



The First Herald Angel

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The First Herald Angel**

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THE FIRST HERALD ANGEL

A CHRISTMAS PLAY WITH MUSIC IN
ONE ACT BY
John Donald O'Shea



The First Herald Angel

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Characters

MICAH (m or f): James' guardian angel

JAMES (m): A shepherd

SUSANNA (f): James' carpenter wife

ASREAL (f): An archangel, and Micah's supervisor

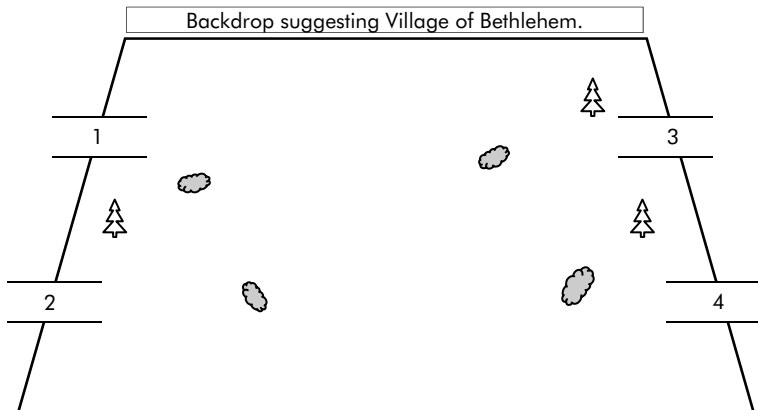
LION (m or f): A mangy old lion

Setting

Place: In the hills near Bethlehem.

Time: Later afternoon and early evening,
the first Christmas Eve.

The Set



1, 2, 3 & 4 = Suggested points of entry onto the stage.
But any point of entry from the wings will do.



= Possible placement of trees/bushes to suggest hill country outside of Bethlehem.



= Possible placement of rocks to suggest hill country outside of Bethlehem.

Props

- Shepherd's Staff for James
- Rose for Susanna

Costumes

- Angel's costume for Micah
- Angel's costume for Asreal
- Period costumes (Poor Shepherd's robe and Poor Wife's robe) for James and Susanna
- Lion's Costume for Lion

MICAH, a small child dressed as an angel, is alone on stage.

MICAH: (*singing*) Come, sons of men to the village of David...
(*speaking to self*) That's not quite right. (*singing different notes*)
Come, sons of men to the village of David.
Come, and pay homage, a Saviour is born.
This is the night that the prophets of old spoke.
My song will guide you, the star will give light.

A shepherd (JAMES) enters and watches.

JAMES: You're far from home, child. These hills are a dangerous place at night for one so young. It will be quite dark, very soon. There are lions and bears.

MICAH: I'll be all right. I'm not afraid.

JAMES: What are you doing here, so far from the village?

MICAH: I'm practicing singing.

JAMES: Why? Are you that bad?

MICAH: Because I want to be a herald angel.

JAMES: Ah... a very noble aspiration. (*slight pause*) But don't you first have to be an angel?

MICAH: That part's easy. I've been an angel for a long time.

JAMES: Uh-huh. How long?

MICAH: I don't know exactly. It seems like forever.

JAMES: How does one become a herald angel?

MICAH: I'm really not certain. It's an entirely new position. I don't think anyone has written up a job description yet.

JAMES: What does a herald angel do?

MICAH: We're going to announce the birth of the saviour later this evening.

JAMES: Which saviour is that?

MICAH: The one Gabriel said would be called Jesus.

JAMES: I'm sorry, but I've never heard of him.

MICAH: He's going to be born at Bethlehem. Since he'll be known as the Prince of Peace, my superiors decided to announce his birth with joyous music. Royal comings are always announced by heralds...

JAMES: I wouldn't know. I've never met a prince.

MICAH: And it will fulfill the prophecies.

JAMES: Yes, all the prophecies must be fulfilled. The people need dreams to believe in.

SUSANNA enters with a rose. She is pregnant.

SUSANNA: Look, James. I found it blooming in the snow!

JAMES: Susanna, guess what? The saviour's to be born this night in Bethlehem! And his name will be Jesus!

SUSANNA: Really? Where did you get that?

JAMES: (*indicating MICAH*) The angel told me.

SUSANNA: What angel?

JAMES: That one.

SUSANNA: James, you old fool, that's nothing but a child.

JAMES: But she says that she's an angel...

SUSANNA: If I told you I were an angel, would that make me one?

JAMES: No, my love. I would never believe that you're an angel.

SUSANNA: Then don't be so gullible. Would you have believed her if she said she was a bear?

JAMES: No... but I would have believed you.

SUSANNA: Then why would you believe a silly child?

