

On the Bethlehem Road

An Advent Play by Fr. Dan Kovalak

BACKGROUND

A reporter doing ‘man on the street’ interviews of travelers to Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ birth. One scene only.

SETING

A busy ‘rest area’ on a dusty road. Props as indicated in the script.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Jenny Salami (reporter) (**JS**)

Woman Shopper 1 (**WS1**)

Woman Shopper 2 (**WS2**)

Soldier (**S**)

Hawker (**H**)

King 1 (**K1**)

King 2 (**K2**)

Murray (**M**)

Tour Guide (**TG**)

Children in Tour (**Chil**)

Prophet (**P**)

Clarence (an angel) (**C**)

SCENE

All Characters (except C) milling around rest area conversing. Reporter is center stage and calls travelers in their turns for interviews.

JS: (open narrative, facing camera) W.R.T.N, your 24-hour Roman television network, is proud to serve the Bethlehem and all Judea in bringing you live reports of news that affects you. I’m correspondent Jenoa Salami live on the Bethlehem road where literally hundreds are expected to participate in homecoming festivities with the Roman census. As you know, the current administration under Caesar Augustus has decreed that all the world should be enrolled and Governor Quirinius of Syria has demanded compliance of all citizens. There’s an air of excitement mixed with political chatter surrounding the planned events. And as your news leader, we’re on the story, bringing you the news when it happens. So, let’s ask some of the travelers how they’re feeling about all this.

(WS1 and WS2 approach...)

JS: Excuse me, ladies. Jenoa Salami, W.R.T.N. news. Could you tell us why YOU'RE headed for Bethlehem?

WS1 (amazed): Me? You mean I'm on TV?

WS2 (adjusting her hair): Oh Jenny, darling, I simply love your show. I watch it all the time.

JS: Well, thank you. Tell us, where are you traveling from?

WS1: We're from the land of Gadara.

WS2 (proudly): Home of the famous pig farms.

JS: Gadara? Why, that's on the far side of the Sea of Galilee! What brings you all the way to Bethlehem?

WS2: What else, deary...shopping! We'll go anywhere for a sale!

WS1 (displaying newspaper): We saw this ad in the Gadara Gazette of this great Census Sale and couldn't miss it for the world!

JS: So, you're really not here for the census?

WS1: Heavens, no! Our husbands work for the Gadara government, running the pig farms.

WS2 (proudly): They're in the pork business!

JS: Oh, I see. SO this is just a pleasure trip for you?

WS1: Absolutely. And we'll be at Caesar-Mart in Bethlehem as soon as the doors open...

WS2...for the "shop till you drop" sale!

JS: Well, I just might see you there myself! Ladies, there is talk among the travelers of some miraculous event to take place during the census. What, if anything, are you hearing about this?

WS1: Oh, there's always some speculation of some miracle among religious types. But we worship our idols and others worship theirs.

WS2: They look for miracles to bring some excitement to their boring lives. We look for sales!

JS: So there's no religious significance or expectation to your coming to Bethlehem?

WS1: No, not at all.

WS2: Jenny, we just SHOP religiously!

JS: Thank you, ladies, for sharing that. Happy shopping! (**WS1** and **WS2** return to crowd.) I see a company of soldiers over there by the vending machines. Maybe we can talk with one of them to get a handle on the pulse of the people on the Bethlehem road. (**S** approaches) Excuse me, sir, Jenoa Salami, W.R.T.N. News. Could you tell us what's happening here and what you're doing?

S: I'm just obeying orders, Ma'am. (to crowd) Let's Keep moving along folks! No sponging the line for the change machine. (to **JS**) Am I on TV?

JS: Yes. We're live on W.R.T.N., proud to serve the Roman Empire. Sir, what is your job here and what are you hearing from this crowd of travelers?

S: I'm just making sure that their papers are in order and there's no trouble. Quirinius wants everything calm and peaceful.

JS: Have there been any problems?

S: Not really, considering the number of people on this road. There's only been one minor incident so far.

JS: What was that?

S: A guy from Nazareth with a pregnant wife was getting folks stirred-up. Some of his fellow countrymen were harassing them, accusing his wife of...well...certain things. But I settled them down.

