

SHIRLEY. Just as I say my first line ... *(In the audience, Mrs. Abramowitz makes her way down the aisle to a seat beside her husband. Young Shirley is gripped with stage fright when she sees her.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. *(Whispers.)* Excuse me ... Pardon me ... *(Steps on someone's toe.)* Sorry ...

SHIRLEY. Who should appear but my mother! One look at her disapproving face and the worst thing that could possibly happen happens.

CLARA. What, Gramma, what happens?!

SHIRLEY. My loud voice fails me!

CLARA. Oh, no!

SHIRLEY. I open my mouth to speak but nothing comes out; not a sound!

MR. HILTON. *(Whispers.)* Shirley? Are you all right? Shirley? *(A cacophony of whispered "Shirley"s.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. *(Stage whisper.)* Come on, Shirley, you can do it, sweetheart.

MR. HILTON. *(Whispers, to Miss Glacé.)* Should we bring down the curtain?

MISS GLACÉ. Perhaps we should. *(Mrs. Abramowitz leaps to her feet.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley Abramowitz, SPEAK UP! God gave you a BIG, LOUD voice, now go ahead and use it!

SHIRLEY. As if by magic, with my mama's blessing, the power of speech returns!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Loud and clear.)* Greetings, good people! *(The audience applauds.)* I am Jesus Christ!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. *Oy vey. (Mr. Abramowitz sits his wife back down.)*

GRANDMOTHER. Jesus! Why have you come?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. You all celebrate Christmas but do you even know what Christmas is? *(Children shake their heads and say no.)* I didn't think so. I have come to tell you the story of Christmas. Which is the story of my birth. *(Miss Glacé plays an overture as the ensemble moves scenery into place.)* A long, long time ago, in the city of Nazareth, there was a young woman named Mary. *(Mary [played by Evie] appears.)*

MARY. I am engaged to be married to a young man named Joseph. *(Mr. Hilton pushes Joseph [played by Jackie] onstage.)*

JOSEPH. I am Joseph, a Jewish carpenter of modest means. *(Joseph mimes sawing. Mr. Hilton provides the sound.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. One starry night, an angel appeared before Mary. *(Angel Gabriel, in full plumage, standing on a ladder, is wheeled onstage by Mr. Hilton.)*

ANGEL GABRIEL. *(Portentously.)* Hello, Mary.

MARY. *(Gasps.)* Who are you? How do you know my name?

ANGEL GABRIEL. Fear not, Mary, I am the Angel Gabriel, sent by God.

MARY. God? Whatever for?

ANGEL GABRIEL. You have been chosen from all the maidens in the land for something very, very special.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. And Mary said,

MARY. Why me?

ANGEL GABRIEL. Be glad. You have found favor with God.

MARY. What is this special thing?

ANGEL GABRIEL. You shall bring forth a son. And that son shall be holy. And that holy child shall be called ... Jesus. *(Miss Glacé strikes a dramatic chord.)*

MARY. But I'm not even married yet.

ANGEL GABRIEL. All the better. Jesus shall be the son of God.

MARY. This is too much. I don't understand.

ANGEL GABRIEL. Trust me.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. So, just as the angel said, Mary soon discovered she was going to have a baby. She told her fiancé, Joseph.

MARY. Joseph, you're not going to believe this but I'm going to have a baby.

JOSEPH. What? How can that be? We're not even married yet!

MARY. I know! Isn't that amazing?

JOSEPH. You made a fool of me! I don't want to marry you anymore! *(Joseph storms away.)*

MARY. Joseph, wait, don't go!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. That night Joseph had a dream. *(Joseph sleeps fitfully. Dream sequence.)*

ANGEL GABRIEL. *(Spooky voice.)* Joseph!

JOSEPH. Who calls me?

ANGEL GABRIEL. It is I, Gabriel, an angel of God.

JOSEPH. What do you want of me?

