

THE GUEST

A Christmas Story

Characters:

Deborah, daughter of innkeepers Rachel and Tobias Ben David- storyteller & child

Rachel, innkeeper

Mary

Joseph

Seth, shepherd

Meshech, shepherd

This playlet may be appropriate for a smaller congregation. Depending on the actors available, while the role of Deborah is envisioned with a child, and the older, Narrator Deborah.

While nothing is written here for "Tobias" simple lines could be improvised or written between him and his wife, Rachel - again, if there are more people than speaking parts.

A very simple stable or cave background can be painted on large cardboard, adding a few animals, straw, pots, pitchforks, etc.

Deborah sits forward, toward the congregation on either the right or left, not blocking the main staging area where any action takes place. She enters first and, after delivering the first few lines, sits down and can "read" from that point forward.

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THE GUEST

Deborah: Oh, I didn't initially see you. Welcome! Come sit here in the shade. Will you need a room for the evening? Please, sir, go inside and speak to my husband about the details. (pause) Excuse me, ma'am? (pause) Oh, this is a story from many years ago when this inn belonged to my parents. I was reading what I wrote about a most unusual couple who stayed here.... actually, for the first four days they stayed in the stable around the back. (Pause) No! If we had the room, we would certainly have given them a space to rest - but it was the year of the Census- do you remember it? Oh, what an exciting time! And with only 3 inns in all of Bethlehem, each of our places were filled with guests. (Pause) Why, yes, if you'd like, I'll read my story to you. [She arranges book, clears throat, tries to speak more clearly and deliberately while reading]

[Joseph and Mary enter as she begins reading]

Deborah: In the year of the Census demanded by the Roman occupation all men with their families were bound to return to the village of their heritage. The village of Bethlehem was filled with people, most of whom we knew or knew of, some we only recognized the family name, but had never seen the people. Father and Mother busied themselves with all our guests as there was much to do. On the way back from the center of town on one of my trips to bring water, a couple that I did not know stood in front of the inn, the woman was extremely tired and sat herself down [looking up in amazement] on this very bench [back to the book]. She looked and carried herself as a woman about to deliver a child any moment. I waited around the corner with my water jug as they spoke to each other very kindly.

Joseph: My dear, I have looked everywhere. There is no room. Others of my family arrived much earlier than we did. I knew we must travel slowly to keep you in as much comfort as possible, but I did not expect.....

Mary: I know you mean well and I know God will provide for us. I closed my eyes for a few moments. Have you asked Tobias whether he has room?

Joseph: Yes, I have and I am embarrassed and upset that we are not being shown proper hospitality according to the Law! [at this point, the young Deborah comes closer and speaks].

YD: Excuse me, sir. I heard you speaking to your wife. I will speak to my mother to see whether we can help you.

Joseph: The Holy One be praised! Your compassion will be rewarded.

Mary: Child, what is your name?

YD: I am called Deborah.

Mary: Then go at once to your mother, Deborah. And may the God of our fathers go with you. [YD leaves, Joseph sits next to Mary on the bench, upset but trying to comfort her]

Joseph: Oh, if we had only left earlier.....[YD returns with Rachael, her mother]

Rachel: Friends, we don't have any rooms left, but I will offer you the only room we have- there is a stable where we keep our own beasts and those of our guests. We can put up a barricade so that you have some room. [Looking at Mary] I am so sorry, my dear. The child born here will always be welcomed to stay with us... I must go. Deborah, please see to it our neighbors receive two blankets, plenty of water and an oil lamp. Please mind it so that there may be no fire here this night. Goodbye for now. [Rachael leaves] [Deborah comes back reading the book while YD, Jos & M continue in pantomime]

