

The King's Christmas: a Modern Medieval Play

A Christmas Almost-Panto Nativity

Adapted, with permission, from “Knock, Knock, Who’s There,” by Rev. Brian Mountford, University Church, Oxford (in *Stars of Wonder*). Adapted by Ana Gobledale

Notes:

- Parts can be consolidated for use in a smaller congregation with fewer participants
- Choose Christmas carols that are favourites
- Knock-knock jokes use names of known people, so these might be altered to use names of people attending.

Characters with speaking parts:

Narrator:

King:

Bishop:

Jester 1:

Jester 2:

Queen:

Mary:

Joseph:

Shepherd 1:

Shepherd 2:

Angel 1:

Angel 2:

Wise People from the East (3 Magi)

Frank:

Myrrh:

Goldie:

Peasant:

Non-speaking parts:

King's Page:

Children Angels: any number

Children shepherds: any number

SCRIPTURE *Luke 1: 39-56*

Read by:

Leader: This is the season of joy and delight!

The season when we remind ourselves of the myriad of surprises surrounding Jesus's birth and which, even now, God has in store for us.

Let us be in an attitude of awe and wonder as Luis John plays a Christmas interlude and our nativity actors assemble at the back.

Music—Christmas Interlude

Leader: This year's Nativity Drama, *The King's Christmas: a Modern Medieval Play*, is adapted from “Knock, Knock, Who’s There,” by Rev. Brian Mountford, of University Church, in Oxford. Listen carefully, for you may recognize some familiar names, perhaps your own! (in *Stars of Wonder*)

Let us now turn to medieval England, inside a castle where the heat from the roaring fire casts off the winter chill, and the aroma of mulled cider fills the air.

SCENE 1: Royal Court

O Come All Ye Faithful (no singing, just as processional music)

All process in from back, following King & Queen to, “O Come All Ye Faithful.”

Narrator: Let us imagine it is Christmas Day in Medieval England, about 600 years ago. The King has invited the Bishop, and the courtiers, to a celebration in the great hall of his palace. The King is jolly, the Bishop is worried, and the party goes on. Let us join them singing,

CAROL 1 **O Come O Come Emmanuel (Luis-organ) (verse 1)**

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.

King: Come on, Bishop, why be so gloomy on Christmas Day?
Bishop: Are you sure it is not you who are too jolly, Sire?
King: Can't anyone make the Bishop laugh?

Jester: Knock Knock
All: Who's there?
Jester 1: Howard
All: Howard who?
Jester 1: Howard I know how to make the bishop laugh?

Jester 2: My turn! Knock! Knock!
All: Who's there?
Jester 2: Dee Holly
All: Dee Holly who?
Jester 2: (singing) Dee holly and dee Ivy...

King Ho, ho, ho! What a hoot! Come on, laugh my dear Lord Bishop. Someone tickle his feet, if you can find them under all those fancy robes! This is Merry England – figgy pudding, yule logs, and all that.

Queen: I've got one! I've got one! Knock! Knock!
All: Who's there?
Queen: Lettuce
All: Lettuce who?
Queen: Lettuce sing another carol!
King: Carol who? (falls about laughing)
Jester 1: Carol, please Maestro!

CAROL 2 The Holly & the Ivy (verse 1)

THE HOLLY AND THE IVY, Now both are full well grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,, The Holly bears the crown.
O the rising of the sun, The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ, Sweet singing in the quire,
Sweet singing in the quire.

King: Pass the sugared almonds, and toffee apples. Let us not be too serious. More wine! More cakes! Enjoy the feast, for all is right with the world.

Narrator: The king is beginning to suffer from a tummy ache. The trouble is, he is trying too hard to enjoy himself. The more he eats and drinks, the worse he feels. And the worse he feels, the more the Bishop, who is neither overeating nor over-drinking, annoys him for being so sensible.

Jester 1: Sire, perhaps a joke will cheer you up?
Knock! Knock!
All: Who's there?
Jester 1: Mervis
All: Mervis who?
Jester 1: Isn't it Mervilous to be here?

King: Ho! Ho! Ho! Enough, Jester! How you make me laugh!
 Jester 2: Knock! Knock!
 All: Who's there?
 Jester 2: Father
 All: Father who?
 Queen: Father Christmas?
 Jester 2: No. Knock! Knock!
 All: Who's there?
 Jester 2: Father
 All: Father who?
 Jester 2: The farther you go, the less you see.
 Bishop: That is deep.
 Jester 1: And the more you learn, the less you know.

