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*Dramatic Publishing*



# A Merry Medieval Christmas!

A One-Act  
Christmas Play

by

**THOMAS A. ERHARD**

and

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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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For Isabel Crouch:  
*with thanks for her  
longstanding support.*

## A MERRY MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS!

*A One-Act Play  
for Min. Six w/doubling, M. or F.*

### CHARACTERS

Divine Messenger	Voice from a Stool
God	Townspople
Lucifer	Noah's Wife
First Angel	Animals
Lightbourne	First Son
Second Angel	Second Son
Third Angel	Abraham
Prompter	Isaac
Adam	Angel
Eve	Ram
Television Voice	Coll
Play Director	Gib
Pikeharness	Daw
Cain	Mak
Abel	Jill
Noah	Angel
Television Weatherman	Mary

*TIME: The Present and the Past*

*PLACES: Heaven and Earth*

## INTRODUCTION

A MERRY MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS! is a program from the English Miracle Plays containing:

*The Banns or Announcements (the Chester Cycle of Plays)*

*The Fall of Lucifer (Chester)*

*The Creation (Chester)*

*Adam and Eve (Chester)*

*The Killing of Abel (Wakefield or Towneley Cycle)*

*Noah (Wakefield)*

*Abraham and Isaac (Brome Manuscript)*

*The Second Shepherd's Play (Wakefield)*

The half-dozen playlets that you are about to see are part of a rich European theatrical tradition. Early in the Middle Ages brief additions, in the form of dramatic dialogue, were added to the Easter Services. These additions proved so popular that they rapidly grew into full-scale Bible stories, at times with rowdy, secular farce.

When the plays (which often became more popular than the services) were finally ordered out of the churches in the twelve hundreds, their patterns were set: they were done at holidays, each playlet told a Bible story, and there was considerable rough-and-tumble comedy plus a production mix of ancient and modern effects.

The plays were staged throughout Europe for hundreds of years. The most well-known were the four great cycles in the English Midlands: York, Chester, Coventry and Wakefield. They lasted

all day. Spectators at York, for example, watched forty-eight plays! They sat on street corners, their day's supply of food at hand, as each play came to them on Pageant Wagons featuring the very latest in stagecraft. For example, the devils often threw the latest fireworks into the audience! A different craft guild staged each play and showed off its most modern technology. Thus, the Shipwrights Guild, in staging *Noah*, would build their fanciest boat; and the Weavers Guild would prepare modern costumes unheard of in the Biblical times represented in the play. Dialogue, particularly in comic moments, referred to local current events, customs and places. In the Wakefield *Second Shepherd's Play*, for example, supposedly set near Bethlehem, the original dialogue clearly places the action in the tiny farm village of Horbury, England, ten miles out of Wakefield.

Modern productions, then, if they are to reflect the rich flavor of the originals, must mix old and new in a comically-naive blend and must remain faithful to the seemingly irreverent tone. The apparent attitude of "having fun with God" did *not* reflect lack of reverence by the medieval players, but instead emphasized the solidity of their beliefs and the closeness of the living faith that pervaded their everyday lives at all times.

The original plays were meant for joyous celebration. We hope that you will join in that spirit . . . and also join in the caroling at the finale.

*(This page may be reproduced in your program. If you do not have a program, it may be duplicated and passed out to the audience members.)*

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## A Merry Medieval Christmas !

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SCENE: Your theatre.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The CAST comes up the aisles of the theatre or hall. A MEMBER plays a live instrument, happily. OTHERS give out handfuls of Christmas candy and heartily welcome as many members of the audience as possible. When the candy is all given out, the CAST sits on the stools at the sides of the stage. Two MEMBERS play a vigorous fanfare on kazoos.

MESSENGER (moving C and reading from a rickety scroll that gives him trouble).

Lordings, royal and reverent; lovely ladies, gentles . . .

Hither am I sent to ask your ears be lent.

For joyous pageant at Christmastide. (Warmly.)

Tonight we'll tell stories about angels, and God's creation,

Then forthwith the fall of evil Lucifer.

The fight 'twixt Abel and Cain, and old Abraham in his pain.

