



HEROD'S SECRET POLICEMAN

An alternative Nativity play

Based on the Open Doors book by Nick Page



How-to guide for Herod's Secret Policeman Nativity play

THANK YOU!

Thank you for choosing to put on a play of *Herod's Secret Policeman*. We hope you will have fun performing it, and that your audience will enjoy this alternative re-telling of the Nativity story, as well as taking home a message about the challenges faced by the persecuted church today.

HOW MANY ACTORS DO WE NEED TO PERFORM THIS PLAY?

Ideally, you would have 16 actors, one for each character.

If you have a larger group that you would like to be involved, you could add extra non-speaking characters, such as extra advisers and shepherds. You could also add an additional sign holder, and the narrator's role could be shared by two people.

If you have a smaller group, you could take out non-essential characters, such as the sign holder and the star, combine the two advisers into one, and have just two shepherds. This would take the number of actors down to 12.

For an even smaller cast, you could have the two advisers double up as Mary and Joseph, and have the three wise men double up as the three shepherds, as well as removing the star and sign holder. This would take the number of actors down to nine. In scene 6, you would then need Herod to come out alone, and have just one or two wise men and one or two shepherds.

CAN CHILDREN PERFORM THIS PLAY?

Yes – that's the idea! But some of the roles have quite a lot of lines to learn, so you will need to judge for yourself how easy the children in your group will find this. We would suggest the biggest speaking parts are best suited to children aged 10 or over. And it would work as an all-age cast as well.

HOW LONG WILL THE PLAY TAKE TO PERFORM?

Around 10-15 minutes. This makes it ideal to include as part of a church service, school assembly or Christmas fayre.

WHAT PROPS WILL WE NEED?

The minimum props you will need are:

- King Herod's throne
- A small gate – could be an actual gate or a picture painted on to a piece of card/wood
- A large sign reading “Very Bad Things”
- A trunk, suitcase or large box filled with fancy dress items
- The Secret Policeman's shepherd costume (we suggest the classic children's nativity look of a man's dressing gown and a tea towel), and a toy sheep
- A manger full of hay and a baby Jesus
- A large sign saying “The End”.

YOU MAY ALSO WISH TO INCLUDE:

- A large book for the narrator to read from – this could hide the script if the actor playing the narrator will find it hard to learn all of the lines
- A large, old-looking book for the advisers to look through when they are asked about Jesus
- Gold, frankincense and myrrh for the three wise men to carry
- Sheep for the shepherds
- A medical bag for the midwife
- Animals to add to the nativity scene
- In scene 6, you could have the characters come out carrying large photos of their modern-day equivalents. For example, King Herod could carry a photo of North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un, the shepherds and wise men could carry photos of persecuted Christians from the Open Doors website, etc.

WHAT COSTUMES WILL WE NEED?

The costumes can be as simple or as elaborate as you like.

You may wish to go for a ‘school nativity’ look, which could be particularly funny if adults are performing the play. This usually involves a lot of dressing gowns, tea towels and crowns made from gold card.

You could have everyone dress plainly and use one or two items to indicate the different characters – a crown for Herod, large beards for the three wise men, flat caps for the shepherds, a large cut-out star held by the star, etc..

Or perhaps you have more elaborate costumes available, or someone who is handy with a sewing machine who would be willing to create some more complete costumes.

HOW SHOULD WE DECORATE THE STAGE?

The only essential items you will need on stage are:

- Herod's throne and the trunk of disguises for scene 1
- The manger and baby Jesus for scene 5.

As each scene is quite short, we suggest you keep the stage quite plain for the rest of the play. The entire play takes place at night, so you may wish to have some kind of dark backdrop. This could be as simple as a black sheet or a more elaborate starry night scene. But this is not essential.

HOW CAN PEOPLE LEARN MORE ABOUT PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS AND HOW THEY CAN HELP THEM?

We would be delighted if you would direct people who would like to learn more to the Open Doors website – opendoorsuk.org. You could also order copies of the latest Open Doors magazine to give to those who are interested by calling **+44 (0)1993 460015** or emailing contact@opendoorsuk.org.

You can also order free copies of the children's booklet that this play is based on, *Herod's Secret Policeman*, and find other related resources, by visiting opendoorsuk.org/herod.

