

# STORIES OF THE HOLY NIGHT

A Play for Christmas by Jewell Ellen Smith

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"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

--The Gospel according to Luke 2:11

"Can man forget this story?"

--Ben Jonson, English poet and dramatist (1573-1637), in I Sing The Birth.

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Time: Christmas Eve afternoon, 1940.

Place: Gooch's Gap, a remote settlement in the Appalachian Mountains.

Characters (in the order of their appearance):

Mamie MacLeod, a widow, the only midwife in Gooch's Gap

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

Mattie Jane Creekmore, Charlie Boy's girlfriend

Anna Mae, Mattie Jane's little sister

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

Bud Alderson, a resident of Gooch's Gap

Joel Roberts Poinsett, American statesman, U.S. Minister to Mexico, 1825-1829

Pedro, Mr. Poinsett's Mexican servant

Little Angie, Anita, and Dolores, Mexican waifs who live with their grandmother

Mexican Grandmother

The Virgin Mary

Martin Luther (1483-1546), noted German religious leader and reformer

Frau Kate Luther, Martin Luther's wife

The Luther Children: Hans, Paul, Martin, and Lena

Mary

Joseph

The Christ Child

Three Shepherds

Angel of the Lord

Host of Angels

Three Orient Kings:

Melchior, King of Arabia, a land where the soil is ruddy.

Gaspar, King of Tarsus, the land of merchants.

Balthasar, King of Saba, the land of spices.

Two servant boys

Appalachian dialect and expressions:

why = how come

it = hit

afraid or scared = a-FEAR-d

not any = nary

poor = pore

young person, child = young 'un

sure = shore

touch = tech

exactly = 'zactly

at all = a-tall

thought (v) = thunk up

was not = warn't

took = taken

food = vittles

thank you = much obliged (oh-BLIJ-ed)

brought = brung

wrapped = wropped

## SCRIPT

### ACT I, Scene 1

*Scene 1--It is Christmas Eve afternoon at the rustic 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 cedar 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 nary a soul to take Christmas with me, nor to look at the leaves in this old yard.

And my pore Charlie Boy! *Sobs* Way off down yonder in that state pen! Locked up day and night For somethin' the pore young 'un didn't do! That's what gits me! Charlie Boy didn't shoot nobody!

*stops sweeping to wipe her tears*

Pore young 'un! That's what he is: jist a young 'un. He's done turned 21, but he's still like a young 'un.

*begins sweeping again*

But hit won't do no good to be carryin' on now. Hit don't pay for a grown woman to cry--'specially when they ain't nobody listenin'.

*abruptly stops sweeping, cocks her head to the side*

I hear somebody comin' up the trail! Whoever 'tis is runnin' plenty fast!  
*Charlie Boy, clad in his striped prison uniform and carrying a big white sheet, comes barging into the yard. He is highly elated, much bedraggled, exhausted.*

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

MARIE: *quite beside herself with joy* Lord ha' mercy!

*Charlie Boy grabs his mother in a bear hug, lifts her off her feet and whirls her around. She drops her broom.*

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

CHARLIE: Hit's me, all right! Oh, Ma, am I glad to git back to Gooch's Gap! That state pen is shore 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 lawmen!

CHARLIE: Didn't tech a hair 'a their heads.

MAMIE: They jist turned you loose?

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

MAMIE: What sort 'a trick?

CHARLIE: You see this here bed sheet? *holds up wrinkled sheet*

MAMIE: Yes, I see hit.

CHARLIE: Well, one evenin' I hear'd three of the guards a' talkin' and tellin' one another ghost tales. And I found out that the one who's guardin' the old back gate on Monday nights is a'feared to death of ghost-es. He thinks they're real!

But I know haintin' ghost-es ain't real, 'cause you told me so. Remember? Long time ago when I was a little young 'un you told me all sorts of stories. Remember?

MAMIE: *wistfully* Oh yes, I remember the stories.

CHARLIE: You said ghost-es--or haints, as some folks say--jist can't be real.

MAMIE: That's right. There ain't no haints. Nor ghost-es. Nowhere.

