Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?

Scene 1

(music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS [SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire, notices that the audience is there.) COOKIE: (Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage, eyeing them suspiciously and then finally speaks.)

I know what yer thinkin'! Yer thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya! "We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin' but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!" Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's somethin' you should know. OK, so we all know the Christmas story happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all know how it went down back then. But what most folks don't reckon is that story might have been a lot more fun if it happened the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old West! At least we think it wou'd.

Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this here camp, and I know everything that happens around these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been my name for years, Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things might have happened, if Jesus was born here in Old West. It all started — for me, anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the plains near a small town called Davidson. We was just mindin' our own business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden there was this really bright light — well, look for yerselfs!

SLIM: Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so full I couldn't eat another bite!

CURLY: Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since… I can't remember!

RUSTY: Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's around!

COOKIE: My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this drive, anyway?
(Prospector ELI runs across the stage toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a never-ending quest for gold.)

ELI: Gold! *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)* Owwww!

COOKIE: Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread! Now, git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

COOKIE: Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

CURLY: Well, I figure we'll be make'n our deadline. That is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from circlin' the west perimeter.

SLIM: Bart? You sent Bart?

CURLY: Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered …

RUSTY: Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

SLIM: Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for, and he was gone for three days!

CURLY: It's all right. I made him tie a string around his finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

BUCK: You think that will work?

CURLY: It always works for me. (*Holding up his finger)* See? I got a string around mine to remind me of something.

SLIM: Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?

CURLY: *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh …

RUSTY: Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin' for him …

SLIM: Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming … (The sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending to ride a horse. BART should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)

BART: Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! (*He pretends to dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*

SLIM: Uh, Bart?

BART: Yeah, Slim?

SLIM: What are you doin'?

BART: Whaddaya mean, Slim?

SLIM: I mean with those things in your hands?

BART: Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the cattle …

SLIM: But you didn't take a horse? And what in the world are those, anyway?

BART: They're my horse.

CURLY: No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!

BART: What?

CURLY: Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em together.

BART: Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed …

RUSTY: Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

SLIM: Never mind, you guys. (To BART) So how was the herd?

BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's somethin' funny goin' on out there!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this really bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever seen!

RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That is weird …

BART: No, not just a star — (Looking around for it) Look! There it is! (They all look and notice it.)

CURLY: Dang! That is bright!

BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson …

RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?

SLIM: That is funny …

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? *(The sanctuary lights should be at their brightest now.)*

RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never noticed that one before! (Points slightly left.)

BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!

SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting bigger!

BUCK: What is it?

SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for us!

RUSTY: Look out! (A bright light illuminates the entire group.

They cower in a huddle. (ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.)

ANGEL 1: Fear not! For, behold —

BART: Huh?

ANGEL 2: I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! (Luke 2:10)

RUSTY: (Among themselves) What's a tidin'?

CURLY: Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?

SLIM: I'm a little bit scared, yeah. *(The five COWBOYS continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk to each other.)*

ANGEL 2: *(Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1)* I think there may be a bit of a communication issue here

ANGEL 1: Yeah? What do you suggest?

ANGEL 2: Well, I think if we bring it more into their vernacular, it might be better received.

ANGEL 1: Good idea! Here goes. *(Clearing her throat)* Hey, y'all!

COWBOYS: *(In somewhat disjointed fashion)* Howdy! Hey! Uhhuh. (etc.)

ANGEL 1: Uh … don't be scared, because I bring you … uh … I mean …

ANGEL 2: Because we got good news!

CURLY: Good news?

ANGEL 1: Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!

BUCK: What is it?

ANGEL 2: Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of David … I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby born!

RUSTY: A baby? *(Pause)* So what?

ANGEL 1: Well, not just any baby. This here baby will be the Savior of all of these here parts!

SLIM: A savior? What's a savior?

ANGEL 2: You know, like a really good guy. Someone who will do good and save all of y'all!

CURLY: You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?

ANGEL 1: Uh, yeah…kinda. A new sheriff!...yeah

SLIM: That would be darn near the best thing that could ever happen to these parts!

BART: Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's meaner than a rattle snake with a toothache.

SLIM: And this savior… he's gonna be born in our little Davidson?

ANGEL 2: That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.

ANGEL 1: You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin' in a feedin' trough!

SLIM: A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a — (Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)

ALL ANGELS: *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Luke 2:14) (All ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)

BART: Gol-lee! That's funny!

CURLY: Funny ha-ha or —

BART: I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!

RUSTY: Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?

