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UNTO US A SON IS BORN

by Tony Nicholls

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UNTO US A SON IS BORN

A NATIVITY PLAY

BY

TONY NICHOLLS

UNTO US A SON IS BORN

ABOUT THE SCRIPT

Early in 1990, I received a letter from Christine Keele, a teacher at the Kalgoorlie Catholic Primary School. She had recently produced a script of mine called THE SLEEPING BEAUTY and now wanted to know whether I had a nativity play in the files. As it happened I didn't but the idea intrigued me enough to make time to write one. This play is the result.

Although the script is fairly fully fleshed out I would expect any school or group producing it to modify it according to their needs and resources. It is possible for instance for one class to present the whole thing; it would be equally possible for a number of classes to present single scenes. Similarly it could be expanded greatly with carols and lessons and become a sort of "carols by candlelight" with a narrative structure. The main thing is that it should mean something to the people who perform it and to those who watch. It should be a celebration.

After its initial production in Kalgoorlie, a substantially revised version of the script was commissioned and presented by the Midnite Youth Theatre Company in St George's Cathedral, Perth WA in November, 1991. The music was selected, composed and arranged by John Bates and the show was directed by Tony Howes. This is the text of that production.

The use of pageant, comedy and rich tragic symbolism in Tony Nicholls' script made this one of the most vivid expressions of Christian literature I have seen performed.

WILL QUECKETT, PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, PERTH THEATRE TRUST

A fine example of ensemble playing made possible by an excellent script.

JILL PERRYMAN

The crowds at the Cathedral were testimony to the appeal of Tony Nicholls' story-telling. The applause, laughter and tears were the ways in which the audiences showed that he had succeeded in giving us a play of substance amongst the tinsel of so many offerings at Christmas.

THE VERY REVEREND DR JOHN SHEPHERD, ANGLICAN DEAN OF PERTH

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

GOD
ADAM
EVE

NARRATOR #1
NARRATOR #2
ANGEL #1
ANGEL #2
ANGEL #3
ZECHARIAH
ELIZABETH

HEROD
CAESAR
MARY
JOSEPH
MELCHIOR
CASPAR
BALTHAZAR
HEROD'S SERVANT
INNKEEPER
SHEPHERD #1
SHEPHERD #2
SHEPHERD #3
BOY

COURTIERS
TOWNSFOLK
SOLDIERS
PROTESTERS
SPIES
MESSENGERS

UNTO US A SON IS BORN

PROLOGUE: IN THE COURTYARD

SILENCE.
STILLNESS.
AN AIR OF EXPECTATION.
THEN WE BECOME AWARE OF A LOW, THROBBING, RHYTHMIC BEAT. IT
BUILDS TO A TERRIFIC, ALMOST UNBEARABLE, CRESCENDO THEN
CRASH!!

A GROUP OF ACTORS EXPLODE ONTO THE STAGE AREA, RUSHING DOWN
TOWARDS THE AUDIENCE LIKE A BURSTING ROCKET. THEY DRAW AFTER
THEM LENGTHS OF BRIGHTLY-COLOURED CLOTH SO THAT SUDDENLY
THE PREVIOUSLY EMPTY SPACE IS ALIVE WITH COLOUR AND MOVEMENT.
THE ACTORS SCREAM AND YELL, WHISPER AND WHIMPER, LAUGH AND
HOWL AT RANDOM. THERE IS JOY, PAIN AND ANGER EXPLODING ALL
OVER THE SPACE. OTHER ACTORS - THE CHORUSES - APPEAR FROM
EVERYWHERE, BEATING DRUMS, BLOWING TRUMPETS, CONTRIBUTING TO
THE SENSE OF CHAOS AND BACCHANALIA. THE SOUND AND MOVEMENT
BUILDS TO A FRENZIED CLIMAX CULMINATING IN AN ELEMENTAL
SCREAM.

THE SCREAM ECHOES AWAY INTO SILENCE.
A SINGLE FIGURE HAS APPEARED ON A ROSTRUM OR BALCONY.
IT FACES AWAY FROM US.

CHORUS: Before the beginning, there was chaos...

THE ACTORS BEGIN TO MOVE SLOWLY IN SLOW, SWIRLY PATTERNS,
DRAWING THE CLOTHS AFTER THEM, LIKE THE COLOURS IN A GLASS
MARBLE.

- seething - random - shapeless - without form - without meaning - without purpose -
restless swirls of carbon.

A DRUM BEAT BEGINS. OCCASIONALLY THE ACTORS EMIT RANDOM CRIES
OF RAGE, PAIN OR LAUGHTER.

And so it was for countless millennia..

THE DRUMMING AND THE SWIRLING SPEEDS UP

Until God spoke!

A HIGH ANGELIC CHORD. THE FIGURE ON THE BALCONY TURNS. IT IS GOD.

GOD: I gave form to chaos, brought order from disorder. I created the universe, the stars, the
planets. And I created the Earth...

SWEET MUSIC PLAYS. GOD STRETCHES OUT HIS ARMS. THE ACTORS TAKE
THE CLOTHS AND QUICKLY ARRANGE THEM LIKE SPOKES RADIATING
FROM THE CENTRE.

