

The Christmas Tablecloth

Music
by
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Book & Lyrics
by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Pastor Jeff Shannon – late 20's – down to earth, nice guy, at the moment having some doubts about his religious calling

Susan Shannon – late 20's – Jeff's wife; supportive, understanding, upbeat

Carl Waldman – 80's – member of the congregation; leads the choir; kind, gentle, sweet

Marta Zander – 70's to 80's – a homeless, lost soul, sad, numb from the challenges of her life

Harold, Albert, Angie – members of the choir; senior citizens, set in their ways, each one comically curmudgeonly

In Flashback:

Young Carl – 40's to 50's – younger version of Carl Waldman

Young Helena – 40's to 50's – Carl's wife.

NOTE: ACTORS WHO PLAY ALBERT & ANGIE CAN DOUBLE AS YOUNG CARL AND YOUNG HELENA

Scene/Musical Number Breakdown

ACT ONE

Scene 1 – The Shannon Home, New Rochelle, three days before Christmas

FOR THE BEST – Susan & Jeff

FOR THE BEST (Reprise) - Jeff

Scene 2 – The Altar of St. Michael's Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, later that day

SING ALLELUA – Carl, Angie, Harold, Albert

WELCOME TO ST. MICHAEL'S – Angie, Harold, Albert

Scene 3 – St. Michael's, December 23, 8:20 am

A SIMPLE PIECE OF CLOTH - Marta

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME FOR MIRACLES – Carl, Susan, Jeff

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME FOR MIRACLES (Reprise) – Carl, Susan, Jeff, Albert,
Angie, Harold

Scene 4 – St. Michael's, 3:00 am Christmas Eve

QUESTIONS – Jeff

ACT TWO

Scene 1 – St. Michael's, 10:00 am, Christmas Eve / Vienna, Austria, 1938

SONG OF ANGELS – Susan, Carl & Harold

WE WILL MEET AGAIN – Young Carl & Young Helena

WE WILL MEET AGAIN (Reprise) – Carl

Scene 2 – The House of Hope Homeless Shelter, later that day

THOUGHTS #1 – Jeff

THOUGHTS #2 – Jeff

Scene 3 – St. Michaels, 10:00 pm Christmas Eve

SONG OF ANGELS (Reprise) – Susan, Carl, Albert, Angie, Harold

SOMETIMES – Jeff

SING ALLELUA (Reprise) – Susan, Jeff, Carl, Albert, Angie, Harold

WE WILL MEET AGAIN (Reprise) - All

ACT ONE

(IN DARKNESS WE HEAR A RADIO AND THE END OF A RECORDING OF JOHN LENNON'S "HAPPY CHRISTMAS (THE WAR IS OVER)"

*A very merry Christmas
And a happy New Year.
Let's hope it's a good one
Without any fear
War is over if you want it
War is over now*

(STILL IN DARKNESS, A DEEJAY'S VOICE IS HEARD AS THE SONG FADES OUT

"WNEW, 102.7.....That was John Lennon and Yoko Ono singing "Happy Christmas (The War is Over)" And its message certainly holds true this year, doesn't it? --the war is over; the boys are finally coming home! Of course, we've still got problems here on the homefront...the economy is in crisis, the President's approval rating is slipping each day and more and more Americans want to see him removed from office— but, in a few days we'll be ringing in the new year and we can only hope that 1974 will bring with it a brighter future for all of us. In the meantime, folks, you've got only three more shopping days left until Santa arrives... still enough time to get out there and grab the hottest item on everyone's Christmas wish list, including mine!—I'm hoping Santa leaves a pet rock in my stocking, this year! OK, back into more holiday music for you. This ones going out to the gang at the New Rochelle Sound Shack. Tthey have us blasting away on their stereos. Thank you, we do appreciate it. "Step Into Christmas" with Elton John, 102.7, WNEW FM.

(SONG BEGINS, CONTINUES AND QUIETLY UNDER SCENE UNTIL RADIO IS TURNED OFF)

SCENE ONE – The Shannon Home, New Rochelle. Three days before Christmas, 1973.

(LIGHTS COME UP TO REVEAL AN EMPTY ROOM EXCEPT FOR A SMALL STEP LADDER, A FOLDING CHAIR AND A FEW PACKING BOXES. A PORTABLE RADIO SITS ATOP ONE OF THE FOLDING CHAIR, FROM WHICH THE ABOVE MUSIC CONTINUES TO EMANATE QUIETLY)

(PASTOR JEFF SHANNON, DRESSED IN SWEATSHIRT AND JEANS, IS SEATED, AND IN DEEP THOUGHT. IN HIS HAND IS HIS CLERICAL COLLAR, WHICH HE STARES AT. HIS WIFE, SUSAN, ENTERS WITH A FEW LAST ITEMS TO BE PACKED INTO ONE OF THE BOXES.)

SUSAN

Well, this is the last of it. It's amazing how much we accumulated in five years.

JEFF

(LOST IN HIS OWN THOUGHTS, IDLY AGREEING)

Yeah.

SUSAN

(AS SHE PACKS THE ITEMS)

Well, at least this move gave us an excuse to separate the important stuff from what we can do without.

JEFF

Sure.

SUSAN

No sense in dragging things with us that we don't need.

JEFF

You're right.

SUSAN

OK if the radio goes in now?

JEFF

I'm sure.

(SHE CLICKS IT OFF AND PACKS IT)

SUSAN

Oh, I hope you were serious about getting rid of your old bicycle. One of the neighborhood boys was thrilled to get it.

JEFF

I know.

SUSAN

(REALIZING HE'S NOT REALLY HEARING HER; AMUSINGLY TESTING HIM)

And it's probably best that we leave behind that Ferris wheel in the backyard.

JEFF

If you say so.

SUSAN

(CONTINUING TO TEST HIM)

And I hope you remembered to punch air holes in the box that we packed your Uncle

Bernie in. It's going to be a long trip in the moving van for him.

JEFF
No doubt.

SUSAN
Jeff Shannon, have you heard anything I've said in the last five minutes?

JEFF
Of course.

SUSAN
OK, what did I say?

JEFF
(FINALLY TUNING IN)
Huh?

SUSAN
I think I've been talking to myself all morning.

JEFF
Sorry, Susan. I guess the reality is finally starting to hit me.

SUSAN
Honey, stop worrying. They're going to love you in Brooklyn.

JEFF
I wish I had your confidence.

SUSAN
They'll welcome you with open arms.

JEFF
I'm not so sure.

SUSAN
Trust me.

JEFF
I mean, it's natural to have some apprehension about taking on a new assignment, but for someone like me fresh out of the seminary.....How do I know I even have what it takes to lead a congregation?

SUSAN

Jeff, there was a reason you ranked first in your class.

JEFF

Yeah, first in my class practicing on other seminarians who are probably having the same doubts right about now.

SUSAN

What about those months assisting at St. John's? The kids adored you.

JEFF

Yeah, I was big with the 12-year-olds. But those were kids. I never felt that I connected with the *adults* there. No matter how hard I tried, I just never felt that I got through to them. But at least there, I wasn't in charge....the buck didn't stop with me. In Brooklyn, at St. Michael's, I'm going to be a one-man band-- the one who has to have all the answers. What if I don't have those answers?

SUSAN

(INTERRUPTING, OVERLAPPING, CALMLY)

Jeff.....Jeff....First of all, you need to give yourself some credit. You're a good man and a wonderful minister, with a strong backbone and a kind heart. They're going to sense that the moment they meet you. Secondly, don't forget that you're not in this alone. I'm going to be there every step of the way.

JEFF

I count on that. You know I do.

SUSAN

And you need to have a little faith.

JEFF

Not exactly something that should be lacking in a man of the cloth, huh? But, why of all places, Brooklyn? Why couldn't they send me to some small town somewhere? And why three days before Christmas?

SUSAN

There's only one man who has the answer to that...

(POINTING TO HEAVEN)

....and we know He works in mysterious ways.

(MUSIC IN CUE #1)

As random as it can all seem, I'm a firm believer that there's a reason for everything. It all happens for the best.

JEFF

Why do I feel a lecture coming on?

SUSAN

Oh, be quiet, and listen.....and keep an open mind!

(SINGS)

FOR THE BEST

**For the best
For the best
It all comes together when we're put to a test.
There's an answer for each question
And a reason for each quest
We just need to keep believing it all happens for the best.**

JEFF

Thank you Norman Vincent Peale.

SUSAN

I'm trying to make a point here. Pay attention.

JEFF

I'm sorry. Please continue.

**There's David from the Bible who achieved a special skill
playing with a slingshot, much against his mother's will.
She tried to confiscate the thing, but David was defiant
and luckily he had it when he faced off with the giant!**

JEFF

You're kidding, right?

SUSAN

What?

JEFF

That is the probably the most inane example of something happening for the best.

SUSAN

But, if his mother had taken the slingshot away from him.....

JEFF

I don't believe I remember the part about David's mother in the bible.

SUSAN

Well, he had to have a mother, didn't he?

(JEFF JUST GIVES HER A LOOK.)

(GIVING IN)

All right. Maybe I took a little liberty.

JEFF

You think?

SUSAN

OK, if you didn't like that one, then....

**Think about Columbus setting off that fateful day.
He thought that he was heading East but went the other way.
At first it seemed the voyage was a bad, unlucky break,
but you must admit it ended up a fortunate mistake.**

It was....