Adam, and also Eve; and Noah's ark, would you believe!

Then, finally, the Shepherds' play. (He smiles.)

All this with good cheer and mirth . . . our stories to honor  
Jesus' birth.

Now I have done what lieth in me to insure this festivity.

That these plays continued may be . . . since their beginning,  
let me see . . . (He checks the scroll.)

Ever since twelve hundred, on Corpus Christi Day. (He bows.)

So now, *enjoy* our Christmas play! (“Official” kazoo music as  
several ANGELS dress GOD in modish identifying costume  
“extras.” The MESSENGER returns to side of the stage and  
sits.)

GOD (walking to the taller stepladder, then smiling in delight).

Ahhhh! By the Holy Trinity . . . My heavenly mansion here I  
see! (To the audience.) I am great God gracious, who never  
had beginning.

Peerless Patron Imperial, and Father all-knowing.

My feelings be all benevolent, all bliss at my bidding,

Both visible and invisible, *all* is my doing. (He shakes the ladder  
hard. It rattles and wobbles. A wry look at the audience.)

Yes, *all* is my doing. (He climbs the first step.)

Now since I am thus settled in my own dwelling,

A world here will I build, and a Heaven without ending. (He  
sighs happily.)

LUCIFER (a smoothie, approaching GOD, accompanied by  
LIGHTBOURNE). Lord, through Thy grace and might Thou  
has wrought nine orders of angels, made by Your thought.  
(The ANGELS bow.) You have made us all so bright in this  
blissful light, and *I* the principal executive in Thy sight. (He  
dons a wildly-bright blazer and struts around.)

GOD (with a sour look at the jacket). Verily, I did *not* create the  
Preppie look! In truth, I have wrought angels satisfied with  
their *inner* beauty. Each, as is right, to walk about the Trinity.  
(GOD and the GOOD ANGELS all hum the “official” music

again as three GOOD ANGELS walk in a circle around the ladder. GOD suddenly stops the song. The GOOD ANGELS lean against the ladder, keeping an angry LUCIFER and LIGHTBOURNE away from the throne.) How now, Lucifer and Lightbourne, faces sour you be making! (GOD casually waves the GOOD ANGELS off the ladder.) Look now that you all act wisely, for hence I must be wending. (He picks up a small airline tote bag.) Man's world that is still void I must create on this trip, plus a dungeon of darkness that shall never have ending.

FIRST ANGEL. We thank Thee, our Sovereignty, that hath formed us so clean and clear. And in this Heaven to abide with Thee, grant us Thy grace to live here. (GOD nods, smiles and hands out giant cardboard motel keys to each ANGEL.)

GOD. Lucifer, since I have formed you *so* fair,  
And exalted you, here I set you next my chair. (He shows LUCIFER to the smaller stepladder.)  
My love to you is so fervent. Look ye fall into no despair.  
But touch not *my* throne, or it ascend, lest to my wrath you bend.

LUCIFER. Nay, Lord, I would not for anything trespass onto Thee.

Thy great Godhead we all dread and *never* exalt ourselves in *Your* stead. (He pulls a penlight from his pocket and shines it importantly.)

Bearer of light Thou hast made me.

LIGHTBOURNE ("me-tooing" but as oily as LUCIFER).

And *I* am marked of the same mold.

*Love* be to our Creator Who hath made us gayer than gold.

Under His power ever to endure. (He bows grandiosely.)

GOD (taking his tote bag and walking down into the main aisle).

And so . . . to Earth I go. (He stops, puzzled.) But where?

(An ANGEL rushes a road map to him.) Ahh! Maybe to . . .

New Mexico! (He goes up the main aisle, waving to the audience, then exits. The ANGEL returns to his place on the stage.)

LUCIFER (pocketing his penlight and pulling out a standard two-battery flashlight which he shines all over the theatre).

Oh, my! I am so wondrous bright among all you shining so clear!

Of all Heaven *I* bear the light of God Himself, just as if He were here! (He takes one step up God's ladder.)

