

OUTSIDE THE INN

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Music and lyrics by TT Patterson

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PRODUCTION NOTES

In the tradition of KIDSWORD, *Outside the Inn* handles the biblical material with a reverent tongue inside a reverent cheek. The play can be performed either with, or without the music written for it; but we do commend it to you, as it is quite lovely. We have tried to build some flexibility into the play, so that you can fit it to your particular resources. For instance: it can be performed with as few as nineteen children, or as many as thirty-eight (depending upon how many angels and sheep you have). Many of the major parts can be cast with either a girl or a boy. About half of the speaking parts can be handled by younger children, but a few of the other half will require older children.

About Irving (or Golda) the Innkeeper: this part will make or break the production. You will probably need a sixth-grade or older child for the part. You may even wish to cast an adult (your pastor?) in the part. You could have Irving (Golda) reading from a diary when he/she addresses the audience, to cut down on memorization.

SYNOPSIS

The play centers around the Innkeeper's recollections and observations as he (she) recounts them for the audience. The innkeeper is a tender hearted person, literally too tender to harm a fly. There was "no room in the inn" because he gave the last room to a family down on their luck.

The play moves along by following the journeys of the Shepherds, the Magi and Mary and Joseph as they head for the stable. The story is narrated by the Innkeeper, who moves in and out of the action. We have made liberal use of humor (at least, what we think of as humor). Some of it does require a bit of timing. Generally, it is better to replace a funny line with a straight one if you feel you're not able to pull it off—but don't give up too quickly. Try to work with your kids on developing personalities for their characters. The lines won't work if they are merely recited.

THE SET

We wrote the play with the front of a church in mind, however, a parish hall or a stage will work. As with all Christmas plays, you will have to conform our suggestions to your physical circumstances. If you happen to have the luxury of access to spot lighting, it would greatly enhance the atmosphere. It can isolate the innkeeper when he addresses the audience, and then draw attention to the scenes he introduces. This kind of lighting will minimize the need for sets.

The inn will occupy center stage, being Irving's (Golda's) headquarters throughout the play. Stage (or sanctuary) right will be the area that the Magi meet Herod, the place of the first shepherd scene, and the area from which Mary and Joseph approach the inn. The stable should be set up stage left, recessed just a bit from the inn. It should be large enough to handle the whole cast, as by the end of the play everyone will be crowded into that general area.

THE CHARACTERS

Primary Roles

Irving (Golda)..... the kind innkeeper.
Jasper the head Magi—and knows it.
Joseph not angry, just annoyed.
Nate. apprentice shepherd-boy; way too excited and animated—always.
Melchior the second smartest Magi.
Balthasar the third smartest Magi.
Mr. Wilson... father of a homeless family with a name that doesn't belong
in the first century.
Mary Loving, soft-spoken mother of Jesus.
Herod whiny, unpleasant and disingenuous.

Secondary Roles

Animals..... they sing, they graze and correct the innkeeper.
Angels they sing, they dance and they scare the shepherds.
Shepherds they know it all and have seen it all.
(you can have one, two or more of them, but there are two speaking parts.)
Mrs. Wilson wife and mother.
Wilson children young and trusting (can be one part).
Herod's two aides..... hard-shelled political "image people".
Herod's page..... loves his job (could double as one of the aides.)
Star bright, takes a bow, runs around, or otherwise hams
it up whenever he or she is mentioned.

NECESSARY PROPS

Mop, bucket, fly swatter, diary (optional) and hotel register on a stand—all for the innkeeper.
Big sack to hold Magi gifts, and a yo-yo. NOTE: For fun and a good laugh, you may substitute whatever the “must-have” toy is for the current Christmas.
Small money bag for Wilson at the end of the play.
Staves for the shepherds.
Garland, on sticks, if you wish, for the angels to wave.
Manger and Baby, for the world.

OUTSIDE THE INN

The innkeeper is whistling and cleaning up with a bucket and mop, in front of the inn, notices audience . . .

Innkeeper: Oh! Hello there! Welcome to my humble, yet comfortable and affordable family inn! You know, people ask me, they say “Irving (Golda), inn keeping must be a pretty dull job, no? I always say, “well actually . . . it is—except for this one night a long time ago . . .” and then I tell them the story I’m going to tell you. It all started when this homeless family named Wilson showed up . . .

Irving recedes and the Wilsons enter, moving slowly, from stage right, toward the inn.

Child 1: Daddy, are we sleeping outside again tonight?

Mr. Wilson: Well, unless this inn has a very kind innkeeper I’m afraid we’ll be staring up at the stars again tonight.

Child 2: Mommy, Daddy, did you see that really bright star in the sky last night? What was it?

The star blazes by, the Wilson’s looking watch it. Mrs. Wilson deadpans . . .

Mrs. Wilson: You mean that one? Well, I think it’s something that happens every hundred years or so. A “planetary conjunction,” I think it’s called. All the planets line up and shine like crazy.

Mr. Wilson: *(as they approach the innkeeper)* Oh. And that looked like a planetary conjunction to you?

Mr. Wilson: Excuse me, kind innkeeper, my family and I have fallen upon hard times. As you might guess, we had to come to Bethlehem for the census; but we’ve no place to stay. Have you a shed or a stable we can use?

Innkeeper: Shed? Stable? I wouldn’t hear of it! I happen to have just one room left. And how will you be paying? Cash, livestock, or not at all?

Mr. Wilson: I don’t think you understa— *(double take)* what was that third option again?

Innkeeper: The third option was “not at all,” as in “free.” It’s a special I’m running tonight, just for you and your family.

Mr. Wilson: We’ll take that third option, then . . . and thank you! I hope I can repay your kindness someday.

Innkeeper: I'm sure you will. (*Innkeeper steps out and addresses audience, Wilsons freeze*) What else could I say? What else could I do? As Moses said, "Love the stranger, for you were once strangers yourselves, in Ethiopia—no, no that's not right. It was a . . . Norway?, no, no . . .

Animals: (*In unison*) It was Egypt!

Innkeeper: (*Looks at them, scratching his head*) Egypt! That's right. Anyway, I tried to do the right thing for that nice young family.

If you are using the songs, "Outside the Inn" is sung here. The animals may rise, and you can include as many of the cast as you wish. The Innkeeper steps back to join the song. After the song, the cast resumes their former positions, and the innkeeper steps forward to address the audience again. If you are not using the songs, simply continue with the next stage direction.

All: Come on in, inside my inn,
Outside it may rage and storm,
Inside you'll be safe and warm,
Tonight you will be safe from harm,
Inside my inn.

The night is dark, you're far from home,
Sometimes life just isn't fair,
It's hard to find someone to care,
And you wonder if God is up there,
Above the inn.

Our beds are soft, our food is good,
And you are weary of the road,
I'm glad if I can lighten your load,
Don't give up for you've miles to go,
Beyond the inn.

If God were a traveler on this dark night,
I wonder if he'd sleep outdoors,
Gazing at the moon and stars,
Would he be poor and have to stay,
Outside the inn?

Come on in, inside my inn,
Outside it may rage and storm,
Inside you'll be safe and warm,
Tonight you will be safe from harm,
Inside my inn.