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LIGHT OVER BYWELL

COMMENTATOR "As it is written in the prophets, Behold I send my messenger before my face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare thee the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. For there cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose."

(The organ plays. The 3 candlebearers go out to the vestry followed by Egbert, then by the other candlebearers. The organ swells, the area lights go on and the Narrator steps forward from the altar down to the chancel steps.)

NARRATOR And just as John was followed by one mightier than he, So was that earlier Bywell church replaced by one of stone. The ghosts that flit before us now are Norman ones, Valiant and brave, yet reverent, Godly men Who ruled with strength, but knew the power Of God was greater than their own. Here in this quiet spot they wrought great works. Come back 900 years and see them plan The building of your church.

(The organ swells and then plays softly as the Narrator moves back to the altar and a boy (Gurth) enters down the nave carrying a yardstick. This is 1093 and the boy is one of the villagers Instructed by Guy de Baliol to erect a new church. As Gurth measures industriously, the organ continues to play, and Cedric, a stonemason appears from the vestry, carrying a piece of stone. He places the stone on the left rostrum, and stands, feet astride, hands on hips, looking at Gurth)

CEDRIC So Gurth, you re working hard?

GURTH Oh yes Cedric. See, I know how to use the yardstick now  
(He moves to pulpit steps)

CEDRIC Good lad, we'll make a mason out of you yet.

GURTH I hope so, there s nothing I d like to be better than a master of my craft like you - except perhaps if I could be a knight and ride a big white horse like Sir Baliol, and have a sword and ----

CEDRIC Steady lad, steady. We re only ordinary Bywell folk you know. Not warriors like Guy de Baliol. Our work is here, in the village -- not in the saddle.

GURTH Yes, I suppose so, but sometimes I just long to jump on my Lord's charger and gallop off.

(He sits on the pulpit steps. Cedric works on his stone with a chisel

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CEDRIC           That's exactly what my Lord's nephew did one day.  
You know young Barnard don't you?

GURTH           Yes he walks with a stick.

CEDRIC           He walks with a stick because he's a cripple. He's been a  
cripple ever since he did what you've been talking about.

GURTH           You mean rode his uncle's horse?

CEDRIC           Right. He tried to ford the Tyne on horseback and was thrown.  
Now poor chap he'll never ride again.

GURTH           Is that why he always looks so sad?

CEDRIC           Probably, but if he grows up to be like his uncle, he'll be a true  
Baliol and a blessing to our village.

( Gurth rises and wanders across the acting area,  
scratching his head.)

GURTH           Cedric?

CEDRIC           Yes lad? Here, measure the span of this stone for me.  
(Gurth does so)

GURTH           Cedric , are you glad Lord Guy and all the other Normans came  
to our land? They are our enemies aren't they?

CEDRIC           Enemies? Well, in a way I suppose they are. But to country  
folk like us it's poverty and starvation and disease that are  
the real enemies. Now take our village. We've scratched a  
living from the soil for centuries. We've fought the Picts  
we've fought the weather and we've fought the floods. We  
usually beat them, but we still couldn't warm our bones, or  
fill our bellies, or worship our God as he should be worshipped

GURTH           I see.

CEDRIC           Then along came the Normans. A foreign people? Yes, with  
queer habits and a strange tongue, but since William Rufus  
gave this part of the North to Lord Baliol, why our enemies  
have been defeated. Now we have knights to defend us, our  
cottages are kept in repair, and best of all we have work  
to do - real Godly work ---

(At this point, Guy de Baliol and his nephew (Barnard)  
emerge from the vestry - the nephew holds a stick  
and limps)

GUY             What is this about Godly work?

(Cedric and Gurth fall to one knee)

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CEDRIC Oh idle chatter my Lord.

GUY Not so idle when it concerns God, Cedric.

GURTH (rising) Cedric was saying how good it is to be building a new house for God in our village.

GUY " A house for God". I like that phrase.

BARNARD Would that God could give me a new leg in return.

GUY You are bitter nephew. But remember those miracles that He performed in Galilee, and have faith. (Now Cedric, come and let me explain my plans to you again.

(Cedric and Guy walk backwards and forwards across the Acting Area talking. Gurth walks over to Barnard, and they simulate conversation. Gurth can examine Barnard's sword, while Barnard can wax curious about the yard-stick.)

GUY I want this church to be a building where worship will seem natural. A plain solid building, using your stout Northcountry stone, and those Roman stones which seem to be so numerous here. I want a simple aisleless nave with a short apse,- a font too, with your skill exercised on it to the full. A tower perhaps may follow. The riches and resources which I have are at your disposal.

CEDRIC What holy men will you bring here my Lord?

GUY I shall offer my church to the Benedictine monks of the House of St. Albans. I intend to visit the Prior at Tynemouth after the Christmas season.

BARNARD (centre) May I come with you Uncle? Please? to Tynemouth? We can ride all the way by the river.

GUY (Moving to Barnard)My boy - your leg -

BARNARD If you could only build me a new leg, Gurth, as you build this church.

GURTH If I could sire, right gladly would I do it.

GUY You're a good boy Gurth. Do you like your work here?

GURTH My Lord I love it.

BARNARD Uncle, if I cannot ride and hunt, I think I shall spend my time here in this church. My king I cannot serve, perhaps the greater King for whom this house is being built

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BARNARD (cont'd) ---will welcome my help.

GUY My boy, you speak with wisdom far beyond your (years) age

(Guy and Barnard walk slowly out into the vestry.)

CEDRIC Poor lad, and yet again lucky lad to be able to rise above his sorrows. You know Gurth, I'm no scholar; can't read or write, and yet I have a strange thought going round in my head.

GURTH What is it Cedric?  
(the organ plays softly)

CEDRIC Maybe it's because Christmas is so close, but I could almost believe I've seen the Three Wise Men in this place to-day, bringing their gifts, just as they did nearly 1100 years ago. Lord Baliol, he has the gold, and all of it is freely given in honour of God. And frankincense - that's something sweet; what sweeter than a person's love? And that's what you're giving Gurth, for you truly love your work here in Bywell. Now myrrh, a bitter herb. Surely our young Barnard has cause for bitterness, and yet he turns it to the service of our Heavenly Father. Yes, perhaps even to-day, here in Bywell, we have as much to offer as those Wise Men in Bethlehem eleven hundred years ago.

(the organ swells and Cedric places his hand on Gurth's shoulder as they walk out, down the nave to the West door. The Commentator speaks:-)

COMMENTATOR Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold there came Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem. saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him. And Herod sent them to Bethlehem, and said: "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him bring me word again, that I may go and worship him also.". When they heard the King, they departed, for lo, the star which they saw in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his Mother, and fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

(The choir sings "We Three Kings". The Narrator then steps forward, from the altar to the chancel steps)

NARRATOR And so the years pass.