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THE INTERGENERATIONAL BALTIMORE CITY CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

(Musical introduction begins the pageant. Gabriel is seated at the bar, looking at his phone. Everyone else is off-stage. As musical introduction concludes, the three BALTIMORE HONS walk onto stage.)

HON 1:

This is the story of a baby, hon. It's a story that you've heard before – possibly many times before. In a lot of ways, the story never changes. But *we* change. The way we hear it changes. So this year, 2015, we want to share how it went over in Baltimore City.

It actually doesn't begin in Baltimore City, believe it or not. Nah, this story starts in Dundalk. That's where Mary was living. She was kinda what we would call a townie: Dundalk-born and Dundalk-raised. And you know how it is when you've lived your whole life in a place like that. People know you. People know your momma. People know your business.

SCENE 1 – Jimmy's Seafood

(By now, HON 1 and HON 2 are standing in front of the bar area. GABRIEL is seated at the bar, staring at his phone. MARY enters and starts wiping down the bar, pretending to talk with customers.)

HON 1: Anyways, Mary was more or less a waitress over at Jimmy's Seafood, over on Holabird. I say "more or less" because she wasn't old enough to serve alcohol or nothing like that. But she was friendly and worked real hard so they let her seat parties and bus tables and whatever else.

There wasn't anything particularly special about the man sitting at the bar that night, she would say later.

No wings or anything dumb like that. He ordered a pit beef sandwich and a Coke and mostly looked at his phone. But when Mary came over to ask if he wanted a refresh on that Coke, the guy looked up suddenly and his eyes were kind of wild and he said:

GABRIEL: Look, I don't want to freak you out or anything. I've got something to tell you and it's kind of a big deal. You're gonna have a baby, Mary. God's baby. This kid ain't gonna be any ordinary kid, either. Your kid is going to be one to save us.

HON 1: Now Mary was still a kid *herself* but it wasn't her first day at Jimmy's either. She knew how the customers got a little weird as the night went on. But she had no idea what to say to this guy. He didn't seem drunk. So she said,

MARY: You're out of your mind, mister. I don't know who you think I am, but I'm not that kind of girl.

HON 1: But the dude didn't seem to be angry or mean or making fun of her. He was actually looking at her in a way that she wasn't at all used to. He was looking at her like she was special. He said:

GABRIEL: It's the Holy Spirit, Mary. It's a miracle.

HON 1: It's hard to explain why, but Mary knew he was telling the truth. It made her feel warm and nervous and kinda out of breath. She said:

MARY: Okay. I'm in. I'll be his mom.

(Musical interlude begins. HON 2 leads MARY towards JOE's apartment. They stop before reaching it. Music concludes.)

SCENE 2 – Joe's Place

HON 2: Now. It's a not a little thing, as you might imagine, breaking that kind of news to your boyfriend.

(JOE walks onto stage, talking silently on his cellphone)

Joe back there - (*HON 2 gestures*) – he was Mary's first real boyfriend – a high school fling that sorta just stuck around like a stray cat and the next thing you know Mary couldn't imagine life without him. They were talking about getting married. (*MARY looks excited, hugs HON 2 happily*).

But I don't have to tell you, hon, that *talking* about getting married and *being* married aren't the same thing, especially when your belly seems to be bigger every day. (*MARY looks nervous and depressed*.) Mary fully expected to get dumped. She expected Joe to just swipe left and find a girl who wasn't full of Messiahs and crazy ideas. So she went by his apartment and took a deep breath and broke the news to him.

(MARY walks over to JOE's area and knocks on an invisible door. She waits anxiously while he hangs up the phone and comes over to open it. They pantomime an intense conversation.)

HON 2: She told him the whole crazy story. And you know what? He didn't think she was crazy. It turns out he had been having some wild dreams himself. He said:

JOE: Mary, listen: I believe you. I'm with you. You're my girl. We'll raise this baby together, no matter what anybody says, no matter what happens.

[MARY and JOE embrace.]

SCENE 3 – Journey to Baltimore City

HON 2: Now, Joe didn't know it at the time but a lot was gonna happen, and soon. It turns out that 2015 was a Census Year.