Deborah: I went about fetching things. Poor Mary was in so much pain. I had to go back inside to take care of the other guests. Later on I brought them both food and a bit of wine to drink, which they took and thanked me over and over again. [pause] Back inside I went, but I stayed close to the door, as did Mother.[Pause] I stepped outside the door twice. Once to listen for any disturbance, but there was none. In fact, it was very, very, very quiet. No alarming sounds from the stable. Looking up the sky was as dark as pitch and the stars were dancing as I had never seen them dance before. One was so bright that at first I thought it was the full moon..... but no. The moon seemed less bright and nearly the same size of the star. I went back in and laid down. Later I woke because I heard talking outside. The shepherds Seth and Meshech who knew my family were walking through the village - at nearly the highest point of the moon, with no sheep in sight!! [Seth and Meshech enter walking and stopping]

Meshech:My grandfather had visions, Seth. But until tonight I never had one!

Seth: Can two or four men have the same vision at the same time. I want to come here, and the messengers of God told us, but I am a sinful and frightened man.

Meshech: Seth, they told us again and again not to be afraid. Messengers of God have told us where we may see a wonder. I am afraid and I come still.

Seth: We must be very close..... hoah[pulling up short, a bit jumpy]- who is in the doorway?

YD: It is Deborah the innkeeper Tobias' daughter. But why, neighbors, are you here?

Seth: We were at our usual place with our brothers Jobeh and Lemnih. It became so still and then a light flashed over the hills. We flattened ourselves to the ground....

Meshech: ... and then there were voices and bright lights that moved in the sky telling us not be frightened— for we all were!

Seth: They said to come into town because [he whispers]*the Messiah* had been born- and was in a feed trough...

Meshech: ...and.... and then the sky was filled with more light and the most beautiful song of many, many voices singing praise to the most high living God. ... we two decided to come and

see this thing that has happened - and our brothers, more frightened than we, stayed with the completely calm sheep.

YD: Perhaps..... Just a moment. [covers her head] Let us go to the back. A man and a woman about to have a baby came to us today and Mother put them in the stable.... I wonder if the baby came. [just then a baby wail. brief, but strong] Oh my! Come..

Deborah: We went around, the three of us. My Mother joined us later - And there they were, the three of them. Joseph had moved the birth straw away. They had brought fabric to wrap around the child to quiet him and were doing this when we came to see them.

YD: Please excuse us, guests. We came to see..... [looking at the men] if there was anything we could do....[the men lowered their eyes and moved toward Joseph]

Mary: No, Deborah. Praise God we are well, me and my son. My, he has a voice!

Meshech: [to Joseph] Brother, we were told - in a vision, a beautiful, musical vision - to come into the village to find a newborn and that this child was [whispering] *the Messiah*, the chosen of God.

Joseph: [to Seth] Is this true, brother? [A shocked Seth shakes his head repeatedly]. Oh, friends, don't be afraid. I too have had visions because of this child. Perhaps we can speak of it over a meal tomorrow, eh? We may all need sleep! Thank you for coming. This is a blessing for you and for my....[saying with quiet satisfaction for the first time] family.

Mary: Yes, brothers, please come see us tomorrow. I need so much rest and my boy needs nourishment and sleep. [Rachel enters and smiles broadly] Thank you for telling us of this news. [Mary smiles quietly and closes her eyes]. [the men walk away]

Rachel: ..Gods blessing on all of you. A son. Praise to God!

Mary: No, thank you. We need to rest.....[both begin to leave] Deborah, I thank you for your kindness. It will never be forgotten. [YD leaves slowly, looking back and smiling].

Deborah: [closing the book]. They stayed with us for three more days and got one of the rooms when one of the other guests left. I will never forget the faces of Mary, Joseph and that beautiful baby boy. Just looking at him made me feel peaceful [mind wanders, thinking back to then, smiling, silent].

Deborah: Oh, please forgive me. It stays with me, even after the family has been gone for many years. Come inside. Be welcome, as welcome our guests were that evening. Let us drink a cup of thankfulness to the glory of God and that the Messiah may bring peace here and to everyone everywhere. Welcome neighbors, welcome.