Please place orders for printed resources in plenty of time before your performance.

GOOD LUCK!

If you take any photos or videos of your performance, we would love to see them. Please email them to contact@opendoorsuk.org. Break a leg!



Cast of Characters



NARRATOR



STAR

(can be a non-speaking part if you wish)



KING HEROD



SIGN HOLDER



SECRET POLICEMAN



SHEPHERD 1



WISE MAN 1



SHEPHERD 2



WISE MAN 2



SHEPHERD 3



WISE MAN 3



MIDWIFE



ADVISER 1



MARY



ADVISER 2



JOSEPH

Scene 1: King Herod's Palace, Jerusalem.

A grand throne is in the middle of the stage.

NARRATOR enters.

NARRATOR: This is a story about something that happened a long time ago, but which is still happening today. A long time ago, there was a very old, very clever, very cruel king.

HEROD enters, followed by **ADVISER 1** and **ADVISER 2**. **HEROD** sits on his throne, looking pleased with himself. **ADVISER 1** and **ADVISER 2** stand either side, looking nervous.

NARRATOR (cont.): His name was Herod. And, although he had been the king for a long time, his people hated him.

HEROD: *(Standing up and looking at the narrator, furious.)* What?!

NARRATOR: Did I say hated? I meant, um, rated! They really rated him!

HEROD calms down, nods and sits. He consults silently with **ADVISERS**.

NARRATOR (cont.): *(Whispers loudly to audience.)* As you can see, no one could say out loud how they really felt. If you said something bad about Herod, even when he wasn't there, he was sure to find out. Herod had spies everywhere. And he had lots and lots of secret police.

Secret Policeman enters, looking suspiciously at the audience.

NARRATOR (cont.): This is one of them. This is Secret Policeman Number 3. Nobody knows his real name.

SECRET POLICEMAN: *(To the audience, seriously.)* It's a secret.

NARRATOR: But for as long as he could remember, he had always worked for the king.

HEROD exits, followed by his advisers carrying his throne.

NARRATOR: One day, Secret Policeman Number 3 was guarding the main gate when some visitors arrived.

*Given a small wooden gate from off stage, gives it to **SECRET POLICEMAN**. Enter **WISE MAN 1**, **WISE MAN 2** and **WISE MAN 3**.*

WISE MAN 1: We are Wise Men.

WISE MAN 2: Three Wise Men.

WISE MAN 3: From the East.

SECRET POLICEMAN: *(Impressed.)* Wow. I've never met Three Wise Men from the East before. *(Thinks for a moment.)* I've never met Wise Men from the north, south or west either, now that I think about it.

WISE MAN 1: We have travelled a long way.

WISE MAN 2: A very long way.

WISE MAN 3: A very, very, very long way.

WISE MAN 1: We have come to see the new prince.

WISE MAN 2: *(Pointing.)* Following that star.

STAR *jumps on stage from the side, waves enthusiastically, jumps back off stage.*

SECRET POLICEMAN: We don't have a new prince. All we have is an old king.

WISE MAN 3: Then take us to him.

SECRET POLICEMAN *hands gate back to **NARRATOR**, who passes it off stage. **ADVISER 1** and **ADVISER 2** enter carrying Herod's throne. They put it down and **HEROD** enters and sits on it. **ADVISERS** stand either side.*

NARRATOR: So Secret Policeman Number 3 took the Wise Men to the king.

WISE MAN 1: *(To HEROD.)* We are Wise Men.

WISE MAN 2: Three Wise Men.

WISE MAN 3: From the East.

WISE MAN 1: We have travelled a long way.

WISE MAN 2: A very long way.

WISE MAN 3: A very, very, very –

HEROD: *(Interrupting rudely.)* Never mind that! Why are you here?

WISE MAN 1: *(Nervously.)* To see the new prince.

HEROD: *(Angrily.)* What new prince?

WISE MAN 2: The one... er... foretold by the star.

STAR *jumps on to the stage, waves enthusiastically, jumps off stage again.*

WISE MAN 3: *(Whispers, to the NARRATOR, looking worried.)* I'm starting to think that coming to see King Herod wasn't a very wise thing to do...

HEROD: *(To his ADVISERS.)* Would anyone like to tell me where this new prince might be found?

