

The Perfect Gift I

The Original Stageplay



Cleveland O. McLeish

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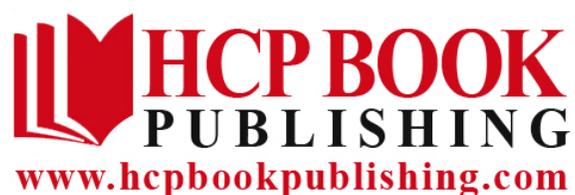


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Characters

MALES

Josef

Pastor Adolphus

Balthazar – Wise Man

Caspar – Wise Man

King Herod

Joseph

Jack

Shepherds

Inn-Keeper

Adviser/ Angel

FEMALES

Carmen

Jennifer

Gene

Mary

Inn-Keeper's Wife

Setting

ACT I – Home – Living/Dining Room

ACT II – Biblical Outdoor Setting

The Story

There is trouble at home for a loving couple, and their teenage daughter as secrets begin to surface, and the consequences of choices come to light in this dramatic Christmas Play, “The Christmas Gift.” A seemingly loving couple is routinely affected by a lack of proper communication.

When they finally decide to be honest with each other, sparks fly, and trouble looms on the horizon for this 18-year marriage. But the Christmas Play being performed at their church may just be the catalyst for change and reconciliation that this family needs.

Please Note: This is Part I of a two-part play that begins in Christmas and concludes in Easter, so expect that the end will leave the audience hanging and anxious for the exciting conclusion.

Play Details

Length: 60-90 Minutes

Cast: 10 Males, 5 Females, Plus Extras. (Some characters can be doubled)

Audience: Teens & Adults

Genre: Contemporary Drama

THE SCRIPT



SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Living/Dining Room

Furniture suggests middle-income residence. There is a couch at center stage, a coffee table, an ottoman, and a few vases with flowers. There is an adjoining dining room with a floating table, counters, a refrigerator, dining table with chairs.

The table is already set for dinner.

Carmen walks out with bowls of food that she places on the table. She wipes her hand in her apron and continues to set the table for dinner. She pauses and looks at her watch. She sighs deeply.

Gene enters.

GENE: Hey, neighbor.

CARMEN: *(startled)* Gene, why can't you knock like everybody else?

GENE: Aw, don't do that to your girl. You know we have an open door relationship.

CARMEN: You're going to give me a heart failure one of these days.

GENE: Your heart is strong, mama. Anyway, my husband going be home any minute now, so are you finished?

Carmen shakes her head. She goes for some containers of food that she hands to Gene.

CARMEN: He's going to find out one day that you can't cook and you've been lying to him all these months.

GENE: He won't find out. I signed up for the cooking class.

CARMEN: You did?

GENE: Well, in my mind I did. But I will make it a reality soon.

CARMEN: You should have taken my advice and just told him the truth.

GENE: You don't know my husband. He likes good food. It's not my fault he can't tell the difference between take-out and a home-cooked meal.

CARMEN: I just think the fact that you're lying to him, it's just not going to end well for you.

Josef comes in from work carrying his briefcase.

GENE: Okay, this is my cue to go. Hi Josef.

Josef looks at the containers in her hand.

JOSEF: Your husband still doesn't know you can't cook?

GENE: And I appreciate you not telling him. See ya!

Gene exits.

Josef looks at the table and smiles. Carmen blinks her eyes at him and frowns.

CARMEN: You're late, again.

JOSEF: Don't start.

CARMEN: Dinner has been ready for over two hours.

JOSEF: You're just setting the table.

CARMEN: You're just coming home. I thought work for you ended at five.

JOSEF: It's called overtime.

CARMEN: Overtime? Since when do you do overtime?

JOSEF: I actually came home in a very good mood.

CARMEN: You came home to a wife who is not. Josef, I work just as hard as you and I have to come home and prepare your dinner. The least you can do is be here on time, so we can eat it before it gets cold.

JOSEF: You're the one always complaining that I'm not pulling my weight around here with the bills. This is what I get for trying.

CARMEN: I know you were not at the office.

JOSEF: How would you know that?

CARMEN: I called.

JOSEF: Why would you do that?

CARMEN: I'm your wife. I think I have a right to know where my husband is.

JOSEF: You don't trust me?

CARMEN: This is not about trust.

JOSEF: What is it about then?

Carmen sighs.

CARMEN: You haven't heard a word I have said, have you?

