

The Beautiful Game - A Christmas Story

Inspired by Michael Morpurgo's
'The Best Christmas Present in the World'

Setting:

The story will begin in the churchyard:

- Crowd meet to the front of the Church, facing the Tower
- Braziers
- Sheep in a small fenced off area in front of the Tower? Donkey again?
- 'Fire' for shepherds to sit around
- Mulled wine/mince pies afterwards

Then the story moves inside Church with 2 settings:

- By the pulpit - inside a house - armchair etc
- S. Aisle - split in to two; stable by door, black back drop/barbed wire & search light design (Barbara paint for us?)

Finally, the story moves back outside to finish with a short scene, a final carol and a blessing.

Refreshments around the braziers.

NB.

- Choir?
- Bells?
- Braziers?
- Refreshments - Ladies of St Lukes?
- Alan Thomas happy to set up sound & lights etc around Church.
(microphones for outside?)

Costumes: *We will need some centurion's helmets plus German & British WW1 caps/helmets & one WWI soldiers jacket. The children who will be soldiers should dress in khaki or navy blue/grey & add a cap/helmet as their soldier's costumes.*

Script takes half an hour to read through + carols - total 1 hour?

Cast.

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Father

Child 1 (& soldier?)

Child 2 (& soldier?)

Child 3 (& soldier?)

(a dog? - starts with father & runs to the children when they come in ...)

Angel Gabriel

Choir of Angels

Mary

Joseph

Innkeeper

Shepherds & Sheep

3 Wise Men

British Soldier 1 (speaking)

British Soldier 2 (& child?)

British Soldier 3 (& child?)

In the opening scene these characters will also be centurions

German Soldier 1 (speaking)

German Soldier 2 (& child?)

German Soldier 3 (& child?)

In the opening scene these characters will also be centurions

Script.

The Beautiful Game – A Christmas Story

Scene One.

Vicar: Welcome & introduce 1st carol.

Carol: **Once in Royal David's City**

Soldiers & Children who will be shepherds and kings are in normal clothes at this stage, they stand either side of the nativity scene and watch carefully

Narrator 1: Many, many years ...

Narrator 2: ... centuries, actually!

Narrator 1: ... ago, Christmas began with a visit from an Angel

Gabriel: I brought wonderful news to a lovely girl whose name was Mary
Gabriel, Mary & Joseph all stand together

Narrator1: Gabriel told Mary that she was going to have a baby

Narrator 2: And then he went to Joseph ...

Narrator 1: ... in a dream ...

Narrator 2: ... to explain to Joseph that the baby was the Son of God
and that he should marry Mary and call the baby, Jesus.

Gabriel: ... and I told them that Jesus would be a King and that he would
save the world from its sins.

Angels dance around Mary & Joseph and Gabriel

Narrator 1: Unfortunately, not everyone would be happy about this piece of
news

Narrator 2: Mary and Joseph did not live in peaceful times

Narrator 1: Would anyone here like to be a soldier?

Narrator 2: We need soldiers and baddies!

*The soldiers come forward from the darkness, hands up and volunteering -
they put on centurion's helmets & carry spears*

Children: We'll be soldiers!

I want to be a soldier!

I want to be a baddy!

*The centurions march around the crowd, pushing their way through, there is
a trumpet fanfare and they stand to attention*

Centurion: To the great and mighty Caesar Augustus, All Hail! I tell you all
- Caesar has decreed that all men will be taxed.

Mary, Joseph and Gabriel look shocked

Narrators: Boo! Hiss!
Encourage crowd to boo as well

Centurion: You are commanded - every man, with his family, to journey to his home city so that he can be taxed; Let no one withstand the word of the law. All Hail, Caesar!

Narrators: Boo! Hiss!
Encourage crowd to boo as well

Narrator 1: This was Joseph and Mary's world; a world where Roman Centurions frightened and intimidated the people of Israel, where taxes were collected for a Roman Emperor ...

Narrator 2: ... and where King Herod clung on to power but feared opposition.