**For the best
For the best
It all came together when he was put to the test.
There were answers for his questions
And reasons for his quest.
because he kept believing that it happened for the best.**

SUSAN

Is that one any better?

JEFF

Better.....

SUSAN

Good.

JEFF

....not by much.

SUSAN

I am *not* giving up until I've convinced you!

**Right now you think you're on the verge
of something you can't control,
faced with a problem and might have the urge
to crawl into a big, black hole.
But now's when you've gotta think positively;
don't fret about what lies ahead.
Keep telling yourself that it was meant to be,**

and there's a reason for this, instead!

**Remember all the men who met in Philadelphia,
who signed a piece of paper that produced America.
They took a chance and put their lives and fortunes on the line
even though they didn't know the country would be fine.**

(SPOKEN)

It ended up

(SUNG)

For the best

For the best

**They all came together when they were faced with a test.
Searched for answers to their questions
and reasons for their quest
and never gave up hope that things would happen for the best.**

JEFF

All right, all right. Stop with the philosophy lesson.

SUSAN

Not until you agree.

JEFF

I agree! I give in! Just stop.

SUSAN

Let me hear you say it.

For the best

Come on...

JEFF

(REPEATING)

For the best

SUSAN

That's good.

For the best

JEFF

For the best

SUSAN

**It all comes together when we're put to the test.
There's an answer for each question**

JEFF

And a reason for each quest.

SUSAN

(QUESTIONING HIM)

We just need to keep believing?....

JEFF

...that it happens for the best.

SUSAN

**Time and time again you'll see
what hist'ry will attest,
good things come about;**

JEFF

(FINALLY GIVING IN)

they always will work out

SUSAN

if you never have a doubt

BOTH

that all things happen for the best.

SUSAN

So, no more doubts, right?

JEFF

(STILL HALF-HEARTEDLY)

I guess.

SUSAN

Jeff!!

JEFF

OK! No more doubts.

SUSAN

That's better.

(SHE GIVES HIM A HUG)

All right, I'm going take one last walk-through to make sure we haven't missed anything.

JEFF

(PLAYFULLY)

Having some doubts, are you?

(SHE GIVES HIM A LOOK)

Just kidding.

SUSAN

These boxes are ready to be packed in the car.

JEFF

Will do.

(SHE STARTS TO EXIT)

Honey?.....thanks. I'm lucky to have you.

SUSAN

(PLAYFULLY)

Yes.....yes, you are.

(SHE EXITS)

(JEFF CLOSSES ONE OF THE BOXES. STOPS. LOOKS UP TOWARD HEAVEN)

JEFF

OK, I guess it's all in Your hands now.

(MUSIC IN - CUE #2)

(SINGS)

For the best

For the best

**I'll try to keep believing, but I have to confess
just once it would be nice to have the answers to the test.**

(MUSIC STOPS)

(SPOKEN)

Nothing? Not even a hint, huh?

(HE TAKES A DEEP BREATH)

All right.....I guess I gotta do this without a net.

(HE GRABS ONE OF THE BOXES, TAKES ONE LAST LOOK UP TO HEAVEN.)

I sure hope You know what You're doing.

(FINAL MEASURES OF THE SONG PLAY OFF AS HE EXITS WITH BOX)

BLACKOUT

*MUSIC SEQUES AFTER APPLAUSE
CUE #3*

**SCENE TWO – St. Michael’s Lutheran Church, Brooklyn
Later that day.**

(UPSTAGE CENTER IS A STAINED GLASS WINDOW. SOLID WALLS ARE ATTACHED ON EACH SIDE. IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW IS A MOVABLE ALTAR, SPARSELY ACCENTED WITH A COUPLE OF CANDLESTICKS, A LARGE PRAYER BOOK ON A BOOKSTAND, POSSIBLY A FEW TOUCHES OF CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS. AT STAGE LEFT ARE 4 CHAIRS SET UP FOR THE CHOIR. AT STAGE RIGHT IS A LECTURN. EXITS ARE BOTH UPSTAGE LEFT BEHIND THE LECTURN (WHICH SERVES AS THE EXIT TO THE PARSONAGE), UPSTAGE RIGHT BEHIND THE CHOIR CHAIRS (WHICH FUNCTIONS AS EXIT FOR THE CHOIR), AND DOWNSTAGE RIGHT (FUNCTIONING AS PUBLIC ENTRANCE AND EXIT FROM THE STREET).

(WHEN LIGHTS COME UP, THE CHOIR--ANGIE, HAROLD & ALBERT, LEAD BY CARL WALDMAN--ARE PRACTICING. THEY MAY NOT BE THE BEST OF VOCALISTS BUT THEY HAVE SPIRIT)

CHOIR

**Sing Alleluia, a child is born.
The world rejoices in a brand new morn.
Hope springs anew from the son of Man.
God has brought forth His Heavenly plan.
Shout from each mountain,
sound ev’ry horn
and sing alleluia,
sing alleluia,
sing alleluia,
a child is born.**

ANGIE (solo)

**Sing alleluia, now Heaven’s caressed
the world with the news that our Father has breasts
each man and**

CARL

Wait....wait....stop....stop....

Angie.....did you just sing “Heaven’s caressed the world with the news that our Father has breasts?”

ANGIE

(GLASSES CLEARLY HANGING FROM A CHAIN AROUND HER NECK)

Yes.

CARL

Why?

ANGIE

Because that’s what’s written here.

CARL

No....no, it isn’t. Perhaps you should read it again.

ANGIE

(IN AN INSISTING TONE)

Sing, alleluia, now Heaven’s caressed the world with the news that our Father has breasts.

CARL

Perhaps you should read it once again....this time with Albert’s bi-focals.

(ALBERT OFFERS HIS BI-FOCALS TO HER)

ANGIE

I don’t need bi-focals!

CARL

You do, and if you had them you’d see that the lyric is “Heaven’s caressed the news that our Father has *blessed*.”

ANGIE

Oh....I that would make more sense.

CARL

Angie, you’re old. There’s no shame in wearing stronger glasses.

ANGIE

(ADAMENTLY, SITTING)

I don’t need stronger glasses. My eyes are as sharp as they were the day I was born.

ALBERT

She’s right about that, Carl.

HAROLD

Yeah, a new baby is blind as a bat.

(HAROLD AND ALBERT HAVE A GOOD LAUGH OVER THIS)

ANGIE

Very funny. And you have no room to talk, Albert.

ALBERT

What do you mean? I don't mind wearing bi-focals. Besides, I don't have a problem seeing.

ANGIE

Oh, no? Who was it that walked into a crowded "Ladies" room at the pot luck supper?

ALBERT

That was an honest mistake.

HAROLD

(CHUCKLING, ELBOWING ALBERT, WITH MUCH INUENDO)

Yeah, but that was a good one!

(THEY HAVE ANOTHER GOOD LAUGH. ANGIE CHASTISES THEM AND THE THREE OF THEM BEGIN ARGUING WITH ONE ANOTHER.)

CARL

All right. All right, that's enough, everyone. We've only got two days until Christmas Eve. If we don't concentrate, we'll never learn this music. And remember, the new pastor is due soon. We want to give him a good first impression of the choir, don't we?

ALBERT

(A BIT SARCASTICALLY)

If you say so.

ANGIE

Why do we need a new pastor, anyway?

HAROLD

Yeah, what was wrong with keeping Pastor Anthony?

CARL

Well, maybe the fact that he was 80, and just had a heart attack?

HAROLD

Well, if you want to quibble about it.

CARL

Look, don't you think having a new, *young* pastor here at St. Michael's will do us all some good, shake things up a bit, and maybe attract some new faces to the congregation?

ALBERT

We like to keep things the way they are. We don't need shaking up.

CARL

Albert, look around. You know there's a lot that needs to be done here, and Pastor Anthony was just getting too old to do it. It's time for us to look ahead, plan for the future. And getting a new pastor is a good start.

ALBERT

I'm not so sure.

HAROLD

Well.....there *is* a lot to be done around here. I just hope he's up to the task.

CARL

We all just need to keep an open mind when he arrives. He deserves that much from us. Can we at least agree on that?

(THEY ALL, MUMBLE RELUCTANT AGREEMENT)

And you promise to be cordial and give him a warm welcome?

ALBERT

We'll be on our best behavior, dad.

CARL

That doesn't give me much confidence.

HAROLD

Don't worry. We'll be good.

CARL

I hope so. Now can we get back to practicing?

(YELLING TO AN OFFSTAGE ACCOMPANIST)

Betty, let's start from the beginning.

MUSIC IN - CUE #4

(MUSIC IN, THEY SING. AS THEY DO, JEFF AND SUSAN ENTER. NOTE THAT

JEFF IS NOT DRESSED IN ANY CLERICAL GARB.)

CHOIR

**Sing Alleluia, a child is born.
The world rejoices in a brand new morn.
Hope springs anew from the son of Man.
God has brought forth His Heavenly plan.
Shout from each.....**

(SONG FADES OUT AS ONE AT A TIME THEY STOP SINGING.)

CARL

(WITH HIS BACK TO JEFF AND SUSAN)

Why did you all stop?

(HAROLD CLEARS HIS THROAT AND NODS EMPHATICALLY, INDICATING JEFF AND SUSAN'S PRESENCE. CARL TURNS TO SEE THEM.)

JEFF

Please continue. We didn't mean to interrupt.

CARL

I'm sorry; I didn't know we had company. Can we help you?

