

STORIES OF THE HOLY NIGHT – Emmanuel Baptist Church 2007 Production

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Characters:

Mamie MacLeod, a widow, the only midwife in Peaceful Hill

Charlie Boy MacLeod, a prison escapee, Mamie's son

Mattie Jane Creekmore, Charlie Boy's girlfriend

Professor DuPont, a noted teacher from the state university school of forestry

Andy Butler, a forestry student

Al Butler, a forestry student, Andy's cousin

Mr. Al Alderson, a resident of Peaceful Hill

Scene 1

It is Christmas Eve afternoon at the mountain cabin of Mamie MacLeod. Mamie, using a homemade yard brush broom, is slowly sweeping leaves in her front yard. On the front porch are three much-worn chairs; not far from the corner of the house is a medium sized tree.

Mamie is talking to herself, feeling sad, and thinking of her son Charlie Boy, who has been a prisoner in the state penitentiary some six months. This, following his conviction of a murder he did not commit.

MAMIE: I don't know how come I'm sweepin' this yard! Here hit is, Christmas Eve. And me, I'm all by myself--with not a soul to spend Christmas wit', not even to look at the leaves in this old yard.

MAMIE continues: And my pore Charlie Boy! **(Sobs)** Way off down yonder in that prison! Locked up day and night for somethin' the pore chap didn't do! That's what get to me! Charlie Boy didn't shoot nobody!

stops sweeping to wipe tears Pore young boy! That's what he is: just a young bwoy. He done full 21, but he's still like a young bwoy. **begins sweeping again**

MAMIE: But hit don't mek no sense mi carryin' on now. Hit don't pay for a big woman to cry--'specially when there ain't nobody listenin'.

abruptly stops sweeping, cocks head to the side (sound effects – footsteps)

MAMIE: I hear somebody comin' up the trail! And dem runnin' plenty fast!

Charlie Boy, clad in his prison clothes and carrying a small bag flung over his shoulder (inside is a big white sheet), comes sneaking warily into the yard. Bedraggled, exhausted but highly elated.

CHARLIE: **(calling out)** Ma! Hit's me! Hit's me! Charlie Boy! I'm home, Ma! Home!

MAMIE: **(beside herself with joy)** have mercy Lord! **(She drops her broom and they celebrate ...).**

MAMIE: Charlie Boy! I can't believe hit's you!

CHARLIE: Hit's me, all right! Oh, Ma, am I glad to git back to Peaceful Hill! That prison shore is a terrible place!

MAMIE: It must be awful. How did you happen to git away? Son, I hope to heaven you didn't hurt none of them police!

CHARLIE: Didn't touch a soul.

MAMIE: You mean they jist turned you loose?

CHARLIE: Not 'zactly. But hit wasn't no trouble a-tall to git out. I figured up a trick!

MAMIE: What sort'a trick?

CHARLIE: You see this here sheet?

MAMIE: Yes, I see hit.

CHARLIE: Well, one evenin' I hear'd three of the guards tellin' one another stories. And I find out that the one who guard the old back gate on Monday nights really really 'fraid.

But I know notin' don't name so 'cause you told me so. Remember? when I was little you told me all sorts of stories. Remember?

MAMIE: *wistfully* Oh yes, I remember the stories. There ain't no ghost-ies nowhere.

CHARLIE: So... Monday night--a night extra dark--I got me this here sheet and hide close to the back gate where that guard was walking back and forth, back and forth. Just as the big old prison clock struck midnight (**sound effects**) I wrap my sheet over me and come up behind the pore guy.

I started sort'a moanin' and sayin': "Oh-h-h! Ohh-hh-h-h! I am the ghost of this bad, bad, bad prison! On dark, dark nights I go too-oo-o and fro, too-oo-o and fro to haunt the guards!... Woof!"

Charlie laughs/ Mamie holds her heart.

That feller! He fainted! Fell over like dead! (**notices Ma holding heart**) Ma you o.k?

MAMIE: yes son, jist a little excited.

CHARLIE: So I jus' take his keys, open the gate, an' chase outta there!

MAMIE: (**with glee**) Good fer you!

CHARLIE: seriously Ma, I'm starved to death. You got any food inside, or anything?

