

THE
WORSHIP
OF
Christmas
CELEBRATE
THE
MIRACLE

SCRIPT

Written by Deborah Craig-Claar

CHRISTMAS BY THE BOOK

Sharing the Story of the Night Hope Came Down

by Deborah Craig-Claar

Premise

It's very late on Christmas Eve, and the only store still open is quirky Polly Klipfits' used bookstore, The Torn Page. Last-minute shopper Kim Wiley has one item left on her gift list: a "happy book about Christmas" for her ailing and recently hospitalized father. "No bah humbugs or Grinches!" she says emphatically. But the old, dusty, worn books Polly offers are not what Kim expects. As the stories of authors from past generations literally come to life before her eyes, Kim realizes she has been searching for much more than a gift. Instead, she finds testimonies full of what her life has been missing—hope—and a life-changing story as true today as it was in a stable so long ago.

Key Scripture

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1, NIV).

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13, NIV).

Time

Christmas Eve, 5:45 p.m., present day
("Book scenes" occur, in order, in 1543, 1903, 1865, and first-century AD)

Place

The small, cluttered main room of The Torn Page used bookstore
("Book scenes" occur at a late medieval cathedral pulpit, a turn-of-the-century parlor, a Civil War-era study, and a small writing room in first-century Judea)

Characters

POLLY KLIPFITS: (40s-60s), a quirky, humorous owner of a used bookstore; she initially appears scatterbrained and flighty, but proves ultimately to be wise and caring

KIM WILEY: (30s), an exhausted last-minute shopper who is doing her best to hide her despondency; her early hesitations and cynicism will give way to a life-changing discovery

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IRIS: (early 20s), Polly's young assistant; a bit high-strung and anxious to please; she seems to always be a bit confused and in a big hurry

SGT. COGLIN: (30s-60s), the neighborhood police officer, affable and protective

Book Authors (in order of appearance):

MARTIN LUTHER (1543), German theologian, priest, and monk

HELEN KELLER (1903), American deaf and blind author and educator

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1865), nineteenth-century American poet

LUKE (first-century AD), the gospel writer

MARY, the mother of Jesus

SHEPHERD, from the Bethlehem hills

SIMEON, a just and righteous man waiting for the Messiah

Book Excerpts

The Sermons of Martin Luther (Vol. 3), by Martin Luther

The Story of My Life, by Helen Keller

The Complete Poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Bible (NIV Translation), Luke 1-2, Acts 2

Scenes and Songs

Note: The scene divisions are for rehearsal purposes only. The action is continuous, and there are no full-stage blackouts during the musical.

Scene 1

"Noel"

"Gloria"

"Celtic Worship"

"Call His Name Jesus"

Scene 2

"Gift of Love"

Scene 3

"Song in the Air"

Scene 4

"I Heard the Bells"

Scene 5

"When Hope Came Down"

Scene 6

"Lord of Heaven"

Scene 7

"God Is with Us" (and Reprise)

"Amen"

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

"Down from His Glory"

SCENE 1

(On one side of the stage is the somewhat cramped and decidedly cluttered main room of The Torn Page used bookstore. Tall bookcases are packed with haphazard piles of worn books and journals. There are a few mismatched chairs and lamps. The room boasts a variety of eclectic Christmas decorations, including a small table tree with an assortment of colorful handmade ornaments. There is also a wooden trunk. On the other side of the stage is an open area that will accommodate the various “book scenes” that come to life as they are read. The choir will, presumably, occupy the center stage area. The production begins with the choir’s rousing rendition of “Noel” and “Gloria.”)

Song: “Noel”

Song: “Gloria”

(Immediately after the conclusion of “Gloria,” there is a shrill voice that bellows from offstage.)

POLLY: IRIS!!!

IRIS: *(also yelling from offstage)* Whaaat?!

(POLLY enters. Her hair is piled on top of her head, held in place with pencils; she is “draped” with Christmas decorations—a garland and strings of popcorn. She sings merrily and continues to yell.)

POLLY: *(singing)* “The first Noel the angel did say” *(yelling)* IRIS!!!

IRIS: *(yelling from offstage)* Whaaat?! What is it?

POLLY: *(singing)* “All is calm, all is” *(yelling)* IRIS!!! *(to herself, shaking her head)* Where is that girl? Just when I need my assistant, she vanishes.

