

Hiriam, The Innkeeper!

By John B. Wintermute

A CHRISTMAS PLAY
FOR THE SANCTUARY

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MINISTER: Actual minister or member of the congregation;
current dress.

HIRIAM: Innkeeper from Bethlehem; dressed in the
Palestinian robes of the First Century.

ASSISTANT: To minister, non-speaking part.

TIME: The present.

THE PLACE: The sanctuary.

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(AT RISE: The MINISTER stands behind the lectern and reads the scripture lesson, as if about to embark upon a typical sermon.)

MINISTER: Our scripture lesson for this evening is from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter two, verses one through seven: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. *(This was the first census made when Quirinius was Governor of Syria.)* And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the City of Nazareth, to Judea, to the City of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered, and she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn ..."

HIRIAM: *(Immediately upon the completion of the words, "no place for them in the inn," enters the sanctuary from the vestibule, shouting.)* Hey, Joe! You here? Joseph from Nazareth, where are you? *(Pauses to ask a person on the end of one of the pews near the back of the church.)* Have you seen Joe, mister? Man about five foot eight. Long gray hair and a beard. *(Moves on down the aisle and stops beside another man at the end of a pew.)* No, you're not Joe! Your hair's cut too short. Besides, Joe would never be caught wearing such silly clothes. Mister, they're really way out! *(Continues on down the aisle and stops near a woman. To HIMSELF.)* Maybe if I could find Joe's wife ... What was her name? She wasn't any bigger than a mite! *(Suddenly.)* Yeah! Mite! Mary! Now I remember! *(HE leans over and asks the woman in the pew.)* You're not Mary from Nazareth, are you?

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MINISTER: *(Upset by this sudden interruption but still in control.)* You, there! Yes, you! What are you doing here?

HIRIAM: I'd think that was obvious to everyone. I'm looking for Joseph and Mary, a couple from Nazareth. Up north somewhere ...

MINISTER: Well, old man, if you'd just quiet down and come up here beside me ... *(Whispers to ASSISTANT.)* Looks like we've got a senile, old man on our hands. If you could slip out and call the police, I'll try and keep him occupied until they get here.

(ASSISTANT does so and returns quickly.)

HIRIAM: *(Making HIS way up on the platform.)* And just who do you think you are, mister?

MINISTER: I'm the minister *(Or member.)* of this church. Now if you'd just come over here beside me, I'm sure we can get matters straightened away.

HIRIAM: *(Going to stand beside the MINISTER.)* Well, hurry up. I don't have all night. I've tried to find Joe, but I can't seem to catch up with him. I can't let him and Mary run around outside in this cold. They'd probably freeze to death before morning.

MINISTER: Now, now, take it easy! Don't get so upset! I'm sure they're all right.

HIRIAM: Oh, so you know Joe? Well, where is he?

MINISTER: No, I don't think I ever met your friends.

HIRIAM: Then how do you know he's all right? You're pullin' my leg!

MINISTER: I wouldn't think of such a thing. Now, if you'd just sit down here.

HIRIAM: Ain't going to do no such a thing. I've got to find Joe, I tell you. Got to get him and Mary out of the cold.

MINISTER: *(Not knowing how to say it.)* You're ... you're ... Well, you're not high, are you?

HIRIAM: High?

MINISTER: You are dressed somewhat odd - and you do act a little strange ...

HIRIAM: Not half as silly as you folks here.

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MINISTER: I mean ... Well, you're not on dope? Pot?

HIRIAM: What's that?

MINISTER: I'm sorry I mentioned it. *(To ASSISTANT.)*
Didn't anyone go for the police? This character has
flipped his lid! *(Back to HIRIAM.)* Maybe if I knew your
name - that might help. You do have name?

HIRIAM: Sure do! Don't you? Thought everyone did.

MINISTER: Well, what is your name, Mister ... Mister ...

HIRIAM: You just want my first name or my whole name?

MINISTER: It would be more helpful if we had your full
name.

HIRIAM: My name is Hiriam, son of James, the son of
Moses, the son of Saul, the son of Samuel, the son of ...
the son of ... *(Muttering to HIMSELF.)* Now who was
Samuel's father ... *(To the MINISTER.)* When you get my
age, you sometimes get mixed up a mite.

MINISTER: You can say that again.

HIRIAM: Oh yes, the son of Samuel, the son of Simon, the
son of ...

MINISTER: *(Cutting in.)* You mean there's more?

HIRIAM: Lots more! I trace my name all the way back
through the Tribe of Judah, to Abraham, to Adam ... the
son of Simon, the son of Daniel, the son of Ezra, the son
of-

MINISTER: *(Cutting HIM off a second time.)* I think maybe
you've gone back far enough. You lost me about six
names back. Maybe if you told me what you do for a
living, what your job is ...

HIRIAM: *(Hesitant. Not wanting the truth to come out.)* I ...
er ... I keep an inn.

MINISTER: Did you say you were an innkeeper?

HIRIAM: *(Bowing HIS head in shame.)* So now you know.
All of you!

MINISTER: No, I'm afraid I don't know. Maybe if you told
me where your inn is located? What state?

HIRIAM: *(Covered with shame.)* In Bethlehem of Judea.
Palestine. The Promised Land.

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MINISTER: *(Who is having a great deal of difficulty swallowing this.)* You mean to stand here and tell me that you own and operate an inn in Bethlehem?

HIRIAM: Not exactly ... I used to operate the inn there. But I gave it up ... after ... well, after ...

MINISTER: You used to operate an inn in Bethlehem. What do you do now? Are you retired?

HIRIAM: Not exactly. I just keep looking around ... here ... there ... everywhere.

MINISTER: Looking for what?

HIRIAM: *(Angry.)* I told you once. For Joe and Mary. Maybe someday, somehow, I'll catch up with them and then I'll ... *(HIS voice trails off in shame.)*

MINISTER: What's so great about this couple you're trying to find?

HIRIAM: Mister, if you'd stop flapping your lips long enough, maybe I'd get a chance to tell you. It was this way! They came to my inn in December ... about two thousand years ago ...

MINISTER: *(Impatient as ever.)* Who're "they?"

HIRIAM: You ain't paying a bit of attention! I told you a half dozen times already. It was this young couple from Nazareth, Joe and Mary.

MINISTER: *(Dazed.)* But a couple of thousand years ago ... It's impossible!

HIRIAM: Happened when Augustus was Emperor of Rome, near as I can remember. He wanted a world-wide census so he'd know how many folks he could count on taxing.

MINISTER: Next you'll be telling me it was when Quirinius was Governor of Syria.

HIRIAM: Let me think. A body's brains get a bit addled after two thousand years. Yeah, seems to me he was the guy who was Governor of Syria. 'Course we Jews didn't have much use for Syria. *(Amazed.)* You mean, you were there too?

MINISTER: Hardly.

End of Freeview

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