MAMIE: Of course. I've always got plenty of left-overs. Come.

As they continue to speak Charlie Boy looks around the house and examines everything curiously. He picks up a newspaper and 'reads' it upside down.

CHARLIE: As soon as I eat, you know what I'm gonna do? Go bird shooting and den fishin'! I want me some fried parrot, escoveitched! With festival! Then, I'm going to see my Mattie Jane!

MAMIE: Well, now, Charlie Boy, you can go shoot birds and you can go catch fish--there's plenty of 'em around --but you can't go see Mattie Jane!

CHARLIE: How come, Ma? Me an' Mattie Jane was--Lord, don't tell me she get married?

MAMIE: No, no. she ain't married. I know you two was sweet on one another. But we can't tell nobody that you escaped from prison!

CHARLIE: But, Ma, Mattie Jane wouldn't tell nobody!

MAMIE: She wouldn't. But that blabber-mouth mother of hers would. That woman tells ever'thing she hears and more too. You see, Son, them police are bound to come lookin' fa' you!

CHARLIE: How could they? They don't know where Peaceful Hill is.

MAMIE: They'll find it. What we gotta do is figure out how you can hide. I ain't lettin' them take you off no more.

CHARLIE: I ain't worried. (**changes tone**) Where's aunt Mirry? I thought she was stayin' here with you.

MAMIE: She was here but her step-son Willie come an' got her yesterday. On account of hit bein' Christmas an' all. They tried to git me to go too, but I couldn't go. Mr. Alderson's wife, es'pectin' any day now and they're countin' on me to be there.

CHARLIE. So you still catchin' babies?

MAMIE: (**boastfully**) Every baby born in Peaceful Hill! -- Ah, I've got it! I jist thought of how you can hide!

CHARLIE. How?

MAMIE. You can put on Sister Mirry's clothes.

CHARLIE: Ma you mus' be kidding! Me? Me wear women clothes? You can't mean that, Ma!

MAMIE: Not all time son. Jist when you're out of the house. That way, if anybody see you, they'll think you are Sis Mirry.

CHARLIE: All right. If you say so. But I don't like hit. I don't like hit one bit.

Scene 2

Charlie Boy emerges--his prison garb covered over with an oversized long dress. The pants of his uniform barely show. He carries a fishing rod and shotgun and starts out of the yard.

MAMIE: (**running after him**) Son!Your tie head! Your tie head! (**hurries to put it on Charlie's head – Charlie protests all the time**) Now, that's better (**ties knot under Charlie's chin**) You look jist like your Aunt Mirry!

CHARLIE: I feel like a fool! (**begins to exit**)

MAMIE: Well, you ain't. We can't take no chances. Make sure you git back before sundown!

Charlie stops quickly, turns and comes back.

CHARLIE: Ma, you gotta promise me somethin'.

MAMIE: What?

CHARLIE: If I can't go see Mattie Jane, then you'll tell me a long, long story tonight. Real long. Like you used to tell me.

MAMIE: Why, shore, Son. I'll make up a good one!

Charlie exits. Mamie picks up her yard brooms and resumes sweeping. Piles leaves into large basket.

Scene 3

Enter Mattie Jane carrying a potted Poinsettia plant and a cake packed in a basket. Mamie's back is turned as she reaches the yard gate.

MATTIE JANE: Miss Mamie? Miss Mamie?

MAMIE: Why-- I-- I-- Oh, hit's you, Mattie Jane! I wasn't 'spectin' nobody! You sort'a caught me by surprise! But I'm glad to see you. Come on in. You want some cerasee tea, or somethin'!

MATTIE JANE: No ma'am, thank you. I ain't got time. My ma sent you this flowers.

MAMIE: It's pretty! I never seen one like hit before!

MATTIE JANE: My Aunt brought it all the way from foreign! Actually she brought two of 'em. An' Ma said you could have one to keep you from bein' so lonely for Charlie Boy...and she sent you this cake, too for Christmas.

Mamie sets flower on edge of porch, takes cake basket.

MAMIE: Tell your ma I'm much obliged.

MATTIE JANE: Miss Mamie?

MAMIE: Yes, Mattie Jane?

MATTIE JANE: (**timidly**) you got any Christmas letter or anything from Charlie Boy?