JS: What accusations were being made?

S: Jenny, you're on TV. Do I have to draw a picture?

JS: I suppose not. But what are you hearing from travelers about some miracle that supposed to happen during this census?

S: Nothing I haven't heard before. Around these parts, folks have been talking about a Messiah coming for a few hundred years. It's just more of the same. (to a traveler...) Hey you! I saw you take that woman's sack. Give it back NOW or I'll arrest you!

JS: Is that a common occurrence?

S: Lady, there are rotten apples in every bunch. Excuse me now, I've got check the papers of those tourists.

JS: Well, thank you sire. (**S** rejoins crowd and **H** approaches) Excuse me, madam. Do you have a moment for a few questions?

H: You're that Roman TV. person, aren't you?! Of course I have time for you.

JS: What are you doing on the Bethlehem road today?

H: Just passing out these flyers.

JS: Flyers for what?

H: Dining and Entertainment! (showing a flyer) Look. The Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce is offering all these special deals, with discount coupons during the census!

JS: I'm sure our viewers would like to hear about some of them.

H: My pleasure. The Bethlehem Inn is offering an all-you-can-eat buffet. The midtown merchants association is offering great deals during their annual Winter Solstice sale. And Caesar-Mart is offering a "buy one, get one free" on Doctor Sholtzstein sandals.

JS: Impressive! I see the theaters have specials shows, too.

H: Indeed! There'll be a "Night of Stars" featuring the biggest acts of the Roman Empire: the magic of Copper Davidfeild, the comedy of Danger Rodnerfield, and the famous Caesar showgirls. Ooo-la-la!

J: Wow. That's quite a line-up. And (pointing up) how great is it that the HEAVENS are providing the brightest star I've ever seen for your "Night of Stars."

H: That's right, Jenny. The local chapter or Stargazers is even hosting a hike to the hills of Shepherds field for the best view of THAT star!

JS: Bethlehem's business will certainly be booming.

H: We hope so, because the economy's not been that good lately. Thanks for the opportunity to tell your viewers about all the special census happenings.

JS: You're welcome. And may I remind our viewers that W.R.T.N. will be doing a live broadcast from the "Nights of Stars." Check your local listings. (**H** departs and **K1**, **K2** and **M** approach.) Gentlemen, could you spare a moment for W.R.T.N. News?

K1 (to **K2** and **M**): Come brothers, it is Jenny Salami from Roman TV (to **JS**) Very pleased to meet you, Miss Jenny.

K2: Very honored indeed to see you...in person!

M: You're much shorter than you look on TV.

JS: Sirs, let me first say I simply love your clothes! Very royal looking. Now, what brings you to the Bethlehem road today?

K2: Is that where we are? We weren't quite sure. (pointing up_ We have just been following that star.

K1: King Herod commanded we do so.

M: We always do what Herod says.

JS: Interesting. I had no idea Herod was into astronomy.

K1: He's not, really.

K2: It's actually his wife's hobby.

M: He's concerned about what the star points to.

JS: And that would be...?

K1:...the coming of a king.

K2: ...the birth of a holy child.

M: Herod's a bit paranoid.

JS: I've heard other travelers talking about this. What've you heard?

K1: As you say. The star signals a royal birth.

K2: And we come to worship the new king...

M: ...and offer gifts!

JS: You're kidding, right? I mean Herod wouldn't stand for competition.

K1, K2, and M (sheepishly): Yeah, we know.

K1: Just the same, we come to worship him...

K2: ...through we know nothing else except he will soon be born under heaven's great star...

M: ...and he will rule heaven and earth!

JS: Fascinating. And what are you bringing to offer this new, soon-to-be-born king?

K1: Well (almost a whisper): I've got a sack of royal gold. He'll be a king, you know.

K2: And I have the finest frankincense that money can buy because the new king will offer sacrifice.

M: I've got the finest scented and spiced extra-virgin oil used to anoint kings.

JS: You mean...myrrh?

M: Myrrh?! I guess you could call it that.

JS: Oh wait. I recall some travelers talking about kings from the East bringing gold, frankincense...and myrrh. You're the kings!

