

MEETING at the MANGER

By Dave Tippett

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Dedication

I would like to thank several people for making "Meeting at the Manger" possible. First of all, to my Pastor, Phil Fuller, for his continuing support and vision for Drama Ministries and for being a friend. Also, to Thom Sneed, for his donation of time and considerable talent. To a dedicated crew of actors and tech people who continue to do excellent work for the building of the Kingdom. And to my wife, Jill, who God graciously placed in my life. Her love and patience have made all the difference.

The playwright, Dave Tippett

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Story of the Play

The church's Christmas play rehearsal is a disaster. The actors are mumbling, stumbling and grumbling. They haven't had time to learn their lines, and when they do remember their cues to come on stage, they're tripping and falling over each other. The choir and play directors feel like they are in the fast lane to ulcer land.

During a much needed rehearsal break, Wendy, a busy lady playing the role of Mary, complains to the new janitor, an old man named William, that she feels in all the holiday hustle and bustle she has lost God. William, an understanding man, urges Wendy to pray, reminding her that God is always there for anyone who seeks Him.

Wendy prays aloud, and with a renewed sense of hope and vigor, she calls the rest of the cast back on stage. But a mishap occurs and William is knocked down. As he rises, we see the nail-hole scars in the palms of his hands. Confused, the actors ask William who he is. In a strong, young voice he answers he is The Way and tells them all that only through a special, personal meeting with Christ at the manger, can we learn to slow down and know Him ... again.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Flexible cast of 23

(Approx. 8M, 9W, 2 Flexible, 4 Children, Extras)

Major roles include:

CHOIR DIRECTOR: May be played by a man or woman, should be dressed in either a suit or nice dress throughout.

MARTI: Play director, 30-ish, can be played by woman or man (change name to MARTY).

WILLIAM: Can be played by an older man or a younger man with effective make-up. Consider casting outside the congregation to enhance play's effectiveness.

WENDY: 30-ish woman who plays Mary, finds God again.

Other roles include:

SAM: Plays Joseph.

DON: Older man, hates playing the innkeeper.

BRIAN: Plays one of the shepherds.

RICK: Younger man who plays a shepherd.

JOHN: Another shepherd, has no staff.

JANIE: 10-12 year old girl, plays an angel.

3 KIDS: Play stable animals (cows).

TERRY: Plays King #1.

SHIRLEY: Plays King #2.

ADAM: Plays King #3.

JOYCE: A member of the angel trio.

BONNIE: Another.

JENNIFER: Another.

EXTRAS: As choir members.

Performance Time: Approx. one hour (with 10 min. intermission).

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Music

There are several opportunities for songs in the play. The director may choose which hymns or carols to use for the choir, trio and ensemble to sing. In addition, the use of appropriate background music is helpful in setting a variety of feelings in several key scenes. One suggestion is Mannheim Steamroller's "Stille Nacht" (Silent Night) from their "Christmas" (1984) CD/tape for the very end of Act I, where William picks up the doll. A very effective part of that song comes when the lone violin starts to play. The use of this piece can greatly enhance that particular scene.

Setting

The stage consists of a low platform in the center, and painted prop walls to shield the various points of entry and exits on SL and SR. A large patch-work backdrop (a curtain with large patches sewn into it) covers the length of the back of the stage.

Props

Manger and large baby doll wrapped in white cloth
Music folders for choir members and director
Watch for director
2 staves for shepherds
Large homemade star
Several copies of "script" for Marti and cast
Pillows for Mary's "belly"
Cleaning items (2 brooms, bucket, rags) for William
Three large gifts for kings
Small wooden table
Make-up pencil for William
Fog (optional)

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The Part of William

William can apply the make-up needed to show the holes in his palms during or right after Wendy's last monologue, with his back turned toward the audience, on the pretense that he is getting something from his bucket (where the make-up pencil can be concealed). By using this technique, the audience will not see the wounds until the very end, right before his monologue.

The actor playing William must use his voice and body to make the transformation believable and complete at the end of Act II. For example, an "old" scratchy voice can be used up to that point with the body stooped over and bent. When the change occurs, the actor can straighten up slowly and change his voice, with a steady, strong inflection. If possible, he should also have a wireless microphone system concealed in his clothing, which is then activated to enhance his closing monologue. A slight reverb can be used very effectively to create the illusion of his transformation and give a greater impact to his message, especially when he says his final word to Wendy ("... forever ..."). As he walks away from her and the rest of the cast, the audience still hears this final word several times before it fades.

Costumes

As this is supposed to be a play in progress, some of the biblical or animal costumes do not have to be complete or even fit very well. Attire includes robes for the choir, everyday clothes for the Director and Marti; biblical garb for those in the play; horns, ears, and tails for the children as animals; and simple work clothes for William.

End of Freeview

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