MAMIE: (**with some hesitation**) Uh-- uh-- no, I didn't git no letter. Charlie Boy don't know how to write, you know. I'm sorry I didn't mek him go to school when he was young. So now he don't read an' write. Jist like me.

MATTIE JANE: Well if you want to I can write a letter for you. And Charlie Boy could get somebody down there to read it for him!

MAMIE: Thanks Mattie Jane. I won't fergit hit.

MATTIE JANE: I better be goin' now. It takes a while to walk them three miles--even if it is down hill all the way.

MAMIE: Tell me jist one more thing: what's the name of this flower?

MATTIE JANE: Oh, Miss Mamie, I wished you hadn't asked. I can't remember the name of it. I think its Poin-somethin'-or-other.

MAMIE: Oh well, I'll jist call hit my "Christmas Eve Flower." Bye-bye!

MATTIE JANE: That's a nice name. Bye Ms. Mamie.

Mamie takes cake from basket, smells it.

Umm-mm-m! Smells good.

Resumes sweeping

MAMIE: Maybe I shoulda told Mattie Jane about Charlie Boy. I jist don't know. I do know that one of these days I'm gonna git her Grandpa to tell what he saw that night of the shootin'. He saw who shot that store keeper. And it shore wasn't Charlie Boy!

Scene 4

Off stage there is a loud gunshot. Another. A third.

MAMIE : Charlie boy sure enjoying himself

Professor DuPont, Andy and Al Butler--their hands above their heads--run into Mamie's yard. Charlie Boy is at their heels, shotgun in his hands. Head tie is off his head and around his neck. The three men are terrified. The men are pleading with their captor, all crying out at the same time.

PROFESSOR: Don't shoot, young man! Don't shoot! We'll explain! We're friends!

ANDY: We're not law men! We're students!

AL: We're from the university! We're just looking at the trees!

PROFESSOR: Young Man, we won't harm you! Believe us!

MAMIE: Charlie Boy! What's goin' on?

CHARLIE: Move back, Ma! I may have to shoot 'em!

MAMIE: No! No! Charlie Boy, don't do that! Not yet! Not yet! Make 'em sit down up there on the porch chairs!

CHARLIE: (**waving his gun**) Y'all sit down up there in them chairs, like Ma said. (turns to Mamie) Ma, they are police! Come to git me! But that ain't what they claim!

The three men scramble into chairs, hands still held high.

MAMIE: We'll find out who they are! (**turns to men**) Now, I don't know where you three fellers come from, but I'm here to tell you one thing: you ain't taking Charlie Boy away from this house!

PROFESSOR: No indeed, Madam! Of course not! We wouldn't think of it!

MAMIE: What have y'all got to say for yourselves? Son, let 'em put their hands down.

CHARLIE: Yeah! Put your hands down. Jist rest 'em on your knees. Now tell Ma that rigmarole you told me. She ain't gonna believe you, though.

ANDY: Professor DuPont, you explain to the lady!

AL: Yes, Sir! Tell her Andy and I are just students! Tell her all about our forestry project:

PROFESSOR: Well, Madam, I'll explain as briefly as possible. My name is Professor DuPont and these are two of my students at the university: They don't live too far from here. During this Christmas holiday I've assigned them the project of collecting specimens from all the different trees in this region of the Greenbay mountains, and, to draw a map showing the location of the

various species. Of course the specimens they're gathering must be identified and arranged in order by family, genus, and species. It is quite a task. Very important. It is a preliminary exercise for the work they'll do toward their master's degrees.

MAMIE: All that don't make too much sense to me. I thought folks went off to that university to study books. Not trees.

CHARLIE: Hit's jist a story they made up, Ma.

MAMIE: Tell me what you got in them bags.

PROFESSOR: Al, empty out your sack and show the lady your collection.

AL: Yes, Sir.

Al shakes out his sack, revealing dozens of small branches of trees.

CHARLIE: See, Ma? They been breakin' limbs off all the trees! Jist look at that! (**angrily**) Don't y'all know them birds have to have fruits to eat? You ought not to broke them off! Ma, maybe they're not lawmen. Maybe they escaped from the asylum!

