

VOICE OF CHRISTMAS

By John B. Wintermute

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STORY OF PLAY

A minister, alone in the sanctuary, wants something different for Christmas Eve service, something with a real emotional kick, perhaps a famous person.

Then the Voice from above speaks. For every glitzy idea the minister has, the Voice counters it. Finally by recounting Jesus' birth, the Voice seems to get through to the minister. The simple nativity is best.

The minister pauses, smiles, then pulls out a tape recorder proclaiming, "But I do have a celebrity!" The tape, however, has only one voice ... his own. The minister realizes the old, old story of Love's greatest gift given the world on Christmas Eve is the only thing he has. It's all he needs.

CAST

THE MINISTER: *(or Sunday School Superintendent.)*

THE VOICE: *(Inasmuch as "The Voice" may suggest the person of God, it would be interesting to have a woman play that role!)*

(The cast may consist of two men, or two women or a man and a woman. In this day of Women's "Lib" there are women ministers.)

THE SETTING

THE MINISTER stands behind the pulpit. A loud speaker should be placed somewhere near the center of the Sanctuary *(or at the rear of the Sanctuary)* and near the ceiling if possible. This is the "VOICE". Whoever is the Voice will have to be able to hear the lines of the Minister. However, the Voice must be out of sight of the audience.

TIME: The present. The Christmas Season

PLACE: The Sanctuary of the Church

(AT RISE: As the play begins the Minister is alone in the Sanctuary, deep in thought, wearing a frown on his [or her] face as if he [or she] cannot quite understand what the problem is all about.)

MINISTER: After all these years I still have trouble coming up with something for Christmas Eve. *(HE turns to leave.)*
I wish I could think of something that would wake this slumbering congregation tonight. *(Begins to walk away.)*

THE VOICE: Not leaving without knowing, are you?

MINISTER: *(Turning quickly back and looking around.)*
Who's here?

THE VOICE: No, I'm not the Janitor or his wife. Let's say, I'm just a Voice from above!

MINISTER: A voice from above? Who are you kidding?

THE VOICE: No one. You were asking questions so I thought you wanted answers.

MINISTER: *(Sure that SOMEONE is playing games with HIM.)* Come out, come out, whoever you are.

THE VOICE: But you did seem concerned, so I decided to come down and lend a helping hand ... *(Pauses, until HE gets it right.)* I mean "a helping voice!"

MINISTER: *(WHO has a temper and is about to loose it.)*
Enough is enough!

THE VOICE: You said you needed something different something exciting ... something that would wake your people up!

THE MINISTER: What's your suggestion?

THE VOICE: Well, I always thought the Bible Story was exciting ... a Baby, destined to re-create the world, born of peasant parents in a stable on a cold December night!

THE MINISTER: It probably was a real thriller two thousand years ago when simple shepherds first saw it. Even the Wise Men may have been impressed but not today! What with space ships, trips to the moon, the possibility of flying saucers and aliens from distant planets ... Today! Well, unfortunately, the church is in the entertainment business whether it likes it or not. It has to have something more modern, more exciting, more startling.

THE VOICE: (*Surprised.*) Entertainment business? (*Sadly. Almost to HIMSELF.*) The first Christmas I had no idea it would end in this sad state of affairs ... that people would be bored, indifferent to the coming of the Prince of Peace! (*After a pause. With determination and loudly.*) If it makes any difference, I'll still vote for the old story about Bethlehem, the Shepherds, the Star, the Wise Men ...

THE MINISTER: (*Wearily.*) I told you that the public's not interested unless the old is packaged in tinsel, glittering wrapping paper, twinkling stars, carrying a real emotional kick!

THE VOICE: You're telling me each religious service must have a bigger emotional bang than the last or your congregation won't come out?

THE MINISTER: Right! That's why this corner church can't compete with the religious super-markets on television. We're going out of business fast! We're becoming relics of a by-gone era. It's not just Christmas but the whole Gospel that's irrelevant today!

THE VOICE: (*Really upset by what HE is hearing.*) The Gospel irrelevant? Well, I never!