CHARLIE: So, I figured me up the trick. Then Monday night--a night black as smut--I got me this here sheet and hid close to the back gate where that scary guard was tromping back and forth, back and forth. *starts reenacting incident* Jist as the big old prison clock struck midnight, I wropped 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 pen-i-ten-ti-ary! On cold, cold nights I go too-oo-o and fro, too-oo-o and fro to haint the guards!... Woof!"

*Charlie laughs*

That feller! He fainted! Keeled over like dead! So I jist taken his keys, unlocked the gate, an' high-tailed hit out'a there!

MAMIE: *with glee* Good fer you!

CHARLIE: *seriously* Ma, I'm starved to death. You got any cold biscuit, or anything?

MAMIE: Of course. I've always got plenty of left-over vittles. Come on in the house.

CHARLIE: Soon's I eat, you know what I'm gonna do? Go squirrel huntin'! I want me some fried squirrel, smothered in thick-en gravy! With biscuits an' syrup! Then, I aim to go see Mattie Jane!

MAMIE: Well, now, Charlie Boy, you can go hunt squirrels--there's plenty of 'em this year--but you can't go see Mattie Jane!

CHARLIE: How come, Ma? Me an' Mattie Jane was--Lord, she ain't up an' married nobody, has she?

MAMIE: No, no. Mattie Jane ain't married. An' I know you two was sweet on one another. But we can't tell nobody that you 'scaped from the pen!

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

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

CHARLIE: How could they? They don't know where Gooch's Gap is at.

MAMIE: They'll find Gooch's Gap. You jist don't know lawmen. What we gotta do is figure out how you can hide. I ain't lettin' them take you off no more, but we better git some arrangements made.

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

MARIE: Sister Loodie is spendin' the winter with me, but her step-son Willie livin' down in the lower settlement--you don't know Willie--well, anyway, Willie, he come an' got Loodie yesterday. On account of hit bein' Christmas an' all.

They tried to git me to go too, but I couldn't go. Bud Alderson's wife, she's 'spectin' any day now and they're countin' on me to be there.

CHARLIE. So you're still catchin' babies?

MAMIE: *boastfully* Ever' blessed baby born in Gooch's Gap! Jist the other day I was tellin' Sister Loodie that-- Ah, I've got it! I jist thought how you can hide!

CHARLIE. How?

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

CHARLIE: Me? Me wear women's dresses? You can't mean that, Ma!

MAMIE: Not all time. Jist when you're out 'a the house. That way, if anybody happens to see you, they'll think you are Loodie.

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

*two enter house*

End of Scene 1

## Scene 2

*Scene 2--same as Scene 1, a few minutes later, on the front porch of the MacLeod cabin. Charlie Boy emerges--his prison garb covered over with an oversized long dress. The pants of his uniform barely show. He carries a double-barreled shotgun and is loading it as he starts out of the yard.*

MAMIE: *running after her son* Your bonnet! Your bonnet! Charlie Boy! *Waves big pink sunbonnet, hurries to put it on Charlie's head* Now, that's better: *ties big bow under Charlie's chin* You look jist like your Aunt Loodie!

CHARLIE: I feel like a fool! *exits*

MAMIE: Well, you ain't. We can't take no chances. *pauses* Git back 'fore 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 'un!

*Charlie exits. Mamie picks up her yard brooms and resumes sweeping.*

I reckon I'd better finish this wretched yard.

*Sweeps vigorously, piles leaves into large split-oak basket. Enter Mattie Jane and her younger sister Anna Mae. Mattie Jane carries a large potted Poinsettia plant, Anna Mae, a pound cake packed in a good sized basket. Mamie's back is turned as they reach the yard gate.*

MATTIE JANE: Miss Mamie?

MAMIE: Why-- I-- I-- Oh, hit's you, Mattie Jane! An' Anna Mae! I wasn't 'spectin' nobody! You sort'a caught me by surprise! But I'm powerful glad to see you. Y'all come in. I'll make you some sassafras tea, or somethin'.

MATTIE JANE: No'm, thank you. We ain't got time. Our ma sent you this here flower. *hands plant to Mamie*

MAMIE: My goodness! It shore is purty! I never seen the like of hit!