JEFF

(ANXIOUSLY TRYING NOT TO WASTE THEIR TIME)

We were just looking for the parsonage.

(BEGINS TO INTRODUCE HIMSELF)

I'm Jeff.....

ANGIE

(INTERRUPTING)

You're not going to find anyone there, honey. Pastor Anthony is gone, much to our disappointment.

HAROLD

(NOT EXACTLY HIDING HIS SARCASM)

Yeah, we're expecting some new guy any time now.

ANGIE

(REPEATING WITH EMPHASIS)

....much to our disappointment!

ALBERT

Some new guy who's gonna come in and probably turn the place upside down.

ANGIE

....and who's gonna change everything we like about St. Michael's.

ALBERT & HAROLD

.....much to our disappointment.

CARL

That's enough, you three.

(TO JEFF & SUSAN)

I apologize for my friends. They're a bit set in their ways in case you couldn't tell. I'm Carl Waldman, and this is Harold, Angie and Albert.

JEFF

(RELUCTANTLY)

I'm....uh..... Jeff Shannon.....actually, Pastor Jeff Shannon. I would be the new guy.....much to your disappointment.

HAROLD

Oh, oh.....

JEFF

This is my wife, Susan.

SUSAN

Hello.

ALBERT

Now, you've gone and done it, Angie.

ANGIE

Hey, I'm not taking the blame for this.

(THE THREE END UP ONCE AGAIN ARGUING ALL AT THE SAME TIME)

CARL

All right, that's enough!!

(THEY QUIET DOWN)

That isn't a very nice way to welcome the new pastor now, is it?

(*TO JEFF*)
Again, I apologize.

JEFF
It's fine....and completely understandable.

SUSAN
(*TRYING TO EASE THINGS A BIT*)
I suppose no one likes dealing with change.

CARL
I guess what threw us off is the way you're dressed.

JEFF
Oh, I'm sorry about that. I didn't expect to see anyone just yet. I didn't.....

HAROLD
(*INTERRUPTING, BEGINNING THE INTERROGATING*)
You *do* wear a collar, don't you?

JEFF
Oh, of course, it's actually in.....

ALBERT
How old are you?

JEFF
I'm 29.

HAROLD
Twenty-nine!?!? That's awfully young to be in charge of a congregation.

JEFF
You might think that, I guess, but....

SUSAN
(*INTERRUPTING*)
Oh, he's very capable of doing what needs to be done.

ALBERT
You got a lot of people here who like things just the way they are.

JEFF
No doubt. But there are always things that can be improved.

ALBERT
Not always.

CARL
(EVER THE CALMING SORT)
Albert, didn't we just agree that there are many things that need attention around here?
But now's not the time to bother the new pastor & his wife with the problems.

HAROLD
I disagree. I'd say now's as good a time as any.

(MUSIC IN - CUE #5)

(SINGS)

WELCOME TO ST. MICHAEL'S

**Welcome to St. Michael's. Before you start unpacking,
we think that you should to be aware of things that may be lacking:
problems that keep mounting and refuse to go away--
so many, we stopped counting, and there's more and more each day.
They might just throw your plans into reverse
'cuz no matter what you've heard...
it's prob'ly worse.**

**The collection plate on Sunday
is pitiful at best.
It's mostly stuffed with IOUs
that leave the budget stressed.
Don't think about the unpaid bills,
you'll only get depressed.
ALL THREE
What do you plan to do about it?**

ANGIE
**The people here are aging;
they won't be volunteering.
You'll need to learn to speak up
since they're mostly hard of hearing.**

ALBERT
(SPOKEN)
What did you say?

ANGIE
You heard me.

**We have a few young members
but they're quickly disappearing.**

ALL THREE

What do you plan to do about it?

ALBERT
**Those are-'nt stained glass windows,
HAROLD**

just windows full of stains.

ANGIE

The walls have started leaking;

HAROLD

we need buckets when it rains.

ALBERT

The roof is fairly sound,

HAROLD

at least the part that still remains.

ALL THREE

What do you plan to do about it?

CARL
(*SPOKEN*)

All right, all right. Why don't we let the Pastor and his wife get settled?

ALBERT
We're not through with him yet.

HAROLD
**The boiler has a problem--
it doesn't keep us warm,
so starting in November
whenever there's a storm
you'll need a pair of long-johns
underneath your uniform.**

ALL THREE

What do you plan to do about it?

ALBERT
**The ceiling is collapsing—
HAROLD & ANGIE
plaster's hanging by a thread.
ANGIE & ALBERT
Last week it came crashing down**

near Agnes Miller's head.
ALL THREE
If she hadn't dropped her bible,
poor Agnes would be dead.
What do you plan to do about it?

ALBERT
The rest room is off-limits;
the pipes froze on the first.
ANGIE
You should have heard the way
old Roger Gillenhammy cursed.
HAROLD
That's cuz he was sitting
on the toilet when it burst.

ALL THREE
What do you plan to do about it?

ANGIE
That's it in a nutshell, there are things that need attention,
HAROLD
much more on the list but far too many here to mention.
ALBERT
We could go on and on but then we'd spoil your arrival.
ALL THREE
These are just some little things that threaten our survival
and might just leave a lesser man down-hearted.
But welcome to St. Michael's!
Welcome to St. Michael's!
Welcome to St. Michael's!
.....*How soon can you get started?*

JEFF
(ALMOST SPEECHLESS)
Well, that's quite a list, isn't it? I'll tell you what--let Susan and I get settled today, give us a chance to look around. And then why don't we all plan on meeting back here tomorrow morning for a work party? We'll get to know each other a bit more and we'll talk more about what needs to be done. Fair enough?

(ANGIE, ALBERT & HAROLD QUICKLY START GATHERING THEIR BELONGINGS)

ANGIE
(NOT BUDGING AN INCH ON THE ATTITUDE)
I'll check my schedule.

HAROLD

Me too. I can't commit to anything until I talk with the wife.

ALBERT

Yeah, we have to plan these things.

JEFF

OK. Then we'll just play it by ear. Susan and I will be here at 8:30 and we hope to see you.

SUSAN

I'll have coffee and donuts ready!

HAROLD

No coffee for me; it gives me the runs.

ANGIE

And I only drink tea.

ALBERT

Decaffeinated.

SUSAN

Oh. Well then, tea it is.

ALBERT

Decaffeinated!

JEFF

Tea and donuts at 8:30!

(BY THIS TIME THE THREE ARE ON THEIR WAY OUT)

HAROLD

If we can make it. I have to check with the wife.

ALBERT

Yeah, we have to plan these things.

ANGIE

Like I said, I'll check my schedule.

JEFF

(CALLING AFTER THEM)

Well, it was great meeting all of you. I know we're all going to get along just fine.

(AND THEY'RE GONE. CARL REMAINS)

I hope.

CARL
(A BIT EMBARRASSED BY THEIR ACTIONS)
Just give them time to get to know you.

SUSAN
Sure, Jeff. Today you're the new guy. Tomorrow they'll be counting you as one of the
group.
(TO CARL)
I can't wait to meet the whole choir.

CARL
That *is* the whole choir.

SUSAN
Oh.

CARL
Just add that to the list of things that need a little help around here.

SUSAN
Well, they may be few, but they're obviously committed.

CARL
Or *need* to be committed. Well, I'll be on my way. I'll see you at 8:30 tomorrow
morning. Welcome to St. Michael's...and I do mean that sincerely.

JEFF
Thank you, Carl.

SUSAN
Good-bye.

(CARL EXITS)

JEFF
(WITH GREAT IRONY)
Welcome to St. Michael's!

SUSAN

Now, Jeff, it's not going to be as bad as you think.

JEFF

That's true. It could get worse.

SUSAN

Now stop it. Just have some faith. And when in doubt just keep thinking over and over....

JEFF

Stop! Don't say it. I got it. It's for the best.

SUSAN

That's right. And don't forget that.

(SHE KISSES HIS CHEEK)

Now come on, we've got boxes to unpack.

JEFF

(RESIGNED TO IT ALL)

I'm right behind you.

(MUSIC IN - CUE #6)

(SUSAN EXITS. "FOR THE BEST" UNDERSCORING MUSIC IN SLOWLY AS JEFF TAKES A LOOK AROUND. HIS LAST LOOK IS TOWARD HEAVEN. HE IS ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING TO GOD, THINKS TWICE ABOUT IT, TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND EXITS AS MUSIC ENDS.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE – St. Michael's. 8:20 AM, December 23rd.

(JEFF ENTERS, NOT HAVING TAKEN NOTICE OF AN OLDER WOMAN, MARTA ZANDER, ASLEEP IN ONE OF THE CHOIR CHAIRS. HE BEGINS TO SET UP A FOLDING CARD TABLE. AS HE SETS IT IN PLACE, HE MAKES A BIT OF NOISE, WHICH AWAKENS THE WOMAN. SHE IMMEDIATELY BEGINS TO GATHER HER BELONGINGS, MOSTLY PAPER BAGS. THE NOISE FINALLY CATCHES JEFF'S ATTENTION)

JEFF

Oh, good morning. I didn't realize anyone had arrived yet. You're here for the work

party?

(SHE BEGINS TO LEAVE)

No wait. There's no need to go.

(SHE CONTINUES TOWARD THE EXIT)

Please.

(HE GRABS HER ARM AND STOPS HER. SHE DOESN'T LOOK DIRECTLY AT HIM)

Please. No need to be frightened.

