THE FORGOTTEN CHRISTMAS STORY
by Rachel C. Hoyer

GENRE: Comedy

SYNOPSIS: Mark Stilman and his wife get a lesson in the true meaning of Christmas from their pastor, a group of carolers and their own children.

DIRECTOR’S TIP: You will need to allow extra rehearsal time for this piece since there are so many characters (choir, pastor, etc.), as well as special effects (videotape, songs, etc.). Rehearse the family and choir separately, and have a blocking rehearsal before you begin run-throughs so you won’t waste time once the entire cast is present.

TIME: Over 5 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 10

TOPIC: Sin


CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Christmas

SUGGESTED USE: Christmas Service, General Church Service

CHARACTERS:
ANDY STILMAN—age 14
SHANNON STILMAN—age 12
CAROLINE STILMAN—age 35 40
MARK STILMAN—age 35 40
CHRISTMAS CAROLERS—any number; can be played by worship team or choir
SHADOW PUPPETS—four to six actors to pantomime the Christmas story behind a screen (carolers can double as pantomime actors)
PASTOR—best if played by congregation’s actual pastor

PROPS: Christmas tree, family room furniture, gifts under tree, popcorn, cookies, needles and thread for popcorn, tray with four mugs for hot chocolate, box of Christmas ornaments, TV/VCR with remote control, videotape with “fall of man” clip, box of tangled Christmas tree lights

COSTUMES: Casual holiday attire

SOUND: Four wireless mics (choir can share one to three additional mics depending on number of people in group). Sound effects needed: Christmas music, doorbell, microphone for TV/VCR
LIGHTING: General stage for family room scene; specials for choir (optional); back lighting for projection screen to do shadow puppets

SETTING: The Stilman family room

Lights up on a cozy family room. Instrumental Christmas music is playing softly in the background. SFX: CHRISTMAS MUSIC. A bare Christmas tree is flanked by chairs and a coffee table. There are gifts under the tree but no ornaments on it. After a beat, ANDY ENTERS, carrying a large bowl of popcorn. He eats some of the popcorn. SHANNON ENTERS behind him, carrying a tray of Christmas cookies.

SHANNON: Andrew Mark Stilman, cut it out. You’re not supposed to eat that. (Hollering off:) Mom! Andy’s eating the popcorn!

ANDY: Shut up, Shannon. You’re such a brat. There’s like a gallon of popcorn—it’ll take us six years to string it. I’m just trying to save us time.

SHANNON starts to retort when CAROLINE ENTERS, carrying a tray with four mugs of hot chocolate and marshmallows.

CAROLINE: Andy, stop eating the popcorn. Shannon, don’t tattle—it’s annoying. And it’s Christmas Eve. Can’t we all just get along tonight? Have some fun together?

SHANNON: But, Mom …

CAROLINE: Don’t “but, Mom” me, young lady. Now start stringing popcorn and have some fun. Dad’s on his way up from the basement, so happy faces, everyone! (She pastes one on herself.)

ANDY and SHANNON start to string popcorn. ANDY continues to sneak bites of popcorn when no one is watching. MARK ENTERS, laden with a large box of Christmas ornaments.

MARK: (Out of breath) Merry Christmas, everyone! (To CAROLINE) Are we hanging bricks on the tree this year? This box was not this heavy last year.

CAROLINE: It’s the same ornaments every year, dear. You’re just getting-

MARK: (Cutting her off) Don’t say it. The box is heavier, that’s all.

CAROLINE: Okay, troops. Let’s get started. Andy, you’re doing great with the popcorn—keep it up. Shannon, unpack the delicate ornaments first, then we’ll get out the clunky stuff from Grandma. Mark, help me untangle the lights.

ANDY keeps stringing/eating. SHANNON starts to unpack the box. MARK hesitates.
MARK: Uh, I thought we’d try something a little different this year. We always end up arguing about which ornament goes where and...well...I think we’re missing the point of Christmas. So, I’m going to step out of the decorating this year and, while you silently place ornaments on the tree, I’ll tell the Christmas story. (To CAROLINE, who is giving him a look:) I saw this in a movie. It’ll be great. (She remains unconvinced.)