She proceeds to finish setting the table. Josef looks confused.

JOSEF: What do you want from me?

CARMEN: I just told you.

JOSEF: I think I missed it, so tell me again.

CARMEN: Where were you? You left the office three hours ago.

JOSEF: I had a few things to do.

CARMEN: And you didn't think you should communicate this with your wife?

JOSEF: I think my wife should learn to trust me. We've been married over 16 years.

CARMEN: It's 18 years actually.

JOSEF: Point is, I can run a few errands without having to give an account to my mother about it.

CARMEN: I'm your wife, not your mother.

JOSEF: Then act like my wife.

CARMEN: You know what, this is giving me a headache. Are you ready to eat?

JOSEF: You really think I would still want to eat after all that?

CARMEN: Why not?

Josef shakes his head and exits almost bouncing Jennifer over as she enters.

JENNIFER: Hi, Daddy ---

Josef is gone without a word.

JENNIFER: Okay. Interesting. Mom, can I borrow your phone?

CARMEN: Nope.

JENNIFER: My screen just froze up again. I will just need it for a few minutes.

CARMEN: You said that yesterday, and I didn't have the use of my phone for three hours.

JENNIFER: C'mon Mom. I have friends waiting for me. I am missing some very important information just standing here talking to you.

CARMEN: I'm expecting a call, so my answer is still no.

JENNIFER: Great. You wanted me to be more friendly and socialize, and now that I am, you're shutting me down.

Jennifer drops on the couch.

CARMEN: I need to talk to you anyway.

JENNIFER: About what?

CARMEN: The time you're coming home from church in the nights.

JENNIFER: It never used to be a problem.

CARMEN: That was when we traveled together. I don't like the idea of you walking home alone.

JENNIFER: So, you and dad can start coming again, so I don't have to.

Pause.

CARMEN: The church thing is kinda over-rated.

JENNIFER: And you say this to me now after raising me in the church?

CARMEN: I'm sorry, honey, but I think it works for you as a teen. It's just not working for us now.

JENNIFER: Let me see if I understand you, Mom. You guys argued less when you were going to church. You smiled more. You were a lot more generous and accommodating. You helped people. I don't see how that is not your thing anymore.

CARMEN: Do you want some dinner?

JENNIFER: Yeah, I expected that. No, I'm not very hungry.

CARMEN: How's school?

JENNIFER: Another six months and high school will be a thing of the past for me. I'm pretty excited that my life is moving so fast. Very soon I will be in college and away from ---

Pause.

CARMEN: Go ahead and say it. I already know what you want to say.

JENNIFER: I just don't understand why you guys argue so much.

CARMEN: You're too young to understand.

JENNIFER: Right. You would be surprised at just how much I understand.

CARMEN: Stop trying to counsel me, Jen.

Pause.

JENNIFER: Okay. I'm stopping right now.

Jen turns and exits.

CARMEN: (*calling after her*) Jen --- Jennifer ---

Jen is gone.

Carmen rubs her forehead in frustration. She shares herself a plate of food and sits to eat alone.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

Josef is fast asleep on the couch.

Jennifer enters and goes to the fridge. She takes out an apple and heads back to her room. She stops when she sees someone on the couch. She stands over the couch and leans over it as she bites into the apple.

Josef groans and turns.

JENNIFER: So, Dad.

JOSEF: Uhm.

JENNIFER: Are you sleeping?

JOSEF: Yeah.

JENNIFER: Okay. Shouldn't you be sleeping in your bed?

JOSEF: I guess.

JENNIFER: Any particular reason why you are sleeping on the couch?

JOSEF: Nope.

JENNIFER: Okay. It's Saturday, do you have any plans?

JOSEF: Nope.

JENNIFER: Can I borrow your phone?

JOSEF: Sure. *(hands phone to Jennifer who quickly exits)*

Pause.

Josef sits up.

JOSEF: What just happened?

Carmen enters. She is holding some paperwork/statements.

CARMEN: Josef, I got the bank statements for this month, and I'm not sure what is going on.

JOSEF: Good morning.

CARMEN: I'm serious.

JOSEF: So, you're talking to me now?

CARMEN: Just enough for you to tell me what's going on.

JOSEF: Are you accusing me of something?

CARMEN: You tell me.

JOSEF: I don't think I like your tone.

Carmen sits. Calms herself before speaking again.

CARMEN: I'm seeing some very large withdrawals from our joint account. Do you know anything about that?