King: My head! Enough! Right now, in this season of Christmas, I feel quite in the dark. I wish I knew more than I do. I wish I knew the secret of Christmas.
 Jester 1: Sire, let these actors young and old, knowledge share, both wise and bold.
 King: Yes, yes.
 Jester 1: Come on actors. Let us act our Christmas play for the king.
 Everyone to their places. Quick! Quick!
(clap hands and direct people here and there. Add manger & chair)
 Mary, you sit here. Joseph, stand behind her. Look interested, man.
 Shepherds, in your places. Everyone ready?
 De, dah! *(Make the gesture of a magician producing an amazing trick.)*
 Jester 1: All ready! Let's sing a song, "O Little town of Bethlehem."

CAROL 3 O Little Town of Bethlehem (verses 1)

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 streets shineth, The everlasting Light;
 The hopes and fears of all the years, Are met in thee tonight.

SCENE 2: Royal Court – Bethlehem stable

Mary: Joseph, don't just stand there. I need a clean nappy. This baby waits for no one!
 Joseph: *(Look around, hunting for a nappy.)*
 Mary: There! Over there! In my bag. Husband, old and wise you may be, but you have got to learn to do your full share of the work. We are a team now.
 Joseph: Yes, dear.
 Shepherd 1: Knock! Knock!
 All: Who's there?
 Shepherd 1: No, seriously, I'm knocking at the stable door. Knock! Knock!
 Mary: *(opens the door)* Who are you?
 Shepherd 1: Shirley
 Mary: Shirley who?
 Shepherd 1: Shirley you can tell by my outfit that I am a shepherd!
 All: *(groan)*
 Joseph: Shoo! Shoo, Shepherd! There is a newborn baby in here. Get out with your dirty feet and clothes! The last people we need in here is filthy traveling shepherds.
 Shepherd 2: Wait. Don't send us away. We saw a vision, and that is why we are here.
 Joseph: *(skeptical)* What kind of vision?

Narrator: A vision? Let us sing of that vision with our next song, “While shepherds watched their flocks by night.”

CAROL 4 While Shepherds Watched their flocks

WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

Mary: (to Joseph) Are they drunk? Maybe it’s that new drug out on the streets.

Joseph: I think they are high on sheep dung.

Shepherd 2: We saw an angel.

Shepherd 1: And the angel told us to come find a baby here.

(Angel 1 enter from side and get the microphone)

Angel 1: Knock! Knock!

All: Who’s there?

Angel 1: Anna

All: Anna who?

Angel 1: Anna baby will be a sign to you!

Mary: Did you say an angel spoke to you?

Shepherds: Yes, an angel.

Mary: Knock knock!

All: Who’s there?

Mary: Tahira

All: Tahira who?

Mary: T’hear a angel?! That’s a miracle!

Shepherd1: It is a miracle! We were just nodding off, when it was like fireworks in the sky. Then all these angels showed up.

Angels (children) *All angels enter.*

Shepherd 2: Then the angels shouted,

Angel 1: Do not be afraid!

Angel 2: Do not be afraid. For see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’

All Angels: Glory to God in the highest!

Narrator: And now let us sing “Angels we have heard on high.”

CAROL 5 Angels we have heard on high (verse 1)

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH
Sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Shepherd 1: It was awesome!

Shepherd 2: I know we are dirty and smelly. Maybe we ought not to be here.

Shepherd 1: Knock knock
All: Who's there?
Shepherd 1: George
All: George who?
Shepherd 1: George not, or ye shall be judged.
Shepherd 2: Dirty or not, after getting the news from all those angels, we could not stay away.
Joseph: I still think you are dirty. But here you are. So, come on in. Just watch yourself near my baby son, or I'll have Health and Safety on you.

MUSIC *We Three Kings of Orient Are – 1 verse, no chorus*
(no singing, just music while magi come forward)

Magi: *(Come up aisle to stable in front.)*
Joseph: *(complaining)* More travelers!
Narrator: Three Magi, wise people from the East, hear the news, too. And they follow the star to the place the child lay.
Magi 1: Knock Knock!
All: Who's there?
Magi 1: Frank
All: Frank who?
Magi 1: *(singing)* Frankincense to offer have I.
Joseph: *(exasperated tone)* And who are you, another Frankenstein?
Magi 2: Knock Knock
All: Who's there?
Magi 2: Myrrh
All: Myrrh who?
Magi 2: Myrrh kindness would do you well, Joseph.
Joseph: Hmmph. They say a man's stable is his castle, but mine seems to be more like Victoria Station! And you? *(look at wise man - Gold)* I suppose you have something to say, too?!
Goldie: No, just a purse full of gold from the rich to share with the poor. *(Give Joseph purse of coins.)*
Joseph: Thank you. Who are you?
Goldie: We three kings of Orient are. Please join us singing.

CAROL 6: We Three Kings (verse 1 only)

WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.
*O, Star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to Thy perfect light.*

Joseph: Well, thanks for coming and sharing your gifts with us in our humble housing situation. Now, Mary and I have a son to bring up! Say a prayer for us, you wise ones; we're on the waiting list for a Council flat!
Jester 2: *(with BIG arm movements)* THE END!