(Takes a cell phone out of her pocket and dials, continuing to talk to herself)

Tsk. I’m always misplacing things. I could have sworn I left her right by the tree, or maybe that was last Tuesday, then again. *(into the phone)* Oh, hello? This is Polly Klipfits. Could you ask Iris to come to the phone?

(IRIS enters the room, on her cell phone. She wears oversized glasses, a really bad Christmas sweater, and several wreaths around her neck.)

IRIS: *(talking on the phone, not looking at POLLY)* This is Iris.

POLLY: *(talking on the phone, not looking at IRIS)* My, that was quick. Iris, I can’t remember where I left you. Do you know where you are?

IRIS: *(moves to stand next to POLLY, but still doesn't look at her; continues to talk into her phone)* I think I was in the storeroom, getting wreaths, like you told me to do, but now I'm in the bookstore. *(confused)* Aren't I?

POLLY: Well, check your GPS. I can wait.

IRIS: OK.

(IRIS quickly punches her phone as POLLY hums "Jingle Bells"; IRIS then looks at her phone and smiles) *(into the phone)* Yes! I'm in The Torn Page used bookstore, Miss Polly.

POLLY: Good. May I have a word with you?

IRIS: Of course. Good-bye. *(puts phone away)*

POLLY: Good-bye. *(puts phone away, turns to IRIS, for the first time)* Hello.

IRIS: *(also turns to POLLY for the first time)* Hello. Are these the wreaths you wanted?

POLLY: Yes. You need to hang them as high as you can *(gesturing to the bookcases)* over there.

IRIS: *(moving to the bookcases with the wreaths)* All right. But I don't understand why we're still decorating. It's 5:45 on Christmas Eve, and we'll be closed in fifteen minutes.

POLLY: Oh, I think we might need to stay open a little later tonight. There are a lot of last-minute shoppers out there.

IRIS: I know. But they're out there, Miss Polly. They're not in here.

POLLY: *(resolute)* If we decorate it, they will come.

("Celtic Worship" begins; the introduction plays under the following lines.)

(joining IRIS in decorating) Now, let's get to work. You drape the bookcases, and I'll deck the halls. *(merrily)* You know what they say, Iris.

IRIS: Uh ... *(thinking hard)* ... fa la la la la ... *(pause, thinks harder, then remembers)* ... la la la ... *(beat)* ... la?

POLLY: *(smiles, sighs)* You took the words right out of my mouth.

(As they decorate, the choir sings.)

Song: "Celtic Worship"

Song: "Call His Name Jesus"

SCENE 2

(After the conclusion of “Call His Name Jesus,” **POLLY** and **IRIS** officially finish their decorating and survey it approvingly with a handshake. At that moment, another frantic voice calls from offstage.)

KIM: (offstage) HELLO?! Is anyone there? Is this store still open?

POLLY: (to **IRIS**) I told you they’d come!

(turning to the direction of the “door”)

(shouting) Yes, we’re open! Come right on ...

(**KIM** rushes onstage, nearly tripping)

... (normal voice) ... in.

(**KIM** is a frazzled, frantic, last-minute shopper, laden with bags. She is bundled up in a coat and scarf.)

KIM: (talking rapidly) Oh thank you. You’re a lifesaver. All the other stores are closing. This is the only place that’s still open, and I have one more gift left on my list. If I don’t find it, I’m going to ruin somebody’s Christmas, and he’ll be sad, and then that will ruin my Christmas, and I’ll be sad, and then Christmas will just be so ... so ... (gasping for the word, looking helplessly at **POLLY**) ... so ...

POLLY: Sad?

KIM: Yes! Exactly. It’s like you can read my mind. I knew I came to the right place. Can you help me?

POLLY: We’ll certainly try. I’m Polly—Polly Klipfits—(motioning **IRIS** over) and this is Iris, my assistant.

IRIS: Hello. Merry Christmas. I’m so sorry yours is going to be sad.

POLLY: No, no dear. We’re going to make sure that ... (to **KIM**) ... now what was your name?

KIM: Kim. Kim Wiley.

POLLY: (to **IRIS**) ... that Kim Wiley’s Christmas is one big tiding of comfort and joy. Let’s start with the comfort. May we take your coat and, uh, cargo?

KIM: Oh yes, thank you.

IRIS: (as she takes **KIM**’s bags) My. These bags are full of decorations. And lights. And so many.

KIM: Well, you can never have too many lights, especially at this time of year.

