

Christmas 1999 - The Celebration of Midnight Mass

Carol: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Reader Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life - this is our subject.

Scene 1

*A man is seated reading the paper and watching television. He is obviously at home; his slippers are on and a can of beer is at his side. As the speech goes on, he is getting more and more agitated.*

Bert Go on...go on...ooh! Get in there, go on...God this is hopeless; why'd we spend all that money on those foreigners? Bloomin' useless the lot of them...ooh. Referee! come on ref! It's got to be a penalty! What'd you mean he dived?

*The doorbell goes. No reply. It rings again*

Get the door will you? I'm watching the football

*His wife goes to the door. There are three people standing there, holding a candle*

Wife Good evening, what can I do for you?

Person 1 We've brought you this from the churches

Wife Oh, what's that?

Person 2 It's a Millennium candle

Wife Oh!

Person 3 You might like to light it on New Year's Eve

Wife Oh, yes, well, yes; I suppose I could do that. How much is it?

2)

- Person 1     Nothing; it's a gift from us
- Wife         But you must let me give you something; just hang on till I get my purse
- Person 2     No, we insist; it's a gift from us, from all of us
- Wife         Oh, which church are you from then?
- Person 3     We're from all of them; we're doing this together for the Millennium
- Wife         Together? That's a bit of a change isn't it?
- Person 1     Yes, it's sort of starting the way we mean to go on, you know, in the next Millennium
- Person 2     Trying to be sorry for all the past and make a new future - together
- Person 3     So we're just going round the district delivering these to every house, as a sort of gesture
- Wife         How many houses?
- Person 1     About 6 and a half thousand
- Wife         Gosh! That's a lot. And there's no charge?
- Person 2     No charge whatsoever
- Wife         And you don't want anything; you're not trying to get us into church or get anything out of us?
- Person 3     Absolutely nothing - it's just for love
- Wife         Gosh; well I'm not a church person myself, you know; well, the odd time at Christmas we've bin, but not for some years now. Don't see the point really - oh, I'm sorry; I didn't mean to.... no offence

Person 1     That's quite OK; none taken

Wife         Well, it's nice that; something for nothing; just for love

Person 2     Just for love

Wife         Would you mind hanging on; I'll just get my husband

Carol        It came upon a midnight clear

Reader      This is what we have heard from him, and the message that we are announcing to you: God is light; there is no darkness in him at all

## Scene 2

*The wife goes to her husband who is still avidly watching the television*

Wife         Bert, there's some people at the door, from the local church

Bert         Hush, woman; I'm trying to watch this; we're losing to a disputed penalty

Wife         Bert, they're from the church; they've come for Christmas

Bert         It's not that lot with the briefcases, is it? Tell 'em to clear off

Wife         No, it's not them; they're from all the churches. They're visiting everybody - together

Bert         Well, give 'em some money and get rid of them

Wife         Bert, they're nice people

Bert         Look, they're all nice people, but they're all after something

Wife         They've brought us a candle, for the Millennium, for the New Year

Bert         Well, pay 'em for it and get rid of them; we can't have these people round here; it's Christmas Eve you know

Wife Bert, they don't want money; they don't want anything.  
They said they brought it just for love

Bert Don't be stupid; nobody gives you something for nothing  
these days

Wife But they have; they insisted; come on, Bert, come and see  
them and at least say thanks

Bert Look, I'm watching this; it's important you know; we're  
losing - again!

Wife Come on, Bert, be nice, for me - it is Christmas you know

Bert Oh, all right; it's nearly half time anyway

*They make their way off stage*

Wife All you think about is your football

Bert That's all that matters

Wife Oh, Bert don't be silly

Bert Heh, don't you start getting all religious all of a sudden, just  
because someone wants to give you a candle for nothing

Carol Away in a manger

Reader The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on  
those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone.

### Scene 3

*The 3 people are still on the doorstep*

Wife This is my husband, Bert

Bert How'd you do

5)

Wife            We'd like to thank you very much for our candle; it was a very nice thought, wasn't it, Bert?

Bert            What, oh yeah, a very nice thought. Which church are you from, then?

Wife            I told you, Bert, from all of them

Bert            All of them?

Person 1       Yes, all of them

Bert            What together?

Person 2       Together

Bert            I thought you lot weren't supposed to get on, you know, Catholics, Protestants, and all them others

Person 3       Well we do now; have done for some time really

Bert            Oh; and who's paid for this lot, then?

Person 1       We have; we had a summer fair together and made the money for them that way

Bert            Had a summer fair, and shared the money, shared the money?

Person 2       Yes

Bert            Like equal shares?

Person 3       Yes

Bert            Blimey! (*to his wife*) They've shared the money, love; well, I've never heard that before. Whatever will you do next?

Person 1       Who knows?