MARTA

I have to go.

JEFF

Why don't you stay for a few minutes?

MARTA

I have to go!

JEFF

Please...stay and talk with me.

(SHE RELENTS A BIT)

You're safe here.

(SHE FINALLY GIVES IN AND RELUCTANTLY SITS)

I'm Jeff Shannon, the new pastor here.

(SHE IS DOESN'T RESPOND)

What's *your* name?

MARTA

Marta.

JEFF

Are you a member of the congregation?

MARTA

No.

JEFF

Well then, welcome to St. Michael's. What brings you here?

MARTA

I was looking for a place to.....to get out of the rain last night.

JEFF

Oh, I wasn't aware that it had rained.

MARTA

And I feel asleep. I'm sorry.

JEFF

No need to apologize. The doors are open to everyone.

(SENSING THAT SHE MAY BE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE)

Are you hungry, Marta? My wife will be here shortly with some food.

MARTA

No. Thank you.

JEFF

Do you live nearby?

MARTA

No.

JEFF

Where do you live?

MARTA

In the Bronx.

JEFF

What do you do in the Bronx?

MARTA

I sell things.

JEFF

What kind of things?

MARTA

Anything people will buy.

JEFF

Is that why you were in Brooklyn.....selling things?

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

Can you show me what you have to sell?

MARTA

No. I.....don't have anything left.

JEFF

Oh. I see.

(NOTICING SOMETHING IN HER BAG)

What's that in your bag?

MARTA

(PULLS THE BAG CLOSER TO HER)

It's not for sale.

JEFF

What is it?

MARTA

A tablecloth. But it's not for sale.

JEFF

Would it be all right if I take a look at it?

MARTA

It's not for sale.

JEFF

I understand. But I'd love to see it.

(SHE RELUCTANTLY PULLS IT OUT AND HANDS IT TO HIM. HE IS IMPRESSED WITH THE INTRICATE NEEDLEWORK)

This is beautiful. Where did you find it?

(SHE DOESN'T ANSWER)

(HE'S NOW FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT SHE IS IN NEED OF MONEY)

You know, my wife would love this. Are you sure you wouldn't want to sell it?

MARTA

No. Besides, it's very old.

JEFF

Nonetheless, I would still love to buy it for her. I have to confess, I haven't bought a Christmas present for her yet.

MARTA

(GRABBING IT BACK FROM HIM)

No...I'm sorry. It's not for sale.

JEFF

OK.

(USING ANOTHER STRATEGY TO HELP HER OUT)

I have an idea.....how about if I give you some money just in case you happen to run across another one like it in the Bronx. If you do, buy it for me and then the next time you're in the area you can drop it off.

MARTA

I don't think.....

JEFF

(INTERRUPTING)

It would mean a lot to me.

MARTA

Well....

JEFF

Please.

MARTA

All right.

JEFF

Wonderful! Just let me go back to the rectory to get you the money. Wait here. I'll be right back. OK?

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

Please don't leave.

MARTA
All right.

(JEFF EXITS)

(MUSIC IN - CUE #7)

(SHE SINGS.)

**A simple piece of cloth...
a few ornamental stitches...
the remnant of a life
once blessed with simple riches;
the fabric of a time
when only one thing mattered--
the days we had together--
before lives and dreams were shattered.**

**A simple piece of cloth....
the memories it holds--
all the happiness and joy--
now lost within its folds**

**When the world that you know is taken away;
when the life that you had is gone;
when the things that made up all the things you ever needed
disappear, with the will to go on.**

**When day after day as each memory dies
and the loneliness grows with each dawn,
what is left for a person to do except wonder**

why

why

why go on living

if the reason for living is gone?

*(AS MUSIC CONTINUES, SHE PUTS THE FABRIC BACK IN THE BAG AND TURNS
TO LEAVE. SHE STOPS.)*

**When day after day as the memories die
and the loneliness grows with each dawn,
what is left for a person to do except wonder**

why

why

why go on living

if the reason for living is gone?

(SHE PULLS THE TABLECLOTH OUT OF THE BAG, TAKES ONE LAST LOVING LOOK AT THE FABRIC AND WITH BITTERSWEET EMOTION FINALLY PLACES IT ON ONE OF THE CHAIRS, THEN LEAVES.)

(JEFF REENTERS, CASH IN HIS HAND. NOT SEEING HER, HE CALLS OFF TOWARD THE EXIT.)

JEFF

Hello? Marta? Hello???!!

(DISAPPOINTED THAT HE MISSED THE CHANCE TO HELP HER, HE COMES BACK IN, AND SEES THE TABLECLOTH. SUSAN ENTERS CARRYING THE REFRESHMENTS SHE PROMISED FOR THE WORK PARTY.)

SUSAN

Did you call me, Jeff?

JEFF

No, I was yelling for someone else.

SUSAN

(PLACING THE TRAY ON THE WORK TABLE)

Who?

JEFF

An old woman. I found her asleep here when I came in.

SUSAN

(INDICATING THE FABRIC)

What's that?

JEFF

A tablecloth. She left it behind. I could tell that she needed some help and I offered to buy it from her. I left to find the money to give her; when I came back she was gone.

SUSAN

This is beautiful.

JEFF

I know. And she obviously had an emotional attachment to it. It must've been hard for her to part with it.

SUSAN

Maybe she'll come back for it.

JEFF

I don't know. Poor soul. She just seemed so lost. I tried my best to let her know that she was safe here and for a few moments I thought that I had succeeded. Guess I was wrong.

SUSAN

We could try to find her. Did she say where she lived?

JEFF

She said the Bronx. But, in a city like this, even if she lived two blocks away we might still never find her. Great. My first full day on the job and already I'm off to a less than memorable start.

(ALA BASEBALL)

Strike one against the home team!

SUSAN

Well, you must've made some connection with her.

JEFF

Why do you say that?

SUSAN

She obviously trusted you enough to leave this with you.

JEFF

Let's hope so.

SUSAN

I know so! Why don't I put this somewhere safe just in case she does come back for it.

JEFF

OK.

SUSAN

In the meantime, when the work party shows up, the donuts are here, and the tea.

JEFF

(A BIT MOCKING)

Decaffeinated?

SUSAN

Decaffeinated.

JEFF
Good work!

SUSAN
I'll be right back.

JEFF
Thanks, honey.

*(HE BUSIES HIMSELF WHILE HE WAITS FOR THE WORK PARTY TO ARRIVE,
PERHAPS TAKING OUT A PAD AND PENCIL AND BEGINNING TO LIST THE
TASKS HE HOPES TO ACCOMPLISH.)*

JEFF
Let's see.....what do we tackle first? Leaky roof, broken plumbing, faulty boiler.....
Hmmm. I think the first priority is.....a cup of tea!

(AS HE POURS HIMSELF A CUP OF TEA, CARL ENTERS)

CARL
Good morning.

JEFF
Good morning, Carl. Would you like some tea?

CARL
Sounds wonderful.

(JEFF POURS ANOTHER CUP FOR CARL)

Sorry I'm late.
(LOOKING AROUND)
Where are the others?

JEFF
You're the first to arrive.

CARL
Oh-oh.....it's already almost 9. That's not a good sign.

JEFF
They might still show up, right?

CARL
You offered them free food. If that didn't get them here on time, nothing will. I've

known those three to get in line at the crack of dawn at McDonalds for the free senior coffee.

JEFF

I thought they didn't drink coffee?

CARL

Doesn't matter. It's free.

JEFF

So, you really think they won't be coming?

CARL

Don't let it get you down. Look, I know how they think. They're fully aware that St. Michael's needs someone like you if it's going to survive. They'll come around, eventually. But they need that to happen on their own terms....at least at first. They know you're at a disadvantage now, being new here, and they're just throwing their weight around because...well, because they think they can. It's as simple as that.

JEFF

You think so?

CARL

I guarantee it.

JEFF

I hope you're right

CARL

In the meantime, I'm here to help get things started. I may be old but I've still got some kick left in me.

JEFF

Great.

(HE REACHES FOR A PAD OF PAPER)

Well, after everyone left last night, I jotted down the problems they told me about, at least the ones I could remember. This is what I have so far. Look it over and see if I've forgotten anything. Once we have a complete list, we'll figure out what needs to happen first.

CARL

(LOOKING OVER THE LIST)

All right.

JEFF

Are you married, Carl?

CARL

I was. My wife died many years ago, in Austria.

JEFF

I'm sorry.

CARL

That's where we lived....in Vienna.

JEFF

What brought you to the states?

CARL

I left shortly after the war.

JEFF

It must've been hard to leave your home behind.

CARL

Once my wife died, there wasn't much more reason to stay.

JEFF

Any children?

CARL

None, but we tried. How about you?

JEFF

Not yet. We just need to get our lives more in order before we can think about raising a family.

(SUSAN REENTERS)

SUSAN

Good morning, Carl. So nice to see you again.

CARL

It's my pleasure, completely, Mrs. Shannon.

SUSAN

Aren't you sweet?! And please call me Susan.

CARL

Susan it is.

SUSAN
The others haven't arrived?

JEFF
Not yet. We're not really sure if they're coming at all. Strike two!

CARL
They won't stay away forever.

JEFF
If you say so.

CARL
Look....