    SHANNON and ANDY start to protest, but they see their father’s excitement. They acquiesce.

CAROLINE: (Trying to be supportive) Great idea, Mark. That’s just...great. Hot chocolate, anyone?

    ANDY and SHANNON jump at the offer. They get hot chocolate and cookies and settle down to their tasks as MARK begins his tale.

MARK: Okay, then. Here we go. (He pauses to gather his thoughts.) Once upon a time...

ANDY: Dad, I thought you were telling us the Christmas story, not some fairy tale.

MARK: Just bear with me, Andy. It’s been a long time since I told a story. (Pause) Okay... where was I?

SHANNON: Once upon a time...

MARK: Right. Thank you, sweetie. Once upon a time, there was a girl named Mary. Now, she and her sister, Martha, argued all the time about who would cook and who would clean the house ...

CAROLINE: Uh, honey?

MARK: (Perturbed at another interruption) Yes?

CAROLINE: That’s the wrong Mary. The Christmas story is about a girl who had a baby.

MARK: Not the same Mary?

CAROLINE: NO.

MARK: Oh. Okay. Scratch the sisters arguing. (Pause) So this girl-Mary-she has a baby. (Directly to the kids) Of course, she was legally married and everything. They just got married a little younger back then.

SHANNON: Uh, Dad?
MARK: No more interruptions! (There is silence. He continues.) So Mary had a baby—a boy, I think. The doctor pronounced him healthy, and sent her home from the hospital after 24 hours. (CAROLINE starts to interrupt, but MARK silences her with a look.) Then three really important guys—they were rich, too, I think—stopped by the house to see Mary and the new baby and to bring gifts. They had missed the baby shower, and wanted to bring gifts anyway. So they gave the baby money—never too early to start a college fund—some nice aromatherapy candles, and a spice rack—I think that was for Mary.

Then some local union guys stopped by—Mary's husband was a union carpenter—but they didn’t bring any gifts, just...uh...peace and goodwill. At church the next Sunday, the choir sang like angels, and Mary was very pleased. She pondered all these things in her heart. The end.

ANDY: Nice one, Dad.

MARK: Nice what, Son?

ANDY: Story. Nice...uh...story.

MARK: Thanks, but it’s more than a story, Son. It's fact.

ANDY: Dad, it’s not even close. You didn’t say anything about why the baby came or anything.

MARK: Okay, Mr. Smartypants, if you know so much, why don’t you tell us the story and I'll string the popcorn.

ANDY: (Thrilled to be off popcorn duty) Okay! Shannon, I’m going to need your help.

SHANNON: Okay.

ANDY: (Assuming the role of storyteller) Well, it all started thousands of years ago in the Garden of Eden.

MARK: Garden?! I don’t remember any garden in the story.

ANDY: Dad, you asked us not to interrupt you. So please, no interruptions.

MARK: Fine. Go on.

ANDY: In the Garden of Eden were Adam and Eve, the first people God created. God put them in charge of the garden and gave them only one rule: no eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He told them if they ate fruit from that tree, they would die.
SHANNON: Ooh! Let me tell the next part. (ANDY gives her the floor.) So Satan made himself look like a snake—which was a good animal at the time—and he told Eve that it was okay for them to eat from that tree. When she said, “No, it’s not—we’ll die,” he said, “Did God really say you’d die?” And he got Eve into a whole bunch of bad choices—doubt, disobedience, thinking she could be like God—well, the whole thing was the first real sin.

ANDY: Right. So Satan brought evil into God’s perfect world.

MARK: Okay. You lost me back at “Garden.” I thought you were going to tell the Christmas story. Help me out, here. You haven’t told me what Adam and Eve have to do with Christmas.

ANDY: What do you want, a video? (He has an idea) Wait! Shannon, where’s that NBC special you made me tape?

SHANNON: I didn’t make you—I just said it was better than watching Monday Night Football.

ANDY: Where’s the tape? (SHANNON finds it near the VCR and hands it to him.) Here, Dad. Watch this.

FX: VIDEO CLIP PLAYS ON PROJECTION SCREEN.

