

# KEEPING WATCH

## CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE SHEPHERDS

A One-Act Children's  
Christmas Play

Written by

**LINDSAY FINLEY**

*with Renee and Bodie Hodge*



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# FOREWORD

*When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."*

*(Luke 2:15)*

Who would have thought the first people to worship the newborn King would be shepherds?

The coming of Jesus, the Savior of the world, was first prophesied in Genesis 3:15 when God promised Adam and Eve that the Seed was coming who would crush the head of the serpent. This promise was made more specifically to Abraham, and then passed on to Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. For centuries, the Israelite people waited and longed for the Messiah to come. And when Jesus finally came in the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4), he came humbly and unexpectedly, and almost everyone missed it.

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)*

Almost everyone missed it—but not a small group of shepherds tending their flocks outside the city of Bethlehem. And this unique Christmas play explores Christmas through the eyes of those very shepherds.

We’re excited that you’ve chosen *Keeping Watch* for your Christmas program this year. Through this production, you are connecting the babe in the manger that those shepherds worshipped to the reason why Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, was sent as the final sacrifice to make salvation possible.

Christmas is about Christ, but it’s more than just about Christ coming. It’s ultimately about why he came—to offer salvation to everyone who believes—and what that means for sinners like you and me. We pray that this production is a blessing to you and your group and that many hearts are touched this Christmas with the gospel message.

In Christ,



**KEN HAM**

CEO—*Answers in Genesis, the Ark Encounter, and the Creation Museum*

# FROM THE AUTHOR

**LINDSAY FINLEY**

*Fine Arts Teacher, Answers Academy*

It happens every year, usually after Thanksgiving, but sometimes earlier. Christians all over the world pull their nativities out of storage and gently place the well-known figures around the infant Jesus as a display in their homes, classrooms, or churches. Pastors in churches begin their sermon series about each figure and their significance in the biblical account that changed the world. We listen intently as Linus from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* quotes Luke 2 where these individuals help tell one of the greatest miracles in history. However, what do we really know about these figures? Mary and Joseph? The wise men? The shepherds?

It is this question that has led Answers Academy on the journey to discover as much as we can about these people and in turn, share what we have learned with our students and others. What better way to do this than to write a Christmas play that will teach our students and the audience as well?

This is Answers Academy's third published Christmas program. Our first production focused on the wise men and their journey to seek the truth and find the Messiah. Our second production was about Mary and her journey of faith and trust to be the mother of Jesus. Now it is the shepherds' turn! Join us as we look at the shepherds, how they lived, society's view of them, and their understanding of the message given to them on that extraordinary night.

I hope this script encourages you and gives you the opportunity to share the unyielding truth of the gospel message with your audience. Included with the script is additional historical content written by Bodie Hodge that dives more into the lives of shepherds in the first century. This information is a great teaching tool for your performers and possibly yourself!

Along with this historical information, there is also supplemental material available online. This material includes a printable actor's script, editable program templates, and a recording of Answers Academy's performance on the Answers Center stage at the Ark Encounter!

Throughout the script, there are listed songs. Please note that the songs are merely suggestions, not requirements. Many songs (including hymns) will work within the context of the script. As a music teacher, I truly believe that songs can enhance the message of the program and can be a wonderful way to further engage your performers and your audience. One of my favorite quotes from Scripture is: “Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!” (Psalm 96:1).

My prayer is that this program will be a blessing to you, the performers, and the audience and that the gospel message and gift of salvation will be shared and spread. May we always continue to give God all our praise and glory!

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# CHARACTERS

*All of the following characters are dressed in traditional first-century clothing unless otherwise noted.*

## **OLDER ELAM**

an older man, preferably with a beard

## **LYDIA**

a young shepherdess

## **SAMUEL**

a young shepherd, an aspiring musician

## **ESTHER**

a shepherdess

## **BENJAMIN**

a sojourner

## **HANNAH**

Benjamin's wife

## **REBEKAH**

Benjamin and Hannah's daughter

## **MARTHA**

Benjamin and Hannah's daughter

## **SILAS**

a shepherd

## **JARED**

a shepherd

## **YOUNG ELAM**

a young shepherd

## **BARNABAS**

a shepherd

## **HEAD ANGEL**

dressed in white robe with gold belt or sash

## **ANGELS**

(as many as possible)  
dressed in white angel gowns

## **MARY**

a young Jewish woman

## **JOSEPH**

a young Jewish man

## **NATIVITY ANIMALS**

can vary in number

## **CHORUS SPEAKERS**

can be dressed as angels or in modern-day attire

## **CHORUS SPEAKERS 1–4**

## **TOWNSPEOPLE 1–5**

## **EXTRA TOWNSPEOPLE**

# KEEPING WATCH

## PROLOGUE

### THE MESSAGE TO THE SHEPHERDS

*Stage direction: The CHORUS is positioned to stage right or stage left (depending on director preference) and standing on a platform or risers. The set is split with the “Present Scene” at the side of the stage opposite the CHORUS, and the “Past Scene” center stage.*

#### **Song Suggestion 1: “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks”**

**OLDER ELAM:** I am a shepherd. A simple man, a godly man. (*he pauses in reverence*) Hundreds of years from now, people will say that I was not only simple, but lowly in mind—and in status. An “outcast” is what people will call me and those in the same profession as I. They will call shepherds dirty and smelly (*he pauses and sniffs himself*), which may be true some of the time. However, they will also call us the lowest of the low. People will use this *untrue* description of us as one of the many reasons the message we received was so extraordinary and significant. The message that made us shepherds famous. The message given to us that will resound thousands of years later. The message that should have been sent to those of higher esteem and stature.

