

Gabe And The Wise Guys
A New Play

The scene is New York City. A couple of flats are in the background, painted with representations of famous Times Square buildings.

Cast of Characters:

Narrator

Joseph

Mary

voice of Mary's mother, Anne

Gabe, manager of the 92nd Street Y

Elizabeth (Mary's cousin)

Man at Counter

Virgin Megastore Clerk

Danny, a subway conductor

Rudy, an usher at the Shubert Theatre

Moe, a cab driver

children's choir headed to a concert at Carnegie Hall

3 professors of the classics: Dr. Fotheringay, Columbia University; Professor Wonmugg, New York University; and the Rev. Canon Schell, General Theological Seminary

Scene One

NARRATOR: This is the city. New York City.

(*SL behind doors*) ANNE: Oh, dear, sweetheart. You're engaged to Joseph. What's he going to say? What will he think? I love you, dear, and so does your father, but this is not good news. What are you going to do? And this story about not knowing how it happened, I just don't know, Mary...

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS: (*derisively*) What? Pregnant? What do you mean, pregnant? What do you mean, you don't know how it happened? Yeah, sure, right! It happened like pregnancies happen! You're going to be lucky if Joseph doesn't dump you just like that! You're outta here!

Mary and Joseph stumble out and meet in center.

JOSEPH: What did your mom say?

MARY: She wasn't too bad, but I think she was crushed by the news. I didn't know what to say, what to do – I just thought I'd get out for a while. My friends were horrible! They made fun of me and treated me terribly.

NARRATOR: Mary and Joseph, a couple with a problem. They wandered up and down the streets of Manhattan in the rainy night. The sirens, the noise of the traffic, the street vendors, the unique New York smell of diesel fumes, roasted walnuts, and yesterday's garbage assaulted their senses. They went looking for a cheap hotel, if one would have a

room. But there were no rooms to be had, not even at the Portland Square. A convention was in town....

JOSEPH: We've walked fifty blocks and I'm tired. And I don't have any money, either. Maybe we could stay here, and I could offer to do some repairs around the building. After all, I'm a carpenter, and it beats staying under the 59th Street Bridge, or on some air vent.

MARY: I've heard of the 92nd Street Y, but I didn't know they had rooms to rent. I'm tired and hungry, and my feet hurt from all this walking. We could sleep on a nice warm subway platform, I guess.

JOSEPH: Yeah, and get mugged, not that we have anything anybody would want. (*They enter the building.*)

GABE: Hey, harya?! Whatcha need?

JOSEPH: We'd like to get a room...

GABE: You married?

MARY: No, but...

GABE: Then you ain't getting no room togedda! This is a nice respectable joint, and I'm gonna keep it that way, or my name ain't Gabriel. Which it ain't, by the way, it's Gabe. Youse guys can have rooms on the same hall, shared bath, ten bucks a night apiece, clean sheets once a week, whaddya say?

JOSEPH: Well, you see, I...

GABE: Ain't got no money and want to do some work around here to pay for the rooms. If I had a nickel for every time I heard that sad story, I'd... (*Mary seems to become faint*) Say, whasamatta wit da little lady? (*They help her sit down.*)

JOSEPH: Well, she's pregnant, and we're a long way from home. Neither of us have eaten, and we've walked all the way up the West Side.

GABE: On da streets in this weather? And she's expecting? Man, that's rough. Look, let's getcha some food and getcha into some rooms, and we'll talk about it in the morning. OK?

JOSEPH: Thanks! Oh, thanks, I don't know what to...

GABE: If ya don't know what to say, don't say nuttin. Let's get you fed, we got vegetable soup tonight. The kitchen's closed, but I got some pull. (*They exit.*)

Scene Two

Joseph and Mary are sitting on opposite ends of the stage, asleep. Gabe the Y attendant has taken on the demeanor of the Archangel Gabriel, God's messenger.

GABE: Greetings, Mary. The Lord is with you!

MARY: I don't understand. What do you mean?

GABE: Don't be afraid, Mary, because you—of all women—have received God's blessing. You've become pregnant and you'll have a son. And you'll call him Jesus.

MARY: But I don't understand at all. I'm a virgin. How can I possibly be pregnant?

GABE: The Holy Spirit caused you to become pregnant, and the power of God has come over you. Your son will be the son of the Most High God. He'll sit on the throne of David, and his kingdom will never end. Now, why don't you go visit your cousin

Elizabeth? She's pregnant too, even though everyone said she was too old to have a baby.

(Mary goes back to sleep. Gabe turns to Joseph)

GABE: And you've considered sending her away because you were ashamed. You can't do that. He won't be your baby, that's true, but you must take him and raise him as if he were your own. He is the son of God, Joseph. And you'll be remembered through the years as the man whom God called to care for his son.

