

AND TO THINK THAT IT HAPPENED ON JEFFERSON STREET  
*An Epiphany play*

Cast of Characters

A Narrator  
Joseph  
Mary  
Leslie, the Senior Warden  
Alberta, the Junior Warden  
David, the Head Verger  
Gabriella, a priest at All Saints' Episcopal Church  
Mauveline Tutweiler, waitress at the Waffle House  
BJ, clerk at the Summit hotel  
Liz, Mary's cousin  
Anne, Mary's mother  
The youth choir at All Saints'  
The choir directors, Debra and Mary Lou

Scene One

*The background is a large blue arrow sign, with the word Tupelo on it. Also might be simple representations of other buildings such as the Bancorpsouth Arena, One Mississippi Plaza, the Lyric theatre, and the like.*

NARRATOR. This is the city. Tupelo, Mississippi. A small town in the south, which prides itself on taking care of its own and others, and making it possible for everybody to have a chance to be what they can be. Certainly true, for the most part, but on a cold winter night....Well, we shall see.

ANNE. My word, I just do not believe it. Mary, I know these things happen all the time, but they do not happen to YOU. I mean, my goodness, child, I was planning for you to go to MS State and be a Tri Delt just like I was, and go on and be something and do something, and here you come with this wild tale about being pregnant and not knowing how it happened. Well, Heavens to Betsy, child, I might have been born yesterday, but I assure you I was not born last night. Didn't you go to those classes they had at the high school where they EXPLAIN these things? What are they going to say at the club, darling? Who is this boy, anyway, who are his people? I just know your father is just going to fall down dead when he hears about this. Who is this boy's father anyway, I'm sure your father is going to want to speak with him. Good gracious, girl, my head is just splitting, now go on and let me have a little bit to take this in.

*The scene changes. Mary is now with Joseph, in his old truck, which doesn't run all that well at the best of times.*

Scene 2

JOSEPH. What did your mama say?

MARY. Well, you know she absolutely had a conniption fit, as you might expect, and all I could do was stand there and cry. I KNOW it's a wild story, but it's true. It can't be yours, it can't be anybody's, but there it is. (She becomes distraught) I bought one of those test things at Walgreens and it came back positive. Twice. So I KNOW. And now I'm getting close, and I haven't been to the doctor, and I've been wearing all these big sweatshirts and I didn't really even start showing till about a month ago, and I just don't know what...(She breaks into tears)

JOSEPH (Typical of most men, has no idea what to say) Well, look, you want to get something to eat?

MARY. Why, NO, I'm not hungry and I don't think I could eat a thing, anyway. Can we just ride around a little bit?

JOSEPH. Sure. Let me know if you get hungry. Your daddy's going to kill me, and I haven't done nothing...Look, you wanna get married? I'm working part time at Circuit City and I might could get another job at the mall, and instead of going to State, I could go to ICC, and...

MARY. Will you just shut up? I don't want to think about anything right now. Let's just ride around.

NARRATOR. They ride up and down the streets in Joseph's truck. They go by the high school, by the mall, up and down Gloster. They sit in the parking lots of closed stores with groups of their friends, because there is just all too little for teenage kids to do. Joseph is being Joseph, a good boy, raised right, more interested in football and horseplay with his friends than in being a husband and father. And why wouldn't he be?

MARY. I'm tired of all this crowd. Can we go?

JOSEPH. Sure, where do you want to go?

MARY. I don't know, and don't care. Just away from these people.

JOSEPH. Ok, sure. Just relax.

MARY. Relax. Well, that's very easy for you to say, YOU're not pregnant.

JOSEPH. (stage whisper) And I'm pretty glad about that, too.

MARY. What?

JOSEPH. Nothing, nothing.

MARY. Turn in here. HERE!

JOSEPH. Why?

MARY. Because I said so. Sometimes I've gone to this church's youth group, and that little side chapel over there is always open. I just need to be quiet for a little bit and think.

NARRATOR. The sign by the side of the door says "Chapel Open for Prayer." And so they go inside. The very walls exude peace. The lovely old windows seem to say, "Here are the ones who have gone before, watching over you." There is no altar, no crucifix. That would be getting ahead of our story....

*Scene 3*

(Joseph and Mary take seats, and just sit for a moment. Joseph begins to doze.

GABRIELLA ENTERS, but he does not awaken)

GABRIELLA. Hi. Can I help you?

MARY. I'm sorry. Is it ok if we're here? We just wanted to sit down for a minute.

GABRIELLA. Darling, of course it's ok. This is where you can go if you just need to sit and rest for a bit.

MARY. Who are you?

GABRIELLA. I'm Gabriella. I kind of...work here. Can I sit down? Do you have a problem I can help you with?

MARY. I don't know, I doubt it. You see, I'm pregnant, and I don't know how I got that way. This is my boyfriend Joseph. He didn't have anything to do with it. Neither did anybody, I don't know what happened.