K1: SHH. We don't want to be recognized.

K2: People will try to steal our gifts.

M: I'm not a king.

JS: But I clearly heard about THREE kings.

K1: Actually, we kings are but TWO.

K2: We bring gold, frankincense...and (pointing to **M**) Murray!

M (after pause): I just came for the ride.

JS: I see. Well good luck in your search for the new king. (to camera) You can be sure that W.R.T.N. will bring you any breaking news about a royal birth with live coverage if or when it happens. (**K1**, **K2** and **M** depart and **TG** and **Chil** approach). Here's an excited group of travelers. Let's see what brings them to the Bethlehem road today. Jenny Salami, W.R.T.N. News. Is this a tour group?

TG: Yes we're on our way to the Bethlehem Homecoming celebration. Am I on TV?

JS: Yes. Where's your group from?

TG: I'm with Desert Trailways: your number one source for Palestine pleasure travel with ten regional offices.

JS: Where's this group from.

TG: This pleasant group originated in Phoenicia.

Voices among Chil:

Are we there yet?
I gotta go to the bathroom.
Stop pinching me.
When's lunch?
Can I borrow a drachma?

TG: (to **Chil**) Please settle down! Can't you see I'm on TV! (to **JS**) You'll have to excuse them. They're a bit tired from the tour.

JS: You're heading for Bethlehem today...why?

TG Its our final stop—thank God! We started years—I mean a few days—ago. We've already visited the Gadara pig farms. the Supermall in Magdala, the Cana Wineries and the Samara Spas. Yesterday we toured the Jerusalem Temple and the Gethsemane Olive Orchards, and made a quick stop in Jericho. Now—finally—we're headed to Bethlehem.

JS: That's quite an itinerary!

TG: Desert Trailways offers the best in Palestine pleasure travel.

JS: What do you think will make your Bethlehem stop special?

TG: In spite of the cameras, Homecoming celebrations are joyous events. We felt this destination would bring this particular tour to a happy conclusion.

JS: So you're tour has nothing to do with the census or religious purposes like most of these travelers?

TG: No. This tour was booked months ago purely as a pleasure tour—no political hassles or religious purposes. These people paid good money to enjoy themselves.

Voices among Chil”

Are we there yet?
I gotta go to the bathroom.
Stop pinching me.
When's lunch?
Can I borrow a drachma?

TG: (to Chil, exasperated) I'll be right there, folks. Chill out! (to JS) You'll have to excuse me. The natives are getting restless. I must go back to work.

JS: Certainly. (to camera) As you see, ladies and gentlemen, the Bethlehem road today included a variety of diverse travelers. (**TG** and **Chil** depart. **P** approaches). Here's another "interesting-looking" traveler. Sir, may I ask, what brings you on the Bethlehem Road today?

P: Who are you?

JS: I'm Jenny Salami. W.R.T.N. News...from TV...

P: Pleased to make your acquaintance. What is TV?

JS: Its an advanced technological device for mass visual and audio communication, but that's not important.

P: What means "technological?"

JS: Excuse me, but I'M the one asking the questions. Tell us, please, what brings you here?

P: My child, faith, hope and love bring us here.

JS: Why did they bring you....and where are they now?

P: Faith, hope and love are NOT people. They are the holt things of the human heart.

JS: Oh, you're a philosopher. You're here for religious purposed, then—this is like a pilgrimage for you?

P: I pilgrimage indeed. I journey to Bethlehem in the faith of my forefathers; to witness the fulfillment of their ancient hopes.

JS: So you concur with some of the stories we've been hearing—about the impending birth of a new king.

P: Not simply a king but the King of Kings; the Lord of Lords. As foretold by the true Prophets of the One True God!

JS: Sir, the entire Roman Empire—that W.R.T.N. is proud to serves—includes people of diverse religions following any number of gods.

P: There is but One True God, maker of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible, and this God has no connections whatsoever with the idols of Rome.

JS (to camera): I remind our viewers that the opinions expressed by our guests do not necessarily reflect with those of W.R.T.N. (to P) Sir, you may find some argument with your views form those who, even at this moment, are offering their daily sacrifice to Caesar.

