



**A Medieval Christmas:
Go We hence to Bethlehem's Bower**
❖ A Pageant with Period Music ❖

Presented by



Poculi Ludique Societas

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A Medieval Christmas: Go We Hence to Bethlehem's Bower

Cast, in alphabetical order

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Danielle Adkins..... | Angel |
| Susan Clarke..... | Citizen 3; Retinue to Herod |
| Alice Degan | Mary |
| Jennifer-Beth Hanchar..... | Salome (a midwife) |
| Jim Jones..... | Citizen 1; Retinue to Herod |
| Rob Kennedy..... | Citizen; Retinue to Herod |
| Mahaffey Khan..... | Jasper (a king) |
| Daniel Kim..... | Manfrace (a shepherd) |
| Peter McArthur..... | Joseph |
| Julia Meadows..... | Mose (a shepherd) |
| Robert Mitchell..... | Melchior (a king) |
| J.P. Napier..... | Retinue to Herod |
| Madeleine Redican..... | Balthazar (a king) |
| Lindsay Squire..... | Steward to Herod |
| Meredith Thomas..... | Citizen 2; Retinue to Herod |
| Daina Valiulis..... | Boras (a shepherd) |
| Connie Wang..... | Zelomye (a midwife) |
| Timothy Wright..... | Herod |

Musicians

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Bryan Martin..... | Lute, Voice (Baritone) |
| Andrea Budgey..... | Recorder, Voice (Soprano) |
| Randall Rosenfeld..... | Gittern, Recorder |
| Jennifer McCallum..... | Voice (Soprano) |
| Peter Drobac..... | Voice (Baritone) |

Production

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Director..... | Kimberley Radmacher |
| Co-producer, Costume Designer, Dramaturge..... | Linda J. Phillips |
| Clerical Consultant, Co-producer..... | Robert Mitchell |
| Stage Manager, Office Manager for PLS..... | Katherine Belyea |
| Assistant Stage Manager, Cherry Tree Design..... | Lauren Shepherd |
| Music Director..... | Bryan Martin |
| Text Modernizer and Editor..... | Alexandra F. Johnston |
| Publicity..... | Julia Armstrong |
| Costume Assistant..... | Nell Coleman |
| Poster Design..... | Irenaldo Fumero |
| Front of House..... | Marilyn Ramsingh |
| Set Painting..... | Joanne Rochester, Tom McNeely |
| Photography..... | Thomas J. Sheridan |

Cast and crew photographs and biographies may be found at
<<http://www.plspls.ca>>.

Please turn off your cell phones and refrain from photography during the performance. The play has a running time of 1 hour without intermission.

Special thanks to:

Barbara Obrai, J.P. Napier, John Lawson, Barbara Tangney, Luella Massey, The Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto

The Text: Selections from the N Town Plays

The plays in the N Town manuscript provide a wide variety of biblical drama. One of the “pieces” that make up the collection is a set of “banns.” Like wedding banns, this was a public announcement of something that was to happen in the future. The verses announce that a group of plays is to be played at “N Town” – literally Nomen, or “Name,” Town – i.e., fill in the blank. It was the custom in England in the late Middle Ages to put on these plays as part of fundraising efforts by parishes or towns, who would send out “criers” with fife and drum to go around to the neighbouring villages and advertise. The last stanza of the banns says: “On Sunday next, if that we may/At 6 of the bell we begin our play/ In N Town” – so you could say, “...we begin our play at St Thomas’s.” The texts of the N Town Plays were modernized for performance by the PLS. We are performing the sequence from the Nativity to the Adoration of the Magi. The sequence begins with the popular legend of the Cherry Tree.

—Dr. Alexandra Johnston

Director’s Note

Welcome to Poculi Ludique Societas and St Thomas’s Anglican Church’s annual co-production of A Medieval Christmas. We have called this year’s programme “Go We Hence To Bethlehem’s Bower”, which, for me, is evocative of the message of hope that this production offers. As I was studying the scripts before rehearsals began, I particularly was struck by the constant pastoral references across the three plays. For a northern agrarian culture like the British audience for whom these plays were originally written, the nativity story would certainly have been particularly poignant. We celebrate Christmas at the beginning of winter, long after the harvest and well before the next year’s planting. This is a resting time that awaits renewal. These plays constantly foreshadow Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, which is the emblem of humankind’s redemption. The image of the mean stable as a metaphorical bower, then, represents the promise of spiritual and literal abundance held within Christ’s birth.