Narrator: **(or Jester?)** Everyone, take a bow! Let's bring our hands together and give them a loud clap!
King, Queen, Jesters: Bravo! Bravo! Well done! *(or such comments)*
All Nativity actors: *Take a big bow.*

SCENE 3: Royal Court (after play)

Narrator: The King enjoys the jester's play, but he is feeling a bit melancholy.

King: I wish I'd seen those fireworks like the shepherds, or had a star to follow like that Frank chap. I would have gone to see Jesus, too. Wouldn't it be amazing to meet Jesus today. Prince of Peace! King of Kings! Then perhaps I would understand the true meaning of Christmas, and I shouldn't feel so fed up, and shouldn't have to try so hard to enjoy myself. I will give a purse full of gold coins to anyone who can help me to meet Jesus.

Bishop: (clear throat) Ahem. Knock! Knock!

All: Who's there?

Bishop: Ivan

All: Ivan who?

Bishop: Ivan idea!

King: Ho, ho, ho, ho. Not bad. Not bad.
Bishop, I have never heard you tell a joke before!

Bishop: Christmas is a time for giving, is it not?

All: Yes. Yes.

Bishop: I think whoever gives from their heart will see Jesus.

King: What?! What are you saying? That you want me to give you my bag of gold?
(*aside to the congregation*) Leave it to the churchman to get me to empty my pockets into the church coffers!

Bishop: Sire. (*looking stern*) Giving from your heart is not just about giving to the church. Though I won't stop you if you would like to drop that gold in the offering basket. No, sire, giving from the heart is when you give without a thought for a payback or reward, without any thought of yourself. It is the source of pure happiness. And it is where you meet Jesus.

Narrator: As the King ponders the Bishop's words, let us sing, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

CAROL 7 *Hark the Herald Angels* (Luis - organ) (verse 1)

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Glory to the new-born King
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise;
Join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem:

*Hark! The herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

King: "Whoever gives from their heart will see Jesus?" Ah, Bishop, you speak in riddles like my jester. Please, please, keep it simple silly.

Jester 1: I know the answer to the Bishop's riddle.

King: Oh, please, now everyone is going mad.

Jester 1: Over by the forest fence, there is a poor peasant who hardly has two sticks to rub together. He eats only old bread. You could take him some jerk chicken and fish, some pudding, some rum punch. Join him at his simple table for a meal, for Christmas dinner. You know, light a big fire, that sort of thing. Share a bit of your ho, ho, ho. Cheer him up a bit. I bet the Bishop is right, that there you will discover the true meaning of Christmas.

King: You fool! I cannot do that. I am the king! And anyway, that sounds boring, and I do not want to miss my own party here.

Bishop: There is a bit in the Bible where Jesus says that when you show kindness to others, you show kindness to him.

King: Really? I find that hard to believe.

Bishop: Matthew chapter 25, verse 39, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?...As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it unto me."

Jester 1: The word of God!

Mary: Sire, you must do it! [*Stand up and walk toward King*]

All: Yes, you must! You must!

King: So you think so, do you Mary? Oh, very well then. But if it does not work, you will all be locked up in the tower dungeons, and ...and have to sleep on the slimy floor, and...and be tickled by spiders.

Joseph: Knock knock

All: Who's there?

Joseph: Olive?

All: Olive who?

Joseph: (*scared voice*) All've us will have to go to the dungeons? (look scared)

King: That's just how kings talk. Now, my page and I shall head to the forest fence.

SCENE 4: On the road

Narrator: The King and his page set out to visit the poor peasant who lives by the forest fence. As they trudge through the snow, the King thinks how much he would rather be feasting and dancing in the warm great hall of his palace.

[*King & Page walk down aisle.*

Peasant comes and sits in centre stage.]

King: Knock! Knock!

All: Who's there?

King: Yvonne

All: Yvonne who?

King: Yvonne now I am having second thoughts.

SCENE 5: Peasant's Shack

Narrator: Then they come to the peasant's shack.

King: Knock! Knock!

Peasant & All: Who's there?

King: The King

All: The King who?

King: No, the king! I am the king!

Peasant: Oh, forgive me, sire. Come in.

Narrator: The squalid conditions of the peasant's shack shock the king. He has ridden past the homes of his people many times, but rarely cast more than a glance in their direction. Now, his eyes are opened. He sees the stark poverty, the misery, the futility.

Page [*Dust off chair before King sits.*]

Narrator: Ashamed of his own excessive splendour, the King wraps his fancy cloak around the shoulders of the poor peasant. He lights a fire and warms the food he has brought with him.