ANNA MAE. Our Aunt Clara brought it all the way from Tennessee!

MATTIE JANE: She brought two of 'em. An' Ma said you ought'a have one of 'em to keep you from bein' so lonesome for Charlie Boy.

ANNA MAE: She sent you this here cake, too. Hit's a Kentucky Pound Cake, 'cause Ma's folks come from Kentucky an' that's the kind 'a cake they always make fer Christmas.

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

MAMIE: This is plum wonderful! Tell your ma I'm sure much obliged.

MATTIE JANE: Miss Mamie?

MAMIE: Yes, Mattie Jane?

MATTIE JANE: *timidly* I don't reckon you got no Christmas letter or anything from Charlie Boy, did you?

MAMIE: *with some hesitation* Uh-- Uh-- No, I didn't git no letter. Charlie Boy don't know how to write, you know. I've wished a thousand times that I had 'a made him go to school when he was a young 'un. But I didn't. So now he don't read an' write. Jist like me.

MATTIE JANE: Maybe sometime if you want to send him word about anything, I'll write hit in a letter fer you. And Charlie Boy could git somebody down there to read hit to him!

MAMIE: That's shore thoughtful of you, Mattie Jane. I won't fergit hit. You never can tell what's gonna happen.

ANNA MAE: We better be goin' now.

MATTIE JANE: Yes, hit takes a while to walk them three miles--even if hit is down hill all the way.

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

MATTIE JANE: Oh, Miss Mamie, I wish't you hadn't a asked. I can't remember the name of hit. Anna Mae, you remember what Aunt Clara called hit?

ANNA MAE: Poin-somethin'-or-other. That's all I know.

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

*Creekmore girls exeunt, Mamie takes cake from basket, smells it.*

Umm-mm-m! Smells powerful good.

*Places cake back in the basket, sets it on the porch. Picks up Poinsettia, smells it.*

Why, this ain't got no smell a-tall to hit. Oh, well, I reckon some flowers jist don't smell good. Like my pa used to say, "There ain't no sich thing as perfection!" 'Course Pa was talkin' about people, but I reckon the same goes for flowers. *resumes sweeping*

Maybe I ought to 'a told Mattie Jane about Charlie Boy comin' home. I jist don't know. I do know that one of these days somehow or other I'm gonna git her Grandpa Creekmore to tell what he seen that night of the shootin'. He seen who shot that store keeper. And it shore warn't Charlie Boy!

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

MAMIE: *with satisfaction* Sounds like Charlie Boy is havin' good luck! I'll cook us a big pot of squirrel mulligan!

*Professor DuPont, Andy and Al Butler--their hands above their heads, their sacks of tree limbs dangling from their shoulders--run into Mamie's yard. Charlie Boy is at their heels, his smoking shotgun in his hands. The three men are terrified. Charlie Boy is not so sure of what he is doing. He thinks the three are "law men" come to take him back to prison. 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: *crying out* Charlie Boy! What in God's creation is 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 set down up there in them porch chairs!

CHARLIE: *waving his gun* Y'all set down up there in them porch chairs, like Ma said. *turns to Mamie* Ma, they are law men! 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. 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 me and Andy 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 boys are two of my students at the state university: Andy and Al Butler. They're students. And 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 Appalachians. And, to draw a map showing the location of the various species. In this county, that is. 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 rigmarole they made up, Ma.

MAMIE: *ignoring Charlie's remark* Tell me what you got in them sacks.

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 off of holly, pine, cedar, oak, hickory, other species, and a rather large limb from a winter huckleberry.*

CHARLIE: See, Ma? They been breakin' limbs off'n all the trees! Jist look 'a there! Holly, an' pine, an' cedar, an' oak, an' hickory. Even winter huckleberry. *turns to men* Don't y'all know them huckleberries is fer the little birds to eat when snow comes? You ought not 'a broke them off!

Maybe y'all ain't lawmen. Maybe you done 'scaped from the lunatic asylum! Ma, let's me an--

MAMIE: *as she 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 Bud Alderson! The baby must be comin'! I'll have to go! Quick, Charlie Boy, gimme the shotgun! You run git a milk bucket out'n the kitchen and go be milkin' the cow. Bud will think you're Sister Loodie.