JOSEF: I took some money to take care of some business.

CARMEN: What kind of business?

JOSEF: Since when do I need to report to you what I do with my money?

CARMEN: Well, this would be our money.

JOSEF: Which is a combination of your money and my money.

CARMEN: Mostly my money.

JOSEF: You just couldn't help yourself, could you?

Pause.

CARMEN: I'm really trying not to get upset, so if you just talk to me and not try to take me in circles, I'm sure we'll be fine.

JOSEF: I already told you I took the money to take care of some business. If that's not enough information for you, too bad. It's all I have to say.

Josef lies back on the couch and pulls the covers over him.

Carmen grabs the cover off him and rolls him out off the couch. Josef jumps up off the floor ready to defend himself. Carmen throws the statements at him.

CARMEN: You can't just do what you feel like, Josef. We were actually saving this money for something specific.

JOSEF: I am sick and tired of you telling me what I can and cannot do. Yes, you're working more money than me, but I contribute too, and I have the same right to the money in the joint account as you.

CARMEN: I really can't do this anymore.

Pause. Carmen rubs her head in frustration. She exits.

Josef is unable to go back to sleep.

JOSEF: My life can't possibly get any worse than this.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP

Jack is seated on the couch looking through a magazine. Josef comes out with two slices of pudding on two plates. He hands one to Jack.

JOSEF: My wife made this yesterday.

Jack takes a bite into the pudding.

JACK: Your wife can really handle herself in the kitchen, huh?

JOSEF: Yes she can.

JACK: Gene has improved greatly over the past few months. As a matter of fact, she made this same pudding yesterday. It is almost an exact replica.

JOSEF: Maybe Carmen is giving her some tips.

JACK: I just love a woman who can cook. So how are things with you and her?

JOSEF: Uncomfortable, as usual. But I think we can work out our differences.

JACK: My first wife said the same thing.

JOSEF: We need to talk, but not here. Let's go around back.

JACK: I only have another five minutes.

JOSEF: That will do for now.

They exit.

Jennifer runs out, fidgeting and visibly upset. She looks in all direction, checking to see if anyone is there. Satisfied, she makes a call on her cell phone.

JEN: Paul, I need to talk to you. *(listens)* It's urgent, I don't care what you have to do. This is important. *(listens)* Look, I just did the pregnancy test, and I think it's positive. Hello! Hello! *(listens)* What? No, you listen to me. I need to get rid of it. This is going to ruin everything. I don't care where you get the money from. Hello! Hello! *(removes the phone from her ears and look at the screen)* You did not just hang up the phone on me.

Jen paces back and forth, rubbing her head in frustration.

JEN: How do I tell my parents this? What about church? What will people think? I can't do this.

Jen grabs her bag and exits.

Pause.

Carmen comes out all dressed.

CARMEN: (*calling offstage*) Jennifer! Jennifer! (*confused*) Where is that little girl?

There is a knock at the door.

Carmen looks at her watch.

CARMEN: Two minutes early.

Carmen goes to the door. She comes back with Pastor Adolphus trailing behind her.

CARMEN: You're early, sir.

ADOLPHUS: I may have miscalculated the time a bit. How are you doing, Sister Carmen? Haven't seen you at church in a while.

CARMEN: I know, I plan to do better in the near future.

ADOLPHUS: Your daughter represents you well though. Very active and willing. Her dedication and commitment is commendable. I see her doing great things in the church.

CARMEN: I called you because my marriage needs help.

ADOLPHUS: Alright, but I do prefer to counsel both parties.

CARMEN: He's here. My challenge now is just to get him to sit with you.

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: He has no idea I'm coming, right?

CARMEN: He would never agree to it.

ADOLPHUS: I'm feeling a bit uneasy in my stomach.

Josef walks out and heads for the fridge. He stops, realizing he caught a glimpse of somebody from the corner of his eyes. He turns to face Pastor. He looks at his wife properly dressed.

JOSEF: Am I missing something?

ADOLPHUS: How are you doing, brother Josef?

JOSEF: I'm fine, Rev. Fancy seeing you here. Why are you here?

Pause.

CARMEN: I called him.

JOSEF: Why?

CARMEN: We need help.

JOSEF: You need help. I'm fine.

ADOLPHUS: Can we sit and talk about this?

JOSEF: My neighbor Paul is around back waiting for me.

ADOLPHUS: It will only take a few minutes I'm sure.