ADVISERS *start whispering together frantically.*

NARRATOR: King Herod often asked his advisers questions as a kind of test. If they answer wrongly, Very Bad Things might happen.

SIGN HOLDER *walks across the stage holding a giant sign reading "VERY BAD THINGS".*

SIGN HOLDER: *(Dramatically.)* Veeery baaad thiiings!

NARRATOR: *(Slightly sarcastically.)* Thank you.

SIGN HOLDER: *(Bowing flamboyantly.)* You're welcome. *(Exits.)*

ADVISER 2: In our scriptures, it says something about Bethlehem?

HEROD: *(To WISE MEN.)* There you go. Try Bethlehem. And do come back and tell me where this prince is, so that I can meet him as well.

WISE MEN nod, bow and exit. **HEROD** gestures to the **ADVISERS** to leave, and signals **SECRET POLICEMAN** over to himself.

SECRET POLICEMAN: *(To the audience.)* Oh no, oh no, he's mad that I brought those Three Wise Men from the East to see him, a Very Bad Thing is about to happen.

SIGN HOLDER starts walking out with "VERY BAD THINGS" sign.

SIGN HOLDER: *(Dramatically again.)* Veeery baaad -

The **NARRATOR** gestures to **SIGN HOLDER** to go back.

NARRATOR: No no no! *(To SECRET POLICEMAN.)* I know the whole story, you're fine.

SIGN HOLDER goes back off stage, disappointed. **SECRET POLICEMAN** looks relieved, goes to **HEROD**.

HEROD: Follow those Three Wise Men from the East. Tell me where they go, in case they don't come back.

SECRET POLICEMAN: Do you really think a prince could be born here without you knowing, Sire?

KING HEROD: *(Angrily.)* Of course not! There are no other rulers except me! But he might be a threat. People might follow him instead of me. So find out all you can. And go in disguise.

SECRET POLICEMAN: Yes sir!

HEROD exits. **ADVISERS** return carrying a large trunk and leave it in the middle of the stage. **ADVISERS** exit taking the throne. **SECRET POLICEMAN** rubs his hands together, excited.

SECRET POLICEMAN: Goodie! I love disguises!

SECRET POLICEMAN starts pulling things out of the trunk. Should include comedy items such as a multi-coloured clown wig, oversized sunglasses, a vicar's outfit, a large, brightly coloured bikini etc. Finally, he should find a man's dressing gown, a tea towel and a toy sheep.

SECRET POLICEMAN (Contd.): Aha! I'll go as a shepherd.

He puts on the shepherd's outfit. Exits carrying toy sheep.

ADVISERS enter, put rejected costumes back in trunk, exit carrying trunk.

Scene 2: Countryside outside Bethlehem

NARRATOR: Secret Policeman Number 3 disappeared into the night. And if there was one thing he was very good at, it was disappearing into the night.

SECRET POLICEMAN enters, carrying his sheep, stumbling around, feeling in front of him with his hands.

NARRATOR (Contd.): The problem with the night, of course, is that it is very dark. And Secret Policeman Number 3 didn't know the way. Then he saw the star that the Wise Men mentioned.

STAR jumps on stage, waves enthusiastically at **SECRET POLICEMAN**.

STAR: Yoo-hoo! I'm over here.

SECRET POLICEMAN: I've never seen that star before tonight. It's all very odd.

STAR skips around the stage, **SECRET POLICEMAN** follows slowly, still stumbling and unsteady. **SHEPHERD 1, SHEPHERD 2 and SHEPHERD 3** enter carrying sheep.

NARRATOR: The star lit his way to Bethlehem. And he was just arriving at the town when –

SECRET POLICEMAN walks abruptly into **SHEPHERD 1**.
STAR exits, skipping.

SHEPHERD 1: Watch where you're going!

SECRET POLICEMAN: Sorry. I'm just, er... a visiting shepherd. Look, I've got a sheep and everything.

SHEPHERD 2: We're shepherds as well!

SHEPHERD 3: (*Suspiciously.*) Your sheep isn't moving much.

SECRET POLICEMAN: She's fainted. She had a fright.

SHEPHERD 1: Ooh, did you see the angels as well?

SHEPHERD 2: They were frightening, weren't they?! Did they tell you about the baby?