NEWS REPORTER walks onstage purposefully, yanking the microphone from HON 2 as though on camera.

REPORTER: I interrupt this program with breaking news! The President has declared a national census. Everyone – and I mean everyone – has to return to their hometown and be counted.

(REPORTER returns microphone to HON 2 and exits.)

HON 2: There was a lot of grumbling and complaining, as you might imagine, but in the end, Mary and Joe decided they would just have to go to Baltimore City, baby or no baby. Thanks Obama!

The Census put them in a tight spot, I gotta tell you. Joe was out of work and Mary's hosting didn't exactly pay the bills. Between the two of them, they scraped together enough cash to get two one-way Greyhound tickets to Baltimore City.

(BUS DRIVER comes out, carrying steering wheel. BUS DRIVER leads MARY and JOE down center aisle slowly, making several stops, until stopping at front of aisle, while Congregation sings Verse 1 of 'O Little Town of Bethlehem.'

*O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above your deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light,
The hopes and fears of all the years,
Are met in thee tonight.*

BUS DRIVER sits down. MARY and JOE then turn to face congregation.)

SCENE 4 – MLK Boulevard

HON 3: What little money Mary and Joe had left went into some last-minute purchases for the baby – diapers, formula, a blanket.

(Someone sitting in front pews puts these items in Mary's arms, taking her money.)

Mary couldn't help but think that this was not exactly the way she pictured her first baby coming into the world, but then again she'd seen a lot of her friends in the same situation. You do the best you can. Meanwhile, Joe was trying to figure out where they could stay for the night. He did what you are supposed to do – call 211.

(JOE pulls out the phone again, dials a number. OPERATOR onstage to ringing piano keys.)

OPERATOR (from pulpit): Thanks for calling 211. How can I help you?

JOE: Hi, I'm calling because my girlfriend and I are in a tough spot. We're here for the Census and we've got nowhere to stay. I was just wondering if there was a shelter that could take us. See – my girlfriend is pregnant and we can't sleep just anywhere.

OPERATOR: Yeah, I can tell you right off the bat *that's* gonna be a problem.

HON 3: The operator explained, nice as she could, that there was a shortage of beds in Baltimore City shelters. And there's a *real* shortage of beds in places where families can stay together. But Joe tried one more time:

JOE: Please ma'am. This is a pregnant girl we are talking about. There's got to be somewhere we can stay the night.

OPERATOR: Listen. It breaks my heart we can't help you. But there's maybe 200 hundred homeless families in Baltimore tonight and we just can't house them all. But there's always tent city. Right under Highway 40, Martin Luther King Blvd. It's not much but at least you'll have something over your heads in case it rains.

HON 3: They didn't have anyone else to call. So that's exactly where they ended up.

(OPERATOR hangs up and exits. MARY and JOE move to the overpass area and begin to lay out blankets and set up a sleeping area while the Congregation sings the first verse of 'Away in A Manger.')

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.*

*The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.*

HON 3: There's no way of dressing this up. Jesus was born to an unmarried teenage girl, under an overpass on MLK. The hope of the world, swaddled in a Dollar Store blanket in Tent City.

They made their sleeping area as comfortable as possible, and tried to pretend like they weren't being stared at by the cars that made their way down MLK. As they settled in, however, Mary and Joe realized that they were not the only ones spending their night in Tent City.

(Suspenseful piano music begins.)

There were...creatures around. As the creatures emerged from the shadows they saw that they were surrounded by animals. There were orioles (*ORIOLES emerge from side doors, wave, and sit*). There were ravens (*RAVENS emerge and join*). There were crabs (*CRABS emerge and join*). Last, but not least, there were rats (*RATS emerge and join*.) Maybe more rats than anyone had initially suspected!

(Suspenseful music transitions into intro for Friendly Beasts).

To Mary and Joe's amazement, the animals gathered around their encampment peacefully. It didn't seem like they meant any harm. Matter of fact, they were friendly. They wanted to see Jesus.

(ANIMALS gather around MARY and JOE and the BABY while the congregation sings a verse or two of The Friendly Beasts. At this time FIREMEN, POLICE, and EMTs come out and form their silent tableau to the side.)