(MUSIC IN - CUE #8)

(SINGS)

**I know that you're feeling a little defeated
There's a battle to fight but the troops have retreated,
but don't give up just yet, they may still come around.
Now is the time that it's best to remember
what happens each year in the month of December.
The one thing that holds true
and can change your point of view.**

**Christmas is a time for miracles,
if only you believe.
What better time of year for a miracle to happen
then on Christmas eve?
When each smile seems to overflow with holiday cheer,
when there's a joyous message in each song that you hear,
when you can feel a special something in the atmosphere,
then it must be Christmas.**

SUSAN
Carl, I like the way you think.

CARL
Thank you, Susan!

**Christmas is a time for miracles.
and the love it can leave.**

**It wraps the world in its glow
with its blanket of snow
and wears its big heart on its sleeve.
Christmas is a time for miracles
but you gotta to believe!**

JEFF

Just what I need--another philopsher in my life.

SUSAN

Jeff, he's right. You know what they say....wishes can come true on Christmas eve.

JEFF

Yes, and they also say, "be careful what you wish for?"

CARL

But if you're afraid to wish, how will your wishes ever come true?

JEFF

I guess so.

SUSAN

We need to just keep thinking....

**Christmas is a time for miracles.
It gives us hope again
The world's full of promises just waiting to happen.
You never know where or when.**

CARL

It's the time of year when magic always fills the air

SUSAN

When peace on earth, good will to men is everywhere

BOTH

**No other kind of feeling can begin to compare
to the feeling of Christmas.**

CARL

I think he may be coming around. What do you say, Jeff?

CARL & SUSAN

**Christmas is a time for miracles
and the wonders they weave.
It's a season that seems**

**to always fill us with dreams
and it's wondrous to conceive
that Christmas is a time for miracles,
but you gotta believe.**

JEFF

OK. You convinced me. From this point on, nothing is going to stop us because we believe in the magic of Christmas!

CARL

That's the spirit!

JEFF

**Christmas is a time for miracles.
That's what we're gonna need!**

SUSAN

Jeff!

JEFF

**But if we have some faith and start by thinking positively,
then we're gonna succeed.**

SUSAN

You said it!

The spirit of the holiday will get us through.

CARL

If we trust it has the power to make our dreams come true.

JEFF

(HOLDING UP THE LIST OF PROBLEMS)

Remember that we're gonna have a lot to do.

SUSAN & CARL

**Then be thankful it's Christmas!
Because**

ALL 3

**Christmas is a time for miracles
Think what we can achieve.
We can make a new start
if we open our hearts
to all the blessings we'll receive.
Christmas is a time for miracles,**

it's no time to grieve!

CARL
Never doubt what you'll find

JEFF
if you open your mind

SUSAN
to the things you never could perceive

ALL THREE
**because Christmas is a time for knowing
the wishes that we wish for can come overflowing.
Christmas is a time for miracles**

JEFF
(TO THEM)
but you gotta believe.

SUSAN & CARL
(AGREEING)
But we gotta believe.

ALL
And we're gonna believe.

JEFF
(SPOKEN, ALA A TOAST)
To Christmas eve!

*(DURING APPLAUSE, ANGIE, HAROLD & ALBERT ENTER ARGUING ABAOUT
GOD KNOW'S WHAT. ANGIE IS CARRYING TWO MCDONALD'S CARRYOUT
BAGS)*

SUSAN
Hey, they're here!

CARL
What did I tell you, Jeff!?

HAROLD
Sorry we're late.

JEFF
It's so good to see all of you. We weren't sure if you were coming at all.

HAROLD

Well, after we left last night, we thought about how rude we were to you and your wife.

ANGIE

And we decided that this wasn't about us. It's about what we all need to do make sure St. Michael's survives.

ALBERT

We agreed that we need to work together if we're ever going to fix all the things that need fixing around here.

SUSAN

That's wonderful.

HAROLD

So what have you done so far?

JEFF

We haven't started yet.

HAROLD

(TO ANGIE)

See, I told you we should have waited another hour!

ANGIE

Be quiet, Harold! And we brought a peace offering.
(SHE HOLDS UP THE BAGS AS SHE CROSSES TO THE TABLE)
Free senior coffee from McDonalds....for everyone!

(SHE AND SUSAN BEGIN UNPACKING THE BAGS)

CARL

How'd you get so many?

ALBERT

Angie went through the line four times.

CARL

They didn't stop you?

ANGIE

They tried. But would you want to argue with a senior citizen at 8 in the morning?

CARL

Good point.

JEFF

Well, now that you're all here, we can get going on our list and at least take care of the things that need to happen before the Christmas Eve service tomorrow night.

ALBERT

That was quite a list we threw at you.

JEFF

It certainly was. But we'll get it all done.

ALBERT

You're pretty confident about that?

JEFF

I am. Because it's Christmas.

HAROLD

And?

JEFF

And you know what they say....

(MUSIC IN - CUE #9)

**Christmas is a time for miracles
Think what we can achieve.
We can make a new start
if we open our hearts
to all the blessings we'll receive.**

ALL

(AS SUSAN AND ANGIE PASS OUT THE COFFEE CUPS TO EVERYONE)

**because Christmas is a time for knowing
the wishes that we wish for can come overflowing.
Christmas is a time for miracles**

HAROLD

(HOLDING OUT HIS COFFEE CUP IN A TOAST)
wherever they lurk

CARL

(TOASTING)

wherever they.... lurk????

ALBERT
(TOASTING)

Wherever they lurk!

ANGIE
(TOASTING)

And that's quite a perk.

JEFF
(SPOKEN)
Let's get to work!

(THEY ALL TOAST ON THE MUSIC BUTTON)

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4 – St. Michael's, 3:00 am, December 24th

(IN DARKNESS WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF A THUNDEROUS STORM WHICH INCREASES IN INTENSITY AND VOLUME. FINALLY A LOUD CRASH IS HEARD. THE SOUNDS OF THE STORM TRAIL OFF UNTIL THERE IS SILENCE ONCE AGAIN. LIGHTS COME UP TO REVEAL A GAPING HOLE IN THE WINDOW ABOVE THE ALTAR THROUGH WHICH A LARGE TREE BRANCH HAS BROKEN THROUGH. PIECES OF THE WINDOW ARE APPARENT ON THE FLOOR)

(JEFF ENTERS IN HIS BATHROBE. SEES THE DAMAGE)

JEFF
Oh, no.

(HE PUSHES ON THE TREE BRANCH, TRYING TO DISLODGE IT, BUT IT'S MORE THAN HE CAN HANDLE. HE KNEELS DOWN AND SLOWLY BEGINS TO PICK UP SOME OF THE GLASS PIECES. SUSAN ENTERS.)

SUSAN
What happened, Jeff?
(SHE SEES THE HOLE IN THE WINDOW)
Oh, my God. Are you all right?

JEFF
(SOMEWHAT DEFEATED)
I'm fine. I heard a crash. I thought the wind may have knocked something over outside.

SUSAN
(ASSESSING THE DAMAGE WALL)
I guess the storm was worse than we thought.

JEFF
I never expected this.

SUSAN
We can be thankful no one was around. Someone could have been badly hurt.

JEFF
Why this? Why now?

SUSAN
Jeff, it's OK. It's just a window. It can be fixed.

JEFF
I *know* it's just a window, but....

SUSAN
But what?

JEFF
Yesterday, when Angie, Harold and Albert finally showed up for the work party, I looked at that as maybe a sign things were going to be OK.

SUSAN
It *was* a sign, honey, I'm sure of it.

JEFF
And now this. You think I had doubts before about what I'm doing here? Well, this doesn't do much for my confidence. What else is there? How much more will we have to deal with? You *still* think everything happens for the best? Well, I'd like to know how this is the kind of Christmas Eve miracle we were hoping for.

SUSAN
I know.....it's impossible to find any logic in it. And maybe there *is* none. Maybe it's nothing but bad luck.....but you have to deal with it and move on. You can't let it defeat your whole purpose for being here.

JEFF
That's just it! What is that purpose? Simply to patch up an old roof? To fix broken toilets? To get heat from an ancient boiler?

SUSAN

You'll find out soon enough.

JEFF

I mean, if that's the case, they don't need a rookie minister. All they need is a copy of the yellow pages!

SUSAN

You know you don't really feel that way.

JEFF

I'm beginning to think I do. I mean, maybe this *is* the sign I've been waiting for. Maybe it's a sign that I'm not cut out for being a minister.

SUSAN

Jeff, give it time. You've only been here two days.

JEFF

And already face a year's worth of challenges, most of them having nothing whatsoever to do with what six years in the seminary prepared me for.

SUSAN

Look, this congregation obviously needs help, maybe more materially at first, but the spiritual stuff is still a part of it. Help them with their physical needs and you'll eventually open their hearts and minds to the rest.

JEFF

(FINALLY GETTING HIMSELF UNDER CONTROL.)

I know. I just need to shut up and forge ahead. It'll all work out.

SUSAN

You're not just saying that?

JEFF

No, I'm fine now.

SUSAN

Are you sure?

JEFF

I'm sure.

SUSAN

Good. Well, I guess we better clean up this mess.

JEFF

You go back to bed. I'll take care of it. There's not much more we can do until morning. The worst of the storm has passed.

SUSAN

Promise you won't try to deal with it until you have help.

JEFF

The choir is due in early to practice. I'll ask the men to help me.

SUSAN

All right. Don't be too long.

(SHE GIVES HIM A KISS ON THE CHEEK)

JEFF

I won't.

