O SAVIOR, WHERE ART THOU?

by Keck Mowry
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O Savior, Where Art Thou?

A one-act play for Christmas

by Keck Mowry
CAST OF CHARACTERS

ELIJAH
GABE
ADAM
EVE
SERPENT
JEREMIAH
ANGELS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
SHEPHERDS 1, 2, 3, 4
BAL
MEL
GAS
MARY
JOSEPH
SOLDIERS 1, 2

BLUEGRASS BAND (OPTIONAL)
PRODUCTION NOTES

SET: The only necessary item for your set is a rocking chair. You may add other country touches as you wish, like hay bales, lanterns, a wooden wheel with spokes, etc.

PROPS: Bible, spittoon, beef jerky, two apples, three hobo sticks (branches with bandannas tied on ends and stuffed with tissue), two blunt pitchforks or other farming tool, three pairs of binoculars, hair gel or cream, comb, doll for baby Jesus, makeup, hairbrushes, hand-held mirrors.

COSTUMES: Characters are to be dressed in rural agrarian clothing. Traditional costuming should be used for the angels, Mary and Joseph. The angels have halos and wings that they put on later in the play. Gabe wears wings with country clothing. Elijah has a long beard and wears a pair of wire-rimmed sunglasses. Jeremiah also has a long beard and wears a hat. Serpent has a thin moustache (may be drawn on) and wears a bow tie and a straw hat.

SOUND EFFECTS: Striking of a cowbell or other similar sound.

LIGHTS: If you have access to a spotlight, it can serve as your star. If not, the wise men may simply pantomime following an imaginary star.

MUSIC: If you are able to form a bluegrass band from the musicians in your church, this is a fun way to showcase their talent. The play may easily be performed without a band, however. The music may be sung a cappella or with piano accompaniment, using soloists or the congregation. Most of the songs are parodies, with new, original lyrics set to the old tunes. Most of them may be found in the following book, although they are traditional standards that may be found in other sources as well.

Selections from O Brother, Where Art Thou?
Hal Leonard Corporation
7777 W. Bluemound Road
P.O. Box 13819
Milwaukee, WI 53213

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Like the band, this aspect of the play is optional. If your church has a PowerPoint software program and a projector, plus a digital camera or camcorder, showing prerecorded photographs or video adds visual interest to the production.

The five scenes are:
One: Adam entreat ing Eve not to leave him.
Two: The “No Trespassing” and “Beware of Cherubim” signs.
Three: Jeremiah trying to preach to the people but being persecuted instead.
Four: The star, with the wise men gazing joyfully at it.
Five: The escape of the wise men. If you choose not to prerecord the scenes, alternate instructions for acting them out are included in the script.
(Upbeat gospel or bluegrass music plays as people take their seats. ELIJAH, a bearded old man with sunglasses, wanders into the sanctuary while the music is still playing.)

ELIJAH: (To audience) My name is Elijah, a prophet of the Lord. You are searching for something of great value. (Pause) You are seeking the Savior. Yes, that is it. You will find him tonight, but not before you see strange and wondrous things. Ah, you will see a snake holding an apple ... an expectorating old man who is persecuted for his obedience to God ... a yodeling astrologer ... dancing shepherds ... and you will even get a glimpse of heaven itself, with all its angels! You will be so moved by what you have seen and heard that you will sing for joy and leave a great sum of money in the offering plate as it passes by! OK, that last one was more of a wish than a prophecy, but you will leave tonight with a song of praise to God upon your lips and hope in your heart. You'll see! (Laughing as he leaves) You'll see.

STORY OF THE FALL

(GABE crosses to the side of the stage. This part may also be read from a lectern.)

GABE: Well, howdy! Good to see y'all. Let me introduce myself. Folks around here tend to refer to me as Gabe. I, however, prefer the formal nomenclature, Gabriel. But seeing as this is an informal gathering of similarly disposed ladies and gents, I will defer to the more common utterance of Gabe. I am, as you might have surmised, a cherubim, a.k.a. angel of the Lord, and I am here tonight to bring the news of a great joy. This is not just any pedestrian pleasure perpetrated on the general public for salacious or sensationalist purposes. No sir, this is the story of a bona fide miracle of epic proportions. For born into an otherwise hopeless and dismal existence of sinful mortal flesh was the son of
God. His name was Jesus, and his paterfamilias was no less than God himself. A rather distinguished lineage to say the least, only hampered by the socially compromising situation of his birth. (Pause) Well, I can see by your rather obtuse yet inquisitive demeanors that you require a more detailed account of this blessed event. (ADAM enters and stands at Center Stage.) So let’s start at the literal and figurative beginning of this story: (Opens the Bible.) Genesis, where the almighty, observing the forlorn countenance of his recently created man, by the name of Adam ...