*Jesus our brother kind and good
Was humbly born in a stable rude
And the friendly beasts around Him stood
Jesus our brother, kind and good*

*I said the donkey, all shaggy and brown
I carried His mother up hill and down
I carried His mother to Bethlehem Town
I said the donkey, all shaggy and brown*

After the congregation finishes singing, HON 3 starts moving over to the labyrinth, where a tableau of FIREMEN, POLICEMEN, and EMT's are frozen in public acts of service).

Scene 5 – Night in the City

HON 3: Meanwhile, it's still Baltimore. When was the last time Baltimore had a silent night? The world around Mary, and Joe, and the baby was LOUD.

(FIREMEN, POLICEMEN, and EMT's burst into sound all at once – sirens and yelling and commotion. At a hand signal from HON 3, they all freeze again. HON 2 begins to speak.)

HON 2: While most of Baltimore was asleep, these women and men were hard at work to make sure the city was safe. It was hard work, and it was dangerous work, and they were tired. Caffeinated, but tired. So you can imagine that it took them a little bit by surprise – ok, a *lot* by surprise, when all those helicopters showed up all at once.

(HELICOPTERS pop up from behind the railing of the balcony, with twirling propellers and lights.)

The spotlight settled in on the women and men working below and they were terrified. You could see it right on their faces. *(WORKERS make terrified faces.)*

HON 2: Now, if you're not from Baltimore, you might not know this, but in Baltimore, helicopters *talk*. These helicopters were full of messengers – reporters and camera people, to be specific. And the one called FOXTROT called out to the people, saying:

FOXTROT *(speaking through a megaphone)*: Ladies and gentlemen, do not be afraid. For once, we've got good news to share. See, there's a newborn baby – right here in Baltimore City. He's gonna be the one to save us. You don't have to take our word for it – go see it for yourself. You'll find him wrapped in a blanket under Franklin Street on MLK.

HON 2: And with that, all of the messengers broke out into song, and the men and women of the city set out in search of the baby.

(Congregation sings the first verse of "Angels We Have Heard On High" as all WORKERS travel to chancel and assemble alongside ANIMALS around MARY, JOE, and JESUS. HELICOPTERS move to chancel as well. BUS DRIVER and REPORTER and OPERATOR also join. Meanwhile HON 2 moves back to other side, where the CEO and BOARDMEMBERS of HEROD Corp are assembled).

*Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.*

*Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

Scene 6 – The Boardroom

HON 1: I've got to tell you that the workers weren't the only ones who watched the news that night. You better believe that the business community was glued to the tube as well.

Specifically, there was one corporate entity that took issue with the messengers' announcement. The HEROD Corporation. Now a lot of people think of HEROD as a leader here in Baltimore. I mean, they've got power, sure. Money, of course. They *have* made the city look nicer – at least those parts where the rich and powerful people like to hang out. But over time, HEROD got used to assuming that they ran Baltimore City. They have a way of getting what they want. And one thing *none* of them wanted was a new King in Baltimore City.

CEO: *None* of us wants a new King in Baltimore City. Am I right?

BOARDMEMBERS, (*grumbly*): Hear, hear! That's right.

CEO: If the media has this story right, this baby will *not* be good for business as usual. They say he will bring the 1% down from their thrones and lift up poor. Disrupt the *makers* and exalt the *takers*. They say...(CEO leans in over the table at the BOARDMEMBERS)... they say he will send the rich away empty.

BOARDMEMBERS (*horrified*): No! Never!

CEO: Friends, the world will seek him. I say we find him first.

BOARDMEMBERS: Indeed!

NARRATOR: And with that, the CEO welcomed his special guests.

(*PROFESSORS enter from front right door, to "Pomp and Circumstance"*).

HON 1: They were a strange-looking crew. Dignified, but scattered. Brilliant, but bespectacled. They were wise ones, strangers from the East. That is, they were professors from Johns Hopkins University, East Campus.

(*PROFESSORS enter with dignity, carrying textbooks, charts, and messenger bags. They inspect everything curiously.*)

CEO: Thank you scholars, for joining us.

PROFESSOR: And thank you, for all your generous support of the university!

CEO: A pleasure, a pleasure. Listen, we have a little field research project. The baby Jesus.

