

Religious Plays

April 2010

J. Garnet Miller

Kenyon-Deane

New Playwrights' Network

Christmas Plays

One-act Plays

Code A1 applies unless indicated otherwise.

The Angels at Bethlehem

Freda Collins

Derived from Scriptural sources. Suitable for either child or adult performers, it can also be mimed with the use of a narrator or choir.

16 children + supers

The Animals' Christmas

James Anderson

Bethlehem is buzzing with rumours about the birth of a royal baby. TV reporters interview the animals that witnessed everything.

3b, 3g + 5 of either sex, 2 m or w (Variable)

Code B1

The Beggars of Bordeaux

Edward Murch

On Christmas Eve, three strolling players arrive at a French inn intending to abscond with the money belonging to their troupe. The play shows how the Nativity affected their lives, including that of the innkeeper's wife who, due to a local Christmas legend, was hoping for a miracle - she gets one but not quite how she was expecting it! Festival and award-winning play.

3m 4w or 7w

Bethlehem Boy

Edward Murch

Four variations on the Christmas theme combine to make this a most unusual play. The cast is for 7 actors but this can be adapted to more or fewer players of any age and sex.

7 players

Dark Noel

L. E. Thomas

Fugitives from war meet in a cave and share their troubles and differing outlooks on life. A vision of the Holy Family brings renewed comfort and joy to them amid their sufferings.

7m 3w 4 children

Fit For a King**Barbara Willard**

Brings to life the birth of Christ. For performance by young children.

23 characters**The Gifts****Mollie Clarke**

The Holy Family is befriended during their flight into Egypt - but their meeting is prophetic, casting the shadow of the Cross.

7w**Jesus of Nazareth - This is Your Life****Andrew Taggart**

The famous programme pays tribute to its most famous guest.

"... refreshing and sincere" - Christian Herald.**6m****The Journey of the Star****Edward Murch**

The Magi, who cannot believe that the Messiah could be born in such a lowly place, are beaten to Bethlehem by their wives. A sincere and well-written play in which the present day problems of refugees are linked to the Nativity.

7w**The Light in Darkness****T. B. Morris**

An imaginative treatment of the Nativity, which links the present world with the first Christmas Night. Mainly in verse.

10m 7w + voice (choir and extras optional)**The Little Shepherd****Minta Meier**

A little shepherd becomes angry when his usual sleeping place in a stable is occupied by Mary and Joseph. Poignant and original.

10 or more children, 12 to 100 choristers**Lonely Road****T. C. Thomas**

The Holy Family, fleeing Bethlehem, rest with a distressed family. When they continue on their way, they leave behind a peaceful family with a healed child.

2m 7w**Mak the Sheep-Stealer****Terry O'Brien**This verse dramatisation of the medieval Mystery Play, *The Second Shepherd's Play*, juxtaposes the attempts of a thief to pass off a stolen

lamb as his new-born son, with the three shepherds being summoned by angels to witness the birth of Jesus. The author has successfully captured the reverence, rich comedy and social comment of the original. Running time: 45 minutes.

6m 2w

Code B1

No Room

Freda Collins & Alison Graham-Campbell

A group of women are told there is "no room at the inn". 20 minutes.

8w 1 child

Saint Germaine

Edward Murch

The legend of Saint Germaine - in the village of Pibrac, Germaine is mistreated by her sister-in-law, Alyse. One Christmas Eve their home is visited by a Duchess seeking a fresh horse and a beggar-woman seeking food and shelter. Out of the goodness of her heart, Germaine gives away her only possession - her horse - and steals a loaf of bread from her sister-in-law to feed the beggarwoman. When Alyse confronts her for theft the beggarwoman reveals herself to be the Madonna and Alyse recognises Germaine for the saint she is. A charming peasant play.

5w

Tell It to the Wind

Edward Murch

The Nativity through the eyes of the shepherds, passing simply from the present to the past and back again.

7w

Time to be Born

P. D. Cummins

A lyrical, exquisitely moving Nativity, written from an entirely different viewpoint. Produced twice by the *BBC*.

8m 3w + extras

Two Nativities

Peter Assinder

The Bright Star (**10w + 1b**) - in a modern barn Johnny is looking after a new-born lamb. *The Light of the World* (**6m 1w + 3 of either sex + chorus**) is a choral re-enactment of the Nativity.

Without Candles

Manuel Straub

Even the Welfare State can't offer room at the Inn - or can it?

11w + choir

The Women of Bethlehem**Carol Woollcombe**

A realistic exploration of the lives of the women of Bethlehem before the Son of God was born amongst them. A play of real atmosphere.

6w + extras

Full-Length Plays

Codes A2 and A3 apply unless otherwise indicated.