MAMIE: (**cocks her head**) Hush a minute, Son, and you tree fellers git quiet! (**sniffs the air**) There's a man comin' up the trail' (pauses) Jist as I thought. Hit's Mr. Alderson! The baby must be comin'! I'll have to go! Quick, Charlie Boy, gimme this (**the shotgun**)! Run an' put a pot on the fire so he'll think you're Sister Mirry.

Charlie runs out, holding up his skirt. Mr. Al, much out of breath, arrives at the front gate, where Mamie meets him.

Mr. Al: Miss Mamie! Hit's time! I come to git you!

MAMIE: You think the baby's on the way?

MR. AL: Oh, yes, Ma'am! My wife said to tell you to hurry! She's in terrible pain!

MAMIE: I'll come right away.

MR. AL: (**starts to look around inquisitively**) Them strangers sittin' on your porch? Are they some of your family?

MAMIE: No, Mr. Al. They-- they're from another district. Jist passing through. They're just interested in some property I have. They're ready to leave.

MR. AL: You ain't gonna sell 'em any of your precious possessions are you?

MAMIE: Not a chance. Now, Mr. Al, you run on back home. Soon's you git there, put a big kettle of water on to boil. And bring out a bottle of that thing...

MR. AL: that thing, Ms. Mamie?

MAMIE: Yes that thing.

MR. AL: What! You're going to give my wife alcohol to drink in har condition?

MAMIE: No Mr. Al the alcohol is for you.

MR. AL: Oh! For me! Lord knows I need it!

Exits hurriedly talking to himself

MR. AL: What a day! I wonder what Ms. Mamie doing with gun? She didn't see that I noticed her pointing it at them sophisticated men. And somehow Ms. Mirry look a little bigger today. O well it mus' be my imagination – on a day like today it is possible to imagine anything. I hope Ms. Mamie hurry and come you know, because I can't catch babies!

Mamie returns to front porch.

PROFESSOR: Madam, if it's all right with you, we'd like to use your telephone and then we'll leave. In a few hours it'll be getting dark.

MAMIE: We ain't got no phone, an' you can't leave. We don't trust you.

Let me explain sometin' to you. I am the only midwife in Peaceful Hill and I've got to go deliver the Alderson baby. That may take some time. Now, my Charlie Boy, as you may have suspicioned, has jist 'scaped from prison. And I mean for him to stay 'scaped. 'Cause he ort not to been sent there in the first place. When that store keeper got killed last year, Charlie Boy jist happened to be standin' there. He didn't shoot nobody.

There was a witness you know - Granpa Creek- but the day of the trial he was flat on his back with pneumonia. So there was nobody there to tell the truth!

PROFESSOR: That's most unfortunate.

ANDY: Yes. Too bad.

AL: Poor devil. I mean... I didn't mean to call your son a devil!

MAMIE: (glaring at Al) So...Y'all will jist have to stay here till I git back. Then I'll decide what to do.

Maybe you know some stories you could tell Charlie Boy to keep him from frettin'. He's crazy 'bout stories, and it would help you pass the time.

PROFESSOR: That's an excellent suggestion! A magnificent suggestion! That's what we'll do! Tell stories! Right, boys?

AL: Absolutely!

ANDY: Lady, we'll tell Charlie stories till midnight, if he wants to hear 'em! Till daylight, if he says so!

MAMIE: One more thing, before I leave here. You've hear'd of "swearin' on a stack of Bibles," ain't you?

PROFESSOR: Why, yes, I think I've heard that expression.

AL: Not me.

ANDY: Me, neither.

MAMIE: Charlie Boy! You can come back now. Mr. Alderson's gone.

Go in the house and look down in the bottom of that box where I keep my quilts and bring them three old Bibles out here.

CHARLIE: What fer?

MAMIE: Jist go get 'em and you'll see what fer.

Charlie exits, Mamie turns to the puzzled men.

MAMIE (**mostly to audience**): Now don't y'all ask me how come I keep three Bibles when me nor Charlie Boy nor my Sister Mirry can't none of us read.

Well I keep dem because they was handed down. From my great-grandpa. He was a Preacher in these parts! Unfortunately we not church goers anymore ...there ain't not even one church in Peaceful Hill.