Pause. Josef is very uneasy, but decides not to fight it. He sits. The others sit too.

ADOLPHUS: It is not uncommon for marriages to go through a rough patch every now and again. But usually it's just a matter of proper communication. We're here to work out our differences, and you would be surprised at how far a little honesty can go, amen.

Silence.

ADOLPHUS: So let us begin there. Carmen, is there anything you want to confess to your husband?

Pause.

CARMEN: Okay, I feel really bad that I work more money than you, Josef. It really does bother me, and I say the wrong things because I really don't know what to say.

ADOLPHUS: Good. How does that make you feel, Josef?

JOSEF: I've been out of touch with my feelings for a while.

ADOLPHUS: And that's the truth, so we're off to a wonderful start. But I feel in my spirit that you want to say something more, brother Josef.

JOSEF: It would be best if I don't.

ADOLPHUS: That's what I'm talking about. What's best for you, may not be best for both of you. The sooner you realize that, the better for ---

JOSEF: I have a gambling problem.

ADOLPHUS: And it's understandable if, what?

CARMEN: What?

Pause.

JOSEF: I've been taking money from our joint account and losing it at the casino.

Pause.

Longer pause.

CARMEN: You gambled away our savings?

JOSEF: I saw an opportunity to level out the playing field, so I took it. I didn't know I would lose every single time.

Pause.

CARMEN: Pastor!

ADOLPHUS: Uhm! I was not expecting that.

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: *(looks at his watch)* Oh, look at the time. I think we're going to need more than one session to deal with this. I will open up a few appointments for you guys at the Church office.

CARMEN: You're going to leave us like this?

ADOLPHUS: We're rehearsing for our Christmas play, and I'm already late. You guys should come see the play. Jen is playing Mary and its ironic cause many believe Mary was just a teenager when she got pregnant. Jen is doing such a great job as the pregnant virgin. You both should come. I'm sorry, but I really do have to go. I will let myself out.

Adolphus exits.

Pause.

Carmen folds her arms waiting for an explanation. Josef gets up to leave, but she stops him.

CARMEN: No, Josef. Not this time. I need an explanation.

JOSEF: I don't have one. I made a mistake. We all make mistakes, right?

CARMEN: We're not talking about me right now.

JOSEF: We're always talking about you. We never talk about anything else. By the way, thank you for that. I feel better now that's its off my chest.

Josef pulls himself free from her grip and exits.

Carmen drops on the couch weeping.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP

Carmen is asleep on the couch. Jennifer enters and tries to sneak past her.

CARMEN: Where have you been all night?

JEN: Aren't you sleeping?

Carmen sits up.

CARMEN: How could I sleep? Come here.

Jen reluctantly goes and sits beside her mother.

CARMEN: If something was wrong, you would tell me, correct?

JEN: It all depends.

CARMEN: On what?

JEN: The kind of mood you're in.

CARMEN: I'm making a great effort right now, so you should feel comfortable enough to tell me anything.

JEN: Okay.

Pause.

CARMEN: Well?

JEN: Well, what?

Carmen sighs.

CARMEN: What is happening with you?

JEN: Why are you interrogating me like this?

Carmen pulls out a used pregnancy test, sealed in a plastic bag.

CARMEN: This is why. I found this in your bathroom trash. It's a pregnancy test showing positive. Is this yours?

Pause.

Jen gets up to exit. Carmen grabs her.

CARMEN: Is this yours?

Josef enters. He frees Jen from Carmen's grip.

JOSEF: What is the matter with you?

CARMEN: Your teenage daughter is pregnant. That's what.

JOSEF: What?

Josef looks at Jen with questioning eyes. Jen looks away.

JOSEF: Is this true?

Jen sits on the couch sobbing. Josef tries to hug her, but she pushes him off.

CARMEN: See what you have done.

JOSEF: What I have done?

CARMEN: You lied to me, Josef. You have never lied to me. You have always been honest with me.

JOSEF: It's easy to be honest when you're not doing anything wrong.

CARMEN: I can't deal with this.

JOSEF: Maybe we need to pray.

CARMEN: Pray? Pray to who? Pray to God? The same God who is destroying this family.

JOSEF: As punishment for our neglect. Maybe if we make it right, He will fix things.

CARMEN: Is He going to put my money back in the account? Is He going to un-pregnate our daughter?

JEN: I'm going to do an abortion.

JOSEF: No, you're not.

CARMEN: I think she should.