And of course, it is to this lowly stable, the unlikeliest of places, that the other symbol of hope associated with the nativity story, the great star, draws the shepherds and the wise men. For me, the star of Bethlehem is yet another metaphorical foreshadowing of Christ’s promise: Seek and ye shall find. Our star appropriately processes through the sanctuary, leading bawdy midwives, poor shepherds and great kings alike to the same place. Whatever our personal faiths or beliefs this seeking is the purpose of every soul’s journey, represented within the sanctity of the newborn.

But amid this solemnity, Christmas is meant to be a time of joy and laughter, and these plays offer you these as well. I hope you will delight in the miracle of Mary and her cherry tree, and the worldly midwives, who understandably are a bit befuddled by Mary's claims of chastity. As always, the devious Herod offers a humorous foil to the more serious message. The cast and I had a riot creating these scenes for you. So laugh, laugh and be merry; and whatever comes your way over the next year, I hope you'll follow your star!

—KDR

Music Director's Note

In the medieval English play cycles, music is obviously expected, occasionally mentioned explicitly, and even (very rarely) included. The N Town plays are no exception. A few specific directions for music are given, and one character actually orders the musicians to play.

St. Thomas's parish community provided the initial inspiration for the source of our music. Its robust intellectual and liturgical life calls to mind what might have existed around a cathedral or collegiate church. This drew me to a specific source in the British Library, the "Ritson" manuscript (British Library Add. 5665). Compiled ca. 1460-1510, it contains carols in English and Latin, liturgical and other devotional music, along with a few secular pieces. It originated in Devon, and several composers identified in it were associated with Exeter Cathedral. Such a highly literate audience would have been perfectly comfortable with Latin, so all but one of the sung pieces in our production have Latin texts. Text is crucial: even where pieces are played rather than sung, I have imagined that our 15th-century audience would have grasped the connections.

One item deserves special mention. The shepherds, before they set off for Bethlehem, are directed to sing the song *Stella celi extirpavit*, invoking the Virgin's intercession against the plague. The text was associated with the Franciscans and was widely known. Today it seems curious and incongruous. The key to understanding, however, is in Mary's words to the unbelieving midwife Salome: "My child is medicine for every sore." In this light, protection from the "ulcers of a terrible death" (an ever-present danger), sought by the shepherds on behalf of all humanity, is perfectly logical.

No single source could meet all of our needs, so a few items have been borrowed from other contemporary sources: *Gloria in excelsis Deo* comes from Cambridge, Magdalen College, Pepys 1236; the carols *Illuxit leticia* and *Nowell - Out of your sleep*, from British Library, Egerton 3307 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Selden B.26 respectively. *L'homme armé*, perhaps the greatest hit of the 15th century, and which accompanies Herod, is set by the English composer Robert Morton (b. ca. 1430).

Working with Kim, Linda, Katherine, Fr. Mitchell and all the cast and crew has been a rare pleasure. I would especially like to thank my friends and colleagues Andrea, Randall, Jennifer and Peter for their participation and wise counsel.

—Bryan Martin

The Music

Prelude

Beata Dei genitrix - *Richard Mowere (fl. ca. 1450-1470)*

Blessed Mary, mother of God, perpetual virgin, temple of the Lord, shrine of the Holy Ghost. You alone without precedent have pleased the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for the people, intervene for the clergy, intercede for all devout women.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Mary and Joseph begin their journey

O radix Jesse - *Anon. (Ritson MS) (not sung)*

O root of Jesse, as suppliants we call upon thee;
come thou, whom we await, and set us free.

Joseph has lingering doubts

Marvel not, Joseph - *Anon. (Ritson MS) (not sung)*

Refrain

Marvel not, Joseph, on Mary mild;
forsake her not though she be with child.

Verse

Joseph, thou shalt her maid and mother find,
Her son Redeemer of all mankind,
Thy forefathers of pains to unbind;
Therefore muse not this matter in thy mind:
Marvel not, Joseph.

The birth of Jesus

Nesciens mater virgo virum - *John Trouluffe (fl. 1448-1473) and Richard Smert (ca. 1400-1478/9)*

Knowing not a man, the virgin mother, without grief, gave birth to the saviour of the world. The virgin alone suckled the King of angels, her breasts full from heaven.