CHARLIE: *as he hands over the gun* How you know hit's Bud Alderson?

MAMIE: I can smell his pipe. Bud's the only man in Gooch's Gap that smokes Prince Albert. An' anybody can tell Prince Albert a mile away.

*Charlie runs out, holding up his skirt. Mamie turns to the foresters.*

MAMIE: You tree fellers jist hold your horses now. Soon as Bud Alderson comes and goes I'll tell you what to do.

*Bud, much out of breath, arrives at the front gate, where Mamie meets him.*

BUD: Miss Mamie! Hit's time! I come to git you!

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

BUD: Oh, yes, Ma'am! My wife said tell you to hurry! She's in a terrible fix! Done started screamin' somethin' awful!

MAMIE: I'll come right away.

BUD: Them strangers settin' on your porch? Are they some of your kinfolks?

MAMIE: No, Bud. They-- They're from another settlement. Jist passing through. They're powerful interested in this here old double barrel that used to be my husband's. They're ready to leave.

BUD: You ain't gonna sell 'em your best shotgun, are you?

MAMIE: Not a chance. There ain't enough money to buy this gun. Now, Bud, you run on back home. Soon's you git there, put a big kettle of water on to boil. Then, bring out your jug.

BUD: You mean you're gonna let my wife have whiskey?

MAMIE: No. That's for you.

BUD: Lord, I need it!

*Exits hurriedly. 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 the lay of the land to you. You see, I am the only midwife in Gooch's Gap 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 the state penitentiary. And I mean for him to stay 'scaped. 'Cause he ort not 'a been sent there in the first place. When that store keeper down in the lower settlement got killed last year, Charlie Boy jist happened to be standin' there. He didn't shoot the man.

Old Grandpa Creekmore seen who done it! But the day they had the trial Grandpa Creekmore was flat 'a his back with pneumonia. So there warn't nobody there to tell the truth!

PROFESSOR: That's most unfortunate.

ANDY: Yes. Too bad.

AL: Poor devil. Oh, Madam, I didn't mean to call you son a devil!

MAMIE: *without hearing Al* Y'all will jist have to stay here till I git back. Then I'll decide what to do. I don't think Charlie Boy will shoot you, unless you scare him or somethin'. He's sort of like a young'un. Maybe you know some stories you could tell him 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: I'm fixin' to let you three do jist that--Swear on a stack of Bibles--soon's Charlie Boy gits back to the house. *walks to edge of yard to call her son* Charlie Boy! You can come back now. Bud Alderson's gone.

*Charlie returns, carrying the milk pail.*

CHARLIE: I didn't git but jist a little milk, Ma. That fool cow acted like she know'd I wadn't Aunt Loodie.

MAMIE: Never mind that. 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 returns to the puzzled men.*

Now don't y'all ask me how come I keep three Bibles when me nor Charlie Boy nor my Sister Loodie can't none of us read 'em. I reckon I keep 'em on account of they was handed down. From my great-grandpa. He was a Circuit Rider in these parts! Yes, siree! A Circuit Rider. Grandpa MacLean left us them Good Books, but he didn't leave us too much religion. We ain't no church goers. As fer that, there ain't no church in Gooch's Gap.

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

CHARLIE: Where you want me to put 'em?

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

*Charlie arranges Bibles, as instructed. Mamie, the shotgun still in hand, moves closer to men.*

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

*Men place hands on 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! Here, Son, you take the gun.

Keep close guard on them fellers. I won't be gone too long.  
*Charlie takes the gun, ambles over to the edge of porch, takes off his bonnet and sits down--facing his prisoners. Mamie darts into the house and hurries back through the corner of the yard and out the front gate--her bonnet and shawl on, a large black satchel in her hand.*

End of ACT I

## ACT II, Scene 1

*Scene 1: Same as Sc. 2 of ACT I. There is no break. Professor DuPont and the two students remain seated on the porch of the MacLeod cabin. Charlie Boy continues guarding them with his double-barreled shotgun. The Poinsettia plant and the Kentucky Pound Cake have been left on the porch, not far from the steps.*

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

CHARLIE: *seeing the plant for the first time* Well I'll be hanged! I hadn't seen that.