Narrator 1: Particularly when he heard the prophecy about the birth of a baby who would become King!

Centurions stand to attention (looking as frightening as possible) as Mary mounts the donkey and rides around briefly before arriving at the Church door

Narrator 2: And so, Mary and Joseph found themselves travelling to Bethlehem, Mary riding on a donkey, but she was very weary as she knew that it was almost time for her child to be born.

Joseph knocks at the door of the Inn/Church, the Innkeeper appears:

Joseph: We are very tired and we have tried everywhere - please can you let us have a room for the night?

Innkeeper: *(shaking his head)* I'm so sorry, we are full up.

Joseph: We must find shelter somewhere, my wife is with child.

Innkeeper: All I can offer is my old stable, I'm afraid it's the best I can do.

Joseph consults Mary and accepts.

The Innkeeper takes his lamp and leads Mary and Joseph in to Church.

Narrator 1: *standing at the door of the Church*

We will follow Mary and Joseph and the Innkeeper and sing 'Oh Little Town of Bethlehem' as we walk.

Carol: Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

Scene Two.

As the procession enters Church:

- *Mary & Joseph to the stable led by Innkeeper*
- *Shepherds to the font*
- *Kings to the N. door*
- *German soldiers then hide behind front pews (in front of pulpit)*
- *British soldiers & then settle in battle set*
- *Children mingle with in-coming crowd*

Father sits in an armchair by the pulpit reading a newspaper - doesn't move or look as the congregation enters Church. (?? He has a dog with him - unpredictable what they do ... probably sniff around people as they come in?)

Once everyone is seated but still chatting/shuffling the children appear at the top of the aisle - shock/startle the congregation in to silence!

Children - confused shouting:

Child 1: Hey! Dad!

Child 2: Hi! We're back!

Child 3: We're in the play!

Child 2: Got a part in the nativity!

Child 1: We need costumes!

Child 3: Can you do costumes?

Child 2: Dad!! We need your help!

All: COSTUMES!!

Dad raises his head, waves vaguely and continues reading. Children run half way down the aisle, stop short and start shouting again:

Child 1: Dad!

Father: What is all this fuss about?

Child 3: We need costumes ...

Child 2: For the nativity

Father: OK ... *(goes back to his paper)*

Children: *(moving closer to the front)* Dad! We need them now!

Father: *(without looking up from his paper)* I'll look in the loft ...

Child 2: *(pulls Dad's paper down)* Can we do it now?

Father: Later ...

Child 3: ... but you always say that!

Father: *(lowers paper and talks seriously)* The paper is important, all these wars, poverty, people struggling so hard. It's important to know these things, to understand them.

Child 1: Isn't there anything happy in there?

Child 3: Some good news?

Child 2: Christmas is good news!

All: Oh, come on, Dad!

Dad folds up his paper, sighs deeply and draws the children across to the pulpit, he signals them to wait down below while he climbs up

Narrator 1: Looks like they've finally persuaded Dad to get out of his armchair!

Narrator 2: And in to the loft!

Narrator 1: I should sing while they do this ...

Narrator 2: it could take some time ... - ????????????????

Carol - Little Donkey

During the carol:

- *Dad throws nativity costumes down to the children*
- *Shepherds come forward and collect theirs & then return to their places to get dressed*
- *Kings come forward and collect theirs & then return to their places to get dressed*
- *The angels get some extra tinsel? Stars to hold? And dance around and about the congregation*
- *Dad holds up some really silly stuff for the narrators who turn him down!*

As the singing stops:

Father: *(exclaims)* Oh, my goodness!

(looks out to congregation) I'd forgotten all about these ...

The kids look up and shout because all has gone quiet

Child 1: Come on, Dad!

Child 2: Is that everything?

Child 3: Dad?

Dad: No, not everything

Dad puts on a 1st World War helmet and holds up a tatty old diary.