CHORUS: And at the very centre of the world, He created a garden...

GOD RAISES HIS ARM AGAIN. THE ACTORS ROLL AND TWIST THEMSELVES INTO THE CLOTHS, TAKING THE FORMS OF EXOTIC AND BEAUTIFUL PLANTS. IN THE VERY CENTRE, SEVERAL ACTORS TAKE THE FORM OF A TREE. THIS SHOULD ALSO SUGGEST THE FORM OF A CRUCIFIX. THERE ARE SOUNDS OF BIRDS SINGING.

CHORUS#1: It was a place of beauty..

CHORUS#2: Of harmony..

CHORUS: Of eternal springtime..!

A SINGLE FLUTE BEGINS TO PLAY

And to have dominion over this paradise, He created a Man and a Woman...

ADAM AND EVE ENTER. THEY WEAR MASKS OF JOY. THEY MOVE AMONGST THE PLANTS AND CREATURES OF THE GARDEN.

CHORUS#1: In the beginning...

CHORUS#2: In the beginning...

CHORUS#3: In the beginning...

CHORUS: Was the Word! And the Word was -

GOD: Love!!

ADAM AND EVE, IN THE CENTRE OF THE GARDEN, BENEATH THE TREE, KISS CHASTELY. A TABLEAU OF PERFECT HARMONY AND PEACE CONTRASTING WITH THE INITIAL CHAOS. THE FLUTE TUNE ENDS. A HARSH DRUMSOUND SUDDENLY INTRUDES.

CHORUS#1: But the Woman was not content -

DRUMBEAT

CHORUS#2: And the Man was but flesh -

DRUMBEAT

CHORUS: They disobeyed their God..

THE DRUMBEAT CONTINUES AS EVE SLOWLY REACHES UP TO THE TREE, PLUCKS AN APPLE AND OFFERS IT TO ADAM. EQUALLY SLOWLY, HE PUTS IT TO HIS MOUTH AND BITES. INSTANTLY THERE IS A SEARING, THUNDERCLAP OF SOUND. WITH A SLOW GROANING SOUND THE GARDEN SLOWLY BEGINS TO DIE, TO WITHER, DROOP AND FALL. FINALLY ADAM, EVE AND THE TREE ARE THE ONLY THINGS LEFT STANDING. THE TREE THOUGH IS BARE AND LOOKS MORE LIKE A WAITING CRUCIFIX THAN EVER. TWO FIGURES IN SAD, DARK ROBES ENTER FROM EITHER SIDE.

CHORUS#1: God was angry.

CHORUS#2: It was in His mind to destroy the Man and the Woman for their disobedience...

GOD STRETCHES OUT HIS ARM

CHORUS#1: But He relented.

THE TWO FIGURES REMOVE THE MASKS OF JOY FROM ADAM AND EVE. BENEATH THEM ARE THE MASKS OF GRIEF AND LOSS.

CHORUS#2: In His mercy, he let them know grief -

CHORUS#1: In His love, he banished them.....

ADAM AND EVE SADLY JOIN HANDS AND WITH HEADS BOWED, MOVE UPSTAGE AND ENTER THE CATHEDRAL DOOR.

CHORUS#2: Sadly, the Man and the Woman left the garden.

CHORUS#1: The first summer had ended -

CHORUS: The long winter had begun.....

MUSIC.

THE ACTORS LEAD THE CONGREGATION INTO THE CATHEDRAL.

ONE: IN THE BEGINNING...

THE CAST OF SHEPHERDS, WORKERS, TOWNSFOLK AND ORDINARY PEOPLE ENTER SINGING A STIRRING PROCESSIONAL HYMN/CAROL AND SURROUND THE ACTING SPACE WHICH IS DIMLY LIT. PERHAPS THEY CARRY CANDLES OR FLAMING TORCHES.

THE MUSIC ENDS.

THERE IS A CYMBAL CRASH.

EVERYONE SPEAKS TOGETHER:

ALL: In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God.

CYMBAL CRASH

HALF#1: Through Him everything came into being.

HALF#2: In Him was Life and the Life was the Light of men.

LIGHT COMES UP ON THE ACTING AREA.

A HUGE STAR IS REVEALED WHICH SHINES BRIGHTLY.

ALL: The Light shines in the Darkness
And the Darkness did not overcome it.

A DRUM BEATS AS THE TWO NARRATORS TAKE THEIR PLACES TO THE LEFT AND RIGHT OF THE PLAYING AREA. NB. THROUGHOUT THE PERFORMANCE MUSIC AND SONG SHOULD BE USED WHEREVER APPROPRIATE.

TWO: THE ANGEL COMES TO ZECHARIAH

NARRATOR #1: Long long ago -

NARRATOR #2: In the land of Judaea -

NARRATOR #1: There was a priest named -

BOTH: Zechariah!

ZECHARIAH HAS APPEARED MOVING UP TOWARDS THE STAR AND FOLLOWED BY HIS CONGREGATION.

NARRATOR #2: One day, as he took the service in his little church -