(SHE STARTS TO EXIT, TURNS BACK)

SUSAN

Are you sure you're all right?

JEFF

Sure.

SUSAN

OK.

(SHE EXITS.)

(MUSIC IN - CUE #10)

JEFF GATHERS THE PIECES OF BROKEN WALL. HE STOPS AND LOOKS UP TOWARD HEAVEN.}

JEFF

So, are you trying to tell me something? Am I just not understanding the obvious signs?

(POINTING TOWARD THE BROKEN WALL)

I mean.....there it is....strike three!

SINGS)

How will I know?
When will you show me?
Where do I find the answer to why I'm here in this place?
If there's a reason,
why can't I see it?
Why does it seem I'm caught up in some impossible race?
There must be something just out of reach,
part of Your grand design,
something that makes some sense of it all,
something I can't define.
Is it standing right before my eyes--
how I fit into your plan?
If I have the strength to see it through,
help me find it somehow if You can.

Ev'ryday,
I know it seems
that I ask you for more.
But it's just
I haven't found my way.
Give me a sign.
Show me the path.
Lead me to what's in store.
Open my heart.
Help me to know.
Tell me what it's all for.

Sometimes at night
I start to wonder
if I'm deserving of all the gifts you've given to me.
And, if I am,
how do I use them?
How can I be the man that I pray you want me to be?
I know you work in mysterious ways,
ways we can't always see.
Give me the faith
never to doubt.
Hear this, O Lord, my prayer,
my plea.

Take my hand.
Guide me through.
Show me what it is I'm here to do.
Open up my eyes.
Teach me to be strong.
Help me now to understand where I belong.

BLACKOUT
END OF ACT ONE

(MUSIC IN - CUE #11)

ENTR'ACTE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE – St. Michael's, 10:00 am, Christmas eve

(IN DARKNESS WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A HAMMER POUNDING. LIGHTS COME UP TO REVEAL JEFF ON A LADDER POUNDING NAILS INTO BOARDS THAT ARE BEING USED TO COVER THE STORM-DAMAGED WINDOW. HAROLD IS ALSO PRESENT, SWEEPING THE AREA. THREE BOXES OF FOOD ITEMS ARE ON THE NEARBY CARDTABLE.)

CARL

(YELLING OFFSTAGE TO THE UNSEEN PIANIST, BETTY)

You just keep practicing, Betty, until Albert & Angie arrive.

(NOTE: BETTY BEGINS PRACTICING "SONG OF ANGELS" (CUE #12) THAT THE CHOIR WILL BE SINGING, PLAYING OFF AND ON THROUGHOUT THE SCENE.)

JEFF

Well, I guess that will have to do until we can get the window replaced.

CARL

At least it will get us through Christmas.

JEFF

(COMING OFF THE LADDER)

Thanks for the help you two.

CARL HAROLD

You're welcome. No problem.

JEFF

(TAKES A LOOK AT HIS HANDIWORK)

Not very eye-appealing is it?

HAROLD

It's fine.

CARL

It's only temporary.

JEFF

I wish there was some way to cover it up for the service tonight.

HAROLD

I wouldn't worry about it. Everyone will understand.

JEFF

Wait a minute. I think I may have a solution.

CARL

What is it?

JEFF

I'll be right back.

(JEFF EXITS)

CARL

So where are Angie & Albert? We've got to practice.

HAROLD

They said they'd be a little late.

CARL

They're an hour late now. What's going on?

HAROLD

Free senior coffee at McDonalds.

CARL

(INDICATING A NEARBY TRAY OF REFRESHMENTS)

Again? They get free refreshments here. Why do they go there?

HAROLD

We're senior citizens. We have it coming to us!

CARL

Well, if they don't get here soon, we'll never learn all this music for tonight.

HAROLD

Don't worry. They'll be here.

(SUSAN ENTERS CARRYING A BAG OF GROCERIES)

SUSAN

Good morning, gentlemen.

BOTH

Good morning.

HAROLD

Here, let me help you with that.

(HAROLD TAKES THE BAG FROM HER AND PUTS IN ON THE NEARBY CARD TABLE.)

SUSAN

Oh, thanks! It's more food for the homeless shelter.

(SHE EYES THE PATCHED WINDOW.)

Oh, I see you patched up the window.

CARL

Yes, it's just a temporary repair until we can get a contractor in.

SUSAN

It looks fine. And I'm sure the congregation will understand. Have either of you seen Jeff?

HAROLD

He'll be right back. I think he went to find something to cover up our handiwork.

SUSAN

How's choir practice coming along?

CARL

We haven't started yet. We're still waiting for Angie & Albert.

SUSAN

Free senior coffee day at McDonalds?

HAROLD

And free apple pies for Christmas!

CARL

If they don't come soon, I'm afraid there's not going to be much music tonight.

SUSAN

Well, don't let me bother you. I'm going to finish packing these boxes.

CARL

Do you need help with those?

SUSAN

No. I'm fine. You two wait for Angie & Albert to arrive.

CARL

All right. But we're here if you need us.

SUSAN

Thanks!

(CARL AND HAROLD PICK UP SHEET MUSIC AND SILENTLY LOOK IT OVER. SUSAN UNLOADS THE GROCERY BAGS AND BEGINS TO PACK THE ITEMS IN THE BOXES NEARBY. AS SHE DOES, SHE BEGINS TO HUM ALONG WITH THE MUSIC THAT THE UNSEEN BETTY IS PLAYING. HER HUMMING EVENTUALLY BECOMES ACTUAL LYRICS. THIS GETS CARL'S AND HAROLD'S ATTENTION.)

CARL

Susan, you know this song?

SUSAN

It's actually one that we sang in the choir at St. John's.

CARL

You sang in the choir?

SUSAN

I did.

(CARL AND HAROLD SMILE AT EACH OTHER)

CARL

How'd you like to sing it with us tonight?

SUSAN

What?

CARL

We desperately need another female voice. And don't tell Angie I said that.

SUSAN

Oh. I don't know. How would Angie feel about it? I wouldn't want to step on her toes.

HAROLD

Who cares? Step! The more, the merrier.

SUSAN

Well...I suppose I could.

CARL

Would you like to sing it with us now?

SUSAN

OK, why not!

CARL

(HANDING HER THE SHEET MUSIC)

Wonderful.

(CALLING OFFSTAGE)

Betty. Start that from the top again, will you please?

(MUSIC IN - CUE #12)

SUSAN & HAROLD

**Angels from the realms of glory
Wing your flight o'er all the earth
Ye who sang creations story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ the newborn King!**

HAROLD

Wow, Susan, you make us sound better than we ever did before!

SUSAN

Thanks!

CARL

**Hark! the herald angels sing:
"Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild**

**God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful all ye nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies**

**SUSAN & HAROLD
Gloria!**

**ALL
With the angelic hosts proclaim:
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”**

**HAROLD
Oh, this is my part.**

**Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o’er the plains.
And the mountains in reply
echoing their joyous strains.**

**ALL
Gloria! In excelsis Deo.
Gloria! In excelsis Deo!**

**HAROLD
Angels from the
realms of glory
Wing your flight
o’er all the earth!
Ye who sang
Creations story
Now proclaim
Messiah’s birth**

**CARL
Hark the herald
angels sing
Glory to
The newborn King!
Peace on earth
and mercy mild
God and sinners
reconciled**

**SUSAN
Angels we have
heard on high
Sweetly singing
o’er the plains

Singing.....**

**ALL
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
With the angelic hosts proclaim:
“Christ is born in Bethlehem,
Hark! the herald angels sing:
“Glory to the newborn King!”
Singing; Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Hark! the herald angels sing:
“Glory to the newborn King!”**

CARL

Susan, allow me to officially welcome you as the newest--and most accomplished--member of the choir of St. Michael's.

HAROLD

And don't tell Angie we said that.

SUSAN

Thank you. I'm honored to join you.

HAROLD

Believe me, we're thrilled to have you.

SUSAN

Well, I better get these boxes loaded into the car so Jeff and I can get them delivered.

CARL

Come on, Harold, let's give her a hand.

HAROLD

You bet.

(SHE HANDS THEM THE BOXES)

CARL

Then while we're waiting for Angie & Albert to arrive, you two can work with Betty while I help the pastor finish the window project.

SUSAN

Thank you, gentlemen. They're not too heavy are they?

CARL

Not at all.

SUSAN

Follow me.

(THEY EXIT)

(JEFF ENTERS CARRYING THE TABLECLOTH THAT WAS LEFT BY THE OLD LADY THE OTHER MORNING)

JEFF

This should do it.

(LOOKS AROUND FOR CARL & HAROLD)
Carl? Harold? Hey!? Where'd everybody go?

(HE SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND PROCEEDS TO CLIMB THE LADDER TO TACK THE TABLECLOTH OVER THE PATCHWORK ON THE WALL. ONCE HE HAS IT UP, HE CLIMBS DOWN AND STEPS BACK TO TAKE A LOOK AT IT. CARL REENTERS.)

JEFF
There you are. Angie & Albert show up yet?

CARL
Not yet. Harold and I were just helping Susan load the boxes for the homeless shelter into the car.

JEFF
Oh, thanks.

(INDICATING THE TABLECLOTH)

What do you think? Just the thing we needed to cover up our unsightly patchwork.

(CARL IS SILENT, STARING AT THE FABRIC)

It's a beautiful cloth, isn't it?