ADAM: I’ll tell you, I am lonelier than a pig at a Seder.
GABE: Now Adam, I don’t believe you would say anything like that.
ADAM: I’m as lonely as a deck of cards in a _____________ church!
GABE: Unlikely.
ADAM: A snowflake in July?
GABE: Adam, I think they get the point. You’re lonely. (Pause as ADAM sadly shakes his head in agreement. Then to audience) Having compassion for the man Adam and his life of unrelenting solitude, the Almighty decided to provide Adam with a suitable partner. (EVE enters. ADAM notices her and takes out his comb and hair cream or gel.)
ADAM: Oh, my hair! (Uses his comb and hair treatment to groom himself.)
EVE: Howdy! (EVE waves at ADAM.)
ADAM: Howdy, partner! (Excited, ADAM wipes his hand and reaches out, shaking EVE’s hand vigorously.)
GABE: It was a match made in heaven. Literally, it was made in heaven. Anyway, Adam and Eve enjoyed the fruits of the garden and the easygoing, slow-paced life of abundance and leisure. That is, until Eve met up with a slick, fast-talkin’, carpet-baggin’ Serpent. (The city slicker serpent enters and sneaks up to Eve. When he approaches her,
he clears his throat to gain her attention.)

SERPENT: I couldn’t help noticing, young lady, that you and
your companion refrain from partaking of the fruit of the
tree of knowledge.

EVE: That’s right, stranger. God told us that if we ate that
there fruit, we would surely die.

SERPENT: (Laughing) A pure canard. Let me tell you
something about this fruit. It not only delights the senses,
but it will give you the knowledge of good (Coughs and
mumbles next two words) and evil, (Loudly) without any
adverse effect upon your person or palate. I happen to
have a sample right here. If you are not one hundred
percent satisfied, you are not obligated to swallow. Now,
how about a little bite? (EVE takes a small bite, chews a
little, smiles and then swallows.)

EVE: Mmmm. Now that’s right tasty!

SERPENT: And you can make an absolutely wonderful
cobbler out of it. (The SERPENT smiles, rubs his hands
together and slinks Off-stage.)

GABE: Eve offered the fruit to Adam. But Adam, wary of fast-
talking, door-to-door salesmen, refused Eve’s overtures,
which offended his beloved, his only sunshine.

(SUGGESTED SONG: “You Are My Sunshine” by Jimmie Davis
and Charles Mitchell (or a comparable love song.) The band, if
available, begins to play as ADAM and EVE exit. Images or a
video of ADAM entreating EVE not to leave him could also be
displayed at this point. ADAM and EVE re-enter. They are
eating apples.)

GABE: Seeing as his prospects for alternative female
companionship were rather limited, Adam reconsidered
his former position and partook of this fallen fruit.

(ADAM bites his apple.)

ADAM: This here fruit is right tasty!

GABE: When the Almighty found out, he was madder than a
_________________ (Insert a denomination) preacher with
laryngitis. The good Lord threw Adam and Eve out of the
garden of Eden and put a great big “No Trespassing”
sign in front of his property. (An image of two signs — “No
Trespassing” and “Beware of Cherubim” — may be flashed on
the screen.)

EVE: What will we do?
ADAM: What have we done? Who will save us?
EVE: A savior, Adam. We are in need of a savior! O Savior,
where art thou? (In great despair, ADAM and EVE exit the
sanctuary.)

STORY OF JEREMIAH

GABE: Over the millennium the people of the world have
posed the same question, querying, “O Savior, where art
thou?” Enslaved in Egypt, they entreated God for a
savior. They were lost in the great Sinai desert, suffering,
oppressed and living in exile. Every time, God sent a
messenger to answer their prayers. Yet they never
heeded the admonitions of the Almighty, preferring
instead to bring sorrow to those whom God sent to help
them. These messengers, prophets of God, were men of
unrelenting sorrow. (JEREMIAH enters carrying a spittoon.
He sets his spittoon down, takes a bite of chaw (beef jerky) and
pretends to spit. As he does, there is a sound effect like the
striking of a cowbell from the band or Off-stage.)