MARK: Okay. I remember watching that with you. (To SHANNON) And for the record, Monday Night Football is art. (To ANDY) And you still haven’t told me what Adam and Eve have to do with Christmas.

SHANNON: Well, God was pretty mad, so he told Satan he would do three things: He’d make it so humans and snakes wouldn’t get along; he’d make Eve’s offspring crush the snake’s head—I’m not sure what that one means; and humans would have to work hard until they die. (To ANDY) That was on Mr. Meyer’s test in religion last semester.

ANDY: Way to be. Mr. Meyer will explain the whole “crushing his head” thing next semester. It’s like this: Satan brought sin into the world, but God wasn’t going to leave it at that. He said he’d send a Savior to save all humans from sin. The Savior would defeat Satan and sin.

SHANNON: Oh! So the Savior would crush Satan’s head—I get it.

MARK: I don’t!
CAROLINE: Shannon, I think I’m following you. Let me try. (To MARK) Honey, here’s the CliffsNotes version: God creates the world. Satan tempts Eve. Eve and Adam sin. God decides to send a Savior to conquer Satan and sin. God talks all about it in the Old Testament—promising people he’ll send the Messiah...

She is interrupted by the doorbell. SFX: DOORBELL. CAROLINE crosses to open the door. As soon as the door opens, a group of CHRISTMAS CAROLERS bursts into song.

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS: (Singing) “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, unto us a Son is given...”

Before they can continue, MARK, caught up in the moment, takes over the song:

MARK: (Singing badly) “And the government shall be upon his shoulders!”

Quickly, CAROLINE cuts him off and apologizes to the CAROLERS.

CAROLINE: I’m so sorry you had to hear that. Thank you all for coming! (She quickly closes the door on them. CAROLERS EXIT.)

MARK: Why did you make them leave? I love that song!

CAROLINE: I’m glad to see you’re catching on...

MARK: Catching on to what?

ANDY: The Christmas story, Dad.

MARK: Oh. (Thinks a minute) No, you’ve still lost me there.

SHANNON: Dad, you were just singing it: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given...and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...”

MARK: Yeah—that song’s a classic. But where’s the apple? Where’s the snake?

CAROLINE: Mark, do you know where the words to that song came from?

MARK: Yes. This one I know. That Handel guy. He wrote this whole...what is it...an opera?

ANDY: Dad! Those lyrics are straight from the Bible!
CAROLINE: They’re from the book of Isaiah. Pastor talked about it in Bible study last year. I think there’s another verse there that says, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

ANDY: Wow. That’s good, Mom.


SHANNON: OOH! I’ve got this one! The angel Gabriel tells Mary she’s going to have a baby.

MARK: Finally, we’re talking about Mary. I think I’m with you.

SHANNON: Good. (Getting an idea) Wait-are those carolers still around? (She looks out the door.) Ooh-they’re at the Murphys’. Here, Dad. Listen to this.

MARK crosses to the door. From “across the street,” we hear the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS sing “The Angel Gabriel.” When the song is finished, SHANNON shuts the door.

MARK: Yes, that’s nice. But this is where it gets a little far-fetched for me. Some angel tells Mary she’s going to have a baby and she’s okay with that? At least in my story, she was married and had an HMO. Now that people can relate to.

CAROLINE: Yes, honey. But you do know that she wasn’t married and didn’t have any kind of health insurance, right?

MARK: Sure. Their parents kicked them out and she gave birth in Joseph’s barn because there was no room for them in the inn. Then there’s something about wise men finding them in the barn.

ANDY: No, Dad. Shannon, I think it’s time.

SHANNON: I think you’re right. Dad, we didn’t want to resort to this, but you give us no choice.

ANDY AND SHANNON: Shadow puppets!

ANDY takes the lamp off the table and angles it at the projection screen. NOTE: the light shouldn’t actually hit the screen or it could ruin the desired effect. ANDY and SHANNON take their places near the lamp and start to make shadow puppets with their fingers. Meanwhile, the SHADOW PUPPET actors take their places behind the projection screen and the backlight is turned on. The goal here is for the audience to see the SHADOW PUPPET actors pantomiming the story ANDY and SHANNON tell.
ANDY: So the Roman emperor ordered a census. Everybody had to go to his hometown to register. Joseph’s family was from Bethlehem, so he and Mary went there. It was a long trip, so Mary rode on a donkey. (SHADOW PUPPET PANTOMIME: Joseph and Mary traveling) Mary was pregnant and was about to have the baby, but Bethlehem was booked—there was no room for them in the inn. (SHADOW PUPPET PANTOMIME: Joseph and Mary asking for a room; the innkeeper shaking his head no) They ended up staying in a stable, and that’s where Mary had her baby.