Christmas in the Market Place**Eric Crozier**

A family of gypsies presents a Nativity play to the townsfolk. First performed by the Pilgrim Players of Canterbury in 1943 and is a favourite among modern Nativity plays. In three parts, which can be performed separately, in combination or in their entirety.

3m 2w (+ 2w optional)**Code A3****Emmanuel****James Forsyth**

The hopes and fears which precede and attend the birth of Jesus and the way the world reacts with hostility to anything new and vulnerable. All the characters have depth and vitality with the rich humour and compassion of a folk play. 100 minutes.

"Fresh and elevating experience ... captures the wonder and glory of the Nativity" - The New York Times

11m 4w + extras**Code A3****His Star Returns****Peter Assinder**

The cast double as characters from the First and Second Comings of Christ. This provides a good opportunity to contrast character and period: Herod's horrific attempts to kill Jesus, with the modern folk's endeavours to save Mary and her unborn Son from the weather.

20m 8w**Code A2****Journey of the Three Kings****C. Martindale**

An unusual and charming Epiphany. The *Higher Education Journal* and *Church Times* thought it excellent and ideal for young actors. Broadcast by the BBC in 1955.

12 characters, extras & animals**Code A2**

Easter Plays

One-Act Plays

Code A1 applies unless otherwise indicated.

Artoban or the Fourth Wise Man

Carol Marshall

Artoban follows the star to Bethlehem. He gives his gifts away to help others on the route and only after many years does he finally meet his King - on the Cross. Very moving play with music.

6m 6f

Easter Story

N. F. Parker

Reverently relates the Easter story through those who were closest to Jesus. The facts speak for themselves, recreating the greatest story ever told.

10m 8w

Fine Linen

H. M. Richards

Joseph of Arimathea moves Christ's body from the Cross to the Sepulchre. The traditional story is interwoven with the romances of the House of Mahlah.

6m 7w

I Will Arise!

T. B. Morris

This Morality verse play uses a group of mourners to symbolise the despair of Man at the apparent triumph of evil. Lucifer tempts them to abandon their faith, but the Youth of the World vanquish Lucifer, hope is reborn and faith renewed. Staged for the Consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral in 1962.

4m 3w + 4 optionals, extras + chorus

Mary's Son

Sylvia Davidson

A mother shows great fortitude during the trial of her son, his betrayal, release and subsequent death. It brings home the poignancy of Easter with dignity and realism.

4w

On the Hill**Edward Murch**

Barrabas's family await his crucifixion, then comes news that a man has been chosen to die instead of him. Shows an original aspect of the Crucifixion with reverence & dignity.

7w**Road to Calvary****Robert Duce**

Barrabas's scheming friend, Simon of Cyrene, willingly carries Christ's Cross on the Road to Calvary.

5m 6w + optional extras**Simon****Leonard J. Hines**

On the morning of the Crucifixion, children remember the time when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and they strewed palms before him. Simon of Cyrene starts to play with them, then they hear sounds of the Procession leading Jesus to Golgotha. Simon carries the Cross for him.

4m 5f**Sorrow Into Joy****Dorothy Myring**

Sincerely portrays the lives of the women closest to Jesus after dark on that first Good Friday - and shows how their sorrow was turned into joy.

5w**Stranger On the Road****Beatrix Carter**

Three travellers ask a family living on the road to Emmaus for a night's lodgings.

3w**They Wanted a Leader****Sam Bate**

A powerful and devout play for Palm Sunday. Philip of Bethlehem invites a Prince of the House of David to lead an uprising against Herod. Instead, the Prince of Peace, Jesus, comes to Jerusalem.

5m 3w

Full Length Plays

Codes A2 and A3 apply unless indicated otherwise.

Behold Your King

Thomas Doran

The Passion, Death and Resurrection. Can be plainly or spectacularly staged. Non-speaking parts provide the background and much of the dramatic effect. It can be used in conjunction with *Innocent Blood* to give a comprehensive review of the events of Holy Week.

7m 7f + extras

Code A3

Eyes Upon the Cross

Don Mueller

Reveals the reactions of people around the cross to the Crucifixion. 90 minutes, but its nine scenes may be presented individually, in various combinations or in its entirety.

"One of the most moving instances of religious drama which I have seen." -
President Van Dusen of the Union Theological Semirian.

11m 11w 2 boys (Doubling possible)

Code A2

Innocent Blood

Thomas Doran

Tells of the treachery of Judas Iscariot and the disloyalty of Simon Peter. It ends with Mary Magdalene's announcement that Christ is risen from the Dead. The first three scenes can be used to introduce *Behold Your King*.

9m 4w + extras

Code A2

Look Back to the Hill

Don Mueller

A cycle of eight Biblical playlets for Easter, but some of these humorous morality tales could be used at other times of the year.