JEN: I just need a small loan.

JOSEF: You're not doing an abortion.

CARMEN: It's her choice.

JEN: I can fix this, Dad. So I don't have to drop out of school. I only have six months of high school left. I can fix this, so nobody talks about us at church.

JOSEF: Abortion has never fixed anything. Right, Jen?

CARMEN: Josef, don't.

JOSEF: If not now, when. Tell her about her older brother.

JEN: Older brother? What are you talking about?

Pause.

JOSEF: Tell her, or I will.

Pause.

JOSEF: Your mother got pregnant when we just met.

CARMEN: Josef, no.

JOSEF: She aborted the child without even talking to me about it. She has never been the same.

CARMEN: She didn't need to know.

JOSEF: If you had told her when I said you should, maybe she would not be pregnant right now.

CARMEN: You never really forgave me for that, did you?

JOSEF: How could I?

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CARMEN: All these years?

JOSEF: I guess we all knew one day it would come to this.

Pause.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP

Carmen sits on the couch weeping. Gene sits close with arms around her trying to console her.

CARMEN: My whole life is falling apart.

GENE: Don't lose faith, Carmen. God will see you through this.

CARMEN: The God who I have been ignoring these past few years? I don't think so. Maybe this really is my fault.

GENE: Don't accept the full responsibility.

CARMEN: Why not? It is my neglect why Jen thought she needed to find comfort in the arms of a man. It is my complacency why my husband started to gamble. I am the one who is guilty of murdering my child. Maybe I deserve this.

GENE: No one deserves this. You need to free yourself.

CARMEN: How?

GENE: Start by forgiving yourself for what you did. I hear a radio preacher say that there is plenty of freedom in forgiveness.

CARMEN: I used to hear that a lot at church.

GENE: When is the last time you been to church?

CARMEN: I don't remember.

GENE: Jen invited me tomorrow. They're having a Christmas play of sorts. We should go. I think Jack is warming up to the church thing.

CARMEN: I think you need to be honest to that man about everything. You see what secrets have done to this family.

GENE: My secret is not as bad as this. I will get to it eventually.

Josef and Jack enters.

JACK: Hey babe.

Gene goes to hug him.

GENE: That was quick. Hi, Josef.

JOSEF: Hey.

JACK: Josef wasn't quite feeling the feeling, so we just decided to come home. The drive out was good though. Right, bro?

JOSEF: I guess.

Silence.

JACK: Are we going to see this play that Jen is in or what?

Silence. Jack glances from Carmen to Josef, feeling uneasy.

JACK: Okay, this is getting a bit uncomfortable, and I'm not quite used to seeing you like this. I'm giving you two options. We can go out right now and have dinner, or you guys can come over to our place for dinner. Gene is planning to do some lasagna today.

GENE: We probably should go out for dinner.

JACK: You know I have my mind set on that lasagna.

GENE: I know, I'm just so tired.

CARMEN: You guys should go and have fun.

Pause.

JACK: Okay, this is just too weird.

Jack sits Josef down beside Carmen. Gene and Jack sit on the other couch.

JACK: I know we haven't been married long, but one thing I've learned is that communication is key to a marriage. My relationship with Gene is built on honesty, and that works for us, so you guys need to just talk things out.

Pause. Gene looks a little embarrassed.

JOSEF: So, you and Gene are honest with each other about everything?

JACK: Yes.

GENE: Baby I need to tell you something.

JACK: Can it wait? We're in the middle of helping our friends here.

GENE: I can't cook.

JACK: Don't be so modest. Your cooking is exceptional.

GENE: It's not my cooking.

Pause.

JACK: What do you mean?

GENE: I get food from Carmen every day. Before we got married, it was take out, but then it got harder to maintain that when we started living together, so Carmen helped out.

JACK: What? --- Why would you do that, Gene?

GENE: I'm sorry. I just could not bring myself to tell you the truth, after lying about it so long.

JACK: (*turns to Josef*) And you two knew about this? And said nothing to me.

JOSEF: It wasn't our place to say anything.

Jack gets up and begins pacing.

JACK: Here I am talking about honesty, when I have been lied to. I don't know how to process this.

GENE: I love you, Jack, and I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

JACK: Forgive you? How do I do that? I feel like such a fool.

Pause.

Jack leaves.

Carmen is now the one comforting Gene.

GENE: He's going to divorce me now.

CARMEN: No, he's not. Just give him time.