Wonder where Mia got hit? Don't nothin' like that grow 'round Gooch's Gap.

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? 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 when Christ the Lord was born. Like tonight. Today is Christmas Eve; so tonight will be the Holy Night.

CHARLIE: *much intrigued* It will? I never hear'd that before. I jist thought Christmas was Christmas.

PROFESSOR: Well, let me tell you the Poinsettia story. Al and Andy, you might like to listen to this, too. It's part true, part legend.

AL: Oh, yes, Sir.

ANDY: We'll be glad to hear it.

PROFESSOR: Back more than a hundred years ago there was in Charleston, South Carolina a distinguished gentleman by the name of Mr. Joel Roberts Poinsett. He was a scholar, a statesman, a diplomat, a man who had traveled much. Once

be had gone on a seven year tour of Europe and western Asia. He could read and speak many languages. Mr. Poinsett eventually became the U.S. Secretary of War. And, in his later years, he founded an academy of fine arts. This unusual man is remembered now mostly for his flower from Mexico. In the year 1825 Mr. Poinsett became the first United States minister to Mexico. He represented our government there for several years. Finally, though, it was time for him to return home.

*On another section of the stage Mr. Poinsett and his young servant Pedro appear. They are busily packing numerous suitcases and parcels. These include a wooden box filled with plants bearing small red blossoms.*

PEDRO: Señor Poinsett?

POINSETT: What is it, Pedro?

PEDRO: You leave Mexico today. Why? You are, what you say, "home sick?"  
(*home seek*)

POINSETT: Si, si, Pedro. In a way, I am truly homesick. I've been down here in Mexico five years, and I long to see Carolina--my old home. But, I am sad to leave Mexico.

PEDRO: *with the flower box in hand* You take this wild flower all the way to your old home?

POINSETT: Si, Pedro. I think it has possibilities. Surely it can be made to grow bigger than it is. Even prettier.

PEDRO: We call it "flor de la Pascua" or sometimes "flor de la noche santo." Why, I don't know.

POINSETT: *with surprise* My word, Pedro, you've never heard the legend of "The Flower of the Holy Night?" I thought everybody in Mexico knew that lovely story.

PEDRO: Not me, poor Pedro.

POINSETT: Of course there are several versions of the legend. The most common one is about three little girls.

PEDRO: Tell it to me, Señor.

POINSETT: Once there lived, near the great cathedral in Monterey, three little girls named Angie, Anita, and Dolores. They stayed with their aged grandmother. And they were very poor.

One Christmas Eve night their grandmother told the little girls that they should go to the cathedral and kneel at the altar and present gifts to the Christ Child. That was the custom then.

*On a separate section of the stage an aged woman and three small girls enter. Angle carries a rag doll; Anita, pink paper roses; Dolores a clump of weeds. The*

*four stop. The grandmother speaks to them in pantomime, sends them on their way. The grandmother fades into the background, as Poinsett continues the narrative.*

POINSETT: Angie and Anita had fine gifts to take to the Christ Child. But all that little Dolores had was a clump of weeds she had gathered from the side of the road.

On the way to the great cathedral the little girls lost their way, and they didn't know which road to follow. So, they sat down by the side of the road and cried.

*Girls sit down, weep, wipe their eyes.*

It was then that they saw a vision of the blessed Virgin Mary!

*Virgin Mary appears, robed as an angel.*

VIRGIN MARY: Where are you going, little girls? And why are you crying on this the Holy Night?

ANGIE: We are going to take gifts to the Christ Child.

ANITA: But we got lost.

VIRGIN MARY: Come, I will show you the way to the cathedral. What gifts are you taking to the Christ Child?

DOLORES: Angle is taking her doll. And Anita has pink paper roses. But all I could find is these wild flowers, and they're not pretty. They are weeds!

VIRGIN MARY: When you lay them at the altar, they will be beautiful.

*Virgin Mary takes weeds from Dolores, gives her a Poinsettia blossom.*

POINSETT: The blessed Virgin Mary leaned over, touched the weeds, and changed them into flowers. And so, ever since then, in Mexico, they have been called "Flowers of the Holy Night."

