

Great Expectations

A Christmas drama according to Luke

Introduction

The first Sunday in Advent (29 November) marks the start of our new church year, Year C in the lectionary cycle, during which we shall be reading from the Gospel of Luke. Although there is a lot of common material in the Synoptic Gospels, it is Luke's account of Jesus' birth that has given us most of the imagery of the nativity story. To supplement the weekly material through Advent and for Christmas Day, we offer a four-story nativity drama that can be used in a variety of ways:

- Rehearsed and performed with costumes and props and integrated into a service, e.g. a carol service, on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, or for a school nativity play.
- Each story could be read separately by different voices during Advent finishing on/around Christmas Day.
- Scene 2 could be used as a way of presenting the Gospel on Advent 4, 20 December.
- Scene 4 could be acted out on Christmas Day with willing volunteers from the congregation.

However you choose to use the drama, we hope that it will set your imaginations free to appreciate the familiar Christmas story afresh.

Further copies of this script can be downloaded from www.rootsontheweb.com.



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Scene 1 Zechariah's story based on Luke 1.5-20

Enter Angel Gabriel – a male, in ordinary clothes.

Gabriel: *(to audience)* I'm Gabriel – the angel. Don't believe me? He didn't either *(points to Zechariah, entering)*.

Zechariah: *(fumbling in robes)* I'm sure I brought some. How am I going to offer incense if I've lost it?

Gabriel: *(to audience)* Old Zechariah the priest – he's on the rota for offering incense to God, here in the Temple sanctuary.

Zechariah: I'm getting a bit past it now. I should be training my son up to do this – if I had one. But it's too late now – Elizabeth...

Gabriel: *(to audience)*...his wife.

Zechariah: ...is way past having children. *(emotional)* Oh God, why didn't you give us the gift of children? I'm just a useless old man – I need a son to...*(pats his robes again)*...to help me find this incense!

Gabriel: *(moving towards Zechariah)* Try the other side.

Zechariah: *(jumps up, terrified)* Waaah!

Gabriel: Don't panic, I'm...

Zechariah: Get out! Get out! Only priests are allowed in here...

Gabriel: ...Gabriel – the angel. We're allowed in too, you know.

Zechariah: Angel, my...

Gabriel: Careful. This is the sanctuary! I've come to tell you your prayer has been answered. Elizabeth will bear a son. You must call him John.

Zechariah: That's ridiculous!

Gabriel: He's going to do more than help you with the incense *(reaches into Zechariah's robes and pulls out a package)*. Look, it's here! *(hands it to him)*. He's going to be a great prophet, preparing the way for the Lord.

Zechariah: *(suspicious)* How do I know you're telling the truth? You don't look like an angel!

Gabriel: I might not look like much, but I've come from the presence of God. Anyway, I can't hang around, I've got work to do. And so have you. You can start by lighting that incense.

Zechariah: *(tries to reply, but finds he's dumb. Gesticulates wildly, pointing at his mouth.)*

Gabriel: Oh yes – since you didn't believe God's messenger, you won't be able to speak until the boy is born. It might help you concentrate.

Gabriel exits, leaving Zechariah speechless.

Scene 2 Mary's story based on Luke 1.26-38

Enter Angel Gabriel – a male, in ordinary clothes.

Gabriel: *(shrugs to audience)* Nazareth? I don't understand. The Messiah's supposed to be born in Bethlehem! We're miles from there, here in Galilee *(pause)*. But I'm just an angel – who am I to question God's orders?

Enter Mary, sweeping the floor with a brush.

Gabriel: Ah, here's Mary, the girl I was sent to visit.

Mary: Good morning. Can I help you?

Gabriel: Don't be afraid.

Mary: I'm not.

Gabriel: Oh. Right. Well, if it's ok with you, you're going to have a son called Jesus *(reads from a scroll)*. 'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and his kingdom will have no end.'

Mary: *(pause)* You do know how babies are made, don't you? Man and woman? Together?

Gabriel: Of course I do.

Mary: Well *(looks around)* there's no man! I'm engaged – to Joseph – but we're not 'together' yet.

Gabriel: No problem – the Holy Spirit will see to it. Your child will be called the Son of God.

Mary: *(pauses for thought)* And you are?

Gabriel: Gabriel – you know, the angel.

Mary: Well, if you say so. You don't look...

Gabriel: I know, but things aren't always how they look. You wouldn't think your cousin Elizabeth looked much like a mother – far too old – but she's going to be. She's six months gone already.

Mary: Wow!

Gabriel: God's work there, too.

Mary: Well, praise be to God!

Gabriel: So what do you say?

Mary: What about?

Gabriel: Having God's Son?

Mary: I'm God's servant – so if that's what he wants, yes, let's go for it!

Scene 3 Elizabeth's story based on Luke 1.39-55

Angel Gabriel – a male, in ordinary clothes – stands with Zechariah the priest. Elizabeth, Zechariah's pregnant wife, is seated.