Father: Look what I've found! I'd forgotten all about this ...
Child 2: That's not Christmassy, stop messing about!
Child 1: Are there any more costumes?
Father: *(pulls on a WW1 soldiers jacket)* You're wrong - this is very much about Christmas! Goodness me, this really brings it all back!

There's an awkward silence as Dad becomes immersed in his reading ...

Narrator 2: Is it good then?

Father: Mmmm

Narrator 1: ... still reading?

Father: Mmmmm

Narrator 2: Fair enough! We'll take over from here, then!

Narrator 1 goes up into the pulpit and steers Father down and back to his armchair where he continues flicking through the tatty old book.

Narrator 2: goes up into the pulpit

Child 3: Well, that's that, then!

Narrator 1: For once ...

Narrator 2: ... and just this once ... *(taps the side of his nose, conspiratorially)*

Narrator 1: Dad is absolutely right.

Narrator 2: *(gesturing at the book & talking to the children)* This book is a diary and it belonged to your great grandfather. It's both sad ...

Narrator 2: Actually, very, very sad

Child 1: I remember about my great grandfather - his story is really sad!

Narrator 1: and happy - full of hope and definitely Christmassy

Child 2: But, he was killed in a war, wasn't he?

Narrator 1: He was, but he was also part of one of the most wonderful things that ever happened on a battlefield

Narrator 2: And one of the most wonderful things ever to happen at Christmas

Children who haven't yet got costumes move forward

Child 3: We haven't got costumes yet, what can we be?

Narrator 2: *(from the pulpit)* What do you want to be? A soldier?

Child 1: You mean a Roman soldier? A centurion? Like before?

Narrator 2: No! Soldiers from the First World War

Narrator throws costumes down to the other narrators who quickly pass them round

Child 2: Hey! These are different!

Child 1: 2 different kinds!

Narrator 1: That's right - German and British

Child 3: Do we get to fight?

Child 2: Can we fight?

Child 1: Can we be enemies? *(all very excited)*

Narrator 2: Calm it! Calm it!

Narrator 1: Yes, sort of, but only if you agree to play football as well

Child 3: I want to play football!

Child 1: You can't play football and be enemy soldiers fighting - that's stupid!

Narrator 1 ushers the soldiers to their places

Narrator 2: Shall we sing, while we sort all this out?

Carol - The First Noel

German soldiers wait in front of front pew, British soldiers settle in to their trench setting.

Stable (Scene 3)

Lights focus on Mary & Joseph in the stable scene; Narrators stand in front of the trench scene facing the stable to help focus attention that way.

Narrator 1: Warm and comfortable in an old stable

Narrator 2: And surrounded by the rustling of sleeping cows and donkeys

Narrator 1: A baby boy was born

Joseph: And we called him Jesus

Mary: Just as the angel had told us

Narrator 2: And above the stable shone a brilliant star, which brought visitors to see the newborn babe.

Shepherds and their sheep approach the stable and offer their gifts to Joseph and Mary

Narrator 1: The first to come were shepherds bearing humble gifts

Narrator 2: Shepherds of sheep

Narrator 1: Just as Jesus would become a shepherd of men

Narrator 2: Bringing love and peace and goodwill to mankind

Shepherds take their places in the nativity tableau

Narrator 1: Our next carol is 'While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks at Night'

Carol - While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

Trenches (Scene 4)

Lights go down on the stable and focus on soldiers in British Trenches

Narrator 1: See here, in the journal, it says;

Narrator 2: 'Today, I write in a much happier frame of mind because something wonderful has just happened, that I must write down at once. We were all standing to in our trenches yesterday morning, Christmas morning. It was crisp and quiet all about, as beautiful a morning as I've ever seen, as cold and frosty as a Christmas morning should be.'

The British soldiers stand up and begin to mill around - rubbing their hands with the cold, jumping up and down to keep warm and talking quietly amongst themselves.

Narrator 1: I should like to be able to tell you that we began it. But the truth, I'm ashamed to say, is that Fritz began it.

