

ONE SMALL CHILD

A Christmas Drama

By: Edie Cunningham

Setting:

In Bethlehem, on patio of a private home approximately two years after the birth of Christ. Adorn the patio with pots and baskets of silk flowers or ferns in front of the two rocking chairs.

Costuming:

Drape colorful bed sheets around the two female cast members (similar styling to Far East Indian Sari).

Props:

A walking stick for Hannah, the aged mother. The Bethlehem Times newspaper, as described in the following script. Two cups and a plate of pita bread sandwiches.

Plot Summary:

A Jewish woman (Esther) is visiting her widowed mother (Hannah). They are caught up in a discourse relating to the action transpiring in their town of Bethlehem. Traveling guests have come from Jerusalem via the East. These men are seeking to worship the new King of the Jews.

The widow mother is focused on her own misery and the potential upheaval the men's quest may bring upon Bethlehem, a town already living under Rome's ruthless rule.

While reciting old prophecies, the ladies begin to see that the events occurring in Bethlehem are more than coincidental. Could the two-year-old boy living in their village with his parents be the long-awaited Messiah as described by their Jewish Prophets centuries before? Their conclusions are about to be tested because God has redirected the men from the East, so they do not return to report to King Herod. King Herod's reign appears to be contested by a so-called Jewish boy-king. This will destabilize Judah because the price to pay Rome will be too heavy for King Herod to bear. God will have to intervene. The boy-king must vanish to survive. Faith comes slowly to Hannah and Esther but it comes all in "one small child."

Drama

Hannah: *(Aged woman hobbles toward her rocking chair and sits down.)* Ah, 'tis the Sabbath. At last a day of rest from all my work. *(Looks longingly to sky.)* Oh, my darling husband Jacob away up there. How I wish the good Lord had left you on earth to enjoy these quiet hours with me. If you'd only been here to help with the chores yesterday!

From this roof top I can see the beautiful hills of Bethlehem. *(Hand shading eyes as she scans distance and then sputters.)* But If I can't have you Jacob, at least I can have the local news to read and fill my lonely hours.

[Construct newspaper from a large piece of brown paper or cut open a grocery store bag. The "brown" paper is to resemble parchment. Print large Greek lettering Βηθλεέμ Φορές across top of the paper ("THE BETHLEHEM TIMES") that faces audience so they can read the headline. Cut and paste random newspaper articles onto the paper below the masthead to give the appearance of a newspaper. (The audience will not be able to see the small English lettering.) On the reverse side of the newspaper tape the following script to help cast in remembering their lines.]

(Hannah starts to rock then picks up newspaper. Hannah is spouting about politics as she reads the news.

Esther: *(Happily enters.)* Shalom, my dear mother Hannah. *(Ladies greet each other with traditional hugs and kisses on both cheeks. Mother gives abundant kisses. Daughter rolls eyes to audience at this demonstration of affection.)* May I have a Sabbath day visit with you? *(Sits.)*

Hannah: So what's the latest news from your husband Levi about his world famous, *Bethlehem Inn*? After all, who on the trade route from Persia to Egypt wouldn't put up there with its plentiful food and warm clean beds? A relief for saddle sores, I should guess!

Esther: I tell you, mother, in my life time Levi and I have entertained hundreds of guests. But, even as I speak to you, Levi is saying good bye to the most unusual

guests we've ever had. They're heading east, to their homes, at any moment. They have a story to tell that tops every story I have ever heard. They told Levi that Almighty God appeared to them in a dream warning them not to *return* to Jerusalem as they'd planned. God told them to *escape* Bethlehem because unbeknown to them King Herod has tried to pull them into a deadly scheme.

Hannah: (*Voice is filled with disdain, and then gets carried away.*) A deadly scheme, Esther? Who are these men? For your safety you and Levi must not get mixed up in these personal affairs of your Inn guests! And can you believe men traveling on the *Sabbath*? 'Tis a day of rest! Our young people today have NO regard for the laws of Moses! Here, take part of the *Bethlehem Times*. Read it with me. Give an old lonely widow some company. And help me read this miserable Greek language.

Esther: Mother (*teasing*), you're reading the paper on the Sabbath?