GENE: I've never seen him so hurt. Did you see his eyes? He will never trust me again.

Pause.

CARMEN: We're always trying to fix things ourselves, and following our own path. But maybe it's time to admit that there is only one Way. Maybe we should go to church. If we can't find an answer there, we have no hope.

Pause.

LIGHTS OUT

Intermission

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Biblical setting

The setting has changed to outdoors. The stage has a few palm trees and rocks. If the budget permits, backdrops could be used to depict different time of day and locations.

Joseph is pacing back and forth. He looks up at the sun, then at the position of his shadow to try and determine the time.

JOSEPH: Why are women always late?

Mary quickly enters.

MARY: Joseph, I have some news.

JOSEPH: You're late.

MARY: I know. I had a visit from an angel, and he gave me some good news. Well, I think it's good.

JOSEPH: Okay. What is the news?

Pause.

MARY: Maybe I should wait to tell you.

JOSEPH: Mary, you know I hate when you do that. If you have something to tell me, just tell me. I don't want to be thinking about it.

MARY: I'm pregnant.

JOSEPH: That's impossible.

MARY: Why?

JOSEPH: We're not married yet. The only way you could be pregnant now, is if...*(realization distorts his facial expression)* And you wouldn't do that to me.

MARY: I'm still a virgin, Joseph.

JOSEPH: So, how can you be pregnant? I'm not stupid.

MARY: The angel told me I would conceive. That this baby would be of the Holy Ghost. God's perfect gift. He even told me the name we should give to the Child.

JOSEPH: We?

MARY: Yes, Joseph.

JOSEPH: How dare you say we, while carrying another man's child.

MARY: You're not listening to me, my love.

JOSEPH: If people found out, they will stone you to death. How could you do this to us? I was so convinced that you were the woman for me.

Pause.

MARY: You really don't believe me?

JOSEPH: I would be stupid to. The wedding is off.

MARY: If we don't get married, Joseph, they will kill me when this pregnancy begins to show.

JOSEPH: You should have thought about that before you broke our commitment.

MARY: I did not break anything. I'm telling you the truth.

JOSEPH: Then let this angel come and tell me himself.

MARY: I really thought you would believe me. You're the one always saying that nothing is impossible for God, so how can you doubt my words?

JOSEPH: I need to be alone now, Mary. Please!

Pause.

Reluctantly Mary leaves.

JOSEPH: How do I deal with this predicament, Lord? If I don't marry her, she's dead, but which man would willingly choose to father another man's child.

An Angel comes up behind Joseph. He touches him on his shoulder. Joseph is startled.

ANGEL: Joseph, what Mary told you is true.

JOSEPH: Who are you, and why were you eavesdropping on our conversation?

ANGEL: I am a messenger from God. He has told me to instruct you not to be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child conceived within her is from God. He will be called Immanuel, and He will save the world from sin.

Pause.

JOSEPH: Is this what Isaiah the Prophet wrote about? A virgin will bring forth a Son?

ANGEL: Yes.

Pause. Joseph is overwhelmed with emotion.

JOSEPH: We're chosen. To see God into this world. I am chosen to father God's Son?

ANGEL: Find Mary. Time is of the essence.

The angel leaves.

Mary comes back.

MARY: Joseph, I just need to say one more thing to you before you put me aside ---

Joseph pulls her into a deep embrace.

JOSEPH: My love.

He releases her, and kneels putting his head to her stomach.

JOSEPH: Immanuel.

Mary looks confused.

MARY: Did I miss something?

JOSEPH: I was wrong to doubt you, Mary. You are truly a woman of God, and I have been a knucklehead. Please forgive me.

Pause.

MARY: Okay. I forgive you, but what happened?

JOSEPH: I had a similar visit like the one you had.

Joseph takes her hand and begins leading her offstage.

JOSEPH: Come, we have a wedding to plan.

They exit.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Biblical setting

Two wise men, Balthazar and Caspar, stand in the garden setting, waiting.

King Herod comes to meet them. The Wise Men bow to him.

CASPAR: My King.

BALTHAZAR: What can you tell us about the King of the Jews?

Pause.

HEROD: King of the Jews? To whom did you just bow?

BALTHAZAR: Not you. Another King. One who will take the throne of David.

HEROD: On whose throne do I presently sit?

CASPAR: We mean no disrespect, your majesty, but it is prophesied that a King would come and save Israel. A King who is yet to be born.

