

# **BELLS OF CHRISTMAS: THE BEST GIFT**

## **A Children's Christmas Play**

© 2013 by Bill Wood (adapted from an old folk story)

There are three stage areas:

1. At the left, a modern-day scene at GRANDPA PETE and GRANDMA GABBY's house;
2. At the right, a village scene from 80 years ago;
3. In the center, an altar that represents a church of 80 years ago.

Use lighting as available to highlight stage areas where action is happening; or, if that's not possible, just keep the lights up on all parts of the stage throughout.

(Casting note: We need a strong grandma, grandpa and grandkids for speaking parts; can use junior and senior youth for Grandma and Grandpa. Other actors have relatively easy parts, in which they act out narration without having to speak themselves. If these parts seem "too easy," we can add lines of dialogue during the Christmas play at the old church.)

### **CAST:**

Grandpa Pete  
Grandma Gabby  
Grandkid 1  
Grandkid 2  
Pedro  
A Poor Widow  
Narrator  
Joseph  
Mary  
Shepherds  
Angels

(Optional) Merchant Woman  
(Optional) Wealthy Man

Congregational Hymn: Good Christian Friends, Rejoice (210)

(LEFT SCENE) ENTER GRANDPA PETE AND GRANDMA GABBY

GRANDPA PETE: What a great time of year this is!

GRANDMA GABBY: Yes, I love it. The grandkids will soon be here and I'm baking some of my Christmas cookies for them.

GRANDPA PETE: Ah, those cookies!

GRANDMA GABBY: I think I hear the grandkids now.

ENTER TWO GRANDKIDS

BOTH GRANDKIDS: Grandma Gabby! Grandpa Pete! Merry Christmas!

GRANDMA GABBY: And Merry Christmas to you!

GRANDPA PETE: Your grandmother has made up some of your favorite Christmas cookies. It's her Old Country recipe.

GRANDMA GABBY: They're just about to go into the oven.

GRANDPA PETE: Fifteen minutes later, cookie perfection!

GRANDKID 1: Grandpa Pete, while we're waiting on the cookies, would you tell us a story about the Old Country?

GRANDPA PETE: How about a Christmas story from the Old Country?

BOTH GRANDKIDS: Yay! An Old Country story!

GRANDMA GABBY: Now, don't you go telling them those Old Country stories. You know the only important story at Christmas time is the real Christmas story – the birth of Jesus.

GRANDPA PETE: Ah, you're right about that. The story of Jesus is the only story that counts.

GRANDMA GABBY: Good. That's settled. Now I'll go put those cookies in the oven.

EXIT GRANDMA GABBY. EVERYONE WATCHES HER GO.

GRANDKID 2: Grandpa Pete, what is "cultural heritage"?

GRANDPA PETE: Well, those are some big words FOR YOU! Why do you ask?

GRANDKID 2: Our teacher Miss Darlene said family stories are part of our "cultural heritage."

GRANDPA PETE: She did? You know, she's exactly right. Maybe I should tell you an Old Country story after all.

BOTH GRANDKIDS: Yay!

GRANDPA PETE: Once upon a time, back in the Old Country, we all lived in a small village. But for such a small village, it had a big church. The church was most famous for its beautiful sounding bells. People came from miles around to hear the bells in that tall tower on Christmas Eve. But one year the bells stopped ringing. The church steward could pull on the bell rope but nothing would happen.

GRANDKID 1: Why didn't they just fix the bells?

GRANDPA PETE: Well, our village had fallen on hard times. We had trouble just keeping the church open, let alone fixing the bells. But the legend around the village said: If someone offered a pure and perfect gift on the altar one Christmas eve, the bells would ring again. And yet, years went by and the bells never rang. That is, until one year a little boy named Pedro made it all right.

GRANDKID 2: Tell us about Pedro!

GRANDPA PETE: Oh, yes, Pedro was an ancestor of yours. He lived in the village.

HIGHLIGHT VILLAGE SCENE AT RIGHT; action is at right but Grandpa Pete is narrating while actors pantomime in the village scene.

GRANDPA PETE: Eighty years ago, he was a little boy. He was usually happy, even though times were hard. One windy and cold Christmas Eve, he stopped by a poor neighbor's house on his way to the church.

(TURN ON LOUD FAN; WIDOW shivers; PEDRO appears at her door)

GRANDPA PETE: This poor woman had only a fireplace for heat, and her woodpile had gotten low. So Pedro went out to the woodpile and chopped enough wood to last her for several days.

(In village scene area, PEDRO pretends to chop wood.)

GRANDKID 1: So they couldn't just turn up the thermostat, back in the village in those days?

GRANDPA PETE: No, they had to keep warm using wood fires. Well, by now Pedro was surprised to see how late it was and he wanted to hurry off to join the others at church.

GRANDKID 2: Why didn't he leave right away?

GRANDPA PETE: The neighbor lady had one more chore for Pedro, to light her porch lamp. When he did, Pedro spotted a little copper coin, lying there in the lamp light. He picked it up and took it in to her. She was overjoyed!

(PEDRO lights the lamp, sees the penny, picks it up and takes it to the WIDOW, who reacts with joy.)

GRANDKID 1: Why was she so happy?

GRANDPA PETE: Times were so hard that she was not going to be able to make a Christmas offering that year. (WIDOW folds her hands and bows her

head in prayer.) She prayed that, from somewhere, she would get some money for an offering. The little coin Pedro found was an answer to that prayer.