(As KIM and POLLY continue to talk, IRIS takes KIM's bags and coat and places them out of the way in a corner of the room.)

POLLY: Now, *(taking a pad and pencil from her pocket)* what are you looking for, Ms. Wiley?

KIM: Please call me Kim. I need a book, a book about Christmas.

POLLY: *(writing)* Book ... Christmas ...

KIM: But a happy book. No bah humbugs or Grinches. Just fa la la. Do you understand fa la la?

IRIS: *(still struggling with the coat/bags upstage, raising her hand)* I do!

POLLY: Iris is an expert on fa la la. So, a happy book about Christmas. Anything else?

KIM: Yes. Make sure there is a humongous tree in the story, covered in blazing lights. I have a tree like that. And trees like that really say Merry Christmas.

POLLY: *(writing)* ... humongous ... lights ... merry ...

KIM: And jingle bells. You can't get happier than jingle bells.

POLLY: *(finishes writing)* Jingle. Got it. Is this for your children? Your husband? A neighbor, perhaps?

KIM: *(quickly)* Uh, no. I'm single. And I don't have time to know my neighbors. I don't speak to them, and they don't speak to me. We have a perfect relationship. No, this is for my father. He's ... *(she stops herself, obviously hiding something; changes direction)* ... he just wants to be happy this Christmas. So do you have anything like that?

POLLY: Oh my, yes! Happy books about Christmas are a specialty at The Torn Page.

KIM: *(taken aback)* The Torn Page?! That doesn't sound very happy.

POLLY: On the contrary, torn pages often indicate a book is loved. Many people tear a favorite page so they can go back and read it again and again.

KIM: I'm sorry. I am not in the market for damaged books. Just show me where your audio books are located.

POLLY: We don't have audio books.

KIM: Surely you carry audio books? *(POLLY shakes her head)* Please tell me you at least have a cappuccino bar ...

POLLY: Ms. Wiley ... sorry, Kim ... we don't have any books published after 1975.

KIM: 1975?! What kind of bookstore is this?

POLLY: A used bookstore. Our books have already had an owner—sometimes more than one. That's what makes them so valuable. You'll find notes in the margins and inscriptions on the title pages. Think of it this way: you're getting several stories for the price of one.

KIM: I'm sorry I wasted your time. You couldn't possibly have the kind of book I'm looking for.

POLLY: But you haven't given us a chance. (*calling to IRIS*) Iris, bring Kim the leather-bound collection in the L section.

IRIS: (*going to a bookcase and climbing onto a stepladder*) Which volume?

POLLY: Number three.

KIM: Really, Ms. Klipfits ...

POLLY: ... Polly ...

KIM: ... Polly. There's nothing here that will give my dad a happy Christmas.

POLLY: You may be surprised.

IRIS: (*handing a book to POLLY*) Here's the book, Miss Polly. (*blows on the book; a pile of dust scatters; KIM coughs*)

Sorry. It's kinda old.

KIM: Don't tell me, 1975.

POLLY: No, 1912. (*hands the book to KIM*) Hold this for a minute, I have to put on my reading glasses. (*She fishes her glasses out of a pocket and puts them on as KIM examines the book.*)

KIM: (*reading the name of the book*) Collected SERMONS?! I couldn't possibly listen to a sermon from 1912.

POLLY: Oh, you won't. The book was published in 1912. The sermon was delivered on Christmas Day in 1543 by a feisty and controversial monk named Martin Luther.

(*POLLY takes the book, opens it, and a light comes up on the opposite side of the stage. MARTIN LUTHER, in clerical dress, stands at a late-medieval cathedral pulpit; two altar boys might stand behind him with lit candles. You might also project an image of Luther or his writings on a media screen.*)

You might be interested in what he has to say. Listen.

(starts to read)

The Bethlehem inn was full. No one would release a room to this pregnant woman. ("She had to go to a cow stall and") ...

(LUTHER starts to speak, his voice overlapping with POLLY's, and then he takes over completely. The lights dim slightly on the bookstore set but don't go out. POLLY, KIM, and IRIS all look intently at the book.)