And on this throne, as I climb near, then I should be as wise as He. (Imperiously.) How now, you Angels that be here, some deference let me see.

FIRST ANGEL. We will not bend under your pride.

SECOND ANGEL. Watch out! I warn thee, Lucifer, your pride will turn to great distress!

LUCIFER. Distress? Huh! I command you all to cease! (He shines the flashlight into the Good Angels' eyes and they become irritated.) Look at the beauty that *I* bear!

THIRD ANGEL. Lucifer, you shall fall on your wicked ear!

SECOND ANGEL. Our brethren's counsel is good to hear.

To both of you I say, Lucifer and Lightbourne,

Beware of that throne, lest God come and He you spurn.

LIGHTBOURNE (pushing the GOOD ANGELS back away from LUCIFER). Faith, Lucifer, yet you *shall* sit on this throne, both clean and clear;

And you, I know, are as wise as old God Himself, were He here.

THIRD ANGEL (trying to haul LUCIFER off the ladder as

LIGHTBOURNE defends LUCIFER). Let this pass out of your thought, and cast away all wicked pride, And keep the brightness that to you is wrought, and let God be your guide.

LUCIFER (angrily stepping one step higher than where GOD was before). Behold, you Angels on every side, carefully watch *this* scene.

I charge you, behold and see what I do mean.  
*Above* great God I will stride, and set myself here, as I ween.  
All you Angels turn to me, I decree,  
And to your *new* sovereign bend your knee! (LIGHTBOURNE bullies the three GOOD ANGELS from behind, trying to get them to bend their knees to SATAN. When LIGHTBOURNE pushes the CENTER ANGEL down, the OUTSIDE TWO ANGELS pop up. When LIGHTBOURNE pushes the OUTSIDE ANGELS down, the CENTER ANGEL pops up. Finally, LIGHTBOURNE uses his hands on the OUTSIDE ANGELS and a knee on the CENTER ANGEL, to hold them down momentarily before ALL escape.)

LIGHTBOURNE. And *I* am next of the same degree, filled with beauty and experience.

Not only to the boss, see, see, but to *me* do reverence!

FIRST ANGEL. Alas! Why make you this great offense?

Lucifer, our sovereign Lord will hurl you hence!

LUCIFER (in a very ugly mood). I order you all, do me reverence.

*I* am the source of Heavenly grace.

Though God come back, I will not hence,

But sit right here before His face. (He crosses his arms defiantly.)

(GOD appears at the back of the main aisle, with his tote bag, hurrying and groaning loudly.)

GOD. Sometimes, forsooth, I ween I spend all eternity  
Rushing through airports, like the ads on T.V.

(To LUCIFER.) Hey, man! What trespass do you make here?  
I made thee Angel and Lucifer, and said thou would be lord  
next to me.

LUCIFER. Forsooth and anon, I was only monitoring . . .

(He thinks fast.) . . . The hot line to the Pentagon!

GOD (yanking a six-volt flashlight from his tote bag and blinding LUCIFER). Lucifer, who set thee here when I was gone?  
I made thee my friend; thou art my foe.

I charge thee . . . fall 'til I say no,

To the pit of Hell evermore! (GOD uses his light exactly like a ray gun, with the GOOD ANGELS humming “metallic” noises. God’s “beam” forces LUCIFER, and then LIGHTBOURNE, to squat inside the two stepladders. They look out at the audience through the rungs, as if in jail.)

LUCIFER. Alas! That ever we were wrought! We were in joy;  
now we be nought.

LIGHTBOURNE. *Your* fault! Hither *thou* hast *me* brought!  
Into a dungeon to take my place. The Devil speed thy stinking face! (He tries to fight LUCIFER from inside the ladders. They try in vain to reach one another with flailing swings.)

LUCIFER. Thy mouth is nothing but whining.

Now lieth we in Hell, pining 'til the Day of Doom.

LIGHTBOURNE (still fighting). With no room! If only *you* hadn't done that flashlight shining!

LUCIFER (an inspiration). I know! Revenge will we take!

I'll pull mankind away from joy!

As soon as God does him make . . . Man we will destroy!

