

Christmas Time in Hatter's Gully (by Mr and Mrs Sproule)

Class Four at Hatter's Gully Junior School had just been told about this year's Nativity play by their teacher, Ms Barrymore.

Alesha knew that if you wanted a good part, you had to get in quickly. "Can I be Mary, please, Miss!"

William was also keen to get a part. "Can I be Joseph, Miss?"

"It's wonderful to see such enthusiasm!" enthused Ms Barrymore. "This year the governors suggested that Mary and Joseph sing a Christmas carol."

"Oh," said William. He didn't like singing.

"Please, Miss," said Daniel. "I can sing! I'll be a sheep in the stable and I'll sing and William can move his mouth and no one will know, Miss."

"It's possible I suppose," said Ms Barrymore.

"Can I be a Roman soldier, Miss?" asked Jack. "I've got the costume already, Miss!"

"I don't think Roman soldiers normally appear ..."

"Yes, Miss!" said David. "They collected taxes and ... and ... things like that, Miss!"

Ms Barrymore thought for a moment "That's a good idea! We'll have a Roman soldier." David and Jack looked really pleased.

"Please, Miss," asked Rosie, "they had three kings, didn't they? Why can't there be a queen?"

"They didn't have queens then," declared Victor.

"They did, too! There was Cleopatra, wasn't there, Miss!"

"It's a good idea, Rosie," mused Ms Barrymore. "But the song we'll sing says 'We Three Kings', doesn't it?"

Millie was the class poet. She instantly saw a way round the problem. "We can sing, 'We Three Royals', Miss!"

"Well done, Millie. Yes, I think we could."

Rosie gave Victor a look of triumph.

“Who wants to be the innkeeper?” asked Ms Barrymore. Nobody put their hand up. “I see the innkeeper and his wife as playing an important part.” Quite a few hands went up.

Penny spoke first. “The innkeeper could have a husband, Miss. We stayed in an inn with a lady innkeeper.”

“Well, yes. I see them both having speaking parts.”

“I want to be an angel, Miss!” said Nancy.

“Angels should be up in the sky, Miss,” pointed out Victor. “My dad’ll fix up a platform, Miss, so the angels can be up above the stable. My dad’s really good at things like that, Miss.” Here he looked at his teacher’s face and saw that she didn’t like his idea.

“Please, Miss, my dad will do a really good job!”

“That’s a wonderful idea, Victor. Yes, the angels should ideally be above the stable but it could be a bit dangerous, don’t you think? They might fall off?”

Victor wasn’t finished with his idea. “We could tie them on, Miss, so they couldn’t fall off!”

“You mean, use a safety harness?”

“That’s it, Miss! My dad has them as well, Miss.”

“Well, Victor, I’ll check with the Head and I’ll let you know.”

“My mum’ll make the star Miss,” said Alice, “someone can hold it up on Victor’s platform, Miss. And they can walk along with it as the star leads everyone to the baby Jesus. Doesn’t it, Miss?”

“Well, yes it does, Alice,” replied Ms Barrymore. This raised platform idea isn’t going to go away, is it? she said to herself.

“We’ll need a donkey, Miss,” pointed out Jess. “and Alice and I want to be shepherdesses!”

Mia had sat quietly listening to all the ideas. She could see them all in her mind’s eye. “Miss, why not have the inn on one side of the stage and the stable on the other. The visitors should all have to knock on the inn door and ask about the newborn king,

Miss. It'll be funny if they all go through the inn and the innkeeper tells them to wipe their feet like my Auntie Sal does when we go there!"

Lots of the other students liked this idea.

"Miss," said Millie, "the donkey could wipe his feet as well!"

"Oh yes, the donkey," sighed Ms Barrymore. "Who wants to be the back end of the donkey?" No hands went up but Ms Barrymore knew someone would eventually volunteer.

The class was almost finished. Ms Barrymore told the students that she would write a story line using their ideas and bring it with her next week.

The students couldn't wait to hear it. It was going to be the best Nativity play ever.

In the next lesson Ms Barrymore sat them all down and read what she had written. "Right. Is everyone ready? Then I'll begin."

NATIVITY PLAY - THE STORYLINE

There was an inn in Nazareth many years ago. The innkeeper was doing some paperwork when a knock came at the door.

"Sorry, we're full," said the innkeeper.