LUTHER: ("She had to go to a cow stall and) there bring forth the Maker of all creatures because nobody would give way. Shame on you, wretched Bethlehem! The inn ought to have burned with brimstone, for even though Mary had been a beggar maid or unwed, anybody at such a time should have been glad to give her a hand. There are many of you in this congregation who think to yourselves: 'If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby! I would have washed his linen! How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger! Yes, you would! You say that because you know how great Christ is, but if you had been there at that time you would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. Childish and silly thoughts are these! Why don't you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor. You ought to serve him, for what you do to your neighbor in need you do to the Lord Christ himself. If Christ had arrived with trumpets and lain in a cradle of gold, his birth would have been a splendid affair. But it would not be a comfort to me."

("Gift of Love" begins; the instrumental introduction plays under the following lines.)

"He was rather to lie in the lap of a poor maiden and be thought of little significance in the eyes of the world." *(pause)* "Now I can come to him."

(LUTHER's light dims out and he exits in the dark. The pulpit is removed in the dark. POLLY, KIM, and IRIS continue to "read" the book silently during "Gift of Love.")

Song: "Gift of Love"

SCENE 3

(At the conclusion of "Gift of Love," any media images fade out, and the lights on the bookstore set come up full. KIM has obviously been affected by what she has read/heard, but she tries to hide it.)

KIM: That was an interesting book. I must admit it wasn't what I expected, especially for 1543.

POLLY: Some things don't change that much over the years. Like births in a stable ... and neighbors in need ...

KIM: *(quickly)* Then again, many things have changed. Like Christmas. Today it's lots of gifts—happy gifts. That's joy to the world.

POLLY: *(gently)* Back then there was only one gift, and it came in a manger. And that's joy to the world.

IRIS: Sometimes one gift is all you need ... if it's the right one.

POLLY: *(smiling)* Iris, you took the words right out of my mouth.

IRIS: Of course, I'd rather give gifts than get them.

POLLY: *(to KIM)* Iris is a one-woman goodwill.

KIM: What kind of gifts do you give, Iris?

IRIS: *(hand on her heart, with missionary zeal)* I have been called to minister to the world ... with yarn.

KIM: *(startled)* Oh.

IRIS: *(her fervor growing)* I feel there is no problem that can't be solved with two seven-inch needles and a skein of worsted weight yarn. I knitted this sweater I'm wearing!

(she spins around)

I tried to give it away, but it seems it wasn't anybody's size.

KIM: It's certainly ... one of a kind.

IRIS: Actually, it's not. I have lots more. I'll show you!

(IRIS runs to the wooden trunk for her collection of knitted wear.)

KIM: *(to POLLY)* Have you tried to get her any help?

POLLY: *(to KIM)* We attempted an intervention in 2012, but it didn't take.

(IRIS returns with a pile of curious and oddly crafted knitwear.)

IRIS: Anytime I see something that needs help, I just knit.

(holds up a knit "book cover")

Like this. Two years ago, I decided to knit covers for all the books in the store.

KIM: Wow. But ... but the books are already so old. And they've all got torn pages.

IRIS: *(completely sincere)* I know. That's why they need protection.

(going through the pile, producing two knit "hats")

And here's a cover for a bad hair day ... and this will cover your broken toaster.

KIM: *(to POLLY)* They look the same.

POLLY: *(to KIM)* They are.

IRIS: And finally ... ta-da!

(She rolls out a fairly large afghan/blanket; it should have no consistent design or pattern and look stitched together.)

It's my masterpiece.

KIM: I can see that. Uh, what is it?

IRIS: I'm not sure. It keeps evolving. It started out as a potholder, then it became a tablecloth, and next ... well ... I'm waiting until I'm sure.

KIM: Sure of what?

IRIS: That I know what this is ... and who it's for. Until then, I just keep knitting.

(POLLY moves to a bookcase to find a book.)

KIM: *(smiling)* You have a very ... special ... way of looking at gifts, Iris. Gifts have just been more of a burden to me—expensive, a hassle. No wonder I always wait until the last minute to shop. *(reflective)* I wish I could see things like gifts and giving through your eyes.

POLLY: *(moving to KIM, handing her an old book)* Well, I happen to have a book here that should help.

KIM: *(reading the cover)* *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller? But ... wasn't she ...

POLLY: (*finishing KIM's sentence*) ... deaf and blind, almost her entire life. Yes. But she had a teacher, who came into her world when she was seven, that taught her to see in her darkness and hear through her silence. Helen became an accomplished author and educator. She had a way of looking at Christmas I think you'll appreciate. Page 53, dear.