Hannah: Shh! (*Laughs.*) Here, enjoy a mutton sandwich and sip on fresh pomegranate juice! (*Eat together.*) What did you mean when you said that you and Levi have "*unusual*" guests at your inn? Did you say "from the East"? Are your guests any "stranger" than we Jews (*with flare*), the sons and daughters of father Abraham?

Esther: Oh, mother, these three men were not people of Israel.

Hannah: Tax collectors from Jerusalem! I should have guessed it! They've come to *rob us blind*! Oh, will the Messiah ever come to deliver Israel from Rome's greedy, money hungry clutches?

Esther: And these men were *not* Roman tax collectors dispatched from King Herod in Jerusalem.

Hannah: Why didn't you tell me?! So, just who are they?

Esther: They're from the east. They appear to be wealthy men, kingly looking, and sporting colorful velvet coats lined with the softest silks. Their shoes are made of the finest leather. And they came laden with treasures!

Hannah: Treasures? No one ever gives us Jews anything! We must work by the sweat of our brow for every denarius! Rich, were they? It sounds as if they could

have paid handsomely for a long stay at your Bethlehem Inn without feeling the pinch, unlike poor widow Hannah here. Did they tell you what brought them to the humble hills of Bethlehem?

Esther: They told Levi they were looking for a king, the one born to us Jews. They said they'd seen his star in the east and that it had led them all the way to Israel where they have come to worship this new King.

Hannah: A King in humble Bethlehem? We've not had a Jewish king born in Bethlehem since King David nearly 1,000 years ago! I hope Levi told those *misguided* rich men they were 10 miles off course! Jerusalem is that away! (*Points.*) They'd find a King there alright, a *Roman* king. And *he'll* gladly take their *treasures* and their *Emperor worship* too (*all said with a dramatic flair*).

Esther: Those men from the east could not have been misguided, Mother. They told my Levi that weeks ago God Almighty had placed a special star in the sky telling them to follow it. It led them *westward to Israel*. (*Matthew 2:1-12*)

Hannah: As I said, the *Gentile KING Herod* lives in *Jerusalem* (*said dogmatically*) where indeed one of King David's ancestors should be on *that throne forever!* (*Genesis 49:10; Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 2:2*) Has our God forgotten His promises to us Jews?

Esther: Mother, the men *had* an audience with King Herod.

Hannah: Dan---ger --- ous.

Esther: They asked Herod if he knew where to find the young King of the Jews?

Hannah: Oh, nice! That must have set Herod off in a *rage!* A rival King born right under his nose! That's competition! Herod will NOT tolerate it! Israel will not be liberated while King Herod is in power.

Esther: Yes, King Herod was *so* disturbed that he ordered our Temple's Chief Priests and teachers of the Law into his court.

Hannah: Surely they must have played into his hand. He has probably deluded them.

Esther: King Herod demanded to know what the Jewish prophets had written about the birth place of the promised Messiah. You remember the ancient scroll of Micah, don't you, Mother?

Hannah: Yes, of course. Your father, bless his soul, taught you well and I listened and learned along with you. (*Quotes Micah 5:2*) But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old.

Esther: Well, our Jewish Temple leaders read Micah's promise to King Herod. Micah identifies Bethlehem as the birth place of the Messiah.

Hannah: As if we Bethlehemites weren't already in trouble enough with King Herod! I worry that he'll dispatch his army here! He'll scour this city until he roots out this new rival King. Pity the man who announces he's King, instead of Herod.

Esther: Mother, the new-born King in Bethlehem is a child.

Hannah: Is the hot Palestine sun getting to you, my dear? Here, you need more pomegranate juice to clear your mind. And I need another mutton sandwich! (*Reaches for another sandwich*).

Esther: (*Smiles and reaches to touch her mother's tummy.*) Go easy on the mutton. Let me finish my story. King Herod told the men to go to Bethlehem to find this new King that is spoken of in the prophecy of Micah. When they left Jerusalem, God sent the same star ahead of them and they followed it. It led then straight to a house here in Bethlehem. When they entered, they found a married couple named Mary and Joseph. And, they saw a young boy child too. God had told Joseph to name him Jesus. The men worshipped King Jesus with their extravagant gifts. (*Matthew 2:7-11*)

Hannah: Are you speaking of that couple Mary and Joseph who gave birth to a boy here about two years ago *in your borrowed stable*?