Narrator 2: First someone saw a white flag waving from the trenches opposite. Then they were calling out to us from across no-man's-land, 'Happy Christmas!'

Narrator 1: When we had got over the surprise some of us shouted back, 'Same to you, Fritz! Same to you!'

Narrator 2: I thought that would be that. We all did. But then suddenly one of them was up there in his grey greatcoat and waving a white flag.

The first German soldier stands up in the centre aisle & waves across to the British soldiers who stare at him

Narrator 1: 'Don't shoot, lads!' Someone shouted.

Narrator 2: And no one did.

Narrator 1: Then there was another Fritz up on the parapet, and another. *The rest of the German soldiers also stand up and wave across.*

Narrator 2: 'Keep your heads down,' I told the men, 'It's a trick.'

Narrator 1: But it wasn't.

Narrator 2: One of the Germans was waving a bottle above his head. 'It is Christmas Day, Tommy. We have schnapps. We have sausage. We meet you? Yes?'

Narrator 1: By this time there were dozens of them walking towards us across no-man's-land and not a rifle between them.

Narrator 2: Little Private Morris was first up. 'Come on, boys. What are we waiting for?'

Narrator 1: And then there was no stopping them. I was the officer. I should have called a halt to it there and then, I suppose, but the truth is that it never even occurred to me.

The British soldiers begin to walk across to meet the German soldiers and begin shaking hands and talking

Narrator 2: All along their line and ours I could see men walking slowly towards one another, grey coats, khaki coats meeting in the middle.

Narrator 1: And I was one of them.

Narrator 2: I was part of this.

Narrator 1: In the middle of the war, we were making peace.

British Soldier 1 and German Soldier 1 meet in front of the two narrators and stand hands outstretched about to shake hands - freeze in this position

Narrator 2: You cannot imagine my feelings as I looked in to the eyes of the Fritz officer who approached me, hand outstretched ...

The two soldiers now shake hands

German 1: Hans Wolf, I am from Dusseldorf. I play the cello in the orchestra. Happy Christmas!

British 1: Captain Jim McPherson, and a Happy Christmas to you too. I'm a school teacher from Dorset, in the West of England.

Narrator 1: We shared my rum ration and his excellent sausage. And we talked, how we talked! He had a wife and one son, born just six months ago.

Narrator 2: As I looked about me there were huddles of khaki and grey everywhere, all over no-man's-land, smoking, laughing, talking, drinking, eating.

Narrator 1: Hans Wolf and I shared what was left of the wonderful Christmas cake dear Connie made for me.

Soldiers begin passing small pieces of Christmas cake around the congregation - half a dozen paper plates, pass them to one person and ask them to keep passing them round

Narrator 2: He thought the marzipan was the best he had ever tasted. I agreed.

Narrator 1: We agreed about everything, and he was my enemy. There never was a Christmas party like it!

One soldier produces a football and holds it above his head, he throws it across to someone else and the soldiers begin to pass and dribble the ball around the Church

Narrator 2: Then someone, I don't know who, brought out a football.

Narrator 1: Greatcoats were dumped in piles to make goal posts and the next thing we knew it was Tommy against Fritz out in the middle of no-man's-land.

Soldiers get a general football match going - involve the congregation too (we'll need to plant some parents who are in the 'know' for this?!)

British 2: Oi! Careful!

Ball goes in to congregation

British 3: Can I 'ave me ball back, mate?

German 2: No! Not to him!

German 3: Over here, to me!

Improvise, encouraging some of the congregation to get up and join in. Throw ball occasionally, to keep it visible.

German Soldier 1 picks up the ball and holds it - all soldiers freeze frame where they stand looking towards the narrators.

Narrator 1: Hans Wolf and I looked on and cheered, clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to keep out the cold as much as anything.

Narrator 2: There was a moment when I noticed our breaths mingling in the air between us. He saw it too and smiled.

