

LIGHT OVER BYWELL
A Nativity Play for Bywell St. Peter's

The purpose of this play, which is for adults and children, is to tell the Christmas story through the medium of Bywell's own history.

Four episodes, showing St. Peter's, through the ages, depict in allegorical form events connected with the birth of Jesus.

The episodes are:-

- 1.803 A.D. The consecration of Egbert in Bywell, & a Danish incursion.
- 2.1093 A.D. The new St. Peter's built by Guy de Baliol
3. Mediaeval Christmas festivities, with a Scottish raid.
- 4.1771 The great flood.

These episodes link with the Christmas story in the following way:-

1. The Saxon story will depict Egbert as the counterpart of John the Baptist, looking forward to an era of peace, security and greatness in Bywell.
2. The Norman story will liken Guy de Baliol, his son, and an apprentice to the three Wise Men bringing their gifts to the service of God.
3. The Scottish raid will be repulsed by the arrival of three shepherds
4. The remarkable recovery of the Bywell baby in its cradle from the flood waters, will evoke in the child's grandfather, feelings similar to Simeon's when he saw the infant Jesus.

Throughout the play there runs a theme of seeking--ever seeking security, reassurance, guidance - seeking for the light. It will be shown how this search can for the Christian, be considered to end in the stable at Bethlehem.

The play needs perhaps 10 men, 3 women, and sundry children. The organ, together with the choir are required. Hardly any props are necessary, but period costumes are essential. Spots, floods, and a dimmer board are required.

The action of the play takes place mainly in the area bounded by the chancel steps, the pulpit, the reading desk (which will be removed) and the front pews. This is hereinafter referred to as "The Acting Area". A curtain area is stretched behind this from the main body of the church. When parted they should allow actors to enter down the centre of the chancel, and should also give a view of the altar, which might be dimly lighted in blue. In front of the curtain, on the chancel steps, is a chair. There will be 2 rostra in the acting area, one in front of the pulpit (right rostrum) and one in place of the reading desk (left rostrum).

It would be desirable to have two spotlights, one trained on the chair and one on the left rostrum. The lights over the Acting Area should be independent switches, so that they can be on when the rest of the church is in darkness.

(As the play opens the church lights are extinguished. A solo voice sings the first verse of "God rest ye Merry Gentlemen". The choir and organ join in the other verses. As they do so the Narrator draws back the curtains and stands to one side. 6 candlebearers enter, followed by the Commentator, The Commentator mounts the pulpit steps - 3 of the candlebearers group on these steps. The other 3 form up round the Narrator, one on each side, the third kneeling before him.

The spotlights are switched on as the carol ends, and the Commentor speaks.

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Commentator "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with GOD, and the word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.
In Him was life ; and the life was the light of men.
And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not."
(The lights go up over the Acting Area and the Narrator speaks)

Narrator "And the light shineth in darkness".
as it has shone throughout the mists of time.
As it lit Bethlehem, and as it shines to-night in Bywell.
Gilding the river as it ripples round this church.
Brightening our hearts, kindling our memories.
And memories hang heavy round us here.
As many as the berries on our trees, are shades
of other Christmastides, which Bywell folk have spent
In Christian prayer. For Bethlehem is never far from
Bywell at this time, and old stone wells are young again
As Christ the babe is born afresh each year.

(The Narrator steps forward)

Come back with us tonight. back to those other birthdays
Of our Lord. Here as you sit in peace,
See these walls crumble, pillars disappear.
See in their stead a wooden building raised,
Stout with the timber of surrounding oaks,
Bleak like the winds that scourge it from the East,
Yet warmed by simple love and faith.
Come back with us eleven hundred years or more,
Back to the Biguell of Saxon times.

(The Narrator turns and walks back up the Chancel to the Altar with his three candlebearers. He remains there for the remainder of this episode. There is the sound of an Advent hymn sung by male voices (eg. Come Emmanuel). Two Saxon men and two women enter from the West door down the centre nave. The two men stand at one side of the chair, and the two women take up a position on the other. As the first verse ends, the Chorus speaks:-)

CHORUS

Here since the dawn of time men have been living,
Living and partly living,
Braving the ice, the wind, the flood,
Fearing the spear the wound, the blood,
Living, yet fearing to live. ~~é~~!
Yet life is free and good
Hunting and ploughing, fishing, serving God

Women

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- WOMEN Caring for husband, children, home,
Living the simple Northern life.
- CHORUS Yet fearing as we live,
Fearing the flame that comes by night,
Fearing the pillage and the fight,
Fearing the ships that some day we shall sight,
Fearing the men from lands of Northern light.
- 1st. Man Will the Dane ravage Biguell's shore?
 (He moves over to the Left Rostrum)
- 1st.WOMAN Will the Dane strike with spear and rod?
- 2nd. MAN Can the Dane triumph over Christian law?
- 2nd. WOMAN Can the Dane violate this House of God?
- (Four children enter from the west door, down centre
Nave. They run up to the men, who welcome them)
- 1st CHILD (mounting left rostrum) Father, why are you standing here
 in the church? it isn't Sunday.
- 2nd. CHILD (mounting left rostrum) Why isn't Mother making our meal?
- 3rd. CHILD I'm cold, and there's no fire in the hut.
- 4th. CHILD (mounting left rostrum) And the wolves are howling in
 the ~~wood~~. Can't we go home?
- 1st MAN Hush children, hush.
- 1st.WOMAN Simple the needs of children; food and warmth and love
 Would that these words were all our ears should hear.
- 2nd WOMAN Would that our little world were compassed by nought else,
 Would that our lives were lightened of our fears.
- 1st. CHILD (running to woman) But what is wrong Mother ?
- 2ndMAN There s no need to be afraid child. We are waiting
 here to see our Holy Egbert.
- 2nd CHILD Egbert? Who is he?
- 1st CHILD Why, Egbert's a Bishop of course