JAMES: Perhaps because I want the Messiah to come. Perhaps because she seems to be sincere.

MICAH: I always tell the truth.

SUSANNA: You do, eh? Just what sort of angel are you?

MICAH: I'm a guardian angel, but I was practicing to be a herald angel.

SUSANNA: Just what does a guardian angel do?

MICAH: We guard the children of God committed to our care.

SUSANNA: I'm a child of God. Do I have a guardian angel?

MICAH: Sure. All humans do.

SUSANNA: Mine must be as worthless as my husband, or else I would not be living in a squalid cave, surrounded by bleating sheep and married to a penniless shepherd.

MICAH: We merely guard and guide. We don't provide free housing.

SUSANNA: It would not take a very good angel to guard all that I have.

MICAH: We don't guard possessions; just you.

JAMES: Susanna, you complain far too much. You should thank the Lord for what you have, and quit worrying about what you lack.

SUSANNA: I did that already. It didn't take very long. Now I would like him to know that since my husband does not provide, I could use his help. (to MICAH) Perhaps this saviour of yours could help?

JAMES: Yes, if he is to be a prince, he will have great wealth. Perhaps he will share it with the poor. After all, that is what good kings do.

SUSANNA: If you really are an angel, could you let him know we were the first to believe in him, and ask his help? Let him know we are poor but deserving people?

MICAH: A guardian angel can only guide you to him. You must ask his help yourself.

SUSANNA: Then, angel, you guide, I'll ask. (*pause*) I am not asking for myself, you understand, but for my child. (*indicating her belly*) He should not be born in a cave.

JAMES: But we have no fine clothes. Will his guards let us in if we are dressed in these rags?

MICAH: If you go to him, no one will bar your way.

SUSANNA: But what kind of king would see poor folk like us?

MICAH: This one. A Prince of Peace, a Wonder Counsellor, a Saviour.

JAMES: But where is his palace?

MICAH: Don't worry, I'll guide you. It's not far.

SUSANNA: You best be telling the truth, "angel." Or the next time I see you, I'll box your ear.

JAMES: I think, my love, we should find some present for this king. Let's go and look...

SUSANNA: Give him one of your lambs. Kings are always hungry. I will at least go and fix my hair.

They exit.

MICAH: (*singing*)

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Glorify to God, our Father above!

This is the night that the prophets of old spoke.

Come, little children, give glory to God!

ASREAL enters.

ASREAL: Micah, what are you doing?

MICAH: I was practicing, Asreal, to become a herald angel. Do you think they (*looking toward heaven*) would let me? It's just for a night.

ASREAL: I've never heard you sing before. You never sing with the other angels.

MICAH: I can't sing with the cherubim and seraphim. They're sopranos. They always choose a key that's too high for me.

ASREAL: I suppose I could ask for you... But who's going to watch James while you're gone?

MICAH: I was planning to take him with me. I'm sure he'd like to see the saviour.

ASREAL: You should take Susanna along, too. It will be good for that carping wife to see that she's not the only person born poor.

A mangy LION enters.

But what's this?

LION: You look like dinner... (*sniffing MICAH*) but you don't smell like dinner.

ASREAL: That's because we're angels; we don't smell at all.

LION: Why not? How is an old cat going to find his dinner, if I can't smell you? (*pause*) But why am I talking to my dinner?

MICAH: You're not really talking. We just know what you're thinking.
We can read your mind.

LION: Then you know, that I was planning to eat you — first. (*to ASREAL*) I prefer tender young meat... (*to MICAH*) Why do you smell like roses?

MICAH: I wasn't aware that I did. Your sniffer must be off.

LION: I've never eaten an angel. Do angels taste good? Actually, I'm rather certain I would much prefer eating a young lamb. If you will give me one, I promise I won't eat you — at least not tonight.

MICAH: It's a very generous offer. I'll see what I can do for you.

LION: Hey, it's nothing. As cats go, I'm really a pretty decent guy. But you didn't answer my question. Do angels taste good?

MICAH: You're going to have to wait for dinner. I'm busy right now. (*getting an idea*) Why don't you stay right where you are? I need an audience. Tell me if you like my singing.

LION: I'm not here for entertainment. I want dinner! (*noticing his feet are stuck*) Why are my feet stuck?

MICAH: Because I need an audience, and you're it.

LION: How long is this going to take? I'm hungry. Can we just get this over with?

MICAH: See what you think of this.

(*she sings*)

Come, shepherds come!

Leave your flocks in the fields.

They will be safe

On this night of God's love.

Come see the Saviour your Father has given,

Follow my song and the star up above.

(*speaking*)

Well, how was it?