Charlie returns, one huge Bible and two smaller ones in hand.

MAMIE: Good. Stack 'em up, right there in front of these tree men. Put the big one down first. Open hit up. Then open the others on top of hit. Make a stack.

MAMIE: Y'all lean over, put your right hands on them Bibles.

Now say what I say. All together. We swear on this stack of Bibles--

MEN: (**in unison**) We swear on this stack of Bibles--

MAMIE: That we won't harm Charlie MacLeod--

MEN: That we won't harm Charlie MacLeod--

MAMIE: And we won't run off before his ma gits back!

MEN: And we won't run off before his ma gits back!

MAMIE: (**with much satisfaction**) Well, that's that! [**Men continue: Well, that's that!**] No, no, not you - Here, Son, you take this. Keep close guard on them fellers. I won't be gone too long.

Scene 5

PROFESSOR: Charlie, I was just noticing this beautiful Poinsettia plant your mother has here.

CHARLIE: (**seeing the plant for the first time**) Well well well...! I hadn't seen that. Wonder where Ma got hit?

PROFESSOR: It's a "Poinsettia." Would you like to hear the story of how the Poinsettia came to be our main Christmas flower?

CHARLIE: Story? Story! Oh, shore! I like stories.

PROFESSOR: Long time ago, down in Mexico, where the first of this species grew, the Poinsettia was known as "The Flower of the Holy Night."

CHARLIE: Holy Night? What night is that?

PROFESSOR: It's Christmas Eve Night. The night before Christ the Lord was born. Like tonight. Today is Christmas Eve; so tonight will be the Holy Night.

CHARLIE: (**intrigued**) I never hear'd that before. I jist thought Christmas was Christmas.

PROFESSOR: Well, let me tell you the Poinsettia story...

A power point presentation is shown here using the Professor's voice to narrate.

ANDY: Professor! That's quite interesting.

AL: So why is the flower called Poinsettia?

PROFESSOR: Well, *Joel Poinsett who was the first US Ambassador to Mexico in the 1820's, wandered into the countryside looking for a new plant species. He discovered this beautiful shrub with large red flowers growing next to a road and took cuttings to his greenhouse in South Carolina. After the flower was developed it was named after him.*

CHARLIE: You know any more stories? 'Bout flowers. Or just anything!

PROFESSOR: Do you know the song Silent Night, Holy Night?'

ANDY: 'Been singing it since I was a boy.

CHARLIE: My grandfather used to sing it to me.

PROFESSOR: ***Tells the story while it is mimed by extra cast members***

It was the Christmas Eve of 1818 was at hand. Pastor Joseph Mohr of St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf near the Austrian Alps decided that he needed a carol for the Christmas Eve service. Well, he had a little poem he had written two years earlier and wondered if it could be put to

music.

He hurried off to see his friend, Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolteacher and also served as the church's organist and choir director. In a few short hours Franz came up with a beautiful melody composed for guitar accompaniment as the organ at the church was broken.

They now had a Christmas carol that they could sing without the organ. A few hours later, Franz stood with his friend the pastor, Joseph, in front of the altar in St. Nicholas church and introduced "Stille Nacht" to the congregation.

Today, this well loved carol is still being sung all over the world in many different languages.

A soloist sings two verses at this time in some other language (Spanish, French...)

CHARLIE: For a tree man you certainly know a lot of interesting stories... You got any more?

PROFESSOR: (**picks up the largest of the three Bibles stacked on the floor of the porch**) So you want to hear another story? I can tell you another Holy night story! I'm going to offer you the greatest story ever told--straight out of the Bible.

CHARLIE: You mean to say the Good Book has got stories in hit?

Prof. begins leafing through New Testament portion of Bible.

PROFESSOR: Plenty of stories, Charlie. True stories.

CHARLIE: (**much amazed**) I shore didn't know that. I thought hit was jist full 'a fire an' brimstone.

PROFESSOR: Ah, here's the part we're looking for: St. Luke 2.

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world would should be taxed...And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city."

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the City of David, which is called Bethlehem... to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child..."

PROFESSOR: Do you want to hear more?