*Mary and girls exeunt.*

PEDRO: Ah, Señor Poinsett that is a fine Mexican story. Will you tell it in your old home?

POINSETT: I'm sure I will, Pedro. I'll probably tell it over and over. Come, let's hurry! My ship sails at high noon. And I must not miss it!

*Two exeunt.*

ANDY: Gee whiz, Professor DuPont! That's quite interesting.

AL: Then Mr. Poinsett really did bring the Poinsettia to the United states?

PROFESSOR: Oh, yes. And after the flower was developed it was named for him.

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

*End of Scene 1, begin Scene 2, without a break.*

## Scene 2

*Scene 2.-- Same as Scene 1. There is not even a lull in the conversation.*

PROFESSOR: Let me think just a minute, Charlie. Naturally I know countless tales about trees.

CHARLIE: Trees will be fine. Jist so long as hit's a story!

PROFESSOR: Ah, I've just thought of the very one!

This, too, is for Christmas Eve. It's part true, part tradition. *Pauses* In old times people believed that on the night when Christ was born "the rivers flowed with wine, and the trees blossomed in the midst of ice and snow."

Nobody knows when folks began to decorate evergreen trees as part of their Christmas celebration. Some say that the custom grew out of the medieval miracle and mystery plays that were produced in Europe for more than 500 years--starting in the year 976.

These plays often opened, showing the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life. So perhaps the first Christmas trees stood for the Tree of Life.

Now, there is a tradition--often repeated--that Martin Luther was the first person to think of putting lights on a tree at Christmas time. *Pauses* Al, and Andy, you've probably heard this legend, and, I'm sure you are well versed in church history and tradition.

But, Charlie, I don't imagine you know who Martin Luther was.

CHARLIE: Can't say as I ever hear'd of him, He never lived nowheres around Gooch's Gap, did he?

PROFESSOR: No, no. He lived a long, long time ago in what is now Germany. Well, to be precise, he was a youngster about 10 years old when Columbus discovered America in 1492.

Luther grew up to be a very learned and religious man. He became a great preacher and teacher. He is called the "great reformer" in the church. For one thing, he translated the Bible into the German language. He wrote hundreds of songs.

Luther's wife was named Kate, and they had four children: Hans, Martin, Paul, and little Lena.

One Christmas Eve night after the Luther family had put up their Christmas tree--and decorated it with apples and paper flowers, and other pretties--Martin Luther went for a walk through the fields. It was a cold night, but the stars were shining very brightly.

*On another part of the stage Kate and the four children begin decorating a Christmas tree. Near the tree is a table on which a candle burns. Martin Luther puts on his wraps, leaves for his walk. Spotlight follows Luther.*

LUTHER: *as he gazes toward the stars* Ah, what a glorious Christmas Eve! The stars are magnificent. Indeed, the heavens do "declare the glory of God." The stars are like a million candles shining from the windows of heaven.

Truly, the Christ Child came as the "light of the world." Ja! (*Ya!*) His very words were: "Ich bin des licht von den welt!" (*Ish been des lisht fon des velt!*)

How I wish I had a way to teach the children that "Gott ist Licht!" (*lisht*)

Merely telling them is not enough. *Pauses*

Ah! I know what to do!

*Hurriedly returns to his family, which is still gathered around their tree.*

Kate, my dear, do we have any extra candles in the house?

KATE: Candles? I think so, Martin. But what are you going to do with more candles? It's not that dark.

LUTHER: I want to put them on our tree!

KATE: Put candles on the Christmas tree? I never heard of such a thing!

LUTHER: It will help us teach the children that the Christ Child came to be the "Light of the world."

*Kate exits, returns quickly with three candles, which she hands to her husband.*

KATE: I found only three.

LUTHER: That's enough to start with. Next Christmas Eve we can get more.

*Attaches candles to tree limbs, as he calls the children together.*

Children?

CHILDREN: *in unison* Yes, Father?

LUTHER: Come here. I want to tell you something.