JEREMIAH: People, I swear they done sold their souls to the
devil. I tried, I tried to tell ’em, “You done forgotten what
life’s all about, keepin’ in your greedy, sinful ways.”
Meanwhile, there is this army of the North called the
Babylonians, fixin’ to invade us. “God ain’t gonna save
you,” I said. “You have forgotten all about him. Is you is
or is you ain’t God’s people?” I said. “Is you is or is you
ain’t God’s people?” They didn’t take kindly to the askin’
of the question. (Pretends to spit again with sound effect.)

They jailed me, threatened to hang me, threw me down
a well and rode me out of town on a rail. You wanna see
the splinters? I was just trying to save them from their
sinnin’ ways, but they would have none of it. I'll tell ya,
they made my life one of constant sorrow. (JEREMIAH
pretends to spit again with the sound effect and exits.)

(SONG: “Jeremiah, a Man of Constant Sorrow” sung to the tune of
“T’m a Man of Constant Sorrows” by Stanley Carter.)

In constant sorrow all through his days.

I am a man of constant sorrow.
I’ve seen trouble all my days.
I bid farewell to old Ju-dah.
The place where I was born and raised.
The place where he was born and raised.

For sixty years I’ve been in trouble,
No pleasure here on earth I’ve found.
For in this world I’m bound to ramble.
I have no friends to help me now.
He has no friends to help him now.

It’s fare thee well to land and family.
I never expect to see you again.
For I’m bound to ride that northern trail way.
Perhaps I’ll die upon this trail.
Perhaps he'll die upon this trail.

You can bury me in sunny valley,
For many years where I may lie.
Pray and you may learn to serve another,
While I am sleeping in my grave.
While he is sleeping in his grave.

Maybe your friends think I’m just a stranger,
My face you never will see no more.
But there is one promise that is given,
I'll meet you on God's golden shore.
He'll meet you on God's golden shore.

(You may show video or pictures of JEREMIAH trying to preach to the people, but being persecuted instead. If there is no video, this can be acted out while the music plays.)

JEREMIAH: (Returns at the end of the music. Pretends to spit with sound effect before talking.) Well, we were overrun by the Northerners. Dang Yankees! I mean Babylonians. They carried us off into exile. But God promised to save us, to send a Savior who would write the law upon our hearts and minds. God promised that Israel will rise again! (Waving his hat) Yahoo! So we kept the faith and waited for our Savior. But he's a long time a-comin'. (Two Babylonian SOLDIERS with pitchforks enter and grab JEREMIAH by the arms.) O Savior, where art thou?

SOLDIER 1: OK, let's go.
JEREMIAH: Hold on! (JEREMIAH retrieves his spittoon, pretends to spit one last time with sound effect and is led off by the SOLDIERS as music plays.)

STORY OF THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN

GABE: Observing the folly of humanity as they squandered every overture of the divine to assuage their self-inflicted suffering brought on by the existential quandaries of life was difficult to endure, even for angelic beings such as myself. (The ANGELS enter without wings or halos.)

GABE: But to the heavenly host observing these sad proceedings, the sense of futility was nearly intolerable.
ANGEL 1: I don’t know how much more I can take of this waiting.
ANGEL 2: They ain’t gettin’ it. They just ain’t gettin’ it.
ANGEL 3: I spoke to Gabriel about them the other day.
ANGEL 5: What did he say?
ANGEL 3: I don’t reckon I know. You know him and his big fancy words. He was talkin’ about somethin’ called so-ter-i-ology. Oh, I don’t know.
ANGEL 4: I tell ya, I can’t wait until God calls to us and says, “Fly, fly down to earth and tell ’em that their Savior is coming.” I’ll fly away. Yessir. (All ANGELS turn and face the congregation.) I’ll fly away.
ANGEL 2: Oh, glory!
ANGEL 4: I’ll fly away.
ANGEL 5: When I fly, hallelujah by and by.
ANGEL 3: I’ll fly away!

(SUGGESTED SONG: “The Angels Fly Away” sung to the tune of “I’ll Fly Away” by Albert E. Brumley.)

Some bright morning when the Lord decides, I’ll fly away.
To that land on God’s celestial orb, I’ll fly away.
I’ll fly away, oh glory,
I’ll fly away, in the morning.
When I fly, hallelujah by and by,
I’ll fly away.
When the shadows of this life have gone, I’ll fly away.
Like a bird who’s sent from God above, I’ll fly away.
I’ll fly away, oh glory,
I’ll fly away, in the morning.
When I fly, hallelujah by and by,
I’ll fly away.
Oh, how glad and happy when we leave, I’ll fly away.
No more cold darn shackles on my feet, I’ll fly away.
I’ll fly away, oh glory,
I'll fly away, in the morning.
When I fly, hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away.