PROFESSORS: Ah yes! We've heard good things.

CEO: We need you to find him. Use your data, use your networks, use the *stars* for all we care. Find the baby Jesus. We are very anxious to...worship him.

(BOARDMEMBERS all start coughing and laughing evilly).

HON 1: And so, the Hopkins professors set off in search of the child. One of them had a background in astronomy and astrology and he took out a telescope....oh, who am I kidding? They just used Google Maps. They just typed "Son of God" into the search bar and to their amazement, a bright yellow star appeared right over the overpass on Martin Luther King Blvd. So they followed the star in search of the child.

(Congregation sings "We Three Kings" as the PROFESSORS make their way up to the chancel. They present their gifts (books, bag, chart) to the baby and take their places around him.)

*We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect Light.*

Scene 7: Back with the Baby

HON 2: After seeing what they saw, the professors just couldn't go back and share what they'd learned with HEROD Corp. See, they got an anonymous phone call from another business leader at HEROD telling them about the real agenda.

(BOARD MEMBER takes out phone, acts this out. PROFESSOR receives the call up front.)

The professors decided to stay a little longer with the baby and then return home another way. After all, they did have tenure.

And I wish I could tell you that HEROD stopped searching for Jesus after that. But they didn't. Soon enough there would be police orders from on high, describing a certain threat, a hidden danger, nestled right among us. Really, he could be anyone. Soon enough there would be police orders to find any boy matching a certain description and get that danger off the streets. Soon enough. But not this night. This story is about the night a new light entered the world.

(Musical interlude plays while CEO and BOARD MEMBERS exit stage. HON 3 ascends into the pulpit as music concludes.)

HON 3:

All in all, it was a quite a scene, hon, down in Tent City. Crabs and ravens, fire fighters and the police, professors, homeless folks and reporters and rats and one very new mom and her incredible baby boy. Mary held Jesus in her arms and just tried to take it all in. She remembered what the man at Jimmy's Seafood had said.

GABRIEL (*now standing at lecturn*): Your kid is gonna be the one to save us.

HON 3: Mary held the baby and she looked at the city all around her. She thought about what had happened on these streets over these last 300 years. She thought about what had happened on these streets over these last 12 months. She thought about the world. Sometimes it just seemed like too much to bear. The baby was so small and helpless there in her arms. Could he really be the Savior?

GABRIEL: It's the Holy Spirit, Mary. It's a miracle.

HON 3: She had to admit that what was happening right before her eyes was a miracle. These people. They seemed like a weird, freaky little family huddling in around her in the snow, gathering in closer to see the baby. She thought about the larger families they represented, the neighborhoods, communities, and professions. The people. She had a sudden vision of what it might look like, this new Kingdom. She held the baby close. She pondered it all in her heart.

But of course, being Baltimore, it wasn't quiet for long. Nah, someone started singing a song. Now it is a point of controversy who started the song. Could have been a firefighter. Could have been a professor. But some folks that I consider reliable swear up and down that it was a rat. You heard me. A rat started singing a song.

(Child in rat costume steps forward and sings the rat solo.)

*Go, Tell It On The Mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, Tell It On The Mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.*

Then the rat gestures for the congregation to join in. While this is happening, the Children's Choir assembles behind rat:

*Go, Tell It On The Mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, Tell It On The Mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.*

*While shepherds kept their watching
Over silent flocks by night,*

*Behold throughout the heavens,
There shone a holy light:*

[Music transitions to "Good Morning Baltimore." RAT falls in with Children's Choir. All cast point to Children's Choir.]

Children's Choir:

*Oh, oh, oh woke up today feeling
the way I always do
Oh, oh, oh hungry for something that I can't eat
Then I hear that beat
The rhythm of town starts calling me down
It's like a message from high above
Oh, oh, oh pulling me out to the smiles and the
Streets that I love*

Everyone:

*Good morning Baltimore
Every day's like an open door
Every night is a fantasy
Every sound's like a symphony
Good morning Baltimore
And some day when I take to the floor
The world's gonna wake up and see
Baltimore and me...*

Final Chorus (or two) of "Go Tell It On The Mountain"

Cast Takes a Bow –

THE END