*Lines children up, according to age*

Hans! Martin! Paul! Little Lena! Now, that's good. Listen carefully, children, I want to tell you a great truth. You know that this evergreen tree represents the "Tree of Life." Eternal life. We have adorned it in honor of the birthday of the Christ. Now, we are adding these candles as a symbol. A symbol that Christ our Lord was born to be the "Light of the world." "Das licht von den welt!"

*Kate lights candles, Luther talks on.*

All of your life I want each of you to remember this lesson: Christ Jesus came to be the "Light of the world." "Gott ist Licht." Tell me, do you understand that?

CHILDREN: *in unison* Yes, Father. "Gott ist Licht."

*Spotlight fades, audience attention is shifted back to Charlie Boy and his captives.*

ANDY: *seriously* Professor DuPont, you really know how to tell a story!

AL: Andy's right, Sir. I bet Charlie wishes you'd tell us another Christmas Eve story.

CHARLIE: I shore do! Per-fess-er, you do make 'em up good!

PROFESSOR: *obviously pleased* You fellows flatter me.

End of Scene. End of ACT II

*There is no break.*

### ACT III, Scene 1

*Scene 1--Same as previous scene. Charlie Boy still holds the three foresters captive on the front porch of the MacLeod cabin in Gooch's Gap. It is in the afternoon of Christmas Eve. To keep Charlie Boy entertained Professor DuPont is telling him a*

*series of Christmas Eve stories. Students Al and Andy are almost as intrigued with DuPont's tales as is Charlie Boy.*

PROFESSOR: *as he picks up the largest of the three Bibles stacked on the floor of the porch* So you want to hear another Christmas Eve story! All right! 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: There's some fire and brimstone, but actually, Charlie, the Bible--or Good Book, and it truly is the good book; it's the magnificent, fantastic book, for there's nothing else like it in the whole world--the Good Book is 66 books in one! All taken together, these 66 books give an account of God's dealings with man. Ah, here's the part we're looking for:

*begins reading*

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the 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.

"And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room in the inn."

*On a separate section of the stage, where a rustic stable scene has been created--complete with a hay-filled manger--Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child appear. Mary wraps a large white blanket around the baby and places him in the manger. Mary sits beside the manger, Joseph stands nearby. The Professor reads on.*

PROFESSOR: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night...."

*Audience sees three shepherds gathered around a campfire. One holds a lamb in his arms.*

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid."

*ANGEL comes to the shepherds at the same time a bright, almost blinding light shines down on them. The three flee in panic, stop some distance from the angel.*

ANGEL OF THE LORD: Shepherds! Come back, shepherds! Don't be afraid!

This is the night for joy! Not fear!

*shepherds return, cautiously*

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!"

FIRST SHEPHERD: *trembling with fear* Di-- Di-- Did you say Chr-- Chr-- Chr-- Christ the Lord?

ANGEL: Yes! Christ the Lord is born! In Bethlehem! Your own City of David!

FIRST SHEPHERD: How-- How-- How can we find Him?

ANGEL: This shall be the sign: "Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

*PROFESSOR reads further.*

"Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

*A group of 10, or more, angels surrounds the shepherds, chanting as they arrive.*

ANGELS: *chanting in unison* Glory to God in the Highest! All glory! All glory! All glory to His name! All praise to the lord most High!

The Almighty has done a great thing. He brings peace on earth! Good will to men!

Peace! Peace! Peace and Good Will!

Peace! Peace! Peace and Good Will!

He brings Peace and Good Will!

*Angels disappear, still chanting.*

Glory to God in the Highest! All glory! All glory! All glory!...

*As all angels fade away, Professor resumes reading.*

PROFESSOR: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, "Saying, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.'..."

"...And, lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was..."

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy!"

*Melchior, Gaspar, Balthasar enter--followed by two young servants who carry a golden chest. They stop.*

GASPAR: My friends, I am most discouraged. As you see, the King's star has suddenly disappeared from the sky! How can we go on when we cannot see its guiding light? Let us make camp for the night.

MELCHIOR: *with excitement* There! Look! There it is! *Points toward sky*

BALTHASAR: Where? I can't see it.

MELCHIOR: Look toward the southwest! Between those clouds!