5m 7w + Narrator

Code A2

Pontius Pilate

Gordon Lea

A Passion Play based on the Swiss legend of Mount Pilatus.

"Reverently and forcefully presented, with good dralllatic action."
- Methodist Recorder.

11m 7w + extras

Code A2

Road to Emmaus

James Forsyth

This sequel to *Emmanuel* deals with the burial and Resurrection of Christ, the opening of the tomb, the disciples' escape to Galilee and

Emmaus and their meal with the resurrected Christ. Both plays are very dramatic, atmospheric and deeply moving.

13m 6w 1 child and extras

Code A3

Spark in Judea

R. F. Delderfield

A dramatic play which shows why Pilate washed his hands of Christ. He struggles to control a rebellious province, whilst plagued by his conscience, his wife's disillusionment and insubordinate staff.

9m 3w

Code A3

General Plays

One-act Plays

Code A1 applies unless otherwise indicated.

The Answer

Phoebe M. Rees

Peter has been in prison and the women pray for his release. They come to realise that spiritual help might still be sent to those who ask for it.

6w

Between Two Prayers

Rudolph Whitelaw

Christ causes great spiritual disturbance to a Pharisee family. The children succumb to the new doctrine, shattering their father's pride.

7m 3w

The Boy with a Cart

Christopher Fry

St Cuthman, as a boy, pulled his mother in a cart from Cornwall to Sussex in search of a new home and vowed to build a church wherever they settled. 75 minutes.

7m 6w and chorus

Farce of the Devil's Bridge

Barry Jackson

Father Kado is trying to build a bridge from his island retreat to the mainland. Plagued by the Devil, he bargains with him, but is saved by a smart cat.

4m 1w + 1m or w

The Fortieth Man

Freda Collins

A gripping dramatisation of Rome's martyrdom of the Christians in the 4th century AD - the freezing to death of the Armenian Martyrs, attached to the "Thundering Legion" at Sebaste.

6m 1w

Mine Enemy My Friend

T. B. Morris

This play imagines a meeting between Queen Vashti and Esther, when Esther asks for help to save her people. Splendid opportunities

for acting, production and setting. Festival winner.
7w

The New Jerusalem

Phoebe Rees

The legend that Joseph of Arimathea brought Jesus to Somerset inspired Blake's poem and this play. It contrasts the philosophies of the Ages of Faith, Reason and Science and concludes that despite the differences there are two connecting elements - Faith and Fear. Ends with a rallying cry to the faithful and a stirring rendition of *Jerusalem*.
12w+

The Trumpet Shall Sound

Phoebe Rees

The events which led to the escape of Saul of Tarsus from Damascus in AD 34.
5w + extras

The Waters of Lethe

Frank Sladen-Smith

On the banks of the River Lethe, all manner of people gather to sip the waters, which cause forgetfulness but, although aware they are dead, they are astounded to find themselves in Hell. Full of tragic and comic incidents. A very moving ending.
4m 6w

Full Length Plays

Codes A2 and A3 apply unless otherwise indicated.

An Army of Innocents

Keith Williams

The Children's Crusade of 1212 AD is a tale of cruelty and danger, courage and cowardice, cunning and stupidity, humour and tragedy. An army of innocent children heads for Jerusalem, in the mistaken belief that their example will convert the Muslims. They are abandoned to their cruel fate by the Pope who's sole intention is to force the Kings of Europe to wage a new Crusade.

24m, 15w and 5 of either sex

Code B3

Brother Ass and Brother Lion

Barbara Willard

Adapted from the story of St Jerome, the Lion and the Donkey. Suitable for youth groups. Televised twice by the BBC in 1955.

9m or w, 2 animals

Code A3

A First Born Son

Edward Wilson

Tells the story of Christ's life as others saw it. In the style of a Medieval Mystery, it has humour and music as well as a message.

18m 9f

Code B3

The Hopeful Travellers

I. Capell

This Morality tells of the adventures of two Flemish rascals in Hell and Heaven, who are finally given a second chance. The French version ran for over 400 performances in Paris.

14 or 18m, 6w, 1 child + extras and chorus

Code A3

Immortal Garden

H. C. G. Stevens

A fantasy about death. An old man's well-kept garden is a comfort to all who behold it with dying eyes. A national critic described it as "*a play which gives you courage to face the vast forever*". An inspiration.

"One is made to feel a sureness that the Life just beyond Death is a continuation - more free ... fuller and richer." - Dame Sybil Thorndike.

7m 4w and voice

Code A3

The Ingoldsby Legends

Kenneth

Pickering

Adaptation of the popular 19th century tales of Richard Barham of

derring-do, demonic deals, infidelity and piety. The Devil and the dying Barham are battling for his soul. The Devil picks tales that show Barham's irreverence, Barham chooses tales that reflect his piety and the fate of sinners to justify his place in Heaven.