So why do we have sacrificial lambs, you may wonder? It was because of sin, *our* sin actually—both yours and mine. You see, in the beginning, God created a perfect world. He saw what he made and called it good. Can you imagine what that must have been like? Sadly, that perfect world didn’t last long. Adam and Eve, our first ancestors, chose to disobey and committed the first sin. After that devastating moment, the world—God’s perfect world—was never the same. Now there was sin. Now there was death. Now death was the only path to redemption and that was through sacrifice—our lambs.



Looking back, the reason we were the first to hear the news is clear when you fully understand the message that was sent on that glorious night—when you fully understand the *significance* of the message. This was a message that changed the world. This is the account of the shepherds.

*OLDER ELAM* walks to center stage to join *LYDIA*, *SAMUEL*, and *ESTHER*.



# SCENE 1

## VISITORS AT NIGHTFALL

*An open field at nightfall. Two shepherds (OLDER ELAM and SAMUEL) and two shepherdesses (LYDIA and ESTHER) are surrounding a small campfire. SAMUEL is relaxing on the ground, strumming a small lyre that is out of tune. He is obviously not paying attention to anything around him but his music, which sounds terrible. LYDIA is standing tall, keenly aware of all her surroundings and on guard. ESTHER is standing near OLDER ELAM.*

**LYDIA:** Samuel, please! Our night has barely begun! Can you at least stand up and *pretend* to do something? I can't handle that music *all night long!* Papa, please tell him to stop!

**SAMUEL:** *(begins to play louder)* We need to have something to listen to while we are out here tonight. Listen . . . *(he pauses his playing)* See? Not a sound out there but the random baas of the sheep. None of the sheep are showing signs of labor. It's going to be a long night, might as well use it for some good practice!

**LYDIA:** If you want to call that "good." *(turns to watch the field again)*

*OLDER ELAM turns to SAMUEL.*

**OLDER ELAM:** Samuel, my son, your sister is right. You need to keep a better watch. No, there are no signs of possible lambs yet, but it is just nightfall, and the night is still very young. A lot can happen in one night. With it being Passover, we must be ready to tend to any new lambs and watch for other impending dangers. That is our most important job tonight. And remember, this is the first time Esther has joined us for the night watch. We need to set a good example for her.

**ESTHER:** Father, why is tonight so important?

**OLDER ELAM:** This week is the start of Passover. Since we live so close to Jerusalem, many travelers will be stopping here in Bethlehem to purchase newly born lambs on their way to Passover. We have several sheep that can possibly provide them with those lambs.

**ESTHER:** So these lambs will be sacrificed?

**OLDER ELAM:** Yes, my daughter. Because of man's sin, we must offer a sacrifice to our Lord to take the place of our own punishment. It's a hard task, but a necessary one. It's been that way since our ancestors, Adam and Eve, first sinned in the garden of Eden.

**ESTHER:** Yes, Father.

**LYDIA:** We must do what God has asked us to do. (*looks at SAMUEL*) The job he has placed us in. (*she stops suddenly*) Father! I think I hear voices!

*They all look offstage as BENJAMIN, HANNAH, MARTHA, and REBEKAH enter. They are weary travelers carrying light luggage.*

**BENJAMIN:** Shalom!

**OLDER ELAM, LYDIA, AND ESTHER:** Shalom!

**BENJAMIN:** I hope we didn't frighten you. We saw your campfire and heard your, uh . . . music. We are on our way to Jerusalem for Passover and thought we could stop and rest a bit. Do you mind?

**SAMUEL:** Not at all! (*he gets up and goes to the group with his lyre*) I take requests. Want to hear anything in particular? I have a song I am working on for a wedding party. They haven't asked me to play yet, but I was going to offer . . .

**OLDER ELAM:** Maybe a little later, Samuel. (*turns back to BENJAMIN*) Of course you may use our fire and rest! From where are you coming?

**HANNAH:** We are from Tekoa in the south.

**OLDER ELAM:** Oh yes! The land of the prophet Amos.

**BENJAMIN:** Why yes, it is! Not many know that. May I introduce my family? This is my wife, Hannah, and my daughters, Martha and Rebekah.

**OLDER ELAM:** Very nice to meet you. My name is Elam, and these are my children. My oldest, Lydia; her younger sister, Esther; and my son, Samuel. My other children are home with their mother.