ANGEL GABRIEL. Mary is telling the truth! The child she carries will be the son of God! Do not forsake her! It is part of God's plan.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. When he woke up the next morning, Joseph had a change of heart.

JOSEPH. Okay, Mary, I'll stick by you. I'll be your husband after all.

MARY. Oh, Joseph ... *(They embrace. Time passes in sunrises and sunsets.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Months went by. Nine months, to be exact. *(A pillow is stuffed in Mary's stomach.)* One day, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. So they rode their donkey through the desert. *(They do.)* The journey was long and rough. Through brutal sun by day and sandstorms by night. *(Mr. Hilton makes howling wind sounds.)*

MARY. Oh, dear, will this journey ever end?

JOSEPH. Look! Up ahead! The light of an inn!

MARY. Thank God.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. But when they stopped at the inn for the night ...

INNKEEPER. Sorry, no rooms, we're all full up.

JOSEPH. But my wife is great with child. See?

INNKEEPER. Goodness, yes! I'll tell you what: You may spend the night in the stable. It will be comfortable enough.

JOSEPH. Thank you.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. That very night, I was born. *(Miss Glacé plays a flourish of chords. Mr. Hilton makes the sound of a baby crying.)* There was no proper bed for me to sleep in so Mary wrapped me in blankets and placed me in a manger where horses and goats and donkeys ate hay. *(Animals gather, neighing and bleating.)* Meanwhile, the angel of the Lord flew across the land to spread the word. *(Whooshing sounds. Flapping of wings. The Angel Gabriel is wheeled around atop his ladder. Two shepherds appear.)*

ANGEL GABRIEL. You there! Shepherds!

SHEPHERD #1. Who are you?

ANGEL GABRIEL. I am the Angel Gabriel sent by our Lord!

SHEPHERD #2. What do you want from us?

ANGEL GABRIEL. Fear not, shepherds! I bring you tidings of great joy! The Savior has been born this very night! He is wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. But the shepherds didn't believe him.

SHEPHERD #1. That's ridiculous!

SHEPHERD #2. Why should we believe you?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Just then, the sky filled with music and heavenly beings. *(A chorus of angels appears and sings.)*

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL,
 JOYFUL AND TRIUMPHANT!
 O COME YE, O COME YE TO BETHLEHEM;
 COME AND BEHOLD HIM,
 BORN THE KING OF ANGELS:
 O COME, LET US ADORE HIM,
 O COME, LET US ADORE HIM,
 O COME, LET US ADORE HIM,
 CHRIST THE LORD.

ANGEL GABRIEL. *Now do you believe me? (The dumbstruck shepherds nod.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Word spread to Jerusalem and the palace of King Herod. *(King Herod enthroned in his palace.)*

KING HEROD. King of the Jews? I don't like the sound of that, not one bit.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. So he summoned the Three Wise Men, also known as the Magi. *(Three Wise Men appear and bow.)*

THREE WISE MEN. *(In unison.)* We are the Three Wise Men, also known as the Magi. What can we do for you, sire?

KING HEROD. Go to Bethlehem and find this Christ-child we hear tell of.

THREE WISE MEN. Yes, Your Highness. *(They back away while bowing.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. And so the Three Wise Men packed a bunch of gifts and set forth looking for me, the newborn King. *(They trek across the desert. Day to night. A star appears [dangling from a fishing rod held by Lester].)*

WISE MAN #2. Look! The bright star in the east!

WISE MAN #3. Let's follow it!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. And they did, all the way to Bethlehem.

SANTA CLAUS. *(Entering.)* Ho ho ho!

THREE WISE MEN. Who goes there? *(Santa appears, hauling a big red sack.)*

SANTA CLAUS. It is I, St. Nicholas, better known as Santa Claus.

CLARA. Santa Claus?!

SHIRLEY. Shhh!

SANTA CLAUS. I have lost my way. My reindeer ran off with my sleigh and I have gifts to deliver.

THREE WISE MEN. We have gifts to deliver, too.