Esther: Yes.

Hannah: Seriously, how could such a poor boy be a King? (*Reflective tone.*) Bethlehem was in a hubbub during that census taking two years ago when that

child was born. Every Jew with roots in Bethlehem was forced to return here to register, including that couple. Weren't they from up yonder in Nazareth?

Esther: Yes. Mary and Joseph are godly devoted Jews. Their baby has ancestral ties to father Abraham and King David! (*Matthew 1:1*)

At the time of the birth of that baby boy, I had asked Joseph what they were going to name him. He said, "The child is of the Spirit of God, and His name was given to me by an angel. His name is 'Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.'" (*Matthew 1:21*)

Hannah: It's all beginning to come together, Esther. Something big has been happening in Bethlehem ever since the boy-child was born here. Remember the shepherds? The ones raising sacrificial sheep on the hillside? Even they were bursting with news after they'd seen the new born Jesus. They told everyone including me, 'Good News, God has come to be our Savior.' " (*Luke 2:8-14*) All these years I've been looking for a deliverer, someone to set us free from Rome. Instead I think God has sent someone to deliver my soul! A lifetime of days of Atonement sacrifices would never be enough to wipe my slate clean before a holy God. But how can a boy-King save me?

Esther: Mother, you didn't object when I told you that the men from the East entered Mary and Joseph's home and *worshipped* Jesus.

Hannah: I was holding back my opinion.

Esther: That was the first time you ever held your....

Hannah: ...but, I am certain you know my thoughts on that subject!

TOGETHER THEY SAY in unison as they look at each other: "We Jews worship God alone. Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad (*Deuteronomy 6:4-9*). Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD."

Esther: Can you see it, Mother? They worshipped *God*. They gave gifts, treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh to that child. Such gifts are fit for a *King*.

Hannah: (*Upset.*) How could all of this be possible? Listen, Esther, you must visit Mary and Joseph. Tell them for me that they'd better keep their hands on that gold because if the Romans get their hands on it...

Esther: ... Mother, you are consumed by the bitterness of your widowhood. It's clouding what God is trying to show us. Can't you see? I'm telling you that the long awaited Messiah is here! There are too many converging "coincidences" ...

Hannah: I recall a story that circulated here in Bethlehem, a story from the Temple in Jerusalem shortly after Mary and Joseph went to make an offering for sin. God-fearing Simeon (*Luke 2:25-35*) held baby Jesus in his arms and cried out, 'Sovereign Lord ...my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

Esther: Yes! Our old parchments are coming to life!

Messenger: (*Enters and announces as he gives Esther a note.*) "Esther, your husband Levi told me to deliver this important message to you. He needs your help immediately."

Esther: (*Looks puzzled. Reads note aloud.*) 'Esther, please come home as soon as possible. I need your help to prepare Mary and Joseph for a long journey to Egypt. God has warned them in a dream to escape with their child.' Escape? Why?

Hannah: Didn't you say God had also told the rich men from the East NOT to return to King Herod because he'd hatched a wicked plan against Jesus?

Esther: It appears that God is warning Mary and Joseph to flee Israel too, to go south to another country. They'll be refugees with a two-year-old son. Imagine the Messiah being chased out of Israel.

Hannah: There is something bigger happening here, something bigger than all the hardships of living under the rule of Rome, and something even bigger than my broken widow's heart. (*Together they stand and hold hands.*)

Esther: Like Simeon told us, the salvation of the LORD is in that young boy who is holed up in the house with Mary and Joseph. I must run to give them a hand to flee our brutal King Herod. (*Esther runs out of scene.*)

Read verses to audience:

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” (*Jeremiah 31:15*)

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” ²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.” And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” (*Hosea 11:1*)

ENDING

Suggested Solo: “*One Small Child*” by David Meece

Lyrics include: “One king bringing his gold and riches. One king ruling an army of might. One king kneeling with incense and candlelight. One king bringing us life. ...”

Pastor/Worship Leader make application.