**LYDIA:** You are only a few hours' walk to Jerusalem. Why are you traveling there so early in the week and at this time of night?

*BENJAMIN and HANNAH look at each other and smile.*

**BENJAMIN:** We are on our way to see Jesus of Nazareth! He was coming to Jerusalem for Passover, and we have been told he is already there.

**MARTHA:** Yes! We heard that when he entered Jerusalem, there were thousands of people there waving palm branches. Can you imagine?!

**REBEKAH:** We dropped everything and left as soon as we heard. We have never seen him, but we have heard he is a prophet and a healer! He says he is the Son of God!

**BENJAMIN:** You *have* heard of this man, yes? Everyone throughout Judea has been talking about him!

**OLDER ELAM:** *(smiles)* Yes, I have. In fact, I have met him.

**MARTHA AND REBEKAH:** *(ad-lib)* Really? Wow!

**BENJAMIN:** Is he really who he says he is?

**OLDER ELAM:** Come, let's sit around the fire, and I'll tell you all about it.

**SAMUEL:** *(smiling to his siblings)* Here we go again . . .

**OLDER ELAM:** It was over 30 years ago, in this very field. I was just a young boy then . . . *(motions to YOUNG ELAM crossing the stage)*

*YOUNG ELAM walks in front of the group to join JARED and BARNABAS center stage.*



## SCENE 2

### RELIVING THE PAST

*JARED and BARNABAS are center stage. One shepherd, YOUNG ELAM, is obviously bored. JARED and BARNABAS are walking around an area, diligently watching. SILAS walks in.*

**SILAS:** I finally found those silly sheep! It turns out one decided to go toward the stream and six others followed.

**JARED:** You know how sheep are. One strays and many follow.

**BARNABAS:** Not the smartest in the world . . .

**SILAS:** No kidding! I had to go through mud a foot deep to get one of them out. I'll be cleaning out my sandals for the rest of the day!

**YOUNG ELAM:** (*disgruntled*) What else is new? All we do is chase after dumb sheep all day and get dirty. I can't wait until I'm old enough to get out of this job and out of Bethlehem.

**BARNABAS:** That may happen soon enough, young brother. For now, we are to do our duty for our father and watch over these sheep.

**JARED:** Elam, why do you dislike this life so much? It's not a job to scoff at, you know.

**SILAS:** Yeah . . . you could be scraping up camel dung in town or washing feet in doorways!

**YOUNG ELAM:** True . . . but I do smell dung and wash my own feet—every day!

**JARED:** Oh, the smell isn't so bad. (*sniffs his armpit*) We have wide, open fields with a breeze. And look! The sun is beginning to set. You can't deny we have the best view for sunsets!

**YOUNG ELAM:** I just don't think shepherding is a respectable job. No one appreciates all the hard work we do. And really—can you name a single shepherd that did great things?

**JARED AND SILAS:** *(together)* King David!

**BARNABAS:** Yes! King David was a shepherd long before he became king. He used his training from protecting his father's livestock to defeat Goliath and conquer lands in the name of God.

**SILAS:** Moses! That man went from herding sheep to herding people in the wilderness!

**BARNABAS:** Don't forget our father Abraham! The Lord promised him that he would be the father of the Israelites with more descendants than the stars!

**JARED:** And his grandson Jacob! He was so wealthy, he made his son Joseph a beautiful coat!

**SILAS:** Speaking of wealthy, what about Job? The Lord blessed him with wealth—twice! He was so wealthy, he had to hire shepherds in addition to his own family!

**YOUNG ELAM:** Well, besides them!

**JARED:** There were also shepherdesses like Rebekah, Zipporah, and even Rachel, who Jacob buried not far from here.

**YOUNG ELAM:** I just wish I could do something different with my life. A job that means more to me!

**BARNABAS:** Young brother, if God wishes you to do something different, it will be. But until then, do the job that has been given to you and do it well. We truly have been given a great responsibility.

**JARED:** Just remember those who have come before you,

brother. Moses, David, Jacob—at one point, these men of God were all shepherds, but God called them all to another purpose of *his* design, not theirs. Being a shepherd helped to mold them into what God needed them to be. (*suddenly alert*) Barnabas, I think we need to keep an eye on this group of sheep over by the ridge. One of them is acting strange. We may need to go take a look. It may be birthing soon.

*BARNABAS goes and stands next to JARED and looks in the same direction.*

**BARNABAS:** Yes, I think you are right. Silas, we may need your help too. Elam, are you OK to stay here alone?

**YOUNG ELAM:** Sure. I'll just walk around in circles, watching my life pass me by.

**SILAS:** Funny, Elam. We'll be back shortly.

**OLDER ELAM:** As my family went to tend to the troubled sheep, I did walk in circles. But as I did, I also thought about what my family was telling me. Was it God's will that I stayed exactly where I was? Was this all it was ever going to be? Well, God answered those questions that very night. Little did we know that our lives were about to change forever.