P: Caesar is a man not a god. May those who now worship him soon find THEIR faith and hopes, too, fulfilled in the new king who comes to be born,

JS: Now, really sir...you should not try to impose YOUR opinions and faith on others.

P: Dear child, have you not heard of the God of our Fathers whose promises are sure; of His Ten Commandments and miracles—speaking to Moses from a burning bush, raining manna from the sky, rescuing His people time and time again? It is from this True God that the new king will come, as foretold by the prophets.

JS: Thank you very much sir. We really must conclude this interview and move along. Have a nice day.

P: Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

JS: Whatever you say. (**P** departs, entire begins to exit as **C** approaches)

C: Excuse me, miss. Could you please tell me in which direction is Bethlehem?

JS (to camera): The road is filled with ALL kinda of folks today. (to **C**) May I ask your name?

C: They call me Clarence.

JS: Well, Clarence, THIS is the road to Bethlehem. All you have to do is follow the crowd.

C: Oh thank you, thank you. I have a slight wound on one of my wings—I mean , arms—I lean legs—and I thought I was going the wrong way.

JS: Did you say wings?

C: Uh,...uh...yes. I'm an angel.

JS: A what?!!!

C: Haven't you ever seen an angel before?

JS: Surely now!

C: Well now you have...and don't call me Shirley!

JS (to camera): Ladies and gentlemen, this is unbelievable! This man claims to be an angel! Not this is the advantage of on the spot, live, news coverage.

C: I'm in the news business, as well!

JS: Mr. Angel—Clarence—could you do something..."angelic" for our viewers?

C: Shh. Not so loud. I don't anyone to know I'm lost. My superiors would be quite upset with me. I've got important work to do.

JS: What work is that?

C: I was sent to this time and place to join a chorus already assembles.

JS: Oh, not I see. You're on of the performing acts for the Night of Stars.

C: Not exactly. Out chorus doesn't really perform, we just, shall I say..."sing announcements."

JS: Announcements of what?

C: Whatever the Almighty God wants us to! We serve Him night and day: 24-7.

JS: Seriously, Clarence, do you expect us to believe that? You're as real and human as every other traveler on this Bethlehem Road!

C: Believe what you want. It IS my job. I was sent to do some announcing with the chorus...and all I know is I'm lost!

JS: What sort of announcement are you supposed to make?

C (fumbling for papers): I know I had it when I left...Let's see...wing maintenance schedule, pocket planner, address list...ah, here it is.

JS: Please, by all means, share it with us.

C: Alright. Its in two parts. My first part is just for a man named Joseph and his pregnant wife, Mary.

JS: That's interesting. A soldier mentioned that they had come this way earlier.

C: Ah, so I am close by. Anyway, I have a solo! It reads; "**Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.**"

JS: Well, Bethlehem IS David's city! Are you saying that the one to be born will be the Savior?

C: Miss, I don't explain them, I just announce them.

JS: What's the second part of your announcement?

C: That's our grand finale. For the second part, the whole chorus joins in. It reads; "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.**" (proudly) That's by far out best number. We've been practicing it for centuries and, now, its just about perfect!

JS: Wow. If that's true, we're on the verge of one of, if not THE greatest moments of human history. And you say it's going to happen around here, in THIS region—this DAY?

C: I'm not here for a vacation! Now excuse me, I really must be on my way. The chorus will be worried about me.

JS: Well, thanks Clarence. Shall I say..."Happy landings!" (**C** departs. **JS** to camera) Friends, we'd better conclude this broadcast now and move our operation to Bethlehem: to see what news awaits us at the end of the Road. This has truly been a remarkable live broadcast of W.R.T.N., your news leader. We hope to return to you very soon with the latest, breaking, possibly world-changing, news. Until then, whether you're traveling the Bethlehem road to tour, enroll in the census, shop, or, yes, even to worship and find the fulfillment of all YOUR hopes, remember that W.R.T.N. is proud to serve you. I'm Jenoa Salami. Thanks for joining us!

(camera off, **JS** afterthought)

That's a wrap. Those travelers were quite a crowd; all with different reasons for going to the same place...I'm outa here...

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