(CARL STILL DOESN'T ANSWER)

Almost looks like it belongs there permanently, doesn't it?

(HE BECOMES AWARE OF CARL'S SILENCE.)

Carl, what is it?

CARL
I know this piece.

JEFF
What do you mean?

CARL
Where did it come from?

JEFF
It was....a gift. Why do you ask?

CARL

Because..... I once owned one just like it.

JEFF

What?

CARL

It was a gift from my wife....one that she made herself. She found a picture of a banquet cloth just like it in a magazine and wanted to buy it as a Christmas gift for me. But we didn't have much money, so she decided to make one just like it. We used it only on special occasions. She made such beautiful things. And she always sewed her initials into the things she made.

(JEFF GOES TO THE FABRIC, TURNS UP ONE OF THE LOWER CORNERS AND FINDS INITIALS)

JEFF

H. W.

CARL

(SPEECHLESS)

Dear God. It can't be.

JEFF

Carl?

CARL

Helena Waldman.

JEFF

Your wife's name was Helena?

CARL

Yes. Who gave this to you?

JEFF

A woman who stopped by the church yesterday.

CARL

What was her name?

JEFF

Marta.

CARL

She is a friend of yours?

JEFF

Actually, no....a stranger. I found her asleep here.

CARL

Did she tell you anything about the cloth....where she got it?

JEFF

No, only that it was very old.

CARL

Did she say where she lived?

JEFF

She mentioned the Bronx. She left before I could find out much more about her.

CARL

I must try to find her. It's possible she somehow knew of my Helena and may have information about what happened to her.

JEFF

You said she died during the war?

CARL

Yes. Although I never knew where or when.

JEFF

I don't understand.

CARL

We lived in Vienna. We had a wonderful life. Helena was a seamstress and I was a watchmaker. We didn't have much, but we loved each other deeply. Our world was perfect for so many years. The Nazis changed all that. When they began moving across Europe, we joined a resistance group that opposed everything that their vile party stood for. Soon it became obvious that Austria would fall to the Germans. We knew our lives would be in danger so we decided to leave the country. We were advised to travel separately, so our plan was to have my wife take the train to Switzerland first. I would then join her as soon as I could arrange to ship our household goods across the border. I still can remember the night she left.

(MUSIC IN - CUE #13)

(SCENE SHIFTS TO 1938, VIENNA. YOUNGER CARL AND HELENA ENTER. CARL CARRIES A SUITCASE WHICH HE PLACES ON THE GROUND.)

HELENA

But how will you find me?

YOUNG CARL

When you get to Switzerland, other members of our group will be there to meet you.
They will take care of you until I get there.

HELENA

How long will that be?

YOUNG CARL

Not long. I promise you. Just as soon as I can arrange to have our furniture shipped
across the border I will board a train. I'll be there before you know it.

HELENA

So many things can go wrong.

YOUNG CARL

Even so, whatever happens, I'll find you.

HELENA

I'm so afraid.

YOUNG CARL

(SINGS)

WE WILL MEET AGAIN

**No more tears, there's no reason to fear,
though the journey ahead seems impossible.
We must part, take one long last embrace,
as the oceans we face seem un-crossable.**

**But I vow that I'll find you wherever you are
for no matter the journey, no matter how far,
I will search through the world
and never give in.
I won't stop 'til the moment
our new life can begin
and we'll live for the day,
on that day when,
once more we'll meet again.**

HELENA
(*SPOKEN*)

How I wish I could be as brave as you.

YOUNG CARL

It's not only courage that will get us through. It's the love we share, which is stronger than any force that may try to break it. You must believe that.

HELENA
(*SINGS*)

**All my life, I've known one thing:
I was blessed to live in a world that's free--
all my days filled with wonder
at the hope and promise around me I see.
Suddenly, all is changing....
.....rearranging....
everything I once knew...
is slipping now from my view.
When did all the world turn cold?
Can the hatred ever mend?
Will we ever know a day it all will end,
when we can be one again?**

YOUNG CARL

**We won't stop, not until we
see a day, when there will be
no more hurt, no more grieving.
And we must keep believing
God will tell us what to do.**

HELENA

Will He ever see us through?

BOTH

lead us to a place where we'll be safe, and then

YOUNG CARL
when the war is done,

HELENA
we'll no longer run

BOTH
and we can be one again.

(THEY HUG. HE PICKS UP THE SUITCASE AND THEY EXIT.)

(SCENE SHIFTS BACK TO 1973)

CARL

That was 1938. She got on the train.....and I never saw her again. When I finally reached safety in Switzerland I was told only that when her train arrived she wasn't on it.

I searched for her for many years after that. Later I found out that the Germans had stopped the train and arrested the members of our resistance group. They took them to a concentration camp where they.....

(HE CAN'T SAY THE WORDS)

JEFF

I'm so sorry, Carl.

CARL

I punished myself for many years—had such guilt for sending her off by herself. Always wondering if things would have ended differently had I gone with her.

JEFF

You did what you thought was best for both of you.

CARL

So much of that story had faded over time. Odd how a piece of fabric could bring it all back in such detail.

JEFF

Carl, this is much too valuable to be hanging on a wall. You have to take it home where it will be safe with you.

CARL

No. Leave it be.

JEFF

Are you sure?

CARL

Helena would have been proud to know that it's here in a place of honor in the Church.

JEFF

Carl, I don't know if it's possible, but I'm going to try to find the woman....Marta.....again for you.

CARL

Thank you. If somehow she did know my Helena, it would be wonderful to finally have an ending to our story.

(HAROLD ENTERS)

HAROLD

Pastor Shannon, your wife is waiting for you in the car.

JEFF

Thank you, Harold. Carl, I'll do my best to find her. I promise.

CARL

I know you will. Thank you.

(JEFF EXITS. HAROLD NOTICES CARL STARING AT THE TABLECLOTH.)

HAROLD

Is everything OK, Carl?

CARL

Yes, I'm fine.

HAROLD

Albert & Angie have arrived. They brought McDonald's apple pies for everyone.

CARL

OK, thanks. I'll be right there.

(HAROLD EXITS)

(MUSIC IN - CUE #14)

(CARL GOES UP TO THE TABLECLOTH AND LIFTS THE EDGE TO LOOK AT HIS WIFE'S INITIAL, KISSES THEM, AND THEN SINGS)

**God will tell us what to do.
He will always see us through
lead us to a place where we'll be safe, and then
when the war is done,
we'll no longer run
and we can be one again.**

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO: The House of Hope Homeless Shelter, later that day

(IN DARKNESS, WE HEAR A SECURITY DOOR BUZZER RINGING)

FEMALE VOICE

Merry Christmas. Welcome to the House of Hope. How may I help you?

JEFF'S VOICE

Merry Christmas! It's Reverend Shannon from St. Michael's. My wife and I have some food donations for the shelter.

FEMALE VOICE

Thank you so much. Please come in.

(DOOR BUZZER SOUNDS INDICATING ENTRY)

(LIGHTS COME UP IN STAGE LEFT AREA TO REVEAL TWO CHAIRS, POSSIBLY A SECTION OF THE DINING AREA OF THE SHELTER. A SIGN OR TWO ON THE WALL MIGHT INDICATE "ALL ARE WELCOME HERE" OR SOME SUCH WORDS OF HOPE)

(MUSIC UNDERSCORES)

(MARTA, THE OLD WOMAN FROM ACT ONE, ENTERS CARRYING A SMALL PLATE OF FOOD. SHE SITS AND BEGINS TO EAT. HER Demeanor CONTINUES TO BE THAT OF A PERSON SOMEWHAT LOST AND DEFEATED.)

(JEFF ENTERS FROM OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STAGE)

JEFF

(CALLING OFFSTAGE)

I'll get the last box from the car, Susan.

(HE STOPS WHEN HE CATCHES SIGHT OF MARTA.)

(MUSIC IN - CUE #15)

(SINGS)

Is it her?

Can it be?

Dearest Lord,

now I see.

Now I can

understand.

Life has been unkind.

**She must be
all alone
on the street
without a home
living for
little more
than what shelter she can find.**

**I must find a way to let her know she has a friend.
Reassuring words to somehow ease her pain.
Make her realize the world has not abandoned her.
Help her understand, and give her hope again.**

(HE MOVES CLOSER TO HER)

Hello, Marta.

*(MARTA IS STARTLED AND AT FIRST DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.
EMBARASSED, SHE BEGINS TO GATHER UP THE PLATE OF FOOD IN AN
EFFORT TO LEAVE.)*

No, please don't go. I'm here to help you.

(SHE GETS UP AND STARTS TOWARD THE EXIT)

Please stay and talk with me.

(SHE IS JUST ABOUT TO EXIT)

Before you go, can you tell me anything about Helena Waldman?

(SHE STOPS)

MARTA
(AFTER A PAUSE)
Helena Waldman?

JEFF
Yes. Did you know her?

MARTA
Why do you want to know?

JEFF
The tablecloth you left at the church yesterday....I believe she was the person who made it many years ago. I'm trying to find out anything I can about her. Was she a friend of

yours?

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

So you knew her back in Vienna?

(MARTA IS TAKEN ABACK BY THE MENTION OF VIENNA)

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

How did you come to get the tablecloth?

MARTA

She brought it with her when she came to America.

JEFF

(SURPRISED)

So she *didn't* die during the war?

MARTA

(CAUTIOUSLY)

What do you know about Helena?