6)

- Bert            You lot planning to get together, like?
- Person 2        We hope so, soon maybe
- Bert            Blimey! Well, I don't go in for this religion stuff much meself; too many rules; too much control; stops you doing what you want. Sorry, I don't suppose you'd agree
- Person 3        No
- Bert            And you're sure you don't want anything, money or something?
- Person 1        No, it's just for love
- Bert            Just for love, eh?
- Person 2        Just for love
- Bert            Well, that's all right then *(He takes the candle)* So what do we do with it?
- Person 1        You light it on New Year's Eve, just before midnight if possible, and you can say the Millennium resolution if you want
- Wife            What's that?
- Person 2        *(produces a card)* Let there be respect for the earth, peace for its people, love in our lives, delight in the good, forgiveness for past wrongs, and from now on a new start
- Bert            It's not religious, then, I mean, there's not God or church in it?
- Wife            Bert!
- Person 1        No, that's right; it's so that everyone can say it, whether they are believers or not

7)

Bert           *(takes the card)* Well that's all right then,*(reads)* respect for the earth, peace for its people, love in our lives... and we light this at midnight?

Person 2      Yes, if you like

Bert           Sort of glow for the New Year?

Person 1      Yes

Bert           Handy if we get a power cut, you know one of them Millenny..ennyium bugs

Wife          Bert!

Bert           Well, thanks then *(he holds the candle, and begins to move into the room muttering to himself)* Something for nothing.....just for love...glow for the new year...new start....well, can't be bad

Wife          I'm sorry he's a bit rude; good-hearted really, but his football's on

Person 3      That's quite all right; we meet all sorts

Wife          Well, then, a very happy Christmas and New Year, Millenny, enny

Person 1      Millennium

Wife          Yes, Millennium, to you all

Person 2      Good night

*(They leave and the wife walks back into the room; Bert is standing with the candle in his hand staring at the television)*

Bert            Blimey! We've scored twice; we're winning. Fancy that; wouldn't have given us a prayer! (*he looks at the candle in his hand*)

8)

Carol            Once in Royal David's City

Reader            For there is a child born for us, a son given to us, and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace

#### Scene 4

*Bert is still sitting in his chair with the candle in his hand, when two young people enter*

YP 1            Is the game finished, Dad; we want to watch "Who wants to be a Millionaire?" before we go out

*Bert is looking rather stunned*

Bert            Aye, it's just finished; come on then

YP 2            How'd they go on then? Lost again?

Bert            No, they won

YP 1            They what? Never!

Bert            They won, 2-1. They were one nil down and scored two goals in five minutes

YP 2            Well, I don't believe it

Bert            You don't believe it? I don't believe it

YP 1            Good goals, were they?

Bert            Dunno; someone came to the door

YP 2            You went to the door during the football? Where was Mum?

Bert She was with me

YP 1 You all right, Dad, you look a bit shook up

YP 2 Why wouldn't he be? They haven't won for ages 9)

YP 1 Heh, what's that? (*points to the candle*)

Bert That is a Milenny, Milly, Millennium candle

YP 2 What'd you buy one of them for?

Bert No, somebody brought it, for us, from the churches; they're doing it for everyone round here

YP 1 Whatever are they doing that for? They must be after something

Bert No, no; just for love they said

YP 2 Just for love? Don't be daft. Nobody does anything just for love

Bert That's what they said; just for love

YP 1 Dad, you didn't believe any of that nonsense did you?

YP 2 He's losing his marbles; it must be the drink

Bert Don't you be cheeky, you; I think it's nice. Nobody's ever given me anything for nothing before, nobody. This is the first time, even if it is only a piddling little candle. I'm going to light this on New Year's Eve, just like they said

YP 1 God, he'll be going to church next

Bert You lot! You've got no respect. Now, where's your mother?

*He gets up and goes out*

YP 2 Not bad, though, is it? Something for nothing - just for love

YP 1 Belt up and watch this; see if you can win a million

YP 2 Oh yeah!

10)

Carol See amid the winter's snow

Reader My dear people, this is not a new commandment that I am writing to tell you, but an old commandment, that you were given from the beginning; yet in another way, what I am writing to you and what is being carried out in your lives as it was in his, is a new commandment; because the night is over and the real light is already shining.

### Scene 5

*A pub. The two young people are sitting with their friends*

YP 1 And there he was, sitting in the chair, just holding this candle; God it was pathetic!

YP 2 He looked really shook up; just because someone had given him something for nothing. He couldn't believe it

YP 1 I can't believe it; now what are you having?

*They give their orders and YP1 goes off*

YP 3 You mean to say that people from local churches were out in the cold, delivering candles to 6 and a half thousand houses? What the hell were they doing that for?

YP 2 It's this Millennium, you know, only Dad can't pronounce it. They said it was just for love, just for love

YP 4 Nobody does anything just for love now; there's got to be something in it for them!