BALTHAZAR: We have followed His star from the east, and have come to worship him.

Pause.

HEROD: I am King. When I die, my son, Archelaus, will be king. When he dies, his son will be king. So, who is this other king you speak about?

BALTHAZAR: It is prophesied that He would be born in Bethlehem. He would be born of a virgin. His rule and Kingdom will have no end.

Pause.

HEROD: Bethlehem?

CASPAR: Yes.

HEROD: And you believe this is a valid prophecy?

BALTHAZAR: Yes, your majesty. The star confirms it.

Pause.

HEROD: Well, go find this king. When you do, bring me word, so I too can come and worship Him.

CASPAR: Yes, your majesty.

BALTHAZAR: Thank you for your time.

The Wise Men turn and walk to the exit. Caspar whispers to Balthazar.

CASPAR: Does it concern you that he knows nothing of what we speak about?

BALTHAZAR: It concerns me that the king will not be born in a palace.

The wise men exit.

Herod is deep in thought.

HEROD: *(calls offstage)* Adviser!

An adviser quickly enters and bows.

ADVISER: Your majesty.

HEROD: What can you tell me about the prophecy of a king to be born of the Jews?

ADVISER: You're our only king.

HEROD: I need to hear the truth. I will not throw you to the lions for telling me the truth today.

Pause.

ADVISER: Isaiah, David & Micah all spoke of a coming Messiah. He is to be born of a virgin and in the town of Bethlehem. But the Prophecies are centuries old. The probability of them actually happening is greatly diminished with time.

HEROD: Yet, some of the wisest men in the world traveled thousands of miles to see this king. Time is of no consequence to the God of Israel. He took 400 years to deliver them from Egypt. How long has it been since the last chapter of the Bible was written?

Pause.

HEROD: How long?

ADVISER: It's been 400 years.

Pause.

HEROD: I will wait a year. If the wise men do not return, I will send out a decree. Every male child in Bethlehem must die.

Pause.

ADVISER: That was also prophesied in the book of Jeremiah (31:15).

Pause.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 8

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Biblical setting

Mary and Joseph are on one side of the stage. Mary holds a newborn baby in her hands. Joseph sits close by, a proud, smiling father.

The Inn-keeper and his wife stand on the other side of the stage.

INN-KEEPER: A manger is no place to have a child.

WIFE: They could not find a room, and she was already in labor.

INN-KEEPER: You're always trying to save the world.

The Wise Men enter bearing gifts. The inn-keeper and wife's attention is drawn away from each other.

INN-KEEPER: Philosophers from the North. Why are they here?

The Wise Men kneel before the child.

The Inn-keeper and wife draws nearer. Shepherds also come and kneel.

BALTHAZAR: We bring gifts for the child.

CASPAR: Frankincense, gold, and Myrrh.

INN-KEEPER: Gold to signify divinity. Frankincense worship, and myrrh death.

Pause.

INN-KEEPER: Who is this child?

BALTHAZAR: We believe this child is the promised King of Israel.

INN-KEEPER: A king, born in a manger? That is not possible.

BALTHAZAR: What is the Child's name?

Mary is still very overwhelmed by the visit.

MARY: His name --- is Jesus.

At the sound of His name, those still standing bow to their knees, including the Inn-keeper and his wife.

INN-KEEPER: Light has come into this world.

BALTHAZAR: The Word made flesh. Grace made flesh. Forgiveness made flesh.

CASPAR: This child is the redemption of the whole world.

JOSEPH: Through Him, all sins will be forgiven.

The scene freezes.

Pastor Adolphus walks out onstage holding his bible.

ADOLPHUS: What would this world be like, if Jesus did not come? Life would have ceased. Chaos and destruction would have reigned, until all is destroyed. We stand on the threshold of time itself. Everything changed when Jesus came, and a new countdown has begun. The countdown to the full redemption and glorification of man. This, despite our sins and wickedness. God chose to come to earth as one of us, to save all of us and forgive us. If God can choose to do that, what can we possibly do to each other that merit unforgiveness? Light is here. Grace is here. Forgiveness is here. If you come to the altar with your gift and find you have ought against your brother, leave your gift and go make it right. Then come again to present your gift. It is impossible to love the God you can't see and hate your brother and sister, who you can see. If God so forgives us, we should do likewise. Forgiveness is a choice that can set us free.

Pause.