JEFF

Very little. Only that she lived in Vienna and fled from the German army in 1938. She was to be on a train to Switzerland, but never arrived.

MARTA

How do you know these things?

JEFF

Please, if you have any information about her or the tablecloth, I would be deeply grateful if you would tell me. Do you know for *certain* that she didn't die during the war?

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

And she was somehow able to make it to America.

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

Did she live in this area?

MARTA

Yes.

JEFF

Do you know whatever happened to her, Marta?

MARTA

She is still alive.

JEFF

She's alive??!! Dear God. Do you know where she is? How can I find her?

(A LONG PAUSE)

Please....it's very important.

MARTA

(ANOTHER PAUSE)

I am Helena.

(MUSIC IN - CUE #15a)

JEFF

What?!

MARTA

I am Helena.

JEFF

But.....you told me your name was Marta.

MARTA

That has been my name ever since I left Vienna.

JEFF

I don't understand.

MARTA

(SLOWLY, SADLY)

On the day I was to go to Switzerland, German troops stopped the train I was on and

began searching for members of the resistance group my husband and I had been a part of. I was able to escape before they found me. I walked for many days. To be safe from being discovered by the Germans, I told anyone who asked me that my name was Marta...Marta Zander.,,and I kept that name, even after I crossed over the border to Switzerland. I stayed in Switzerland for a long time, working as a seamstress, hoping my husband would eventually find me. But I never saw him again. I can only think he was not able to get out of Austria before it fell and was sent to a German prison camp where didn't survive. With the money I had earned, I eventually came on a ship to America. I kept the name Marta Zander. And, why not? Helena Waldman and the life she lived in Austria were gone forever.

(A PAUSE. MUSIC OUT)

How do you know about Vienna?

JEFF

Helena, I give you my word that I will tell you. But first I need you do something *very* important for me. I need you to come back to St. Michael's tonight for the Christmas Eve service.

MARTA

Why?

JEFF

There's some.....I have something there for you.

MARTA

The tablecloth? I don't need it anymore.

JEFF

No, it's something more than the tablecloth.

MARTA

What is it?

JEFF

I promise I will tell you. But, not here....., tonight at the church..

MARTA

No, I can't.

JEFF

Please. You must come!

MARTA

No, I'm sorry.

JEFF

But, why?

MARTA

(AFTER A PAUSE, EMBARRASSED TO SAY IT)

I no longer have proper clothes for such a solemn occasion.

JEFF

Helena, what you wear is not important. God is more concerned with what's in our hearts. And He knows your heart is good and how very special you are. He wants you to be there tonight. *I* need you to be there.

MARTA

I don't know.

JEFF

If you come, I promise you, it will change your life forever.

MARTA

My life is what it is now.

JEFF

No. It's not. You mustn't give up hope. There is more that's waiting for you. You'll see. So I ask you again...I implore you....won't you please come?

MARTA

(ANOTHER PAUSE)

I will consider it.

JEFF

I hope you will.

MARTA

(SHE GETS UP TO LEAVE)

I must go.

JEFF

The service begins at 10:00. I'll be there waiting for you.

MARTA

Good-bye.

(SHE BEGINS TO EXIT)

JEFF

Helena.....You won't regret it.

You have my word.

(MUSIC IN - CUE #16)

(SHE GIVES HIM ONE LAST LOOK AND EXITS)

Dear Lord, please lead her back. Give her the strength to overcome her fear. Help me to show her the miraculous gift that's waiting for her.

(SINGS)

**Suddenly I think I understand Your plan for me.
Deep inside my heart, it's all becoming clear.
Now I finally have the answer I've been searching for
and this is the reason why You brought me here.**

(HE EXITS)
BLACKOUT

(MUSIC SEGUES INTO NEXT SCENE)

SCENE THREE: St. Michael's – 10:00 pm Christmas Eve

(MUSIC HAS SEQUED IN THE DARKNESS. AS LIGHTS ARE ABOUT TO COME UP, WE BEGIN TO HEAR THE CHOIR SINGING. WHEN LIGHTS COME UP THE CHOIR, INCLUDING SUSAN, IS ASSEMBLED, LED BY CARL)

ANGIE, ALBERT, HAROLD, SUSAN & CARL

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

With the angelic hosts proclaim:

“Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Hark! The herald angels sing:

“Glory to the newborn King!”

Singing; Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Hark! The herald angels sing:

“Glory to the newborn King!”

(NOTE: MUSIC UNDERSCORES THE SCENE)

CUE #17

(JEFF ENTERS IN APPROPRIATE PRIESTLY GARB. AS HE ACKNOWLEDGES THE CHOIR AND THE CONGREGATION, HE LOOKS FOR HELENA WHO IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND. HE FINALLY TAKES HIS PLACE AT THE PULPIT AND ADDRESSES THE CONGREGATION.)

JEFF

My dear friends....On this most joyous of occasions, we think back to that night hundreds of years ago when a seemingly ordinary event took place—the birth of a child, in surroundings barely fit for the animals that inhabited it. *Today*, we understand the full magnitude of what happened that night and the momentous power that was set in motion, the power that changed the world forever. Back then, though, how could one begin to know the significance of what was taking place? How could those who gathered there understand that they were witnessing the world's first miracle? They couldn't.

And yet something compelled shepherds to leave their fields and go to that stable; something commanded kings to follow a star. They didn't know why, but yet they believed that God would eventually reveal the answers to their questions and the reason for their quest.

(HE LOOKS OVER TO SUSAN WHO SMILES PROUDLY AT HIM.)

It's a lesson which we all need to embrace every day of our lives...whenever we start to doubt, whenever things seem hopeless, when we think the world has turned its back on us.

**Sometimes
life can seem to go astray
and we feel that suddenly we've lost our way.**

**Sometimes
we begin to wonder why
nothing seems to make much sense at all.
And we start to doubt all that we knew,
everything we once believed was true,
we try hard to justify,
but somehow can't recall.**

**Sometimes
God does things we can't explain,
things that have no reason and no rhyme--
walls too high to crumble,
mountains hard to climb,
things that sometimes bring us pain.**

**But we must have faith He'll see us through
even in the darkest of our days.
Never doubt His reasons.
Never doubt His ways.
and He'll never turn His back on you.**

(SPOKEN OVER LAST PHRASE OF MUSIC)

Believe in miracles. They're real. They do happen. But first we have to believe.

(HE LOOKS ONCE MORE FOR HELENA. EVENTUALLY HE RESIGNS HIMSELF TO THE FACT THAT SHE'S NOT COMING.)

We will now turn to number 107 in our hymnbook and join the choir in singing “Sing Alleluia, A Child is Born”

(MUSIC IN - CUE #18)

(CARL STANDS AND FACES THE CHOIR, CONDUCTING IN SUCH A WAY THAT HIS BACK IS TO CENTER STAGE.)

ALL

**Sing Alleluia, a child is born.
The world rejoices in a brand new morn.
Hope springs anew from the son of Man.
God has brought forth His Heavenly plan.
Shout from each mountain,
sound ev’ry horn
and sing alleluia,
sing alleluia,
sing alleluia,
a child is born.**

**Sing alleluia, now Heaven’s caressed
the world with the news that our Father has blessed
each man and**

(AS THEY SING THE ABOVE, HELENA ENTERS TIMIDLY, DRESSED IN AN OUTFIT PIECED TOGETHER FROM WHAT SHE COULD FIND AT THE SHELTER. SHE MAKES HER WAY TOWARD JEFF. ONCE HE SEES HER, HE RUSHES TO HER, HUGS HER AND THEN SHOWS HER THE TABLECLOTH AS IT HANGS ON THE WALL. SHE IS MOVED TO SEE IT IN SUCH A HONORED PLACE. HE THEN PLACES HER DIRECTLY BEHIND CARL.

THE CHOIR SEES THIS TAKING PLACE AND, ONE AT A TIME, STOPS SINGING. MUSIC ACCOMPANIMENT STOPS COMPLETELY AS WELL. CARL CAN’T UNDERSTAND WHAT’S HAPPENING. SUSAN STEPS FORWARD AND TURNS HIM TOWARD HELENA. JEFF AND SUSAN BACK AWAY.

UPON SEEING CARL HELENA BEGINS TO CRY.)

HELENA

Carl?

(CARL TOO BEGINS TO CRY)

CARL

Can it be true?

HELENA

Yes.

CARL

Helena?

(SHE NODS HER HEAD. HE RUSHES TO HER AND HUGS HER)

Helena!

(MUSIC IN - CUE #19)

I thought I had lost you forever.

HELENA

For so many years I prayed that I would see you once more. I never believed it would be possible.

CARL

We've finally come home to one another. This is a miracle.....our miracle.

**I vowed I would find you wherever you are.
Now, no matter the journey, no matter how far,**

HELENA

**we'll be thankful each day
that we are blessed
with each moment we'll have in store,
BOTH
now and for evermore.**

SUSAN

(AS SHE MOVES IN TO THEM)

**In this world, ever shifting,
we are lost, always drifting**

(JEFF MOVES IN)

SUSAN & JEFF

**but we can't stop conceiving
in the power of believing**

ALL
(AS THEY, TOO, GATHER AROUND CARL & HELEN)

**God will tell us what to do.
He will always see us through;
lead us to a place where we'll be safe, and then
with each passing day,
never more to stray,
He will light our way again.**

(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

BOWS - "Christmas Is a Time for Miracles"

(MUSIC IN - CUE #20)