SLIM: I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to look for this … baby.

CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY: *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah! Let's go! Come on!

BART: Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a horse and starts pounding his coconuts together and rides off.)*

RUSTY: I think that coconut might have fallen on his head.

CURLY: I think his head might be as hollow as that coconut.

SLIM: (Points.) Watch out — it's a python! *(They all gasp and run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass music may be played.)*

Scene 2 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Well, I said the story started in that starry field, but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for us in that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few months earlier than that. You see, there was this young girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow even than ours! *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who face them, their backs to each other.)*

ANGEL 3: Mary Beth?

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe?

MARY BETH and **LIL' JOE:** (In unison, even though they cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!

ANGELS 3 AND 4: (Together) Do not be afraid!

ANGEL 3: (MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)

MARY BETH: Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

ANGEL 3: No, no. You have found favor.

ANGEL 4: (LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

LIL' JOE: Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

ANGEL 3: Well, what I mean is …

ANGEL 4: What I'm trying to say is …

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) What in tarnation are you doin' in my room?! (ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each other, then nod.)

ANGEL 3: Howdy, Mary Beth!

ANGEL 4: Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!

ANGEL 3: God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!

MARY BETH: What do you mean?

ANGEL 3: Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have you a youngun!

LIL' JOE: In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!

ANGEL 4: Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git hitched!

LIL' JOE: But I only kissed her twice!

MARY BETH: This caint be.

ANGEL 3: But Mary Beth! **ANGEL 3 & 4:** It's God's baby!

LIL' JOE: Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?

ANGEL 4: It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled Mary with a baby!

ANGEL 3: And you're to name the little one Jesus!

MARY BETH: I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!

LIL' JOE: So we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?

ANGEL 4: You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.

MARY BETH: God's baby …

LIL' JOE: God's baby

ANGELS 3 and 4: (Together) It's all part of God's plan, y'all … (They join in the middle and exit.)

MARY BETH: (On her side of stage) I'm gonna have God's baby?

LIL' JOE: (On his side of the stage) Mary Beth's gonna have God's baby!

MARY BETH and LIL' JOE: (Together) I'm not ready for this! *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

Scene 3 (Lights up. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine, 'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin' on the sheriff, Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk they found somethin' in the nighttime sky … (COOKIE exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk. There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the jail cell, looking rather haggard.)

HARRY: Festus! (Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A "ting" should be heard.) Festus! Git in here! (FESTUS runs in and trips and falls.)

FESTUS: Yes, sheriff?

HARRY: Whatcha arrest Eli in fer this time, Festus?

FESTUS: He got in a scuf with old man Curtis

HARRY: A fight…that doesn't sound like Eli.

FESTUS: Well, you see! It seems Old man Curtis just had just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.

HARRY: Yeah. So?

FESTUS: Well, old Eli seen him…tackled him!!! and started trying to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!

HARRY: Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that?!

FESTUS: Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —

ELI: Gold!

FESTUS: That sounds about right …

HARRY: Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya, Eli? What?

ELI: Dagnabbit! *(There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.)*

FESTUS: You want I should just blast 'em through the door, sheriff?

HARRY: No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!

FESTUS: (*Creeping cautiously toward the door)* Who th' devil is it?! *(Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside the jailhouse door.)*

FRANK: Please, sir, are you the sheriff?

FESTUS: I'm his deputy! What business you got with the sheriff?

THOMAS: Yes. We have some information which we think he will find very interesting!

HARRY: Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to blastin' 'em, Festus!

FRANK: No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have some very important information to pass along to you!

FESTUS: Whaddaya think, Sheriff?

HARRY: It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have to say. We can always blast 'em later …

FESTUS: (Goes to the door and lets them in.) Come on in.

FRANK: We have traveled far to tell you what we have found.

HARRY: Which is …?

BILL: You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration, back East.

FESTUS: Worldwide Institute of … what?

THOMAS: Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-E for short.

HARRY: W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here parts?

BILL: Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty leader is about to be born in a town very near here.

HARRY: A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon that?

FRANK: Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the night sky.

BILL: We think the star points to the birth of this great leader.

HARRY: Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader born in this here part of the country?

BILL: In a manner of speaking, yes.

HARRY: Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there! (*FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the conversation by turning his head from one side to the other, as if watching a tennis match.)*

FESTUS: What do you make of it, Sheriff?

HARRY: I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

FESTUS: I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I cain't even read a newspaper!

HARRY: Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this newleader-bein'-born thing!

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here parts, and I don't take kindly to no other leader bein' born!

FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a little critter!

HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus, and I don't need no new sheriff messin' things up!

FESTUS: I think I understand …

HARRY: You do?

FESTUS: Not really, no …

HARRY: Oh! Look. Here's what we're gonna do.

FESTUS: All right …

HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well, you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.

FESTUS: Right… Why?

HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and you can guarantee that they git to where they're going safely, right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: So you can come back here and tell me where he is. Right?

FESTUS: Right…Why?

HARRY: (Angrily) So's I can come and … (More calmly) uh … deputize him. OK?

FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!

HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right …

FESTUS: Right! *(confused)*

HARRY: So you go with them —

FESTUS: I go with them.

HARRY: Find the baby —

FESTUS: Find the baby.

HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

FESTUS: Then I come back and tell you where he is.

HARRY: Right! Think you can handle it?

FESTUS: A'course! That's simple!

ELI: Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then away.)

HARRY: Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell them the good news!

FESTUS: What good news?

HARRY: That I'm sendin' you with 'em!

FESTUS: With who?

HARRY: Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!

FESTUS: Baby? What baby?

HARRY: Ah! *(Exasperated)* Look. Just go get your pack.

FESTUS: Right! *(He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his head in weary disbelief.)*

ELI: Dagnabbit!

HARRY: You got that right. *(HARRY crosses over to the three W.I.S.E. GUYS.)* Gentlemen! I believe I have an arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the destination you seek!

FRANK: That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!

HARRY: Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (FESTUS emerges with his pack) will accompany you to protect you on yer journey.

FESTUS: Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?

HARRY: (Sighs.) To find the baby …Nevermind. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My deputy here will return and tell me where you find the baby so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

THOMAS: Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can come back through here and tell you when we find him!

HARRY: I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's going on in his territory, right?

BILL: I suppose so, but …

HARRY: (Drawing his gun and cocking it) I said, I insist! These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin' to happen to ya. *(He holsters his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.)* Oops. Sorry, Festus.

FRANK: (Afraid) Actually, I think an escort might be just what we need.

HARRY: I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead and find the youngun!

FESTUS: (Still hopping on one foot) Right! Let's go, Wise guys! …this way…this way

HARRY: (Watching from the door.) Hey, Festus? Davidson's that way! (Pause) There you go! Good luck! (Back inside) I gotta get me a new deputy. (Going over to the cell, he looks at ELI.) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna stay outta trouble?

ELI: Gold!

HARRY: You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other people's mouths! (He opens the cage.) Go on, now. Git!

ELI: Dagnabbit! (He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.)

HARRY: A new sheriff, huh? (Pause) We'll just see about that! (Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.)

Scene 4

(Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.)

COOKIE: Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to have that baby, too! But when they got there, they found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem … (COOKIE exits.)

MARY BETH: (Mary Beth waddles on the stage.) Jooooooeeee (in pain)

LIL' JOE: (runs in) Are you ok, Mary Beth

MARY BETH: I need you to find me a room now Joe.

LIL' JOE: That hotel was full too. We'll have to keep looking.

MARY BETH: Joe, iff'n we cain't find somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby, we gonna have some problems

LIL' JOE: Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room somewheres! Is there anything I can do to help with the pain?

MARY BETH: Do you think you can find me a stick?

LIL' JOE: Sure, here's one. I don't understand how this is going to help though.

MARY BETH: (yells out in pain) here comes a contraction…ohhhhhh (Hits Joe over and over with stick as he falls to the ground.) Oh that really helped.

LIL' JOE: Glad I could help… stands up and brushes himself off) There's one more hotel in town, I'm sure they can give us a room.

MARY BETH: Just hurry!

INNKEEPER: (Opening the door) Can I help you folks?

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavy with child!

MARY BETH: (offended) Heavy?!

LIL' JOE: My wife is heavenly with child! We need a room!

INNKEEPER: Holy smoke! (Pause) I'm sorry, mister every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!

LIL' JOE: But you don't understand! She's going to have the baby tonight!

INNKEEPER: Are you sure?

MARY BETH: (She grabs both of their arms) OHHHHHH (they both say ow and drop to their knees.

INNKEEPER: Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't it? Uhhh … wait right here! (He exits)

LIL' JOE: See, Mary Beth? I told you I would take care of it! He's gonna go see what he can do.

MARY BETH: I hope so! I can't wait much longer!

LIL' JOE: Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told us about … (joe does funny breathing)

MARY BETH: If it's all the same to you, I think I like the stick better!