All say yes

PROFESSOR: Well what happened was that...(the story is paraphrased)

At the end of the story an appropriated song is played or a children's group could sing, e.g., *Mary had a baby yes Lord (spiritual)*

PROFESSOR: So, Charlie, that's how the Bible tells of the first Holy Night...Over two thousand years ago. In Bethlehem. What do you think of it?

CHARLIE: quite overwhelmed Per-fess-er. What I think is: hit ain't right fer me to even be pointin' this thing at y'all, this bein' the birthday of that Baby Jesus.

puts gun aside

I feel so bad with myself...(sobbing) Y'all can go. Right now. You'd better hurry, 'fore night comes on...and before I change my mind.

PROFESSOR: Why, thank you, Charlie. We appreciate that.

CHARLIE: (still sobbing) I hope you won't tell no police that you seen me!

PROFESSOR: We're not going to turn you in, Charlie. The only person I'll speak to will be one who can arrange for you to have a new trial. That way, you won't have to go back to prison.

CHARLIE: (wiping eyes) Shore enough?

PROFESSOR: Shore enough!

Charlie notices small branches and leaves still on the floor

CHARLIE: Here, lem'me git these here limbs back in your sack. Say, y'all! If you want to know all the different kinds 'a trees growin' here 'round Peaceful Hill, come back anytime an' I'll show dem to you.

AL: You've got a good idea.

ANDY: Charlie, I bet you don't know all the trees around here.

CHARLIE: Shore! I grow'd up here in the woods.

PROFESSOR: I'll tell you what, Charlie. We'll strike a bargain with you. We'll come back and get you to help us identify the trees, and we'll help you learn to read.

CHARLIE: Read stories?

PROFESSOR: Yes. Read stories! How's that?

CHARLIE: Hit's a deal!

Charlie shakes hands with the three as they hurriedly leave. He then sits down on the porch steps, to await his mother's return.

CHARLIE: **(to himself)** When Ma gits back, she may not like it a-tall when she sees them tree fellers are gone. But if I tell her 'bout the Holy Night and 'bout the little Baby in the Bible, she'll see I had to do it.. .it was the right thing to do... it was the right thing to do.

Notices basket holding the cake

CHARLIE: I feel hungry again. Wonder what Ma's got in this here basket. **Unfolds dish cloths covering cake**

A cake! I ain't seen a cake in nearly a year!

As Charlie is lifting the cake from the basket, Mamie returns, bringing Mattie Jane with her. Charlie is so intrigued with the cake that he doesn't see them.

I could eat the whole thing! I am gonna go whack me off a chunk of hit!

Starts to enter house, carrying cake.

MAMIE: Charlie Boy! **Charlie whirls around, almost drops the cake.** I'm back. An' look who I brung with me!

CHARLIE: **(with great surprise and delight)** Mattie Jane! **(runs to greet Mattie Jane)**

MATTIE JANE: Charlie Boy!

CHARLIE: Mattie Jane, you got purtier dan the last time I saw you!

MATTIE JANE: I'm glad you're back!

MAMIE: After that little baby was born, an' we got her settled down, I jist got to thinkin'! An' I thought: "My goodness, Charlie Boy wanted to see Mattie Jane." So--

Y'all ain't listenin' to a word I say! Gimme this cake, an come on in the house so we can eat some of hit.

Takes cake from Charlie. He and Mattie Jane--both in a daze--start following Mamie into the house. Suddenly Mamie stops.

Wait, where's them tree fellers?

CHARLIE: I let 'em go, Ma.

MAMIE: Let 'em go? Bwoy you crazy? You want to go back to prison?

CHARLIE: The per-fess-er, he told me some good stories 'bout the Holy Night. The last one, hit was the bestest! Ma, hit was the bestest story I ever heard! An' you know what else? You listen

to this too, Mattie Jane. The per-fess-er is gonna fix it so I won't have to go back to that prison! An' they're gonna come here next year an' learn me how to read--!

Ma...don't get upset wid me. I really believe this is a Holy Night.

MAMIE: Well...I wasn't expecting to see you and you come home...and you is still 'ere so... I really wasn't expecting to see you and you come home...and you is still 'ere... so tell me more 'bout this Holy Night.

They all walk away to the strains of 'O holy night' Cappeau, 1847

The cast return on the chorus "Fall on your knees."