Just a few more weary days and then I'll fly away.
To a Savior whose love never ends, I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, oh glory,
I'll fly away, in the morning.
When I fly, hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away.

(ANGELS get prepared to fly away as music plays. They take ladylike pride in their appearance and may use mirrors, makeup, brushes, etc. The song is lengthy, so they can take time getting into their wings and halos. By the end of the song they are all dressed. They stand in a line facing the congregation. They may also sing with the band on the choruses or sing the entire song themselves.)

ANGELS 1-5: (Together, looking frustrated) O Savior, where art thou?

GABE: Angels!

ANGELS 1-5: (Together) Yes, Gabriel?

GABE: The chronological passage of time has finally converged with the dialectic of human history, putting an end to our seemingly endless waiting for the eschatological figure of our anticipations of faith.

ANGEL 1: Gabe, what are you saying?

GABE: It's time.

ANGELS 1-5: (Together) It's time?

GABE: Yes, ma'am. The Savior, he be a-comin! (ANGELS 1-5 scream with delight. Song: "I'll Fly Away" (Instrumental only)

ANGELS 1-5 depart as the WISE MEN enter.)
STORY OF THE WISE MEN

GABE: Now far to the east, there were these gentlemen who
gazed upon the heavens in search of some portent of
history. They were Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. (The
WISE MEN enter. BAL sits down in a rocking chair as the
other WISE MEN search the sky with binoculars.)

MEL: Gas?
GAS: Yeah, Mel?
MEL: See anything?
GAS: Nope.
MEL: (Sighs.) O Savior, where art thou?

GABE: These gents had focused their keen intellect upon the
stars, lookin’ everywhere for a sign in the highways of
life and the astrological heavens. They were lookin’ for
the Lord.

(SUGGESTED SONG: “In the Highways, in the Heavens” sung to
the tune of “In the Highways” by Maybelle Carter.)

In the highways, In the heavens,
In the highways, In the heavens,
In the highways, In the heavens,
I’ll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

I’ll be somewhere looking,
I’ll be somewhere looking,
I’ll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

I’ll be somewhere looking,
I’ll be somewhere looking,
I’ll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

If he calls me, I will answer,
If he calls me, I will answer,
If he calls me, I will answer,
I’ll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

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I'll be somewhere looking,
I'll be somewhere looking,
I'll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

I'll be somewhere looking
I'll be somewhere looking
I'll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

In the highways, in the heavens,
In the highways, in the heavens,
In the highways, in the heavens,
I'll be somewhere looking for my Lord.

(The WISE MEN look around the sanctuary as the song is sung. The WISE MEN may sing the song themselves if desired.)

GAS: Hey, Mel.
MEL: Yeah?
GAS: (Points up.) What does that look like to you?
MEL: Oh, wow! I think that's it! Bal — Balthasar, take a look at that!
BAL: Well, that's downright purdy, Mel.
GAS: No, Bal. It's the light. The light which will lead us to the Savior. Do you see it? (Pauses and looks to the sky, then turns to the congregation.) I — I saw the light!
MEL: (Facing the congregation) I saw the light!
BAL: (Remains in his rocking chair.) You mean no more troubles? No more strife?
GAS, MEL and BAL: (Together) Well, praise the Lord, I saw the light!

(SONG: "The Wise Men Saw the Light" sung to the tune of "I Saw the Light" by Hank Williams.)

CHORUS:
We saw the light, we saw the light.
No more darkness, no more night.
Now we’re so happy, no sorrow in sight.
Praise the Lord! We saw the light.

I searched so aimless, never could see
I couldn’t let a real savior in.
Then a star came like a stranger in the night.
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.

CHORUS

Just like explorers, we searched the land.
Nary a map or a helping hand.
Then like the sunshine that God gave us so bright,
Praise the Lord, we saw the light.

CHORUS

Took us some time to wander for days.
The road is long and bumpy the way.
Now we have seen a star in the night.
Praise the Lord, we saw the light.

CHORUS

(The WISE MEN follow the star out of the sanctuary as music plays. They re-enter at the end of the song with their hobo sticks. Video or images of the star and WISE MEN joyfully gazing at it may be shown on the screen as the band plays.)

BAL: Mel, Gas, I need a sit-down.
GAS: No, we need to keep going.
BAL: Gas, I swear you are a fanatic for findin’ this Savior. My dogs hurt me somethin’ awful.
GAS: Fine. You two rest here. I’m going to ask around about this Jewish Savior.
MEL: Just be careful, Gaspar. Jerusalem ain’t our town. (GAS looks around when he is noticed by two SOLDIERS.)