Gabriel: *(to Zechariah)* So, how's it going? Looking forward to being a father at last? You remember he's got to be called John?

Zechariah: *(gesticulates, indicating he's mute)*

Gabriel: Oh sorry, I forgot. You can't speak.

Zechariah: *(points at Gabriel)*

Gabriel: It's not my fault – I'm only an angel! I just do as I'm told. You're the one who didn't believe the good news I brought, remember?

Mary: *(shouting offstage)* Elizabeth! Are you there?

Elizabeth: *(clutches her stomach)* Goodness, Zechariah, the child nearly jumped straight out of me! Come and feel my 'bump'.

Gabriel: *(to Zechariah)* Go on – she doesn't know I'm here. *(to audience)* Sometimes I think nobody does.

Zechariah feels Elizabeth's 'bump' as Mary enters.

Mary: Elizabeth – is it true? *(looks at bump)* Wow! It is true!

Elizabeth: *(they embrace)* Mary! Let me look at you! You are so blessed by God – my baby jumped for joy when you shouted *(puts her hand on Mary's stomach)*. And there's a blessing from God inside you too – a blessing for us all.

Gabriel: *(to Zechariah)* You married a real wise woman – take it from me, you should listen to her!

Zechariah: *(gesticulates grumpily)*

Mary: Zechariah! What's the matter?

Zechariah: *(gesticulates, indicating he's mute)*

Mary: What?

Elizabeth: Oh, something happened to him. He was doing duty at the Temple, and while he was in the sanctuary, he had some kind of vision. He hasn't been able to speak since *(pause)*. I quite like it!

Zechariah: *(gesticulates crossly)*

Gabriel: *(to Zechariah)* Well, God might have struck you dumb, but he's turned your cousin into a poet. That's what comes of believing God's promise. Just listen to this!

Mary: Elizabeth, I'm so happy – My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Gabriel: Well done, Mary! Even angels couldn't sing it better.

Scene 4 Joseph's story based on Luke 2.1-14

Angel Gabriel – male, dressed in ordinary clothes, watches Joseph and Mary as they register.

Official: Welcome to the Bethlehem registration office. Name?

Joseph: Joseph.

Official: House and family of David?

Joseph: Yes.

Official: From Nazareth?

Joseph: Yes.

Official: *(looking at pregnant Mary)* Congratulations!

Joseph: Yes – sorry – thanks.

Official: You are now duly registered. Emperor Augustus has you on his list, so you can both go home.

Mary: *(groaning)* I don't think so. Joseph, the baby's coming.

Gabriel: *(to audience)* So *that's* why the Messiah is born in Bethlehem when his mother lives in Nazareth! My job's done, really. God said to me, 'Gabriel, go to Zechariah and tell him about his son.' Then he said, 'Go to Mary and tell her about *my* son.' That's all. But I like to see things through, so here I am in Bethlehem *(pause)*. Don't worry, no one will spot that I'm an angel.

Benjamin enters.

Benjamin: Mary? Fancy seeing you here!

Mary: *(through gritted teeth)* Benjamin, nice to see you.

Benjamin: Have you heard about Elizabeth?

Joseph: We're in a bit of a hurry...

Benjamin: She's had her baby, you know.

Mary: Really, we have to go...

Benjamin: And you know what? They called him John!

Joseph: Mary's having...

Benjamin: There was a big argument about it.

Mary: Benjamin, I'm *(shouts in slow syllables)* HAV-ING A BA-BY!

Benjamin: Congratulations! Then old Zechariah found his tongue again and confirmed it: 'His name is John.'

Mary: Now, Benjamin...*(urgently)* I'M HAVING IT NOW!

They exit hastily.

Benjamin: *(to Gabriel)* Friends from Galilee.

Gabriel: Do you know of somewhere they can go to have their baby?

Benjamin: *(thinks)* Well, I've got a cousin who has a stable at the back of his inn. Would that do?

Gabriel: Sounds about right. You couldn't just run after them, could you, and take them there... QUICKLY!

Benjamin: Yes. Oh. Right. Right you are, chief.

He exits hastily.

Gabriel: *(to audience)* Bang on time! There's a crowd of angels doing a fly-past over the hills and scaring the living daylight out of a bunch of shepherds right now – telling them to come down here and find the Messiah. God sent the glitter squad for that job – shining wings, haloes, the lot. Proper bling for the big occasion.

Shepherds rush in.

Shepherd 1: *(to Gabriel)* We're looking for a baby.

Shepherd 2: In a manger.

Shepherd 3: He's a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord!

Gabriel: This way, gentlemen *(points in the direction Mary took)*.

After a moment, Mary re-enters, holding Jesus, supported by Joseph, with the shepherds and Benjamin following behind.

Gabriel: Oh, well done! Well done, you wonderful girl! Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth!

Written by Steve Dixon, Children's Officer for the Diocese of Manchester. Steve has also written for touring theatre, had short stories broadcast on Radio 4 and is a published author of children's Christian fiction.

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