The Biblical characters come to life and stand beside the pastor. They bow as the audience applauds.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 9

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Living/Dining Room

Furniture suggests middle-income residence. There is a couch at center stage, a coffee table, an ottoman, and a few vases with flowers. There is an adjoining dining room with a floating table, counters, a refrigerator, dining table with chairs.

The table is already set for dinner.

Carmen, Gene, Jack, and Josef sit around the table. They are deep in thought.

JOSEF: I'm not sure I like the way they portrayed the Inn-Keeper and his wife. It's not Biblical.

CARMEN: It's drama.

JACK: Yes, but if you're going to look at the Biblical story, its best to stick as close as possible to what the Bible says.

GENE: The Bible says very little about the Inn-Keeper and his wife. I'm sure there was much more going on than the few verses we read about them.

JOSEF: So, it's okay to speculate?

CARMEN: It's okay to use our imagination a little bit. Our ability to imagine is a gift from God.

JOSEF: I suppose so.

CARMEN: Jennifer did well playing Mary.

JOSEF: I'm proud of her. Maybe she did well because to some extent, she can relate.

JACK: It was a good play.

Pause.

GENE: Jack, I'm very sorry I lied to you. I know how you love a woman who can cook, and I didn't want to lose you.

JACK: It didn't matter if you could cook or not. I'm in love with you.

GENE: I know, and just so you all know, I finally signed up for the online cooking class.

Carmen high fives her.

GENE: I will be a master chef in eight weeks. Ah mean, how hard can it be and I want my husband to continue getting real home cooked meals, from my own hands.

Jack hugs her.

GENE: So, I'm forgiven?

JACK: I forgive you, as God has forgiven me. I guess we all lie from time to time.

GENE: Have you ever lied to me?

JACK: Who knows.

GENE: Seriously Jack, I'm not playing.

JACK: Let's go home. Leave these two to talk.

GENE: I need to know, Jack. Have you ever lied to me?

Jack leads Gene offstage.

Pause.

CARMEN: I don't think Jennifer is going through with the abortion.

JOSEF: Good. No use compounding the problem. Question is, are we going through with the divorce?

Pause.

CARMEN: It's too complicated to try and explain, but sometimes a couple has gone as far as they can, and there is just not many options ---

JOSEF: I forgive you, Carmen.

Pause.

CARMEN: You forgive me?

JOSEF: I forgive you for aborting our child.

CARMEN: I'm sorry. *(breaks down)* I thought it was the best decision for this family. We really could not afford children.

JOSEF: Why them and not Jennifer?

CARMEN: I don't know, but I'm glad I didn't. She's been such a blessing to us, I just didn't see it for a long time. Maybe I was too caught up with my own selfish ambition. I don't know if she will ever forgive me?

JOSEF: We did learn tonight that forgiveness is the whole point of God coming into this world.

Josef takes Carmen's hand. She's not sure how to respond.

JOSEF: We've all failed. But it's not reason enough to tear this family apart. I'm willing to give it another try if you can forgive me for what I did to our finances.

CARMEN: Yeah, I think I can. I'm saying it, but am not sure I'm doing it, but we will see. With all that's happening in our family, we need to take it one day at a time. We have more trying days ahead.

JOSEF: So, no divorce then?

Pause.

CARMEN: We'll leave that for the people who can't love enough to forgive.

They share a hug.

JOSEF: Anyway, where's Jennifer?

CARMEN: She said she was gonna make a small stop. I thought she would have been home by now.

Josef reaches for his cell phone.

JOSEF: I better call her.

There's a knock at the door. Pastor Adolphus enters.

ADOLPHUS: Okay, I need to ask you guys something, and I need you to be honest with me.

CARMEN: What is it, sir?

ADOLPHUS: Did you know that Jennifer was pregnant?

Pause. Josef and Carmen share glances.

JOSEF: Yes, sir. We did.

ADOLPHUS: Oh, this changes everything.

CARMEN: Who told you?

ADOLPHUS: Strange enough, she did.

JOSEF: That is strange.

ADOLPHUS: She has so much potential, and I have great plans for her. Now this is just turning out to be one very complicated mess.

JOSEF: Sir, we have dealt with other teenage pregnancies before.

ADOLPHUS: Yes, but never one like this. A sister getting pregnant for someone outside of church is one thing. But a sister getting pregnant for someone in the church, that's a different story.

CARMEN: What are you saying?

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: Oh my, you two don't know who the father is, do you?

Pause.

LIGHTS FADE

.... To be continues!