(*As KIM opens the book, a light comes up on the opposite side of the stage. HELEN KELLER, portrayed as a 23-year-old woman in 1903, sits curled up in an old rocking chair with a pen and notebook of paper. Media images can include photos of a young Helen Keller and/or the cover of the original book. KIM begins to read, and then HELEN's voice overlaps and takes over. [You can also use an offstage voice for HELEN.] Lights dim slightly on the bookstore set but don't go out. POLLY, KIM, and IRIS all look intently at the book.*)

KIM: (*reading*) "Tell us about your happiest Christmas.' Do you say? These words send my thoughts flying back to the time when the word Christmas was first spelled into my hand. (I was just beginning to be conscious of myself)" ...

HELEN KELLER: ("I was just beginning to be conscious of myself), most experience was one splendid bud. After indescribable darkness, silence and vain longing, the happiness of childhood had flashed upon me — love had breathed a new life into me, and on that birthday of the Giver of life to all men I was a living soul! ...

"I was nearly seven years old when my teacher came to me, so my first Christmas came in my eighth year. In memory it stands out vividly—the jump out of bed, waking everybody with a 'Merry Christmas!' spelled by my hand, ... and a flurry of preparation for the family party after breakfast. ... How full the air was of secrets and mysteries! How tantalizing were the odors of gifts hidden away from my prying fingers—oranges, candies, pretty new toys. I do not think any child ever plotted more surprises ... or received more delightful gifts than I did on that beautiful Christmas day. ...

"Once I heard someone ask, 'What pleasure can Christmas hold for children who cannot see their gifts or the sparkling tree?' ... We sightless children have the best of eyes ... in our hearts and in our fingertips."

(**HELEN** looks up from her writing and signs the final line as she speaks it.)

"The only real blind person at Christmastime is he who has not Christmas in his heart."

(**HELEN** smiles and goes back to writing as her light dims out and then she exits. The rocking chair is then removed in the dark. "Song in the Air" starts. **POLLY, KIM, and IRIS** continue to "read" the book silently during "Song in the Air.")

Song: "Song in the Air"

SCENE 4

(At the conclusion of "Song in the Air," any media images fade out, and the lights on the bookstore set come up full. KIM is deep in thought; POLLY gently closes the book.)

POLLY: That's quite a story, isn't it?

KIM: Yes. It is. *(pause)* I was just thinking about ... *(quickly covers her feelings once again)* never mind.

POLLY: *(looking intently at her)* You were just thinking about what?

KIM: I was just thinking about my tree at home. You know the humongous one covered with blazing lights? The one that says "Merry Christmas"? Helen Keller never saw a Christmas tree. Not once. Helen Keller never saw light. But she seemed to know a lot more about how to have a merry Christmas than I do.

POLLY: She has something to teach all of us. What was it she said? "The only real blind person at Christmastime is he who" ... now what was it?

KIM: *(softly)* "has not Christmas in his heart."

POLLY: *(nodding)* Christmas in his heart.

(POLLY reaches out and squeezes KIM's hand, just as a jovial man's voice shouts from offstage.)

SGT. COGLIN: *(from offstage)* It's the night before Christmas. Is there a creature stirring?

KIM: *(startled)* Who's that?

POLLY and IRIS: *(in unison)* Sergeant Coglin.

POLLY: He's the neighborhood police officer ...

IRIS: ... he protects the neighborhood ...

POLLY: *(smiling at KIM)* ... because that's what good neighbors do.

(SGT. COGLIN bursts into the store; a jolly soul, he is in uniform and wears a large overcoat; he shakes off some snow.)

SGT. COGLIN: Brrrrrrr! It's one cold night out there, and it's even startin' to snow! I saw your lights on, Miss Polly. I figured I'd best check on you and Miss Iris. Is everything all right?

POLLY: Oh yes, Sergeant. We needed to stay open a little later than usual ...

IRIS: ... for a last-minute customer! This is Ms. Wiley.

SGT. COGLIN: (*shaking her hand*) Well, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am. I don't think I've seen you around these parts. Do you live nearby?

KIM: No, I live about a mile past the park. This seemed like a good day for a brisk walk.

SGT. COGLIN: Old Man Winter may have something to say about that. Listen, I'll finish up my patrol, then I'll stop by and make sure you ladies get home safely.

KIM: Oh, I don't want you to go out of your way, Sergeant.

SGT. COGLIN: It's not out of my way. I live past the park, too. In fact, my wife and daughter would love it if you would stop in for some Christmas Eve pie.