NARRATOR: Joseph and Mary stayed at the 92nd St Y for a few days, until another convention came to town, and then Gabe gave them bus fare to go visit Mary's cousin Elizabeth, out in farthest Brooklyn.

Scene Three

NARRATOR: Mary meets Elizabeth, who is also pregnant, in her old age.

(Mary enters. Elizabeth jumps up, her hands on her belly)

ELIZABETH: My goodness, he jumped as if he knew who you were! How have you been feeling? Have you been sick much?

MARY: No, it's been fine, I just don't quite know what to make of all this.

ELIZABETH. Well, I know. You are blessed among all women, and so is the child you carry. How could I be so lucky? The mother of my Lord has come to me, and my own child leaped for joy when you walked in!

MARY: My soul praises the Lord, and my heart sings to God. He has looked on me with favor, as lowly as I am. Generations to come will call me blessed. For God has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

NARRATOR: Mary stayed with Elizabeth for quite a while, until it was almost time for the baby to come. Then it came time to return home, to be counted in the government census. Joseph and Mary went across the Williamsburg Bridge and into the Lower East Side, where their parents lived, right around the corner from Delancey Street. The neighbors, unfortunately, headed them off and sent them packing. Joseph and Mary made the long walk, on a cold night, back up to the 92nd St Y. Surely Gabe would help them.

MAN AT COUNTER: Gabe? Who? Nevah hoid of him. Ain't nevah been nobody work here by that name. Nah, we ain't got no rooms, either, especially for two people who ain't got no money. Nah, I don't need no work done, neither. Gedaddahere!

NARRATOR: Joseph and Mary headed back downtown. It was snowing, and Mary's birth pains were beginning. Her time had come. They managed to reach Times Square. If they could just make it to 42nd Street, to the bus terminal, they could at least get in out of the cold for awhile, at least until the Transit Cops ran them off.

Scene Four

MARY: (*leaning against Joseph*) I can't go any farther, it hurts too bad. The pains are happening closer and closer together.

JOSEPH: Mary, you've got to hang on a little bit longer, just 5 blocks. Please? Mary, I don't know what to do!

MARY: I have to sit down. Somewhere, anywhere. Look, let's go in this store, "Virgin Records" I'll bet they'd let me warm up just a little bit, maybe we could figure out what to do.

JOSEPH: Ok, Ok. (*to the store clerk*) Look, is there someplace my wife could sit? She's very tired and pregnant, and it's very cold out, and...

MARY: (*moans very loud with a labor pain*)

CLERK: Yeah, and she's about to have that baby, too! Oh, great googly moogly, what are we gonna do? There's no time to call 911, that baby's coming now! Look, this really ain't the best place to do it, but I've got some packing cases in the back, we can fix up a warm, dry place back in the alley. And I think there may even be a blanket or two, and you can have my sweater.

NARRATOR: The clerk lets them out back, into the alley. He and Joseph get a warm, dry shelter built, out of the wind. There's even a barrel, and they start a fire. Mary has her baby. Joseph manages to find enough thrown out back issues of the Daily News to cover Mary and Jesus and provide a little warmth. Precious little, it is bitterly cold.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR (*entering from back, singing *The First Noel**)

CHORISTER 1: When are we gonna get to Carnegie Hall?

CHORISTER 2: It's cold, I'm hungry.

CHORISTER 3: How come the old bus broke down?

ALL: We're cold, we're hungry, etc.

GABE: Hey, what's up?

ALL: We're cold, we're hungry, etc.

GABE: Look, that's not all that important right now. Because you see, tonight a baby was born who was the son of God! The savior! And this is how you'll know him: you'll find him, wrapped in old newspapers – the Daily News, NOT the Times – in some cardboard boxes back in the alley by the Virgin Megastore.

CHORISTERS SING *Silent Night, Holy Night* as they approach Mary and Joseph

CHORISTER 4: Excuse me, lady, please, ma'am. How come you're having a baby back here in this alley? Dontcha have no house to go to? I gotta house, it's out in a place called Staten Island. Ain't you got no house, lady? That dude we saw said your baby was the son of God. Is he the son of God, lady?

MARY: What do *you* think, sweetheart? It's cold out here, you'll catch your death...
CHORISTERS SING *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* as lights fade and they continue to softly hum the tune

Scene Five

NARRATOR: And there were shepherds – Danny, a subway conductor on the number 9 train; Rudy, an usher at the Shubert Theatre; and Moe, one of the few remaining English-speaking cab drivers in the city. They were having a cup of coffee and a hot dog off a push cart down near Washington Square. They'd known each other for a long, long time. They looked up town and saw something strange. The whole Empire State Building was lit up with blue and white lights. The guys knew that at this time of year, it was supposed to be red and green.