SHEPHERD 3: We've seen the baby. We think He's the Messiah, the one true King who will rescue all of us!

SHEPHERDS *so excited about this idea, they don't notice* **SECRET POLICEMAN** *exit.*

SHEPHERD 1: *(Turning as if to address Secret Policeman.)* What did the angels say to – oh!

NARRATOR: But Secret Policeman Number 3 was no longer there. He had disappeared into the night.

SHEPHERDS *exit.*

Scene 3: Streets of Bethlehem

SECRET POLICEMAN enters, still carrying his sheep, stumbling and feeling his way around.

SECRET POLICEMAN: First the star and now all this stuff about angels and the Messiah. It's all very weird.

MIDWIFE enters, walking confidently. Walks straight into **SECRET POLICEMAN**.

MIDWIFE: Watch where you're going!

SECRET POLICEMAN: Sorry, I'm just a visiting shepherd with my sheep.

MIDWIFE: (Crossly.) Not another shepherd! First you barge in on that poor young mother, and now you run around town bashing into people.

SECRET POLICEMAN: What young mother would that be?

MIDWIFE: I was called in to help her with the baby. And you know where they put the child? In a manger – an animal's feeding trough. I mean, not hygienic, is it?

SECRET POLICEMAN: No. And this was just round the corner, was it?

MIDWIFE: Yes... (Suspiciously.) Why isn't your sheep moving?

SECRET POLICEMAN: Er... concussion. She got knocked out when we bumped into you.

MIDWIFE: (Looking away.) Hmm.

As she looks away, **SECRET POLICEMAN** exits.

MIDWIFE (Contd.): Anyway, you're not to go and bother her – oh!

NARRATOR: But Secret Policeman Number 3 was no longer there. He had disappeared into the night.

MIDWIFE exits.

Scene 4: Streets of Bethlehem

SECRET POLICEMAN enters, still carrying his sheep, stumbling and feeling his way around.

SECRET POLICEMAN: The star, the angels, and now a baby in a manger. It's all very strange.

WISE MAN 1, 2 and 3 enter closely together in a line. **SECRET POLICEMAN** walks straight into **WISE MAN 1**, who in turn bumps into **WISE MAN 2** who steps back and treads on the toes of **WISE MAN 3**.

WISE MAN 1: Watch where you're going!

SECRET POLICEMAN: Sorry, I'm just a visiting shepherd with my sheep.

WISE MAN 2: Why isn't your sheep moving?

SECRET POLICEMAN: Shhh, she's asleep. She's tired out after walking so far.

WISE MAN 3: Oh, have you come a long way?

WISE MAN 1: We have also come a long way.

WISE MAN 2: A very long way.

WISE MAN 3: A very, very, very, very, very long way.

WISE MAN 1: But it was worth it to give the baby our gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

SECRET POLICEMAN: Why would you give a baby such expensive things?

WISE MAN 2: He's not just a baby! He is God's special gift to us all. He will save all of us! We're going to go back home to tell others all about Him.

SECRET POLICEMAN: Are you going to tell Herod?

WISE MAN 3: Of course not! We're not stupid.

SECRET POLICEMAN *exits without the WISE MEN noticing.*

WISE MAN 1: We're wise.

WISE MAN 2: Very wise.

WISE MAN 3: Very, very, very... hang on a minute, how did you know about Herod?

NARRATOR: But Secret Policeman Number 3 was no longer there. He had disappeared into the – well actually, he had gone to see the baby.

WISE MEN *exit.*

Scene 5: Stable in Bethlehem

The stage should be set up like a traditional Nativity scene, with a baby Jesus in a manger full of hay, MARY and JOSEPH sat either side, and some animals near by. STAR should also be there, staring at the baby adoringly.

SECRET POLICEMAN enters unnoticed, still carrying the sheep, looking amazed.

NARRATOR: It was not a place you'd expect to find a prince. It was dark and smelly and there were animals there. But as Secret Policeman Number 3 looked at the mother, the father and the baby in the manger, he had the strangest feeling.

SECRET POLICEMAN: The star, the angels, the manger, the gold, frankincense and myrrh. It's all very... wonderful!