SHANNON: Some shepherds were out in the fields with their flocks when an angel appeared. They were really scared, but the angel told them not to be because he had good news. He told them Jesus had been born in Bethlehem and they should go see him. (SHADOW PUPPET PANTOMIME: Angel appearing to the shepherds and sheep)

CAROLINE: If I may say, you guys are really good at this shadow puppet thing.

ANDY: Thanks, Mom.

CAROLINE: Did they teach you that at camp?

SHANNON: Anyway, a whole bunch of angels appeared and said ...

CAROLINE: Wait—I’ve got this one. Hold on. (She runs to the door. The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS are there.) Wow. You guys are fast. Do you know “Gloria” by Michael W. Smith?

The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS ad lib “yes,” “sure,” etc., then sing “Gloria.” CAROLINE thanks them and closes the door.

CAROLERS EXIT.

MARK: Okay, okay. I had most of that in my story. But you said shepherds. What about the wise men? Where were they?

ANDY: They came later, Dad. But you’re right—they were an important part of the story.

SHANNON: They read the prophecies that said a Messiah would come. And they followed a star to Bethlehem so they could worship Jesus. They knew he would grow up to be a king.

CAROLINE: Oh! I’ve got a great idea. Hold on. (She runs to the door and opens it. Hollering out:) Carolers! Wait! I have one more request! (The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS return to the door.) Do you guys know “One Small Child”?

CHRISTMAS CAROLER: Yes, but it’s pretty cold out here. May we come in?

CAROLINE: Yes, of course. Come on in.
The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS ENTER and sing “One Small Child.”

ANDY: That was great. Thanks.

CHRISTMAS CAROLER 1: You’re welcome. Will that be all? We were supposed to be back at the church half an hour ago.

CAROLINE: Yes, that’s all we need. Thank you so much!

The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS EXIT.

ANDY: Well, that gets us to Christmas and even a little beyond, Dad. Does it make sense now?

MARK: It’s beginning to, Son. But I’m a little concerned about all the traffic in the house tonight. Now that it’s just the four of us again, will someone—

He is cut off by the doorbell. SFX: DOORBELL. CAROLINE crosses to the door and answers it. PASTOR is at the door.

CAROLINE: Pastor Greg! Merry Christmas! What brings you here?

PASTOR: Merry Christmas, Caroline. I’m looking for the church’s Christmas carolers. Someone said they were spending a lot of time here tonight?

CAROLINE: I guess we did kind of hog their time, Pastor. I’m sorry. We were just trying to help Mark understand the reason for Christmas. See, we started with Adam and Eve, and that threw him off a little.

PASTOR: I could probably help. May I come in?

CAROLINE: Oh, yes. Forgive me. Please come in.

PASTOR ENTERS and talks to MARK.

PASTOR GREG: Mark, it’s simple. The Gospel of John sums it up nicely: “In the beginning ...” (John 1:1–14)

PASTOR explains John 1:1–14 and summarizes for MARK that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We needed a Savior, so God sent Jesus. The whole message should be addressed to MARK and the family and take 2–3 minutes. At the end of the message, the doorbell rings again. SFX: DOORBELL. CAROLINE answers the door. It is the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS again. They ENTER.
CHRISTMAS CAROLER 1: Here he is. Pastor Greg, we heard you were looking for us, so we came back to find you. (To CAROLINE) And we thought of another song that might help you out: “Celebrate the Child.”

The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS lead the cast and congregation in singing “Celebrate the Child.”

After the song, the cast, including PASTOR GREG, EXITS. PASTOR segues into Holy Communion.

During Holy Communion, the worship team leads the congregation in appropriate Communion and Christmas songs.

................. Lights down