"Don't you have a small room, a bit of space, a corner or anywhere sheltered for my wife and I?" asked Joseph.

The innkeeper was about to speak when her husband appeared from the next room.

"You look really tired and your poor wife! We have space in our stable. You can always sleep there, if you like."

Mary, Joseph and their donkey were led through the inn to the stable at the back.

"Wipe your feet!" said the innkeeper as they came in at her front door.

Mary and Joseph made themselves comfortable. Later the innkeeper's husband came hurrying into the inn from the stable.

"They've got a little baby!" he cried.

Soon there was another knock at the door. Some shepherdesses and their lambs were outside. “We’ve come to see the baby king!” they said.

“What king? We don’t have a king here. You’ll have to go to the castle to see him!” replied the innkeeper.

“We’ve followed his star! We were out in the fields with our flocks when an angel appeared ...”

“An angel?”

“Yes! Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, the angel told us about the king and the star.”

“What star?”

“That one up there! Come and look!”

Sure enough, there was a star directly over the stable!

“Well, he must be important if he has his own star! You’d better come in.”

The shepherds and their lambs entered.

“Wipe your feet! That lamb’s a bit dirty. Can’t you clean it?” said the innkeeper.

The visitors went through to the stable and worshipped the newborn king. The innkeeper’s husband had heard what the shepherdesses had said.

“He’s got his own star and an angel told them about him. That means he must be someone really special!”

“Wait a minute! If he’s to be king, what about King Herod and his family?”

“What about them?” asked her husband.

“But don’t you see? We can make some money! They’ll pay us well for this information!”

“You’re not telling them anything!”

“But...!”

“You’d better not!”

There was another knock at the door.

“Hello?” said the innkeeper. “We don’t have any....” Here she stopped as she curtsied low.

The king at the door spoke, “Good innkeeper, we understand that you have residing here a new born king. We have been following his star from the east.”

“Yes, your - your - majesty! He’s in the stable at the back of our humble establishment!”

The king turned to the queen and the other king who were waiting outside.
“The soothsayers were correct. He truly is a king of the people. As it is written, he resides in a humble stable!”

The royal visitors entered the inn.

“If you please your majesties, could you possibly see your way to wiping your feet? I’m sorry to ask but....”

“Don’t be daft!” said her husband. “Your majesties! We will be truly honoured to clean our floor after you and your camels have passed through!”

“Thank you, my good sir,” said the queen as she followed the kings through to the stable at the rear.

“The queen called me ‘her good sir’! Such an honour!” enthused the innkeeper’s husband. “And did you see the gifts? All that gold and I’m sure I could smell frankincense!”

“I smelt myrrh as well!” said the innkeeper.

Soon, there was another knock on the door. “Open up in the name of Caesar Augustus!”

“Now we’re for it!” whispered the innkeeper. “They must know about the baby king ! What do we do now?”

“Open up! We know you’re in there! There’s a star up above!”

The innkeeper opened the door to find a Roman soldier standing there.
“Yes sir! Sorry sir!” cried the innkeeper.

“You’ve been naughty, haven’t you!” said the soldier.

“I’m so sorry sir! It won’t happen again, you see we got this.....”

“No excuses! Pay up!”

“Pay up? What do you mean?”

“You didn’t pay your taxes, did you!”

“Didn’t we? I’m so sorry sir! We wouldn’t want to upset the mighty Caesar, our great Emperor!”

“Whatever. Where’s the cash?”

The innkeeper handed over a bag of coins.

“That’s more like it!” crowed the soldier as he took some money for himself and put the rest in a large official looking leather pouch. “See you again soon!”

“That was close!” said the husband, “you nearly told him about the baby king, didn’t you!”

“True, but it won’t happen again!” said the innkeeper. “That baby’s got all these people coming to worship him. He’s got his own star so he must be really special.”

She thought for a bit then added, “Think of all the people like us. Look how hard we work. At it day and night and what do we get? We pay high taxes to the Roman Caesar and King Herod and they live in luxury, don’t they!”

Her husband added, “The king in our stable isn’t going to be like them, is he! A humble stable’s good enough for him. Tell you what, I’m going out there to worship him. Are you coming?”

“Yes I am!” said the innkeeper, “and I’m not charging them for the use of the stable!”

So, the innkeeper and her husband joined the others worshipping in the stable. A bright, glowing star shone overhead.