NARRATOR: All his life, Secret Policeman Number 3 had obeyed orders. All his life, he believed what he'd been told by the king. But what if this baby really was a kind of prince? What if the angels really had been telling the truth? What if He was God's special gift? Suddenly, he realised this little baby was the most important person in the world.

JOSEPH: (*Noticing SECRET POLICEMAN.*) Hello? Another shepherd.

MARY: Your sheep doesn't look too well.

SECRET POLICEMAN: I'm not a shepherd. This is a present. For the baby.

Puts the sheep next to the baby.

MARY: Thank you.

SECRET POLICEMAN: (*Suddenly urgent.*) But we don't have any time! The king thinks your Son is a threat. And that means a Very Bad Thing might happen to Him.

SIGN HOLDER enters carrying "VERY BAD THINGS" sign.

SIGN HOLDER: *(Dramatically.)* Veeery baaad –

SECRET POLICEMAN: We don't have time for that!

*Shoos **SIGN HOLDER** away, **SIGN HOLDER** leaves looking tragically disappointed.*

JOSEPH: *(Nodding.)* We know. I had a dream about it. We have to go.

MARY: But where will we be safe?

SECRET POLICEMAN: I'll take you. I know where you can cross the border without anyone seeing.

JOSEPH: How do you know?

SECRET POLICEMAN: I... used to be a secret policeman.

MARY: And what are you now?

SECRET POLICEMAN: I don't know. Somebody different. Somebody better.

***SECRET POLICEMAN, MARY** carrying Jesus, **JOSEPH** and **STAR** all exit. Stage is cleared.*

NARRATOR: So, Secret Policeman Number 3 led the mother and the father – whose names were Mary and Joseph – away from Bethlehem and on a special secret route into Egypt.

***SECRET POLICEMAN, MARY** carrying Jesus, and **JOSEPH** enter.*

SECRET POLICEMAN: You'll be safe here.

JOSEPH: Thank you.

MARY: What will you do now?

SECRET POLICEMAN: I don't know. Maybe I'll become a shepherd. I've got the uniform.

JOSEPH: If Herod finds out that you have helped us, he will kill you.

SECRET POLICEMAN: I'll be careful. I'll have to hide. *(Thinking for a moment.)* But maybe in the future lots of people will believe that your Son is the true King. And there will be other rulers and kings who won't like that. So maybe a lot of us who follow your Son will have to hide.

MARY: We don't know how to thank you.

MARY and **JOSEPH** look at Jesus, and don't notice as **SECRET POLICEMAN** exits.

JOSEPH: We don't even know your real name – oh!

NARRATOR: But Secret Policeman Number 3 was no longer there. He had disappeared into the night.

MARY and **JOSEPH** exit.

Scene 6: Blank Stage

*Although the following lines have been given to the **NARRATOR**, you could share them out among the cast if you prefer.*

NARRATOR: This is a story about something that happened a long time ago, but which is still happening today.

HEROD and **ADVISERS** enter.

NARRATOR (Contd.): There are still a lot of ‘Herods’ around the world – people who are every bit as cruel as King Herod was, and who demand complete obedience from the people they rule. Like Herod the Great, they feel threatened by Jesus and try to arrest or even kill anyone who follows Him.

HEROD and **ADVISERS** stand back, **SECRET POLICEMAN** enters.

NARRATOR (Contd.): There are also still a lot of Secret Policemen around today – people who spy on their own people. They keep a record of anyone who they think is suspicious. In the parts of the world where Christians are seen as a threat, they may be followed, or have their homes and meetings raided.

SECRET POLICEMAN stands back, **SHEPHERDS, WISE MEN** and **MIDWIFE** enter.

NARRATOR (Contd.): But there are also still a lot of ‘shepherds’ and ‘wise men’ around as well – people who know how special Jesus is and choose to follow Him. In many parts of the world, following Jesus can be a very dangerous thing to do, so often these Christians meet in secret.

SHEPHERDS, WISE MEN and **MIDWIFE**, stand back, **MARY** and **JOSEPH** enter carrying Jesus.

NARRATOR (Contd.): And meeting Jesus is still changing the lives of millions of people around the world today. Persecuted Christians know that it is worth risking everything to follow Him.

SIGN HOLDER and **STAR** enter holding a sign saying “**THE END**”.