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- 3rd CHILD Why should a Bishop come to Biguell?
- 4th CHILD Especially in winter, to a cold wooden church.
- 2nd MAN Egbert is a man of God my son. A Bishop, the 12th Bishop
Of Lindisfarne. He has been consecrated here to-day.
- 1st CHILD In our little village?
- 2nd CHILD A Bishop in Biguell?
- 1st MAN That is so child. The holy man is here to-day, poor
simple peasants though we be. We wait here to receive
the blessing of a true man of God.
- 3rs CHILD But why is he here?
- 4th CHILD Why has he left his priory on Lindisfarne?
- 2nd MAN He left because his priory is no more.
- All CHILDREN No more?
- 1st CHILD The sea destroyed it?
- 2nd CHILD A thunderbolt from Heaven?
- 1stMAN It was the---
- 1st WOMAN Hush husband, hush
- 3rd CHILD Was it the Danes who destroyed it?
- 4th CHILD I don't care about Danes, I m hungry.
- 1st WOMAN Thus speaks the voice of innocence, the voice of youth.
Would that our pangs were only hunger's pain.
- 2nd WOMAN Would that our thoughts could dwell on childish cares,
Would that our minds were free from fear of Dane.

(The second verse of "Come Emmanuel " is heard. Bishop Egbert emerges from the vestry. The 3 candlebearers at the altar precede him down the chancel, and group behind his chair as he sits. At the left rostrum one child should remain standing, the other 2 should kneel and the Saxon father should stand by them. All other actors move to right rostrum. The child should kneel on the top, The Saxon father should stand by with head bowed, and the women should fall to one knee and assume a reverent position. As the verse ends the Bishop speaks.)

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BISHOP My dear people of Biguell, my dear people of God. It is with great joy that I your Bishop, come to be consecrated by you. I say that I come with joy, even though I come from Aidan's Lindisfarne which lies in ruins neath the sword and fire of the Northmen.

(murmurs from his listeners)

I say with joy because these earthly woes are passing trials. Our minds must look beyond their narrow torturing fears and see the peace that lies ahead. For Advent is a time of looking ahead, and what great joy is there for those with faith to see.

(A noise of voices makes itself heard from West door of church)

Whatever perils lie in store, the promise still remains.

(A youth comes in, down the nave, and flings himself before Egbert)

YOUTH My Lord Bishop, the Danes are here!

ALL The Danes.?

(All actors on the left rostrum move across to the right rostrum. Egbert remains seated.)

Egbert Rise my son, have no fear.

YOUTH Their ships sailed up the Tyne under cover of darkness They have killed the monks at Ovingham and now they have landed here. You must fly my Lord, you must fly!

CHORUS Yes you must go!

EGBERT My people we are in the hands of God and in the House of God. Where better can we be?

(The noise has been increasing, and 3 Danes come down the centre nave from the West door. They carry spears. One positions himself on the chancel steps, another near by in the acting area, and the 3rd (the tallest) on top of the left rostrum. Egbert stands.)

1st DANE What, another holy man?

2nd DANE And more cringing Angles too.

3rd DANE The river runs red already with the blood of such as you

2nd DANE What place is this?

EGBERT This is Biguell. These are my people and I am their Bishop.

1st DANE So I see by your rich raiment (he makes a mock bow) Well my Lord Bishop, we don t worship your God, but we do like your pretty ornaments, so we ll have them.

(All the Danes advance on Egbert. The youth flings himself in the way. A Dane thrusts his spear into the youth, who staggers to the vacant rostrum clutching his shoulder. The 2 Saxon women move to support him. The 2 Saxon men advance towards the Danes. The children stay on the right rostrum. Egbert raises a hand and speaks.)

EGBERT Peace! In God's holy house no further blood will be spilt
What do you want of me?

1st DANE We want your pretty baubles. They will please our women-
folk across the grey North Sea.

(Egbert hands over his robe and symbols of office, and stands in a simple black cassock.)

1st MAN But my Lord- your emblem of power.

2nd MAN Your emblem of piety sire.

EGBERT My children, God alone has power, and piety exists without
a golden sheath.
(to the Danes) - Now go in peace you men of war, for plunder
lust and bloodshed have no place in Biguell.
(The 3 Danes hesitate, then turn and go out muttering.)

DANES We will see what the houses have to offer.

(The 2 Saxon men cautiously cross the acting area and kneel.)
The children kneel in front of Egbert, the women kneel
where they are. The church lights are extinguished.
Only the candles illuminate Egbert, who stands.
The organ plays softly as he speaks)

EGBERT And so the day draws on and the danger passes. But you
remain my people and your village stands inviolate. And so it
seems to me it always will. The passing years will bring
their trials, but out of evil shall come good. I seem to see
in other centuries a church of stone stand where this wooden
sanctuary is; a place ~~a place~~ where pillars, arches, tower
and nave rise splendidly in praise of God. You, in your
steadfastness and faith, my children are but the forerunners
of greater power to come. Now go in peace; and let your
minds be calm and still- as still as the night which surrounds
your little town.

(He raises his hands in blessing. The organ swells, and
the choir sings "O Little town of Bethlehem"
One by one the men, women, and children rise and move
out down the nave to the West door.
The Bishop and candlebearers remain until the hymn ends
Three candlebearers then group round the pulpit, the
other three stay with Egbert. Egbert lowers his hands
and clasps them, looking upwards as the Commentator speaks)