BALTHASAR: Ah, yes! There it is! I knew the Holy King's star would return. After all, it has been our guide for two years!

GASPAR: Yes! let us hasten on to Bethlehem! Oh, I'm thankful! It is a time to rejoice!

*Wise men move on toward stable scene. Professor continues reading.*

PROFESSOR: "And when then were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

*Wise men open golden chest. Melchior takes out a casket of gold.*

MELCHIOR: *to Joseph* I, Melchior, King of Arabia, bow down before this Holy Child and offer him gold, because he is born the king-- the king of all kings.

GASPAR: *holding out the frankincense he has removed from the chest* I, Gaspar, King of Tarsus, the land of merchants, bow down before this Holy Child and offer him frankincense to burn on the altar of God. The Babe is born the high priest of this world.

BALTHASAR: *presenting the myrrh he has removed from the chest* I, Balthasar, King of Saba, the land of spices, bow down before the Holy Child to offer him myrrh. He is born the great physician, with healing in his hands.

He will comfort man in all his griefs, his sorrows; bear all his transgression, all his iniquities; and give him peace. *Cf. Isaiah 53*

*ANGEL OF THE LORD appears at the stable scene, while shepherds and wise men are still kneeling before the manger.*

ANGEL: Shepherds of Bethlehem, go back to your fold and keep watch over your sheep.

Wise Kings of the East, depart now. Return each to his own kingdom. But do not travel through Jerusalem, because of the wicked king there.

Joseph, take the young child and Mary his mother and flee into Egypt. Hide there, for King Herod will seek the Holy Babe to destroy him.

*All leave, as directed. Angel disappears.*

End of Scene 1

*Spotlight directs audience attention back to Charlie and his captives.*

## Scene 2

*Scene 2.--Same as Scene 1. There is no break. Charlie still holds Professor DuPont and the two students at gunpoint, on the porch of the MacLeod cabin in Gooch's Gap.*

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

CHARLIE: *quite overwhelmed* Per-fess-er, hit's plum too wonderful fer the likes 'a me. What I think is: hit ain't right fer me to even be pointin' this here shotgun at y'all, this bein' the birthday of that Baby in Bethlehem.

*puts gun aside*

Y'all can go. Right now. You'd better hurry, 'fore night comes on.

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

CHARLIE: I hope you won't tell no law men that you seen me!

PROFESSOR: We're not going to turn you in, Charlie. The only law man 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: Shore enough?

PROFESSOR: Shore enough!

CHARLIE: That'll be great!

*Notices small branches and leaves still on the floor*

Here, lem'me git these here limbs back in your sack.

*Boys refill Al's sack. Professor places Bibles in one of the chairs.*

Say, y'all! If you want to know all the different kinds 'a trees growin' here 'round Gooch's Gap, come back in the spring when the leaves put out an' I'll show 'em to you. They's lots more trees than these. You ain't found half of 'em.

AL: You've got a good idea.

ANDY: Charlie, I bet you do 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 in the spring and get you to help us identify the trees, and we'll help you learn to read:

CHARLIE: Read stories?

PROFESSOR: Yes. Read stories!

CHARLIE: Hit's a trade!

*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 Good Book, she'll see I done right.

*Notices basket holding the cake*

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: Oh, Charlie Boy!

CHARLIE: Mattie Jane, you done got purtier an' purtier!

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

*Two are oblivious to Mamie; she doesn't notice.*

MAMIE: After that fat 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' y'all come on in the house so's we can eat some of hit.

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

Good heavens! Where's them tree fellers at?

CHARLIE: I let 'em go, Ma.

MAMIE: Let 'em go?

CHARLIE: The per-fess-er, he told me three good stories 'bout the Holy Night. But the last one, hit was the bestest! Ma, hit was the bestest story ever told! An' you know what else? You listen to this too, Mattie Jane. The per-fess-er is gonna git hit fixed so's I won't have to go back to that state pen! An' they're gonna come here next spring an' learn me how to read--out'n the Good Book! I'm gonna read THE STORY OF THE HOLY NIGHT!

*Three enter door of cabin.*

END OF PLAY

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