The midwives depart with the blessing of Mary and Joseph

Regi canamus glorie - *Anon. (Ritson MS) (not sung)*

Refrain

Let us sing to the King of glory,
who is born of a virgin.

Verse 1

Now from the citadel of the Father
he has entered this world;
the offspring of a chaste mother
has accepted flesh;
he comes from the virgin's womb
to redeem the human race here,
and to disperse our terrors.

Refrain

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

The angel appears to the shepherds

Gloria in excelsis Deo (solo) - *Verse, 1st responsory, Matins of Christmas Day, Sarum rite*

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to people of good will.

The heavenly choir announce the birth of Christ

Gloria in excelsis Deo (choir) - *Anon. (Cambridge, Magdalen College, Pepys 1236, no. 7)*

The shepherds prepare to go to Bethlehem

Stella celi extirpavit

Star of Heaven,

who nourished the Lord

and rooted up the plague of death

which our first parents planted;

may that star now deign

to hold in check the constellations

whose strife grants the people

the ulcers of a terrible death. (*the shepherds' version ends here*)

O glorious star of the sea,

save us from the plague.

Hear us: for your Son

who honours you denies you nothing.

Save us, Jesus, for whom

the Virgin Mother prays to you. (*the choral version ends here*)

The shepherds go to Bethlehem

Gloria in excelsis Deo - *Anon. (Pepys 1236, no. 36) (not sung)*

The shepherds depart

Stella celi extirpavit (choral) - *Anon. (Ritson MS)*

See above.

The entrance of Herod and his retinue

L'homme armé – Robert Morton (b. ca. 1430) (not sung)

The armed man should be feared.

Everywhere it has been proclaimed
that each man shall arm himself
with a coat of iron mail.

This accompanies each entrance and exit of Herod and his retinue

Illuxit leticia – Anon. (British Library, Egerton 3307)

The Magi meet

Refrain (not sung)

Gladness has shone forth through the threefold gifts.

The Magi continue their journey

Verse 1 (sung)

The star shone before the Magi in the way,
lest they should wander off the road,
and grants that their journeyings be smooth.

The Magi depart from Herod and travel to Bethlehem

Verse 2 (sung)

Entering the royal precincts,
the kings offer great things
as triple gifts to the new-born child.

The Magi stop to rest

Verse 3 (sung)

Fearing the cruelties of Herod,
they return to their own [countries]
by another way, in obedience
to the angel's commands.

The Magi sleep and are warned by the angel.

Refrain (not sung)

The Magi awaken and return to their countries

Nowell – Out of your sleep – Anon. (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Selden B.26)

Out of your sleep arise and wake,
for God mankind now hath ytake,
All of a maid without any make;
Of all women she beareth the bell.
Nowell!

About PLS

The mission of PLS (Poculi Ludique Societas) is to rediscover the theatrical traditions of the Middle Ages and Renaissance through textual research and dramatic experimentation, and to bring those traditions to life for contemporary audiences of all ages. PLS sponsors productions of early plays, from the beginnings of medieval drama to as late as the middle of the seventeenth century. As part of the Centre for Performance Studies in Early Theatre, PLS operates in affiliation with the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto. PLS also collaborates with the theatre history research project Records of Early English Drama (REED) at the University of Toronto.

About St. Thomas's Anglican Church

St. Thomas's Anglican Church is a parish of the Anglican Church of Canada. It was one of the earliest Anglo-Catholic congregations in Canada. It was established in 1874, moving twice before settling into its present Arts and Crafts building, designed by parishioner and renowned Toronto architect Eden Smith. St. Thomas's has a strong tradition of musical excellence and involvement in the arts.

Next from PLS: *Three Farces from Three Lands*

Banish the February blahs and get in a pre-Lenten carnival mood with these short 16th century farces from Germany, Holland, and England, including two old PLS favourites. All three share a typical comedic view of marriage among the peasantry. There will be slapstick fights, puppetry, and pie!

The Stolen Shrovetide Cock by Hans Sachs

The Farce of the Fisherman by Cornelis Everaert

John John the Husband by John Heywood



Poculi Ludique Societas

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Studio Theatre, 4 Glen Morris St.

Box Office: 416–978–7986