

A Ruler Born in Bethlehem

Imagine the poor Innkeeper and his wife on the night of the census: flat out just answering the door. Bethlehem would have been bursting at the seams that night, and no doubt travellers would have been persistent at the Inns and hard to turn away.

Costumes

The Innkeeper can wear a simple tunic, over shorts and shirt, and a belt. Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds, too, should have similar costume, but with a towel and band around the head. The Kings should have more royal clothing, perhaps purpose made cloaks of purple, blue, gold or red. Crowns can be simply made by spraying cardboard gold and possibly adding material that matches their cloaks, or beads as jewels.

The cat is perhaps the hardest character for a costume. Give the actor brown top and leggings, and then a brown hat with either purpose made cardboard mask or some face paints. You could also cut out some stripes from black paper or material and attach them to the clothes with either safety pins or stitches.

The sheep and dog (and other animals if you wish) can be dressed similarly, using black and white clothing.

Set / Props

The Inn itself can be as simple as a table and chairs (with imaginary door) or as grand as a painted backdrop with a real door in a freestanding frame. The choice is yours, and will usually depend on time and skills available. One prop which is required, is a *Bethlehem Gazette*. You can make one up by using the templates in Appendix A. Just photocopy the pages and paste them to the cover of a local paper. Place the paper on the table on stage prior to the performance.

Cast

If you are having all actors speak on stage you should try to use older actors (teens) for the Innkeeper and his wife. Otherwise, you can pre-record a sound-track using adults and teens (see p4) and use much younger children on stage. There are three shepherds and three kings in the cast,

however if you have fewer actors you can easily give these lines to only two, or even one if you wish. You can always use preschoolers to be a 'non-speaking' shepherd or king, just so you still have the proverbial three kings. If you have a good number of pre-schoolers you can dress lots of them as animals and create a large nativity to one side of the stage. As each group knocks at the Inn and is sent down to the stable it can walk across the stage to join the animals. By the end of the sketch you will have a large nativity scene to give a final bow and receive great applause.

Innkeeper

Innkeeper's wife

Joseph

Mary

3 Shepherds (with sheep & sheep dog)

3 Kings

cat

NB 'Chorus' is everyone together

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

Micah 5: 2

Scene: The Innkeeper's house, Christmas Eve

Innkeeper Ah, what a day! (*Picking up Bethlehem Gazette*). Remind me to do some extensions before Caesar calls his next census.

IK wife You'll have to fix up the lean-to first – I can't believe we've got paying customers in there tonight.

Innkeeper Alright, I'll get onto it! I see the *Bethlehem Gazette* is still going on about that prophecy of some ruler being born in Bethlehem. A likely story, that one.

IK wife Maybe he'll be born while the census is on – our village must have ten times its usual number.

Knock at the door.

IK wife Not another one! We don't have room!

Innkeeper I know, I know, I'll tell 'em.

Innkeeper goes to door.

Innkeeper Yes?

Joseph G'day. How're you going? You got any room?

Innkeeper No, sorry, we haven't. Try the next place.

Mary Agghhh!

Joseph But my wife's about to have a baby. Anywhere will do. What about your stable?

Innkeeper (*Pause*) Oh, alright then. Just for tonight. Straight down there and mind how you go – the paving's a bit uneven. Haven't had time to fix it.

Joseph Thanks mate. Really kind of you.

Mary Thank you!

Innkeeper goes inside.

IK wife Did you send them up the road?

Innkeeper Kind of.

IK wife What do you mean?

Innkeeper They're using the stable.

IK wife What??

Innkeeper She's in labour, dear. I can't turn a woman away that's in her condition.

IK wife But it's about to fall down. One breath of wind and the whole thing'll collapse. And what will the Hospitality Standards Institute have to say about that?

Knock at the door.

Innkeeper I'll go.

IK wife No more room, remember?

Innkeeper I know.

Innkeeper goes to door.

Innkeeper Yes?

Sheph'd 1 Hi. We're looking for a couple that came this way a short while ago.

Innkeeper Hey, if I've opened this door once tonight I've opened it a hundred times. You've no chance if you're trying to find your family.

Sheph'd 2 No, not family. We're looking for a king.

Innkeeper I thought you said a couple. Make your mind up.

Sheph'd 2 A couple that is about to give birth to a king.

Innkeeper Well he's not a king yet, then, is he? Look, I've had a hard day...

Sheph'd 3 Some angels came and told us – they sang to us.

Innkeeper I really must get back to my wife...

Sheph'd 1 Have you seen a pregnant woman?