

A MANGER FOR ALL SEASONS

By Beth Loughner

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Betty Davis, who went to be with Jesus before ever realizing the full impact of the gift she passed on to me...her love of reading and putting pen to paper!

The Playwright

STORY OF THE PLAY

The life-size nativity is up once again for public display along a busy sidewalk. Different views of Christmas abound and each will leave their mark on the nativity. Meet the attorney who believes he's well on his way to heaven by his wonderful contributions to society, or the two teenagers who find it hard to fit Jesus into their high-tech world. Cheerful shoppers are sure all the nativity needs is a bit of sprucing up to be appealing, and an apathetic Christian finds it easier to follow than to lead. Unbelief plagues two construction workers, who find Jesus fascinating, but nothing else. Three wise men restore the nativity by removing the items left behind by each set of characters. Only after the contribution check, computer modem, tolerance books, bright lights and decorations are removed does the original and unchanging story of Christmas return.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

6 m (doubling possible), 4 w, 2 flex, 2 girls, 2 teens

NARRATOR: Man or woman any age.

MARY: Woman, late teens or early twenties.

JOSEPH: Young man around the age of Mary.

ATTORNEY: Middle-age man/woman, in a hurry.

DAVE: Teenager interested in computers.

TOM: Another

CAROL: Woman who has just been shopping.

LAURA: Another.

KARI: Girl shopping with her mother.

LISA: Another.

KAREN: Tolerant woman.

BOB: Construction worker.

JERRY: Another.

WISE MEN: Three men.

Performance time: About 45 minutes with music, 30 minutes without.

SETTING: Nativity scene on public display on a busy city sidewalk. Manger should be big enough for two adult characters, a small trough, baby doll and props. May use straw or large, stuffed sheep for additional props inside manger. A green or blue light inside the scene is very effective for night-time use. A small bench is nearby.

PROPS: Computer cord, books, cellular phone, briefcase, enlarged cardboard check, enlarged picture of two people shaking hands, several shopping bags filled with tree ornaments, artificial Christmas tree with lights and trimming, cassette or CD player, and two lunch pails.

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Stage is dark except for the low, glowing light in the manger. MARY and JOSEPH are sitting beside the manger with baby Jesus. [Optional song, suggested duet: "What Her Heart Remembered" by Michael Card.] SPOTLIGHT on NARRATOR who enters from SR and stands to the side of the manger scene.)

NARRATOR: Christmas! I don't know about you, but Christmas seems to have changed over the years. Scenes of the manger (*Waves hand toward scene*) are few and far between, replaced by the larger, new improved Santa's workshop in the mall. It comes earlier, too. Christmas in July isn't just a one-time event anymore, it's the official kick-off of the Christmas bombardment. Independence Day streamers compete with the newest ornaments that will adorn Christmas trees in the months ahead. By the month of December, it's all pretty much old hat. Santa and his reindeer have been around for months and my Christmas tree has shed most of its needles and there's still two weeks until Christmas. I've also seen some of the Christmas movies ten times since Thanksgiving.

And what about this? (*Gestures toward manger*) The nativity scene — the oldest and ultimate symbol of Christmas. What do you think about when you come across this scene — in front of the church, in a store, on top of Grandma's TV? Maybe you would say that even this scene has been overused, too familiar. Is it no more than the twinkling lights and plastic Santas that you see on the neighbor's lawn? Will it be forgotten in the disarray of wrapping paper, festive dinners, and iced sugar cookies? Will you pack it away before New Year's, never to be thought of again until next Christmas?

Perhaps, the nativity has lost its meaning, or maybe it never meant anything to you in the first place. Is there something about these two poor Jewish parents and their brand new baby that differs from ornaments and candy canes? What does it mean to you? Maybe you see it like this. (*Waves hand toward CS, then exits in the darkness*)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT turns on ATTORNEY as he/she runs in from SR to the edge of SL wearing a suit, and carrying a briefcase. He/she is trying to catch a taxi and does not see the nativity at first glimpse.)

ATTORNEY: Taxi! Taxi! *(Waving a hand)* Taxi! *(Comes back to CS in front of nativity)* Great! Just great! I'll never make it to the courthouse in time to file that extension. *(Cellular PHONE RINGS. Answers gruffly)* Yes. *(Pause)* No, no, no. Don't schedule anything for that night. That's the United Way banquet and I'm accepting the "Highest Contributor" award. *(Pause)* You'll have to move the McPherson appointment to Wednesday. *(Pause)* No, not on Thursday. I have choir practice at the church. *(Pause)* No, don't tell him that...do you want him to think I'm some kind of religious kook or something? Almost forgot, call that Salvation Army rep and tell him to pick up those toys. I didn't spend all weekend going door to door for nothing.

(Looks offstage) Taxi, taxi. I missed it again. *(Back into phone)* What? Sure, sure. *(Hangs up. Looks around at nativity)* What's this? A nativity scene, complete with Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus. *(Turns to audience)* Some people really get into this Jesus thing. They say how He came to earth to save mankind from sin. I don't know, it's a nice story, but it's a bit too much. As for me, I don't need to be saved from anything. I lead a pretty good life and God wouldn't turn me away at the pearly gates.

I mean, look at this check. *(Holds up enlarged check that was leaning on the outside of manger)* I had this tidy little sum cut this morning for those little kiddies at the children's hospital. *(Places it in the manger for viewing)*

And this, see this picture? *(Holds up large picture of two men shaking hands)* That's the governor and me when I was awarded the "Golden Citizen" award last year. He was quite impressed with my community involvement. *(Places photo standing up in manger)*

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Besides, I attend church, even sing in the choir, help with the food pantry, give free legal advice, tithe...well, you get the picture. So, as you can see, I got the inside track on this heaven bit. It all balances out in the end, just like the scales of justice. Jesus might be all right for some people, like those down and outters at the jailhouse. *(Laughs)* They'll need a real push to make it to heaven. But not me. *(Cellular PHONE RINGS.)* Excuse me. Yes. *(Pause)* Schedule it in. A few more contacts at the orphanage might not be a bad idea. I don't have to touch them do I? Fine, fine. *(As if seeing a taxi)* Gotta go. *(Hangs phone up)* Taxi, taxi. *(Runs off SL. SPOTLIGHT off.)*

End of Freeview

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