KIM: Thank you, really, but (*hesitant*) ... actually ... you see ... I'm ... expected at the hospital.

POLLY: Oh.

IRIS: You are?

SGT. COGLIN: Well, that's even better. The hospital is just a few blocks away. But you'll still need an escort. All of you. And that's an order, ma'am. (*turns and walks toward the "door" to exit*)

POLLY: (*to KIM*) The sergeant likes to pretend he's on *Dragnet*.

SGT. COGLIN: (*stops and turns back, theatrically*) Farewell. I'm off to walk in a winter wonderland.

KIM: Sergeant, Iris has made some great ... gifts ... that would really help keep you warm tonight.

SGT. COGLIN: I know.

(*He opens up his overcoat to reveal an oversized Christmas sweater that is even worse than IRIS's.*)

I think I'm covered. See you later, ladies.

(**SGT. COGLIN** *turns and exits, singing "Let it snow, let it snow, let it ..." brrrr!*)

KIM: (*sincerely*) That was very thoughtful of you, Iris.

IRIS: Sgt. Coglin's sweater was the first sweater that was the right size.

POLLY: (*to KIM*) My dear, you never told us you were headed to the hospital. Are you all right?

KIM: I'm fine. It's ... it's my father. He had a stroke last week. He's not really talking yet. We're not sure how much he hears or sees or even remembers.

POLLY: Is your mother with him now?

KIM: *(shaking her head)* No. Mom died about ten years ago, and I'm an only child. It's been just Dad and me for a lot of Christmases now.

(looking back at her stacked shopping bags)

I was trying so hard to make this Christmas happy, you know? For both of us. Lights, decorations, jingle bells ...

(looking down, sadly)

I guess I've been going about it all the wrong ways.

POLLY: No, you haven't. You're on your way to spend Christmas with him. That's going to make him very happy. Believe me.

KIM: Is it? I'm just not sure about anything anymore. About happiness. About Christmas. About peace on earth, goodwill to men. Sometimes I think God's stopped listening to us when we pray. *(pause)* At least He's stopped listening to me.

POLLY: I know it feels that way sometimes, but it's not true. I have something I want you to read.

(POLLY goes to a bookcase to get a book as IRIS sits beside KIM.)

IRIS: I know how hard it is to pray when you're sad or scared. I never feel like I have words that are smart enough. Sometimes I don't have words at all. But my pastor told me God knows the prayers in our heart, even when we can't say them out loud. *(pause)* Does that help?

KIM: *(genuinely touched)* It does. *(squeezing IRIS's hand)* Thank you, Iris.

POLLY: *(sitting beside KIM with an old book)* This book was written by someone who once felt like you do tonight.

KIM: *(taking the book, reading the cover)* *The Complete Poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.*

IRIS: Just open it at the bookmark. It's my favorite poem. I read it a lot ... even when it's not Christmas. *(pause)* It's about bells.

KIM: *(smiling)* Probably not the jingle variety. Let's see ... *(opens the book to the poem)*

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play"

Wait a minute. I think I've sung this before. Isn't it a Christmas carol?

POLLY: Yes, but it was a poem first. And there's a very powerful story about how it came to be written.

(As **POLLY** relates the story, a light comes up on the opposite side of the stage, revealing **HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW** in Civil War era civilian attire. He sits at a small writing desk with a kerosene lamp. Paper and a pen are on the desk. He appears to be in deep despair, and is praying. Media images can include a portrait of Longfellow and/or the book of his poetry.)

More than one hundred fifty years ago in Cambridge, Massachusetts, before the dawn on Christmas Day, a man was in deep despair. It was 1864, the darkest days of the Civil War. The gentleman was a writer by trade, and not only had he recently lost his wife in a tragic accident, but now his oldest son, a lieutenant in the Army, lay gravely wounded, fighting for his life.

(“I Heard the Bells” begins; the introduction plays under the following lines; **LONGFELLOW** looks up and, encouraged, picks up his pen to write.)

But then, as the first light began to dawn, the hope that Christmas promises each of us washed over him, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow took his pen and began to write ...

LONGFELLOW: *(speaking as he writes)*

“I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.”

Song: “I Heard the Bells”

(The lights remain on **LONGFELLOW**, writing, during the song. Lights dim slightly on the bookstore as **POLLY**, **KIM**, and **IRIS** continue to read the book.)

