

# ***An Unexpected Gift***

*By Lori Wilkerson*

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## **DEDICATION**

*This play is dedicated to the Soldiers of Christ Youth Group of the Claysville, Pennsylvania United Methodist Church. They breathed heart and soul into my vision. My love and thanks to each and every one of them. Pastor Bruce Merritt convinced me that this was good enough to share when I didn't have confidence in myself – thanks, Bruce! You are the perfect example of God's servant. And to my son, Jonathan, the greatest gift God has ever given me.*

*The Playwright, Lori Wilkerson*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

See the Nativity through the eyes of a family in the second century, "new" Christian believers in awe of the recent miraculous events. Jacob, a middle-aged shepherd, visits the home of Gaspar and Vashem and their children. The children demand Jacob tell the story of his grandfather, one of the shepherds who was visited by the angels announcing the birth of Baby Jesus. Vashem then tells the next story, that of the innkeeper. Finally Gaspar relates the story of his grandfather Melchoir, one of the wise men, and how he asked for a small strip of Jesus' blanket. The piece of cloth is now treasured dearly by Gaspar's family. As each story is told by the adults, the action comes alive onstage. We see the mysterious way God has of sending just what we need, not what we expected. The shepherds expected someone more important, the innkeeper expected a warrior, and the wise men expected a philosopher. Yet, each person comes to realize that the gift that was given was perfect, just the way it was.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*6 m (with doubling), 3 w, 1 adult flexible; 1 boy, 2 girls*

**SECOND CENTURY:**

VASHEM: A middle-aged mother.

GASPAR: Vashem's husband.

EMMA: Their little girl.

JOSEF: Their young son.

MIRALL: Their teenaged daughter.

LISBET: Their youngest girl.

JACOB: A middle-aged shepherd.

**YEAR OF OUR LORD:**

THREE SHEPHERDS: Young and eager.

MARY: Mother of Jesus (non-speaking).

JOSEPH: Mary's husband (non-speaking).

INNKEEPER: A burly man.

PRINCE BALTHAZAR: Son of a king.

GASPAR: An astronomer to a king.

MELCHIOR: Another astronomer.

NARRATOR: Man or woman, reads from Bible.

Doubling: Gaspar (Vashem's husband) can double as Joseph at the stable when the Shepherds visit. The three Shepherds can double as the three Wise Men. In the last scene, the Innkeeper can play Joseph when the Wise Men visit.

**Performance time:** About 30 minutes.

### **COSTUMES**

SHEPHERDS: Simple robes and head coverings. At least one should have a shepherd's crook or staff.

VASHEM'S FAMILY: Nice robes and sandals, but not ornate.

JACOB: Older, worn-looking clothes.

THE INNKEEPER: Nice robes, a money pouch. An oil lamp to carry in one hand.

MELCHIOR and GASPAR: Rich robes, rings on their fingers.

PRINCE BALTHAZAR: Princely robes, a crown, lots of jewelry.

MARY: Simple robes, a head covering.

JOSEPH: The same.

BABY JESUS: Should be wrapped in simple cloth of white or white with a blue stripe.

### **PROPS**

A rag doll for the children. A water pitcher and cups or other touches for the table. A large scroll (an astronomy chart). A manger may be used for the Baby Jesus, or Mary may hold him. An extra swatch of the baby's swaddling cloth.

OPTIONAL: As a reminder to continue to "tell the story," small strips of old cloth, preferably white or white and blue striped, can be passed to the congregation or attached to the programs.

### **SETS**

The sets can be simple or elaborate, depending on your resources. The original presentation used a very basic set; a round table and chairs and benches for the family to gather around at stage left, and a separate area at stage right where the events of the Nativity take place. The action should be continuous.

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*(AT RISE: The CHILDREN gather around VASHEM, their mother, in a second-century home.)*

EMMA: Mama, tell us again about when Great-grandfather followed the star!

VASHEM: No, not yet. I told you, we have a very special guest coming this evening. You'll just have to wait.

JOSEF: *(Demanding, stomping HIS foot.)* Who, Mama? You keep saying that a visitor is coming, but it's late! It will be too late to tell the story tonight!

VASHEM: You must learn to be patient, Josef. This is a story that never grows old, and it is never too late to tell it. So, when our guest arrives, then I will tell it.

*(A KNOCK at the door, and the CHILDREN scramble after their MOTHER to answer it. At the door is a plainly dressed man, JACOB. He looks tired.)*

VASHEM: Jacob! It is so good to see you again! Come in, come in.

JACOB: Bless you, Vashem! And much thanks to you, young lady.

*(HE accepts the offered water that MIRALL, the eldest daughter, has poured.)*

MIRALL: *(Smiles, but is obviously shy.)* You are welcome here, sir.

JACOB: Your children are a credit to you, Vashem. And where is ...

JOSEF: *(Muttering.)* Is THIS the special guest? I thought you meant somebody important!

VASHEM: Josef! That was an unkind thing to say ... how do you know how important this man is?

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JOSEF: I'm sorry, Mama. I just meant, I thought someone like Prince Hakim was coming to visit, or someone else from the palace! Someone with a horse, at least!

JACOB: *(Laughing.)* Well, I do have a perfectly fine donkey outside if you'd like to see him. His name is Binky!

LISBET: Oh! I want to see Binky! Take me, please, Emma!

JACOB: He's around back, near the stables.

*(The two GIRLS exit, chattering away.)*

JACOB: *(HIS hands are on his hips.)* What, you're not going to see my fine steed?

JOSEF: He's just a donkey, sir. We have donkeys of our own.

VASHEM: Josef, this man is a very special man. His grandfather, too, was there when the star shone so brightly. His grandfather saw the Lord's angels!

JOSEF: Really? Were they huge? Did they have wings? Do they really glow?

JACOB: Let's wait for your sisters, shall we?

*(While waiting, MIRALL pours drinks for everyone, and THEY gather round the table to chat. VASHEM offers plates of food. Just then, the GIRLS come back.)*

EMMA: He's a very nice donkey, sir.

JOSEF: The story, the story! Now, Mother? *(HE is halfway between pleading and bossy, tugging on his MOTHER'S sleeve.)*

JACOB: So your mother has a story, does she? I bet I know the story she's telling. *(HE winks at EMMA.)*

JOSEF: It's about a star, and a little boy who --

JACOB: Was born in a faraway place, in a manger?

EMMA: *(Delighted.)* How do you know the story?

JACOB: Ah! Because I have heard the story, too, because my mother taught it to me!

*(This hushes the CHILDREN for a moment; then they burst into speech, trying to out shout each other.)*

## **End of Freeview**

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