GABRIELLA. I understand. Just rest a minute, dear. *(She puts her arm around Mary, who snuggles close, because Gabriella is like the mother everybody would like to have and few of us do. Mary begins to doze.)*

GABRIELLA. *(talking to Mary as she sleeps)* Sweetheart, don't worry. God's own blessing has come upon you. You are pregnant with the child of God, by God's own Holy Spirit. You will call him Jesus. He will be the son of the Most High God, and will sit on the throne of David, and his kingdom will never end. Now go visit your cousin Elizabeth in Aberdeen. She's pregnant too, and thought she was way too old for it. *(GABRIELLA turns to Joseph, who still sleeps.)* And you. You have an awful lot of growing up to do all of a sudden. This child is not yours, true. But you have to take him and raise him as if he were. Down through the years, you'll be remembered as the man whom God called to care for his son. *(She exits, and they awaken.)*

MARY. I had the strangest dream. I want to go visit my cousin and think about it. Can you take me to Aberdeen?

JOSEPH. Sure. I had a funny dream too. *(They exit.)*

*Scene 4*

*(Elizabeth enters, Mary enters. Elizabeth is older than Mary)*

MARY. I just don't know what to make of all this.

ELIZABETH. Well, I know. When you came in the front door, this one I'm carrying jumped like he was ready to come out. It was almost as if he knew who you were and what was happening with you. Honey, you feeling ok? Have you had much morning sickness? Are your feet swelling much?

MARY. No, everything's fine, I just had this odd dream.

ELIZABETH. So did I, baby, so did I. I know how it is with you. That's God's own baby you're carrying. You are blessed among all women.

MARY. My soul praises the Lord, and my heart sings to God. He's looked on me with favor and even as unknown as I am now, generations to come will call me blessed. God has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

NARRATOR: Mary stays with Elizabeth for a while, until her time draws near. Joseph comes to pick her up, and they return to Tupelo. It is one of those cold nights we have in Mississippi, with freezing rain in the forecast. Dick Rice on TV9 is saying that there could be some icing on bridges. Naturally, he will understate the case...

### Scene 5

JOSEPH. You hungry?

MARY. Seems like the closer this baby gets, the hungrier I get. I know I'm eating for two, but this is ridiculous. Can we stop somewhere when we get back to town? I don't think I can wait till we get home.

JOSEPH. Sure, we'll stop at the first place we get to. Man, these roads are getting icy.

MARY. Be careful, honey. Don't slide off into a ditch.

JOSEPH. It's not bad yet. Tell you what, I need to stop by the mall just a minute. That be ok?

MARY. (*reluctant*) I guess.

NARRATOR: They follow Highway 45 all the way around by the mall. By now, the freezing rain is falling in earnest, and the roads are becoming treacherous. Joseph decides to head on down Gloster, before they get any worse. But both are hungry, and they decide to pull into the Waffle House, both having a taste for an omelet....

### Scene 6

MAUVELINE. Hey, hon, how y'all doing? You want a cuppa coffee? How 'bout a little bite to eat? I was beginning to think I wadn't gonna have any company at all tonight.

MARY. Well, I don't care for coffee, but I'd like a Diet Coke. And a ham and cheese omelet and some hash browns scattered and smothered...and maybe some sausage and a biscuit or two.

MAUVELINE. (*chuckles*) Bless your heart, sugar. I'll feed all three of you. What about you, Daddy, you want the same thing? Bless your heart, too. When you due, baby?

MARY. Any time now. I'm scared to sneeze too hard, I'm afraid I'll start something.

MAUVELINE. What about this boy, anyway? He gonna be a good Daddy? He don't look any older than my boy, Otho.

MARY. He'll do just fine. Ohhhhh! (*She has a spasm. She is going into labor.*) Oh, heavens, I believe it's time.

MAUVELINE. Oh, Law! You need to get this child to the hospital, but Lord have mercy, look at those streets! You'll never make it! I'm calling 911, they'll send somebody. (*She picks up an imaginary phone.*) Hello? Hello? This is Mauveline Tutweiler down at the Waffle House on North Gloster, and I've got a youngun about to have a youngun right here on one of my bar stools....What? You don't mean it....You

can't get anybody here because the ice has got everybody working wrecks? Well, I never....This would be a nice place to have an ambulance service! I'm gonna write the Daily Journal! Hello? Hello?

MARY. OHHHHHH. It hurts!

MAUVELINE. Look sweetie, there ain't no ambulance coming, and I can't help you on account of my sugar, I might just fall right out, and this boy doesn't need TWO women to take care of. I tell you what. They've always got people trained to do this stuff in hotels. You drive across the street to that Summit place, I know the man that owns it, he's real nice even if he ain't from here, you go over there now, they'll help you. *(She starts fanning herself.)*

*(Joseph and Mary drive across the street in the freezing rain. The ice on the streets is treacherous. They come to the front desk of the Summit, a boutique hotel. They confront the desk clerk, BJ)*

### Scene 7

BJ. Do ya see the sign? This is a boutique hotel, we ain't got no rooms for riff raff here.