THE MINISTER: People today are pragmatists.

THE VOICE: "Pragmatist." Sounds a lot like "Paganist!"

THE MINISTER: People don't care if a something is true or beautiful. Their only test is, "Does it work?"

THE VOICE: How do they know if it "works?"

THE MINISTER: That's easy. If our church program brings in new members or more money, then it works!

THE VOICE: Sounds materialistic! What about compassion and love?

THE MINISTER: Love costs money! First comes cash, then comes compassion.

THE VOICE: I don't see it!

THE MINISTER: No, but the Lord would. HE was a good business man. (*Explaining, as if to a child.*) So you see, everyone has to have a "Come on!" You have to trap the attention of folks, before they'll sit still long enough to listen to the Good News of the Gospel. (*After a brief pause to collect HIS thoughts.*)

THE MINSTER: (*Cont'd.*) Besides, people who are interested in hearing the old story will stay home tonight and see it presented in living color on television.

THE VOICE: (*Impressed.*) There's a way to take folks back to the original event?

THE MINISTER: No, but after the television writers, producers and directors finish with the old, old story, it's a lot more exciting than the real thing ever could have been.

THE VOICE: (*With tongue in cheek.*) Will miracles never cease?

THE MINISTER: (*A trace of envy enters HIS voice.*) Tonight I have to compete with a Preacher on television who's putting on a Christmas Pageant with real, live sheep, camels, and donkeys not to mention one of the best choirs in the nation for a musical background! (*Becoming excited.*) If I could stage something like that! Picture it unfolding here in this sanctuary tonight, before your very eyes ...

THE VOICE: There's not enough room in here for all those animals. You'd have camels stumbling over sheep, with donkeys running up and down the aisles, pushing their way into the pews, chewing on the hymnals, messing up the carpet!

THE MINISTER: You're right. (*As HE remembers his own personal situation, he becomes depressed.*) Besides, I couldn't even borrow a sheep for tonight's service. If I could, the church officers wouldn't let me, even if fifty new church members came marching down the aisles behind the sheep. As for a Choir ... I couldn't even get a soloist.

THE VOICE: (*In mock sorrow.*) It's a crying shame!

THE MINSTER: (*Still in despair.*) If I could just dream up something different, exciting ...

THE VOICE: In your frenzied stage of mind you might come up with a nightmare!

THE MINISTER: (*With a new inspiration.*) If I had a celebrity to interview tonight! (*Taking time to explain to the VOICE.*) There was this couple who got famous people on their religious talk show. The people would testify how the Lord helped them become rich and famous!

THE VOICE: (*To HIMSELF in amazement.*) I don't remember such nonsense.

THE MINISTER: (*WHO has not paid the slightest attention to the VOICE.*) If I even had someone of local notoriety; someone with power, popularity or money who would be willing to say that all that they have they got from God! (*To the VOICE.*) People like to identify with the rich and famous!

THE VOICE: (*Trying to lighten the moment.*) And a celebrity wouldn't mess up the place like a herd of animals would!

THE MINISTER: (*More to HIMSELF, as if outlining the show already.*) I would ask them how they felt about Christmas and Christmas presents!

THE VOICE: (*Overly helpful.*) How about Santa Claus? Maybe he could drop by for a minute while he's making his rounds!

THE MINISTER: (*In anger.*) This is no laughing matter. (*Back to planning.*) It should be someone who's noted for their generous spirit, their readiness to give to those in need...

THE VOICE: (*Still trying to help, or is HE.*) How about Miss America?

THE MINISTER: (*Really excited.*) Could you get her to come?

THE VOICE: (*Not certain.*) Well, she did tell the nation how God helped her win the crown. (*Confessing the terrible truth.*) But your church is too small to make it worth her while.

THE MINISTER: (*Weary of being the butt of the VOICE'S humor.*) You keep throwing a monkey wrench into every idea I have? I don't know why you're against my efforts to turn the Christmas Story into a success story that would attract the attention of the news media and save thousands of souls. If I had just one half-way famous person here tonight, think how many people would show up.

End of Freeview

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