like to attend the candlelight Christmas Eve service at our church - it's just on the corner over there. [*He points.*]

Woman: You've been goin' door to door on a night like this?

Bob: Well, yes.

Woman: Isn't it too cold?

Bob: Well, no.

Woman: Why would you do that?

Bob: Just because I wanted to invite my neighbors to come to church on Christmas Eve.

Woman: I know, you said that all ready. I just don't understand why you would want to do that.

Bob: Because it's Christmas [*as if that explains everything*] and I think that Christmas-time is a time when we should be in church celebrating the real meaning of the season.

Woman: Look, I don't know why you bothered doin' all of this. Don't you know that people have better things to do at Christmas-time than go to church? Don't you know that people have better things to do than stand out on the porch and talk to their neighbors? I mean, I've got two pies in the oven and two ready to go in. I've got presents to wrap and a house to clean.

Bob: I realize that we all have things to do this time of year, but I think that it's important for us to take time out to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. I mean, we all get caught up in the celebration of the season and we all forget the real meaning of Christmas. Don't you think that you'd

be better off if you put all of the worldly celebration aside long enough for you to celebrate Christ's birth?


Woman: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That all sounds good, but whose got time for it?

Bob: That's my point exactly. We have to make time for it. We have to show the Lord that He is more important than our worldly celebration and what better way to do that then to come to church to celebrate Christ's birthday?

Woman: [*Timer bell goes off.*] Well, my pies are done. I have to go. Look, thanks for askin' me to your church and all, but I can't make it. [*She begins to shut the door, then, as an after thought.*] Merry Christmas. [*She shuts the door.*]

Bob: [*Bob speaks to the closed door.*] Yeah, uh, well, Merry Christmas.

- CURTAIN -



Hymn I

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Reading II

Matthew 2:7-12

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Scene III
The Salvation Army Bell

Scene:

This section has no spoken words in it. Bob is working as a Salvation Army volunteer. He is standing just outside of a store with as close of a representation of a Salvation Army donation pot that you can come up with standing right at his side. He is dressed in winter clothes and should appear as if he has been standing out there for quite some time.


Bob begins to ring the bell in the dark. The lights come up on him as he stands there ringing his bell as people walk right on by - not Even making eye contact with him. Have as many people as you can find dressed in winter coats, with shopping bags and wrapped presents walk right on by from one side of the stage to the other (have them walking both ways at the same time. Don't make it appear as if this is the runway of a fashion show). Some people are talking amongst themselves as they walk across the stage, some are passing others in a hurry to get somewhere.

No one stops to put a dime in the pot. No one stops to say hello to Bob. No one Even acknowledges his presence. Some Even look as if they are purposefully avoiding him.

The lights go down after a few moments. Bob rings the bell a few seconds after the stage is dark.

Be sure to give the audience enough time to realize that the people are acting as if Bob isn't Even there. The scene could last five minutes if you have enough people to cross the stage to make it look natural. Make sure that the bell ringing is loud enough to make the average person take notice. Don't make the scene appear as if Bob isn't trying to get people to notice him. Make the scene appear as if the people aren't interested in giving - as if the people are in too big of a hurry to pay him any attention.

- CURTAIN -



Hymn II
It Came upon the Midnight Clear

Scene IV
The Telephone Bell

Scene:

Bob is sitting down at his kitchen table making a telephone call to a family that hasn't been in church for a while. The voice on the other end of the phone is heard from off stage, or just over the sound system.

The scene begins as the ringing telephone is heard. The telephone ring should be the old style - ringing bell, not the modern tone of a portable phone.

Man: [*Answering the telephone.*] Hello.

Bob: Hello, and uh, merry Christmas.

Man: Yeah, merry Christmas to you too.

Bob: This is Bob Peterson calling - from the little church on the corner. I'm calling to invite you and your family to come out to church this Christmas Eve for our annual candle light service.

Man: [*Getting defensive.*] Oh, you are, huh? You're callin' me just to invite me and my family to come out to your church? Just out of the blue like this? You just thought that you'd give us a call to invite us to come to church, did you? Well, who asked you to do this, that snooty pastor of yours?

Bob: No, Pastor Davis didn't ask me to do this.

Man: [*Easing up.*] He didn't.

Bob: No. Actually, he doesn't Even know that I had planned on calling you. I'm doing this on my own. I've noticed that you and your family haven't been in church the past few months and I just thought that Christmas-time would be a good time for you to start attending again.