JOSEPH. But my wife...

BJ. And we don't have paramedics either. *(changing his tone as Mary holds her stomach and moans...)* Look, everybody's got problems. I'm sorry, I really am.

MARY. I just need a place to lie down for a minute, I'll be ok.

BJ. Look, it's like this. I haven't even got a place for you to lie down, even if I wanted to. This place is full. Every bed is taken and there's even people sleeping on the couch in the lobby. This weather has got everybody run in off the road. You're just gonna have to make it to the hospital, if you can. Get back out on the highway, I think it might be a little more clear than Gloster Street. Go down Front, turn on Jefferson, left on Green. You'll get there. Sorry, I really wish I could help you, no kidding. I think every hotel in this town is full. You'd think the furniture market was in town or something.

NARRATOR: Joseph and Mary get back in the truck, and creep down the highway. A truck had turned over at the Front Street exit, giving them no choice but to head downtown. They turn on Jefferson, creeping slowly on the treacherous, black ice. It was almost impossible to drive on – not like the snow they have up north, just a solid glaze of ice. You can't get traction on that stuff, not even with snow chains, and...but I digress.

### Scene 8

JOSEPH. I don't think we're going to make it in time. This street is just too bad. Every time I hit the gas, I go in a circle. I wish this truck was all wheel drive.

MARY. I don't care. I'm just so tired, and I hurt so bad. And the pains are coming close together. You're going to have to help me.

JOSEPH. ME? I don't know nothing about delivering no babies!

MARY. Stop here. I can't go any farther. Help me in there. See, that's the place we went a long time ago. See the sign, "Chapel Open for Prayer." At least it'll be warm in there.

*(Joseph helps her into the chapel. GABRIELLA is there, praying. She looks up and smiles)*

*Scene 9*

GABRIELLA. I thought I might see you again. *(She takes the kids in an all-encompassing hug.)* You're all right now, we'll get you right through this. Come with me. We'll get a bunch of nap cushions out of the nursery, and blankets too. It's warm in here too. Everything is going to be OK!

NARRATOR: And there were in that country, since the weather was not very good and the heating system was still a little iffy, certain shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night. There was Alberta, a senior warden, Leslie, a junior warden, and David, the head verger. Since the youth choir was practicing, and the vestry was about to meet, and the EYC was working on a fundraiser, there was quite a crowd on hand on that cold, icy night. The three shepherds had stepped out under the bell tower so the head verger could have a quiet chew and they could discuss the recent bowl game results. And suddenly, the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and there was a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, good will to men." And the three shepherds – might have been a bit taken aback, not to say nonplussed, perhaps even a bit startled – but they feared NOT. And since the light seemed to be coming from the parish hall, that's where they headed.

JOSEPH. What am I supposed to do with this pot of water you made me boil?

GABRIELLA. Go pour it out.

JOSEPH. Pour it out? I don't understand. What was I supposed to do with it?

GABRIELLA. You were supposed to stay out of the way with it, and you did a wonderful job, and I am so proud of you.

*(The three shepherds burst in. Mary and the babe are together, with Gabriella and Joseph standing by.)*

ALBERTA. Mother Gabby, what's going on?

LESLIE. Yeah, what's happening? We were under the bell tower discussing the budget...

GABRIELLA *(interrupting)*. You weren't discussing the budget, you were trying to figure out whether I was going to have a nice short vestry meeting so we could all go home. You KNOW I always know these things.

ALBERTA. We know, and we've been trying to figure that out. Say...

GABRIELLA. Never mind that now. Look who has come to us!

LESLIE. Look at him! He looks just like that baby in that scene under the altar. Do you suppose...?

DAVID. On a night like this, anything is possible.

*(At this point, we hear the youth choir practicing...singing the last lines of the chorus of God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen. We hear the choir director say "OK kids, that's good for tonight. Let's go to the parish hall to get snacks before your parents come." They enter and stop suddenly and watch, amazed at what they're seeing. One brave girl steps out of the crowd.)*

CHOIR 1. Hey lady, is that a brand new baby? It's all red and yucky looking.

MARY (*smiling*). Yes, yes he is. His name is Jesus.

The other kids have started gathering around.

CHOIR 2. That's a funny name. But I have a neighbor whose name is Heyzoos.

CHOIR 3. How come you have the baby here and not at the hospital?

CHOIR 4. When are we going to get our snacks? I'm hungry.

CHOIR 5. Hey look! The baby's smiling at me.

CHOIR DIRECTOR. Kids...kids! Let's get out of the way. Come on, stand over here and let's sing to the baby.

*(They quickly line up on the steps and all start singing Silent Night. All in the tableau join in. The lights dim and the tableau freezes as the song ends.)*

NARRATOR. And so it happened...or might have happened...one cold and nasty night in Tupelo, MS. What an unusual and humble beginning for our Lord. Let's welcome him to the world with a joyful noise! Let's stand and all sing JOY TO THE WORLD!

THE END