SOLDIER 1: You. You ain’t from around these parts, are ya?
GAS: No, I’m from the East.
SOLDIER 2: An Easterner?!
GAS: I’m looking for the new King of the Jews.
SOLDIER 1: New king?
GAS: Yessir. The Savior.
SOLDIER 2: I think the old King would like to ask this Easterner a little somethin’ about this new King and Savior. (The SOLDIERS grab GAS and take him to jail.)

GABE: While Melchior and Balthasar recuperated from their journey, Gaspar ran afoul of the civil authorities, namely one King Herod. Herod sought to extract the precise location of this alleged king. Naturally, Gaspar refused to elucidate Herod as to the location, which inevitably resulted in Gaspar’s incarceration. Upon learning of Gaspar’s detention, Melchior and Balthasar clandestinely visited their associate and lamented his captivity while contemplating the dubious fate of their journey. (BAL and MEL make their way over to the jail where GAS is being held. Two SOLDIERS stand watch over GAS.)

BAL: Pssst. Gaspar, whatcha doin’ in there?
GAS: (Whispering loudly) Boys, listen very carefully. Do not seek the Savior.
MEL: (Worried) Bal, I think we’re in a tight spot.
GAS: Do not seek the Savior.
MEL: Yup, we’re in a tight spot.

(SONG: “In Herod’s Jailhouse Now” sung to the tune of “In the Jailhouse Now” by Jimmie Rodgers.)

I had a friend named Gaspar,
He used to seek saviors and gods.
He thought he was the smartest guy around.
But I found out last Monday that Gas got locked up Sunday.
They've got him in the jailhouse way downtown.
He's in the jailhouse now, he's in the jailhouse now.

Well, I told him once or twice,
Stop seeking God and a Jewish Christ,
He’s in the jailhouse now.

Gas liked to pray to his Savior
Worshiped, bowed, and labored,
But finding Christ was his greatest gain.
Well, he got throwed in jail with nobody to go his bail.
The King sought the Savior he refused to find.
He’s in the jailhouse now, he’s in the jailhouse now.

Well, I told him once or twice,
Stop seeking God and a Jewish Christ.
He’s in the jailhouse now.

Well, I went out last Tuesday, I met a guard named Hussie,
I said I was the newest guy in town.
Well, he started to noticin’ my money
And he started to callin’ things funny.
He looked in every bag and began to frown.
We’re in the jailhouse now, we’re in the jailhouse now.

Well, I told that Herod to his face,
I don’t like to see this place.
We’re in the jailhouse now.

(The WISE MEN can sing the song or lip-sync to the song as
the band plays it. MEL and BAL use their hobo sticks to dance
to the music. GAS sings the yodeling part in the song.
Following the directions to the song, MEL and BAL are placed
in the prison with GAS by the two SOLDIERS.)

GAS: I thought I told you: Do not seek the Savior.
MEL: Fellas, we’re in a tight spot.
GABE: It is not widely known how the three companions escaped from captivity. But it is rumored that Gaspar bribed one of the soldiers with a quantity of myrrh and, with exceptional alacrity, they made their escape.

(SUGGESTED SONG: “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs or another instrumental number. The WISE MEN pause as they watch the video or images of their escape. The song plays while the images are displayed. Alternatively, if no pictures or video are possible, the WISE MEN can wander through the sanctuary while the music is played, making their escape. If the video is used, the WISE MEN sit there talking and laughing after the song is over.)

GABE: Well, OK boys, git! (WISE MEN exit as ANGELS 1-5 re-enter.)

STORY OF THE SHEPHERDS
ANGEL 1: Who do you think we should try now?
ANGEL 3: I don’t know. We’ve scared off everybody so far.
ANGEL 4: Do you think it’s my outfit?
ANGEL 5: Of course not. You look like an angel.
ANGEL 4: Why, thank youuuu.
ANGEL 2: I reckon it’s the heavenly host thing. It’s just too much for folks. When they see us, they just go hog wild, screamin’ and a-yellin’.
ANGEL 3: Maybe if just one of us does the meetin’ and greetin”?
ANGEL 1: Sounds good to me.
ANGEL 2: (Pointing to the back) Look — shepherds! (SHEPHERDS 1-4 enter from the rear of the sanctuary, singing and searching the sanctuary.)

(SONG: “In the Highways, in the Heavens” sung to the tune of “In the Highways” by Maybelle Carter.)

In the highways, in the heavens,