LIGHTBOURNE (joining the plot). Yeah! We'll make mankind go amiss!

And look to keep him e'er from bliss!

GOD (to the ANGELS at the side, sadly). Behold, my Angels, Satan is your foe.

Ah, pride, what happens when you increase so!

LUCIFER. Alas, alas, for woe and wickedness I am stuck in this divine ladder.

Nevermore out of here shall I pass, but lie in hell growing badder and badder.

(The ANGELS make "metallic" noises as GOD uses his flashlight to force LUCIFER and then LIGHTBOURNE out from under the ladders and to stools at the side. All the ANGELS sit.)

GOD (digging a blueprint out of his tote bag and examining it, puzzled). Now my creation here I begin.

The first thing that I shall assay . . . (He thinks hard.) . . .

Lightness, darkness, you shall be twin,

The dark to the night, the light to the day. (As a secret to the audience.)

I really do make all things out of nought. (He sighs.)

So far 'tis a busy first day I have wrought. (GOD pulls a kitchen match out of his pocket and lights it, then waits, puzzled, for something to happen. He shines his flashlight vigorously, but nothing happens. Embarrassed, He scratches his head.)

Verily, nowhere in the Bible does it say that creation had an easy way. (He has an inspiration and waves his arms hugely,

like a symphony conductor.) At my bidding . . . let there be light! (Lights come up everywhere, including on the audience.)

Light is good, I see it bright. (He pauses.) Finally.

All this because of my own might. (He thinks.)

Light . . . day shall be called, aye. And the opposite . . . night! (He gives another wave. The lights go down on the audience. He stretches and yawns.) Thus my first day is made full. (He pauses.) Now I will make the firmament.

Above the welkin, beneath also, mmmmm . . . Heaven it shall be called. (The ANGELS hold up travel posters of various resorts.)

No, verily, *Heaven* I meant! (One ANGEL holds up a map of your stage.) That's more like it! (He yawns.) Thus comes on evening, and ends the second day. Now will I . . . (He falters.) . . . Now will I, God omnipotent . . . (He falters.) . . . Now will I . . . (A confidential aside to the audience.) I am omnipotent . . . sometimes. Mistress Prompter, forsooth, my next line is stuck in my tooth. (He waits, nodding.)

PROMPTER (in a disgusted tone). Now will I create the waters every one.

GOD. Gramercy. Now I will create the waters every one. (For these creations, a series of large posters in grade-school style drawings may be held up by the CAST at their stools. Alternatively, the posters may be taped to the walls of your theatre. Two ANGELS with pointers would then walk around pointing to the pictures, dueling when they meet. GOD finally separates them and they return to their places on the stage.) But in places dryness soon shall come.

The dryness . . . Earth, where man shall run. (*Figure of Man*

*Jogging)*

Now on Earth, herbs spring! (*Drawing of Cactus*)

And each, some kind of seed must bring.

Thus the morning and the evening of the third day is come and gone.

(Apologetically.) We're on fast time here in Heaven.

Now I will make through my might, lightning in the welkin bright. (*Zig-zags*)

Two great round lights I will also make. (*A Sun and a Moon*)

The sun and eke the moon you see.

The sun for days to shine on all: the moon at night to be on call.

I will also make in the firmament stars, through mine intent, Seafarers to guide, wherever they be sent. (*Tons of Stars*)

Also there must be gobs of planets . . . (*Many planets, including Saturn with wobbly rings*) . . . And this one's bent.

(Saturn really puzzles him.)

Now see I that this work is good. (He massages his lower back.)

But tiring, and without food.

Now will I in the waters fish bring. (*Many, many fish*)

And fowls in the firmament flying. (*Giant drawing of the San Diego Chicken*)

Great whales in the sea swimming. (*Whales. He suddenly bursts into song.*) And a partridge in a pear tree!

CAST (leaping to their feet at their stools and loudly singing).

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me – (GOD silences them with a conductor's double-arm wave. ALL sit chastened.)

GOD (embarrassed, speaking confidentially to the audience).

Sorry about that. This is all good, I see. (Grandly.) All beasts, I bid ye, multiply!