YP 5 Probably want to get you into church

YP 6 Yeah, boost the numbers for Christmas; make it look as if everyone believed the fairy story

All            Yeah

11)

YP 1            Sorry, I couldn't even get to the bar; it's too packed; shall we go somewhere else? We'll never get a drink here now

YP 3            They'll all be packed; we'll never get a drink anywhere

YP 4            We could go to my place, only my folks are in; they want a quiet night before facing the grandchildren tomorrow

YP 1            I know, why don't we go, you know, find a church, just go

YP 2            You mean, just for a laugh

YP 1            Well, no; I'm curious that's all; let's face it, all we're going to do is sit here in the pub with all these others and get legless; seems a bit pointless if you ask me

YP 3            Heh up! They've got to him; they really have; they've nobbled you

YP 1            No, don't be silly

YP 2            We could just go and see, couldn't we? Be no harm in that

YP 4            Yeah, sing a few carols, feel Christmassy

YP 5            I'm game; beats sitting here with this drunken shower and not even a drink for yourself

YP 6            Go on then, I'll come too. God, fancy that, me in a church on Christmas Eve - my Dad'll never believe me

*(They leave)*

Carol            While shepherds watched

Reader            The Word was the true light, that enlightens all people; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had

its being through him and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him

12)

Scene 6

*(Bert and his Wife come in from the back of church making a bit of noise)*

Bert            I thought you said we could get a seat at the back

Wife            But I never knew they're be all these people here

Bert            What are they all doing here?

Wife            Same as us; it's Christmas; you always get lots of people going to church at Christmas, and then not bothering the rest of the year; it's sort of sentimental

Bert            You mean like us?

Wife            No not us! We don't ever go; can't think of the last time I was in a church; Look, I thought it'd be a good idea, you know after that candle business and all

Bert            You and your something for nothing - just for love, eh?

Wife            Sshh!

Bert            I don't want to go up there to the front; everyone'll see me

Wife            Everyone can hear you as it is. Sshh!

Bert            Look, this isn't a good idea; I think we should go home. We don't belong here with all these holy people

Wife            They're not holy; they're the same as us;

Bert            And what are we only hypocrites?

Wife            We're not hypocrites; we just got a bit lost along the way. They made us welcome at the door, looked as if they were pleased to see us, so be welcome, shut up and sit down.

*(They sit at the front of church on the left; the young people enter from the back; they work their way up the church on the right)*

13)

YP 2        Why can't we hang around outside like all those other people?

YP 1        We won't see anything

YP 3        See what? There's nothing to see

YP 1        Sshh! Look we can't be rude; those blokes told us to sit here; we don't want them to think we're just drunks rolling into church at midnight

YP 4        We're not drunks; I've hardly had a drink at all thanks to you and your daft ideas

YP 1        Come, just sit down and see what happens

Carol        Come to the manger

Midnight Mass begins

*Leave out the second reading*

Prayer of the Faithful

Offertory Hymn    God rest ye merry gentlemen  
                          Blest are you, Lord God

Eucharistic Prayer No.1

Communion Hymns    The holly and the ivy  
                                  Hark the herald angels sing

Blessing

*The people remain in church after the procession leaves*

Scene 7

*Bert and his wife get out of their bench*

14)

Bert            You know, that was real nice that was; nice bit of singing, tree and the what-you-call-it....

Wife            Crib

Bert            Yeah, crib and that; somebody shook me hand; a complete stranger, and said: “peace be with you”, and “happy Christmas,” nice. Kinda makes you feel good about yourself, don’t it? I wonder if it’s like this every week

Wife            You’re not wanting to come again are you? Blimey, something really has happened to you

Bert            I dunno; kind of unnerves you; makes you feel that the rest of your life is a bit cheap and pointless, sort of thing, you know - pub, bookies and football. Perhaps there is a bit more to it after all. These people are all good to each other, and they were good to me; didn’t know me from Adam; it’s just a bit strange, that’s all. I used to think it was all a load of rubbish; I’m not so sure now.

Wife            So you’ll not be mithering and moaning and giving out all Christmas day now, eh? Good, we’ll all have a bit of peace, then

*They start to walk down the aisle; on the other side of the church, the young people get up to go*

YP 2            Well that was all right, wan’t it; lights, singing and all that

YP 3            Yeah, it was; better than all that bellowing and nonsense in the pub

YP 1            You coming back to our place, then? I owe you a drink at least

YP 2            I hope Dad’s all right; he gets real miserable at Christmas

YP 1 Oh he'll be all right; somebody gave him something for nothing tonight; he still can't believe it

15)

YP 4 Let's go and have a look at the tree; it's nice

*They move forward and bump into Bert and his wife who are just leaving*

YP 2 Dad, is that you, and Mum? What are you doing here?

Wife What are you doing here, which is more to the point? Did the pub shut early?

YP 1 No! It was so packed, they all were, and we decided to come here, just to see what it was like

YP 2 What's Dad doing here? He's not been in church for years

Bert Nor have you, so you've no need to crow

YP 1 Wasn't that candle business, was it? You know, just for love?

Wife I think so; He wants to come again, you know

YP 2 What? Blimey; now that is a miracle!

Bert Come on you lot, stop going on; let's go home and have a happy Christmas

*(He takes the candle from his pocket, looks at it and walks out with his arm round his wife)*

Reader And the Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth

Carol O Come all ye faithful