Narrator 1: Our next carol is 'We Three Kings'

Carol - '**We Three Kings**'

(A collection will be taken during this carol)

Stable (Scene 5)

Lights focus on nativity scene

Enter the 3 Kings

Angel: to Mary and Joseph

These visitors are just the first who will welcome Jesus in to the world at Christmas time each year. Their gifts are precious, but they also show us that life won't always be easy.

King 1: Gold, I bring, to crown him King

King 2: Frankincense, I bring, to mark his holiness, the Son of God, here on earth

King 3: And Myrrh, I bring, for all men must die and sorrow will surely come his way

Angel: This baby will bring peace to people's hearts even at the worst of times. Grown men, soldiers in the heat of battle will remember this child and stop fighting - they'll even play football!

Joseph: Football?

Mary: What is football?!

British soldier 1 & German soldier 1 come forward:

G. Soldier: I think this is how we should resolve war. A football match - no one dies in a football match.

B. Soldier: I'd prefer cricket - then we Tommies could be sure of winning, perhaps!

Soldiers laugh, shake hands with each other, shake hands with Mary & Joseph (& a few of the others), then return to their places.

Mary: What lovely men!

Joseph: They seem such good friends; football must be a good thing, whatever it is!

Kings take their places in the nativity tableau

Narrator 2: Our next carol is **Away in A Manger/Rocking Carol**
Carol - Away in A Manger/Rocking Carol

Trenches (Scene 6)

Soldiers are chatting together with G1 & B1 soldiers at the front

B Soldier 1: Well that's the game all done - a German win! Well done!

G Soldier 1: Thank you, but I think our goal was rather wider than yours!

B Soldier 1: That's very generous of you, Hans!

They shake hands warmly and join the others.

Narrator 1: The time came, and all too soon; the game was finished, the schnapps and the cake and the sausage had all run out and everyone knew it was all over.

Narrator 2: Soldiers wished each other well

Narrator 1: And said that they hoped they would each see their families again soon

Narrator 2: That the fighting would soon be over ...

Narrator 1: ... and they could all go home.

The soldiers bid their farewells to each other and the German soldiers pass through the congregation and away, waving as they go.

Narrator 2: Hans saluted to Jim as he walked slowly and, it seemed, unwillingly away. He turned to wave just once and then became one of the hundreds of grey-coated men drifting back towards their trenches.

Everyone waves, encourage congregation to wave too? Allow a pause for the soldiers to move away - brief silence.

Narrator 1: Please join us as we go back outside.

Narrator 2: And we will sing Silent Night, but please follow the words on your sheets because we will sing the first verse twice, once in English and then in German.

Return outside to the carol - Silent Night, first verse repeated in German,

Outside & close (Scene 7)

Nativity scene sets up again with the soldiers standing on either side

Father - still in helmet & jacket comes forward:

Father: *(reading from the journal)*

That night, back in our dugouts we heard them singing a carol, and singing it quite beautifully. It was 'Stille Nacht' - 'Silent Night'. Our boys gave them a rousing chorus of 'While Shepherds Watched'. We exchanged carols for a while and then we all fell silent. We had had our time of peace and goodwill, a time I will treasure as long as I live.

My dearest family! By Christmas time next year, this war will be nothing but a distant and terrible memory. I know from all that happened today how much both armies long for peace. We shall be together again soon, I'm sure of it!

Child 1: But Great Grandfather never did come home did he?

Father: No, and Great Granny never stopped waiting for him ...

Narrator 1: Even when the army returned his jacket, his helmet and his journal to the family many years later.

Narrator 2: And they weren't home by the next Christmas either - there would be 3 more Christmasses in the trenches before that happened ...

Narrator 1: ... And many more husbands, brothers, fathers and sons who never returned

Angel: *steps forward with a closing message from the crib scene characters (Mary and Joseph stand with him)*

On that very first Christmas Day, Jesus brought us a message of hope and love that we can still hear 2,000 Christmasses later!

WHOLE CAST:

We wish everyone a very Merry Christmas with peace and goodwill to you all!

Sing: **See Amid the Winter's Snow**

Closing prayers and thanks