GRANDKID 2: Well, if she was so poor, why didn't she just keep the little coin?

GRANDPA PETE: That would not have been right. She felt that God sent her the coin in answer to her prayer. So she gave it to Pedro to put in the offering for her, and sent him on his way.

GRANDKID 1: But Pedro was late by then?

GRANDPA PETE: Yes, even as he was on his way to church, the service was getting to the main part of the Christmas story.

LIGHTS UP ON CENTER OF STAGE; ALL OTHER LIGHTS DOWN. Now, at center stage, actors act out what the NARRATOR is reading

NARRATOR: Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

(JOSEPH and MARY walk to center stage)

So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

(JOSEPH and MARY sit next to manger and pose with baby doll)

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

(ENTER SHEPHERDS; then ANGEL enters and faces SHEPHERDS)

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

(ENTER ALL ANGELS)

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

(SHEPHERDS move to manger and look in at baby doll)

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: Away in a Manger (194)

LIGHTS UP on GRANDPA PETE and the GRANDKIDS on side stage

GRANPA PETE: So the service was almost over. The last thing was, people presented their offerings at the altar. Everyone was hoping a perfect gift would make the church bells ring. But they didn't have much hope, since the bells had not rung in years.

GRANDKID 1: What happened then?

GRANDPA PETE: Well, people took up their usual gifts. Then everyone noticed that a rich merchant woman took forward a whole basket of silver.

(MERCHANT WOMAN PANTOMIMES GIVING HER GIFT) She felt inspired to give to the church. She thought it was a perfect gift. She put her gift on the altar, but the bells did not ring. She went back and sat down.

GRANDPA PETE: And then a wealthy man took forward a gift of several bars of gold. (WEALTHY MAN PANTOMIMES GIVING HIS GIFT) Would this be the perfect gift? No, the bells remained silent. Everyone in the church was disappointed, because again this year the bells would not ring. The pastor asked for the lights to be turned down for the final candle-lighting ceremony.

GRANDKID 2: So the church was all dark then?

GRANDPA PETE. Yes, it was all dark. Just then, Pedro came in. Seeing that the offerings had already been given, he sneaked around the side of the church, then up to the altar. He put that little copper coin on the altar alongside the silver and gold.

PEDRO sneaks up, places a penny on the altar, and sneaks back into the darkness.

(12 CHIMES SOUND ON ORGAN; all on stage look up at the ceiling to hear the bells.)

GRANDKIDS: And the bells rang!

GRANPA PETE: Yes, the bells rang. The most beautiful, sweet, clear notes you have ever heard. A perfect gift had been given – not the silver of a rich merchant or the gold of a wealthy man, but a simple copper coin from a poor shut-in.

GRANDKID 1: I'll bet Pedro was famous in the village after that!

GRANPA PETE: Well, no. He wasn't. He didn't want to take credit for someone else's gift. So he sneaked to the back of the church while it was dark. Only the steward saw him. But Pedro didn't tell and the steward didn't tell. Here's what was important about the gift Pedro took up to the altar: It was a faithful believer's gift, an answer to prayer, and that made it a perfect gift.

GRANDKID 2: So what happened after the bells stopped ringing?

GRANPA PETE: Everybody hugged each other. Then the whole church stood up and sang "Joy to the World."

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN: Joy to the World (318)

GRANDKID 1: Grandpa, who rang those bells after Pedro put his gift on the altar?

GRANPA PETE: People in the village had different ideas. Some said that God rang the bells. Others talked about the strong wind that night. It almost knocked the bell tower over, and in doing that, maybe the wind freed up the bells so they could ring again. Still others said they thought the steward had fixed the bells during the week before, then rang the bells after seeing what Pedro did.

GRANDKID 2: But what do you say?

GRANPA PETE: I say God rang the bells. For the One who made heaven and earth – how hard could it be to ring some church bells? Or maybe he acted through the wind or the steward to ring those bells. The important thing was that Pedro delivered a perfect gift and the bells rang.

GRANDKID 1: Grandpa, how do you know so much about Pedro?

GRANPA PETE: I'll tell you some other time. I think your grandma is coming now. Uh, you don't have to let her know I told you that story again. It's our secret.

GRANDKID 2: Yeah, grandpa, it's our "cultural heritage."

ENTER GRANDMA GABBY.

GRANDMA GABBY: Children, the cookies are ready.

EXIT TWO GRANDKIDS, screaming: "Yay! Cookies! Thank you, Grandma Gabby!"

GRANDMA GABBY AND GRANDPA PETE watch the GRANDKIDS exit.

GRANDMA GABBY: I love the traditions of Christmas.

GRANPA PETE: Me too – the decorations, the time with friends and family, and most of all the Christmas story.

GRANDMA GABBY: And I like the way we say “Merry Christmas,” just the two of us, using our Old Country names.

GRANPA PETE: Yes, I know what you mean. I have been called “Pete” in this country so long I don’t think about that old name very much any more. Well, Merry Christmas, Gob-riella.

GRANDMA GABBY: Merry Christmas, Pedro.

ENTIRE CAST: Pedro?

GRANDPA PETE (steps forward, points to himself, points to an unaware GRANDMA GABBY): I won’t tell if you won’t tell.

ENTIRE CAST: Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Congregational song: SILENT NIGHT (193)