(CHORISTERS stop humming)

MOE: Somethin's happenin' youse guys. Somethin' weird's happening. Lookit them lights.

RUDY: Yeah, what's that all about? Gimme another hot dog, willya?

DANNY: I read a story once.

RUDY: Oh, so youse can read and everyting?

MOE: Shaddap, what did the story say?

DANNY: It said that sometime a baby would be born who would be da Son of God, and we'd know when it was time by da signs in da heavens. And if dat ain't a sign in da heavens, I don't know what is. Youse guys know day's supposed to be red and green dis time of year – for some reason, don't know why – just dis time a year, I guess.

RUDY: Let's go find out what's happening.

NARRATOR: The trio went in Moe's taxi (he was off duty at the time, as are they all) toward Times Square. When they got past 34th Street, they saw that the big crystal ball at One Times square was all lit up, and it wasn't even New Years yet! They parked the cab, and got out.

DANNY: That light seems to be pointing down in that alley by the Virgin Megastore. Let's see what's happening.

MOE: I ain't going down no alley, I don't care if Times Square HAS been Disneyfied!

RUDY: C'mon, ya big chicken! I hear music! *(They approach the Holy Family)*

DANNY: Ain't you guys cold?

JOSEPH: No, for some reason it doesn't seem all that cold. Don't know why, it's just – warm enough, somehow.

MARY: Would you like to see my baby?

ALL: Oh, yes ma'am, yes, he's a beautiful baby, look, da kid's smiling!

DANNY: Look, do you mind if we just hang out here for a while and keep an eye on things? It's cold, and this still ain't the best neighborhood, even when Disney got through with it.

CHORUS sings *The First Noel*

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, three friends have gathered at the Café Edison for a late night snack after attending a stimulating lecture at The New School. Dr. Francis Fotheringay, BS, MS, PhD, Professor of the Classics, Columbia University; Professor Albert Wonmugg, BA, MA, DSc, Chair of the Department of Theoretical Metaphysics, New York University. And last but not least, The Rev. Canon Otho Schell, Johnston Professor of Homiletical Exegetical Theology, General Theological Seminary. We're talking some serious brainpower, here. These boys absolutely lived on fish.

DR. FOTHERINGAY (to audience): We were having a late supper at the Café Edison after the most charming little lecture at The New School.

PROFESSOR WONMUGG: Yes, and as we were finishing our coffee we happened to look out and saw the crystal ball at One Times Square all lit up. And Otho said –

CANON SCHELL: This certainly can't be right. It's not New Year's Eve yet. We need to find out what's happening.

DR. FOTHERINGAY: So we hailed a taxi and headed down to City Hall. As we passed the Empire State Building, we noticed it was lit in the wrong colors for the season.

Needless to say, we were growing more and more perplexed. We got to City Hall and His Honor the Mayor, Michael Bloomberg himself was still in his office working on the budget.

PROFESSOR WONMUGG: We told His Honor about the complete waste of taxpayers' money on lighting the ball a week early. And about the strange lights on the Empire State Building.

CANON SCHELL: He told us that he had no idea what was happening, but that we needed to find out, report back to him and he'd put a stop to it. This kind of thing couldn't happen in "his" town, but he suspected that Elliot Spitzer had something to do with it.

DR. FOTHERINGAY: But I knew of an ancient text of prophecy that told that these strange signs of lights in the night sky—the Empire State Building and the crystal ball—would be a sign from heaven, telling us of a miraculous birth.

NARRATOR: The professors got back in their taxi...they had had the foresight to pay the driver to wait for them...and headed back towards Times Square. They exited the cab at the corner of 43rd and Broadway and tipped the driver well...

DR. FOTHERINGAY: We were intrigued, so we ducked around the corner, saw the light softly glowing in the alley next to the Virgin Megastore and heard this lovely music, and saw the newborn baby, just lying there with his mother. Imagine a holy baby right there in an alley. Naturally we wanted...

PROFESSOR WONMUGG: ...to pay our respects of course. We had stopped at this little all night store over on 42nd Street, and picked up a few things. I got this little gold ring for the baby.

DR FOTHERINGAY: I had stopped at an all night Duane Reade drug store and got this little bottle of perfume. I'm not quite sure what myrrh is, it had this mysterious kind of aroma that seemed like it fit the occasion.

CANON SCHELL: And I had picked up some frankincense. It smells pretty unique too – kind of like – oh, I don't know...a little smoky, a little sweet. I smelled something like it once in a church I visited in Tupelo, MS.

The three professors turn toward the group gathered around the baby and kneel, presenting their gifts.

NARRATOR: And so it happened. On a cold snowy night in the middle of winter, Christ came to earth...

ALL SING: *Joy to the World*

THE END