LIL' JOE: It's not really the same to me! (The INNKEEPER returns.)

INNKEEPER: Uh … I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My wife is really the manager of this establishment, and she said no.

LIL' JOE: What? How in tarnation … ?

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.

MARY BETH: What does that have to do with … ?

INNKEEPER: Well, I told her you were in a bit of a desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going to be born in her hotel.

LIL' JOE: Oh, come on! She can't have it out here!

INNKEEPER: No, I suppose not, but … (INNKEEPER'S WIFE enters.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Did you tell them, Albert? Did you tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having babies in this … (Noticing them) Oh! Hello!

LIL' JOE: Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Absolutely not! Good heavens! We're running a hotel here, not a hospital!

LIL' JOE: But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Wish I could help, but we're full.

INNKEEPER: Wait! I know!

LIL' JOE: What is it? Anything!

INNKEEPER: Well, I just bedded the animals down for the night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but at least the hay would be warm and there would be someplace to lay down

LIL' JOE: You can't be serious! This is a baby we're talking about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way that we would even think about —

MARY BETH: (Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard) Joe!

LIL' JOE: (Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him) Which way would that stable be?

INNKEEPER: Right this way! In the back!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I suppose, if you promise to clean up after yourselves. (innkeeper mary and joe all walk away) I'll even give you the non-holiday weekday rate, but it won't include the muffins in the mornin'.

LIL' JOE: That's very … kind of you.

INNKEEPER: (To LIL' JOE) You have no idea. (INNKEEPER leads MARY BETH and LIL' JOE Offstage as the lights fade and optional music plays.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. COOKIE, and all five COWBOYS enter into the street scene, with BART hitting his coconut halves together.)

COOKIE: That's about the time that passel of angels done showed up at our field. Well, it ain't every day that a bunch of angels tells ya you need to look at somethin', so we all headed into town to see if we could find that baby they was talkin' about. It weren't hard to know where to go — that star was just a-glowin' for all it was worth.

SLIM: Well, boys, it cain't be far! That star is really bright, and it looks like it's practically right overhead! *(Bart rides in hitting coconut shells together)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* What's all the noise. I'm trying to run a business here!

SLIM: Bart, You think that since we're in town now you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed …

BART: Oh, all right! (Pretends to get off.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Sorry guys — we're all full up tonight!

CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?

RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the field …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?

SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for is a baby.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin' here tonight!

CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would be born in Davidson tonight.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?

SLIM: Yeppers. And God even put a special star in the sky just to light up your inn.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well …

CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Look. We were completely full, so I told them they couldn't stay here.

SLIM: So where did they go?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Actually …

INNKEEPER: (Running in from Offstage) Honey! You gotta come see!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these gentlemen right now.

INNKEEPER: But that lady just had her baby in the stable out back!

BUCK: In the stable?!

CURLY: What is she doin' out in the stable?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: I told you we was full!

RUSTY: I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the angel told us!

INNKEEPER: As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin' fer a crib!

SLIM: Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that …

BART: You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But like I said …

INNKEEPER: Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You got to come see!

SLIM: Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!

RUSTY: Let's go see! (They all follow the INNKEEPER Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

BART: (Disdainfully) Ma'am.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: But we was full!

BART: Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd have my horse step right on yer foot!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What horse?

BART: (Claps his coconuts together at her.) Good evenin' ma'am! (He exits.)

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well, I never! (Slams door. Lights out. All exit as optional music plays.)

Scene 6

(Lights up. This is the stable scene. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE are Center Stage with the baby as the five COWBOYS enter with the INNKEEPER. COOKIE enters.)

COOKIE: Sure 'nuf, that baby was in the feedin' trough, just like the angels had told us! He had the sweetest little spirit, too — a real good baby! Didn't seem to bother him none that he was layin' right where the horses et! Anyway, we commenced to talkin' with his folks and just tried to make him feel welcome in the world!

BART: Sure is a cute little feller! (Pause) Whadya name him?

MARY BETH: His name is Jesus.

SLIM: Jesus. I like that! Sheriff Jesus!

LIL' JOE: Oh, I don't know if he's gonna be a sheriff.

CURLY: But he must be! After all, the angel said he was gonna be a great leader!

INNKEEPER: Boy howdy! To think the new sheriff was born right here in my little stable!

BART: Don't bring that up again, mister. I'm still a mite sore about you turnin' them out in the cold like this!