SCENE 5

*(At the conclusion of "I Heard the Bells," any media images fade out and the lights on the bookstore set come up full. The lights go out completely on **LONGFELLOW**, he exits, and the writing desk is replaced by a simple wooden bench and table in the dark. **POLLY** and **KIM** continue their conversation. **IRIS** moves to the bookshelf to get one more book.)*

POLLY: *(closing the book)* "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep." I know it's hard, but that's a promise we need to remember, even when it's dark, even when it's silent.

KIM: But what about "peace on earth"? That's a promise that's never come true.

POLLY: Are you sure?

KIM: There's always been war—today, yesterday, tomorrow, always.

POLLY: Maybe the angels over Bethlehem were talking about a different kind of peace. Maybe they were promising the peace each of us can have with God, here on earth.

KIM: How's that even possible?

POLLY: Well, I think we should look at one more book.

*(IRIS joins **KIM** and **POLLY**, and hands **POLLY** an old worn Bible.)*

IRIS: I've got the book right here, Miss Polly.

POLLY: Thank you, Iris. I think we'll start at ...

IRIS: ... the torn page.

POLLY: Yes, the torn page. *(to **KIM**)* We've read this story so many times. I can't wait to read it one more time tonight. The author's name ... is Luke.

*(As **POLLY** opens the Bible, the light comes up on the side stage. A man in biblical robes, **LUKE**, sits on the bench at a small wooden table. He writes on a scroll with a pen. **POLLY** speaks first, reading from the book, then **LUKE** starts to speak, their voices overlap, and then he takes over completely. Lights dim slightly on the bookstore set, but don't go out. **POLLY**, **KIM**, and **IRIS** look intently at the book. The following sequence can be augmented with appropriate projections of the biblical scenes described.)*

(reading) "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us," *(therefore it seemed good to me to write an orderly account.)*

LUKE: *(therefore it seemed good to me to write an orderly account.)* "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, ... to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. ... The virgin's name was Mary."

(MARY, in simple biblical dress, emerges from the dark to stand next to LUKE. She looks above her in awe and wonder.)

"The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. You will [be with child] and give birth to a son, and you are to [give] Him [the name] Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.'" And Mary answered,

MARY: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled. My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is His name."

(MARY remains onstage, still looking up in wonder. LUKE continues.)

LUKE: "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world." So Joseph went up from Nazareth "to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, ... she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger."

(A SHEPHERD, in biblical dress, emerges from the dark to stand next to MARY. He also looks up in awe.)

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby." An angel appeared to them, saying, "I bring you good news [of] great joy. A Savior has been born to you;" He is Christ the Lord! "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared, ... saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, ... and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.'" And the shepherds said,

SHEPHERD: "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

(SHEPHERD remains onstage, still looking up in awe. LUKE continues.)

LUKE: "So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed."

(SIMEON, also in biblical robes, emerges from the dark to stand next to MARY and the SHEPHERD, both of whom continue to look up.)

Now when the time came, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. "There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout." The Holy Spirit had revealed to him "that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's [Christ]. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in ... Jesus, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying,"

SIMEON: "Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace."

("When Hope Came Down" begins; the introduction plays under the following lines.)

"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all [people]: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel!"

*(As the choir sings "When Hope Came Down," **MARY**, the **SHEPHERD**, and **SIMEON** slowly exit together. **LUKE** continues to write as **POLLY**, **IRIS**, and **KIM** continue to read the Bible in the bookstore. Media images can trace the events of the birth of Christ.)*

Song: "When Hope Came Down"

SCENE 6

(At the conclusion of “When Hope Came Down,” LUKE continues to write; POLLY, KIM, and IRIS continue to look intently at their Bible. The bookstore light comes back up full.)

KIM: I’ve heard that story my whole life, but I feel like I’m hearing it for the first time.
(starts to close the Bible)

POLLY: Don’t close that book yet. The story isn’t over. Luke saved the best part for last. Look in his letter called the Acts of the Apostles.

IRIS: Chapter two. There’s another torn page.

KIM: *(smiling)* I found it.

(KIM starts reading from the Bible, then LUKE starts to speak, their voices overlap, and then he takes over completely.)

(reading) Men of Israel. “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs. (This man was handed over to you by God’s [set purpose]) ...

LUKE: (“This man was handed over to you by God’s [set purpose]) ... and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead, ... because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.” Exalted to the right hand of God, He has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. *(pauses; sets down his pen)* Amen.