7+

Code B2

Jonah

David Campton

A modern man studies the world and concludes that if there is divine justice then the wicked must be punished. The original elements of the story have been combined with music, action and comedy for a real celebration.

9m 7w + extras

Code A2

A Little Moses Goes A Long Way

G. Pedder-Smith

A musical telling of Moses' story up to the crossing of the Red Sea. Plenty of scope for clowning, juggling, stilt-walking etc. Humorous sketches act as footnotes to the main story. For 7-13 year olds.

20 Children

Code A2

The Midlands' Mysteries **Kenneth Pickering & Douglas Sugano**

Adaptation of *The N-Town Cycle*, which retains much of the style and character of the original text. Many of the pageants are unique and it contains the most ritual and music of any of the English cycles. Mystery Plays are amongst the great dramatic treasures of European literature. In spite of their pious intentions, the humanity of the authors shines through: they are full of humour; music; dance; tension; joy; refinement and vulgarity. A vivid re-enactment of the major events in religious history, including The Creation, Crucifixion and Resurrection, as seen through the eyes of medieval scribes.

Flexible cast

Code B3

Noah Gives Thanks

Eric Crozier

To celebrate Noah's seventieth birthday, his friends plan a private harvest festival. The vicar and his wife wreck the celebration. The old folk are heartbroken, but their faith is rewarded by a very happy little miracle.

4m 3f 3 children

Code A3

The Parting of Friends

Kenneth Pickering

The life of Cardinal Newman from his days as an Anglican priest,

through his disillusionment with the subjugation of the Anglican Church to political needs, to his conversion to Catholicism.

11+

Code B2

The Song of the Morning

T. B. Morris

Verse play about Job. Suitable for church or stage production with or without scenery. Produced at Truro Cathedral in 1954.

9m 8f 1m or f + optional chorus

Code A3

Tyndale's Dream

John Stuart-Anderson

The history of William Tyndale who devoted his life to translating *The Bible* into English, but was burnt at the stake as a heretic for his pains.

Flexible

Code B2

Books on Religious Drama

Let's Prepare a Nativity Play

Freda Collins

Describes how *Angels of Bethlehem* was written and first produced with child actors. Taken together, these two titles are invaluable aids for teaching Christian drama.

"... a really practical book, which faces all the tasks - movement, grouping, costume and the conduct of rehearsals." - *Teacher's World*.

ISBN: 978-0-85343-079-7

£4.50

Saints and Their Emblems

Robert Milburn

Medieval craftsmen identified the Saints they were depicting in stained-glass windows, carvings and statues by a system of symbols. This book, by the former Dean of Worcester Cathedral, gives a brief biography of the most common English Saints and their emblems. A valuable guide for visitors to churches and, of course, it can be used in stage sets to get the details right.

ISBN: 978-0-85956-064-3

£8.50

**The Single Source of All Filth
Self**

David

A fascinating history of a vicious seventeenth century pamphlet war which led to the premature end of the literary careers of Vanbrugh and Congreve; the replacement of red-blooded Restoration drama with innocuous sentimental comedy; and censorship of the stage by the Lord Chamberlain - a situation which lasted until 1968.

The Reverend Jeremy Collier blamed the profanity on the stage for society's ills. His intemperate pamphlet, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, although often poorly argued, struck a chord with the emerging middle-classes. A succession of charges and counter-charges were published, with the playwrights forced to defend themselves in print. This book gives an overview of the debate and provides lengthy extracts from the main pamphlets from both sides of a war that changed the course of English drama. David Self's cogent account will be of great interest to all students of English theatrical history and Restoration drama in particular.

ISBN: 978-0-85343-626-3

£9.50

**Drama in the Cathedral: The Twentieth Century Encounter of
Church and Stage** **Kenneth Pickering**

Drama in the Cathedral charts the gradual re-association of the Church and Stage at the start of the twentieth century. Historically, the Church used drama to promote the Christian message, for example through Mystery Plays. But a schism followed the increased debauchery of seveneenth-century drama. The first tentative steps at the end of the nineteenth century to again use drama as an evangelical tool culminated in the Canterbury Cathedral Arts Festival - the first of its kind.

The main part of the book examines the plays produced at Canterbury, especially T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, as the established church warmly embraced the stage as a means of reaching new congregations. Dr Pickering discusses how the authors and the subjects of their plays were chosen; how they were staged; their reception at, and life beyond, Canterbury; and their place in the canon of religious drama. The book concludes with a challenging survey of recent experiments in drama and religious faith.

ISBN: 978-0-85343-627-0

29 illustrations

£14.95

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