INNKEEPER: Yeah, I know. But what else could we do? My wife already told you …

BART: Yeah, yeah, I know. Oh look, yonder she comes now — maybe to apolergize …

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: (With the W.I.S.E. GUYS right behind her) Right back here, gentlemen!

CURLY: What in tarnation is going on now?

SLIM: You know, we use that word a lot. What's it mean?

CURLY: No clue. (Pause, then to W.I.S.E. GUYS) Who are you?

BILL: My name is Bill. We are from the Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. My colleagues, Thomas and Frank, and I have followed the star to this place.

FRANK: We have reason to believe that this baby is destined to become a great leader!

THOMAS: All of the prophecies say that he is to be the Savior of the world!

SLIM: You boys been studyin' on these things a while, have ya?

FRANK: For years, yes sir.

SLIM: That's funny!

CURLY: Funny haha or funny strange

BILL: What's funny?

SLIM: That you guys had to get all colleged up to know that this here baby was gonna be a great leader.

THOMAS: Why is that funny?

SLIM: 'Cause we had an angel tell us the same thing just a few hours ago, and we didn't even finish the eighth grade!

FESTUS: Why, I'll be! There is a baby here after all!

BART: What are you doin' here, Festus? Shouldn't you be out pickin' on little old ladies or somethin'?

FESTUS: No! (Pause) It ain't Thursday, is it?

RUSTY: Why are you here, Festus?

FESTUS: I came with these here fellers to see if there really was a baby underneath that star!

BUCK: Yeah, I bet!

FRANK: (To MARY) We brought some gifts for the baby, if you don't mind.

MARY BETH: Oh, my! Of course not!

BILL: I brought him gold. (He places a bag of gold next to the manger. Just then, ELI charges in from Offstage.)

ELI: Gold! (He runs toward the bag of gold, but FESTUS steps in front of him, gun drawn.)

FESTUS: I believe that there gold belongs to the baby, Eli!

ELI: (Pause) Dagnabbit! (He moves back, head down.)

FRANK: I brought him some incense. (Places it next to the gold.)

MARY BETH: Look, Lil' Joe. Frank brought incense!

THOMAS: And I brought myrrh. (Places the mirror beside the other gifts.)

BART: Myrrh? Why would you bring a baby myrrh?

FESTUS: That's simple! So's the little feller could get a good look at hisself! (He starts to play with the little baby in the trough.)

BART: (Pause) Oh!

SLIM: Well, this is all well and good, but I still don't understand why Harry sent you to keep tabs on these boys, Festus.

COOKIE: Yeah, that Dirty Harry is up to no good, and I think he means to do harm to this baby!

FESTUS: What? But he's just a little baby!

BUCK: Cookie's right. Harry knows that little babies grow up.

FESTUS: Come to think of it, Harry said that exact thing!

ELI: (Steps forward with a very thoughtful look on his face, rubbing his chin. Very articulately, and out of character, says) If I might interject, I would think it would be terribly imprudent at this point to promote any interaction between Sheriff Harold and the infant as the Sheriff actually intends to come kill the baby.. Now if you'll excuse me, I must take my leave to seek out a certain mineral which shall remain nameless. (*Everyone stares at him in disbelief that he could be so articulate. He then exits.)*

CURLY: Wow. Didn't see that coming.

BART: Festus, you cain't tell him where the baby is!

FESTUS: (Pauses as he looks at the baby.) No, I suppose I cain't.

CURLY: So what are you gonna tell him?

FESTUS: I reckon I'll do a mite of forgettin' when I git back there in a coupla days. (He smiles.) The sheriff's gotten purty used to that over the years!

COWBOYS: (Ad lib their support) All right! Hooray! Way to go, Festus!

SLIM: Well, I reckon we oughtta get back to watchin' the herd. It was really nice meetin' ya and all …

RUSTY: But Slim, we didn't bring any presents for the youngun like these W.I.S.E. fellers did.

BART: That's right! We oughtta do something for the little guy.

CURLY: I know! We could do a little jig for him to remember us by! (Music begins at low volume.)

SLIM: Oh … I suppose so … (The COWBOYS do a country line dance in the background as COOKIE moves to Center Stage and the lights go down on the main stage.)

COOKIE: So that's the way it happened. Or at least it coulda happened that way, iff'n God had chosen to wait a while to send his youngun. I know, I know — people are purty happy with the way things turned out a long time ago in a little town called Bethlehem. But from now on, remember that things could have been different — and a lot the same — if Christmas had happened for the first time while cowboys watched their herds by night. Y'all come back now, ya hear?