(LUKE’s light dims out, and he exits in the dark. The wooden bench and table are also removed. “Lord of Heaven” begins; the instrumental introduction plays under the following lines.)

POLLY: *(taking KIM’s hands)* That’s the real gift of Christmas, my dear—a manger, yes, but it’s so much more. It’s a cross, an empty tomb, and a throne in heaven. And it’s the greatest gift imaginable because it offers us hope—the hope of eternal life.

KIM: Hope. *(quietly)* I think maybe that was the gift I’ve been looking for.

POLLY: There is no need to look any longer. The gift is yours—just receive it.

(KIM bows her head with POLLY and IRIS as the choir sings “Lord of Heaven.”)

Song: “Lord of Heaven”

SCENE 7

(At the conclusion of "Lord of Heaven," KIM hugs POLLY.)

IRIS: *(with childlike happiness)* Merry Christmas, Miss Kim.

POLLY: *(gently)* Merry Christmas, my dear.

KIM: *(with deep feeling)* Merry Christmas. Oh yes, it most definitely is.

(Suddenly, SGT. COGLIN's voice is heard from offstage.)

SGT. COGLIN: *(from offstage)* It's the night before Christmas. Is there a creature stirring?

POLLY: *(calling to him)* Come on in, Sergeant.

(SGT. COGLIN enters, covered with even more snow than before.)

SGT. COGLIN: Good evening again, ladies. The snow is really starting to come down out there. If I'm going to get you all home tonight, we'd best hit the road.

POLLY: *(standing)* We're more than ready, Sergeant.

IRIS: I'll get the coats.

(She goes upstage to retrieve the coats.)

POLLY: But I think we'll need to make another stop first.

SGT. COGLIN: And where's that?

POLLY: The hospital. There's someone there expecting a happy Christmas tonight. *(smiling at KIM)* I'd like to be there when it's delivered.

SGT. COGLIN: As you wish, ladies.

(He steps up to speak to KIM as POLLY and IRIS put on their coats.)

So tell me, Ms. Wiley, did you find the gift you were looking for?

KIM: Oh yes.

SGT. COGLIN: Well, The Torn Page has just about everything you could possibly want.

KIM: I discovered that tonight.

(IRIS walks up to KIM with the stack of books they previously read.)

IRIS: So, have you made your selection, Miss Kim?

KIM: My selection?

IRIS: You came in to buy a book about Christmas. Which one do you want?

KIM: I ... I don't think I can choose just one ...

POLLY: *(coming forward with a large red ribbon; ties the stack of books like a gift)*
Then take them all—good winter reading. The rest of the year too.

KIM: Thank you. My dad will love hearing these stories, even the ones on the pages that aren't torn.

IRIS: *(coming forward with her large knit blanket)* I have something for your father, too. I know it's kind of lopsided, and the colors don't match, and it's really, really, really big, but ...

KIM: *(quickly)* No ... it's perfect, Iris. It's perfect.

IRIS: I thought it might help keep him warm.

KIM: I know it will. Thank you.

(KIM hugs IRIS.)

SGT. COGLIN: *(picking up KIM's shopping bags)* I've got your other shopping bags, Ms. Wiley. Ooo-ee. You've got enough lights here to electrify a Disney World® parade.

IRIS: But Christmas is going to be over after tomorrow. You won't need those decorations anymore.

KIM: I'm not so sure. I'm thinking about throwing a huge New Year's party for the entire neighborhood.

SGT. COGLIN: You've really found the Christmas spirit, ma'am.

KIM: *(to POLLY and IRIS)* And so much more.

SGT. COGLIN: *(starts to sing, robustly)* "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant ..."

(SGT. COGLIN exits, carrying the bags, followed by IRIS, carrying the blanket; she begins singing, as does KIM)

SGT. COGLIN, IRIS, and KIM: "O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem! Come and behold Him, born the King of angels! O come, let us adore Him."

(SGT. COGLIN and IRIS have exited, but continue to sing offstage. KIM hangs back slightly and finishes the chorus with them.)

"O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!"

(KIM smiles once more at POLLY and quickly exits.)

POLLY: You took the words right out of my mouth.

(POLLY turns off the remaining lamp and exits after the others as the choir begins "God Is with Us.")

Song: "God Is with Us" (with optional Reprise)

Song: "Amen"

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Song: "Down from His Glory"