LION: The tone was clear. The placement of the notes, precise. And the phrasing was well conceived. In all, it was a rather heavenly performance. It made me want to lie down with the lamb... (*not quite believing what he just heard himself say*) Why did I say that?

MICAH: If you could overcome your desire to eat anyone who crossed your path, you could have a very successful career as a theatrical critic.

LION: Yah, I was good, wasn't I? Now, can I go? I promise not to eat you.

MICAH: (*thoroughly pleased*) Sure. Oh, by the way... you'll find a nice fresh tuna over behind that rock.

LION: What's a tuna?

MICAH: It's a tasty salt water fish.

LION: What's a fish?

MICAH: Just go over by the rock and find out.

LION: I prefer young lamb.

MICAH: Just try the tuna. You'll like it... And it's better for you. Less cholesterol.

LION: (*a bit put out*) Thanks, I guess. (*while leaving, to audience*) I really did think she was good. I didn't just say it so I could go to early dinner.

ASREAL: James and Susanna are returning. You have my permission to sing for the saviour. If it's not all right, I'll get back to you.

ASREAL exits. JAMES and SUSAN re-enter.

JAMES: I couldn't find the right lamb. Mine are all too old to please a prince. Do you think the saviour would be content if I promise to bring him a choice young lamb early next spring?

SUSANNA: He'll throw us out, you old fool. Who ever heard of a prince with patience? Kings are not patient people.

MICAH: This one will be.

SUSANNA: (*oblivious to MICAH*) Kings are used to getting what they want, when they want it. (*imitating a king*) "You there. Slave, bring me my sword!" (*gesturing to another slave*) "You there, get my chariot!"

JAMES: (*to MICAH*) She may be right. Are you sure it is all right to go without a gift? Is there something else we could bring?

MICAH: Just bring yourselves.

SUSANNA: Just bring yourselves, you say! Who would want a penniless shepherd and his even more penniless wife?

JAMES: You complain too much, my dear.

SUSANNA: That's because I have so much to complain about, my love.

JAMES: The scriptures, my love, say be thankful for what you have.

SUSANNA: What do I have? I live in a cave surrounded by smelly sheep.

JAMES: You have a roof over your head, food to eat, and a husband who loves you.

SUSANNA: But I want more. I want more for our child.

MICAH: Then let me guide you to Bethlehem.

JAMES: Perhaps there you will find "more."

SUSANNA: (to MICAH) Will I?

MICAH: You will find a saviour, and that is everything.

SUSANNA: But you said this Jesus is to be born at Bethlehem later this evening. What can a baby do for us?

JAMES: Even kings have to be born, my love.

SUSANNA: Then why don't we wait and pay homage later? (*indicating her stomach*) If I must walk across these fields, your child could be born before this saviour.

JAMES: You are not due for two weeks. Have you felt pains?

SUSANNA: No, not yet.

JAMES: Would you mind if I go? You could stay and rest.

SUSANNA: Go. When my time comes, you will be in the fields with your sheep, anyway. You go with your "angel."

JAMES: Do not wait up for me. (*SUSANNA exits*) At times I think she complains too much. But then, maybe I am not the best of husbands.

ASREAL enters.

ASREAL: Micah, I told them how you sing. You have permission.

JAMES: (to MICAH) Is this an angel, too?

MICAH: No, this is Asreal. He's (*She's*) an archangel.

ASREAL: (to JAMES) We are God's messengers. And I had that lion tell them how well you sang. They felt that heralding the arrival of the

saviour, was entirely consistent with your duty to guide the sons of men.

MICAH: Thank you, Asreal.

LION enters.

LION: (to MICAH) Can I have some more tuna fish? All that testifying made me hungry. I need more tuna!

MICAH: Wasn't so bad, was it?

LION: It was wonderful!

JAMES: When precisely will the saviour be born?

ASREAL: The virgin mother is already in labour.

JAMES: Then shouldn't we be off? Where do we go? (to MICAH) Do I go with you?

MICAH: No, but you can start, James. Go to Bethlehem. I will go ahead and guide you.

ASREAL: Listen for Micah's song.

LION: What about me?

MICAH: We'll find you a lamb.

LION: (with enthusiasm) To eat?

MICAH: No, to fulfill the prophecy. (to LION) You go with James, but don't eat him. If you behave yourself, I'll give you a present.

LION: What do I have to do?

MICAH: Just go with James and when you get there, lie down and rest.

LION: Is that all?

ASREAL: That's all!

LION: What's my present?

ASREAL & MICAH: Tuna.

LION: Oh boy, oh boy! Oh boy! You've got a deal!

MICAH: It's time to go, James. Take this beast along with you and no one will bother you.

JAMES and LION exit.



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