King: Here. Warm up with some macaroni & cheese.
 Peasant: Thank you, sire.
 Narrator: The King tries to remember his jester's jokes, and shares them with the peasant. And makes some up himself.
 King: Knock! Knock!
 Peasant & All: Who's there?
 King: Esau
 Peasant & All: Esau who?
 King: (singing) Esau three ships come sailing in!
 Narrator: And so they sang. Let us join them singing, "I saw three ships come sailing in."

CAROL 8: I saw three ships (verses 1 & 6)

I SAW THREE SHIPS COME SAILING IN

On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
 I saw three ships come sailing in
 On Christmas day in the morning.

And all the bells on earth shall ring,
 On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
 And all the bells on earth shall ring,
 On Christmas day in the morning.

Narrator: Leaving the peasant with a full stomach and roaring fire, the King takes his leave, with a full and humble heart. He thanks the poor peasant for his hospitality and company.

King gets up and shakes the peasant's hand, as does the Page. They wave good bye.

SCENE 6: On the road (heading home)

Narrator: On his way home to his sumptuous palace, the king realizes how quickly the day has passed, and how good and content he feels.
 King: No amount of dancing and eating could make me feel this good!
 Narrator: But then a sadness falls upon him.
 King: But I never did see Jesus. And I am no closer to understanding the mystery of Christmas.
 Narrator: As the King walks, he prays.
 King: Lord, Jesus, I wanted only one thing, that this Christmas I might meet you, just as the shepherds met you at Bethlehem.
 Narrator: Then the King hears a voice speaking out of the darkness. It is the voice of the poor peasant.
 Peasant: But you did meet me today, sire. You visited my humble house. You brought me food. We ate together. We laughed together. Now do you know the true meaning of Christmas?
 King: (*pause for a moment, then exclaim*) Well, great macaroni and cheese and coleslaw! I think I jolly well do.
 Narrator: And so the King's eyes and heart are opened with the message of Christmas. And the story continues: The shepherds made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Here ends the reading. And here ends our modern medieval nativity drama. Thanks be to God!

Please put your hands together for our troupe of actors.

All take a bow, and words of thanks.

***CLOSING HYMN** *Good King Wenceslaus*

Leader: Please stand for our closing hymn, *Good King Wenceslaus*, to re-cap our Nativity Drama. Note the sections for Men, Women and all. Children, you may join in wherever you like.

CAROL 9: *Good King Wenceslas (all verses)*
[All actors take a seat during singing of Carol 9]

ALL: **GOOD KING WENCESLAS LOOKED OUT ON THE FEAST OF STEPHEN,**
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.

MEN: “Hither, page, and stand by me, if you know it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?”

WOMEN: “Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes’ fountain.”

MEN: “Bring me food and bring me wine, bring me pine logs hither,
You and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither.”

ALL: Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went together,
Through the cold wind’s wild lament and the bitter weather.

WOMEN: “Sire, the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer.”

MEN: “Mark my footsteps, my good page, tread now in them boldly,
You shall find the winter’s rage freeze your blood less coldly.”

ALL: In his master’s steps he trod, where the snow lay dented;
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian folk, be sure, wealth or rank possessing,
You who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing.

PRE-CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray.
Jester 1: One last thing to make you laugh?
Leader: Okay, but make it quick.
Jester 2: Knock knock!
All: Who’s there.
Jester 2: Todd
All: Todd who?
Jester 1: Todd-day is the day that Christ is born!
Leader: Indeed our God is a God of delight and surprises! Thanks be to God!

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray. Gracious Lord, help us all be ready to welcome Jesus, the Lord of Love, into our lives anew. Thank you for our youth, children and adults who practiced, prepared costumes, herded our little ones, and together have enthusiastically presented the Good News in our special Nativity drama this morning. Help us keep the joy shared this morning in our hearts throughout this last week of Advent, as we share the hope, peace, joy and love of Christmas with others. Amen.

***BLESSING & SENDING FORTH**

Please stand for the close of our worship.

Go into the world, encouraged by the love shared in this time of worship, refreshed in the knowledge that love is all around, and strengthened to be God’s ambassadors of love to all people. Amen.

THE GRACE

HYMNS

Procession (just music) O Come all Ye Faithful

CAROL 1: O Come O Come Emmanuel (verse 1)

CAROL 2 The Holly & the Ivy (verses 1)

CAROL 3 O Little Town of Bethlehem (verses 1)

CAROL 4 While Shepherds Watched their flocks (verse 1)

CAROL 5 Angels we have heard on high... Gloria.... (verse 1)

CAROL 6: We Three Kings (verse 1)

CAROL 7 Hark the Herald Angels (verse 1)

CAROL 8: I saw three ships (verses 1 and 6)

CAROL 9: *Good King Wenceslas (all 5 verses)*