Man: [*No longer aggressive.*] And why do you think that Christmas-time would be a good time for us to start attending your church again? I mean, are the coffers runnin' low or somethin'?

Bob: No, I just think that Christmas-time is a good time for all of us to be in church. I think that Everyone should be willing to go to church on Christmas Eve to celebrate the birth of Christ - that's all.

Man: Why would I want to be in church celebrating Christ? I mean, what do I have to celebrate?

Bob: We have plenty to celebrate. This is the anniversary of the greatest gift that God has Ever given to us. This is when we celebrate the day that Jesus

Christ was born. This is the day that God became man. This is the day that the one who would give himself as a sacrifice for all of humanity was born. Why wouldn't you want to celebrate that?

Man: Well, to be honest with you, that all sounds well and good, but I don't know if you have kids or not...

Bob: I do.

Man: Oh, good. Then you'll understand. You see, our kids get up really early on Christmas mornin' so if we had to stay up late to go to church then we'd all be wiped the next day - and you know that the next day would be Christmas and all. I mean, that's not a day that you want to be tired, you know. That's the kind of a day when you want to be at your best. Hey, you know, I wonder if you've thought about having your Christmas Eve service on the day before Christmas Eve, I mean that would be much more convenient.

Bob: I think that you're missing the point entirely.

Man: Well, that's my opinion.

Bob: I guess Everyone's entitled to their opinion.

Man: I think that you're takin' this church thing a little too seriously, I mean do you think that God would rather have me be in church holdin' a candle or at home watchin' my son open his presents?

Bob: I think that He'd rather you were at church - and at home the next day.

Man: Well, that's just not possible. Hey, I've gotta' go. We're puttin' the tree up today, so we're kinda' busy. You know how that goes. Hey, but thanks for callin' and maybe we'll see you in church sometime after the hustle and bustle of the holidays cools off.

Bob: That'd be great.

Man: Merry Christmas. [*He hangs up. The disconnect is audible. Bob hangs up his phone.*]

Bob: Merry Christmas.

- CURTAIN -



Hymn III
What Child Is This

Scene V
The Church Bell

There are no spoken words in this section either. Church bells are heard ringing as if the person listening to them are within the church whose bells are ringing. The bell ringing is only meant to set the scene for this section. The bells should not be loud or overbearing. They should only be used to let the people know that Bob is in church. The bells fade as Bob approaches a manger scene. He kneels down before the replica of Jesus and stays there in a somber attitude as if he is contemplating what it would be like to be there at the birth of His newborn King.

As he is kneeling in silence, the choir begins to sing "What Child Is This." At the completion of the song he rises and, if he is to recite the final reading, addresses the audience. If there is to be a reader for the final passage, then Bob quietly exits as the reader begins.

Reading III

On a cool December night about 2,000 years ago a wondrous baby lie in a manger. That baby wasn't special because he was born to a wealthy couple. That baby wasn't special because he was born in a stable. He was special because He was God born as a child. He was the incarnate God, come to die to cover the sins of the world.

The heavenly angels knew that He deserved to be worshipped. The shepherds knew that he was special and that He deserved to be worshipped. The wise men knew it too. They were willing to risk their lives to worship and protect the newborn King.

Someone has said that wise men still seek Him today, yet many people are too caught up in the celebration of the season to realize that he is special, to seek him and worship Him. The Lord has given us the greatest gift that we can Ever receive and He has provided a star, a way for all of us to find that gift. He has left it up to us to decide whether or not to follow that star, to seek what lies beneath it, to believe what we find, and to worship Him after we believe in Him.

Will you be a wise man? Will you follow that star? Will you seek Him? Will you believe in Him when you find Him? Will you come and worship Him?

[If your church has church bells, start ringing them now. If not, then play the recording of the bells that you played for the last section.]

The bells are ringing. Do you hear them? Will you choose to listen to them or will you ignore them? Will you respond to them or will you give excuses? Are you too busy? Are you too caught up in the traditions of the season to celebrate the One who deserves to be worshipped?

Do you realize that He gave you the greatest gift that you can Ever receive? What will you do with it? Will you accept it? Will you reject it? Will you tell others about it? Will you share it, or will you hide it?

The bells are ringing. What will you do? I know what I'm going to do. I encourage you to follow me to that star and worship Christ, the newborn King.

- CURTAIN -



Copyright © 1996 by James E. Bogoniewski, Jr.