

AUDITION OPTIONS FOR *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*

By Barbara Robinson

ANYONE (Adult / Young Adult / Youth / Teen): The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cursed their teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down toolhouse. The toolhouse burned right down to the ground, and I think that surprised the Herdmans. They set fire to things all the time, but that was the first time they managed to burn down a whole building. I guess it was an accident. I don't suppose they woke up that morning and said to one another, "Let's go burn down Fred Shoemaker's toolhouse" . . . but maybe they did. After all, it was a Saturday, and not much going on. It was a terrific fire—two engines and two police cars and all the volunteer firemen and five dozen doughnuts sent up from the Tasti-Lunch Diner. The doughnuts were supposed to be for the firemen, but by the time they got the fire out the doughnuts were all gone. The Herdmans got them—what they couldn't eat they stuffed in their pockets and down the front of their shirts. You could actually see the doughnuts all around Ollie Herdman's middle. I couldn't understand why the Herdmans were hanging around the scene of their crime. Everybody knew the whole thing was their fault, and you'd think they'd have the brains to get out of sight. One fireman even collared Claude Herdman and said, "Did you kids start this fire, smoking cigars in that toolhouse?" But Claude just said, "We weren't smoking cigars." And they weren't. They were playing with Leroy Herdman's "Young Einstein" chemistry set, which he stole from the hardware store, and that was how they started the fire.

The fire chief got us all together—there were fifteen or twenty kids standing around watching the fire—and gave us a little talk about playing with matches and gasoline and dangerous things like that. "I don't say that's what happened here," he told us. "I don't know what happened here, but that could have been it, and you see the result. So let this be a good lesson to you, boys and girls."

Of course it was a great lesson to the Herdmans—they learned that wherever there's a fire there will be free doughnuts sooner or later.

MALE (Youth / Teen)

Narrator: (*Reciting in the pageant*) And in that region there were shepherds in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them... (*Gladys doesn't appear, trying again*)... An angel of the Lord appeared to them... (*Gladys still doesn't appear, continues worried*)... The glory of the Lord shone around about and they were sore afraid... (*trying to give Gladys her cue*)... WHEN THE ANGEL OF THE LORD appeared to them and said, Be not... (*Gladys appears suddenly yelling her line, continuing flustered*)... and suddenly there was a multitude of heavenly host, saying Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men.

CHARLIE: (Singing) "Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, because there are no Herdmans there. And Jesus loves us, as they say, because he keeps them miles away." I don't care what everybody else said, that's what they really thought. All that other stuff is okay but the main good stuff about church is that the Herdmans aren't there, ever... That's what I said... stay away from them. Go to church.

MALE (AGES 18 and Up)

REV. HOPKINS: I've been on the telephone all day, and I can't make heads or tails of it. Some people say they set fire to the ladies' room. Some people say they set fire to the kitchen. Vera Wendleken says all they do is talk about sex and underwear... The whole church is in an uproar. I don't know... Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me", but I'm not sure he meant the Herdmans... Grace, don't you think we should cancel the pageant? We could blame it on the fire... makes a good excuse.

FATHER: Well... that's what they were... Mary and Joseph. They were refugees, in a way. They were a long way from home, didn't have any place to stay, didn't know anybody. They were probably cold and hungry and tired... and messy. (*To Mother*) I think you worry too much. Now... I'm going to push baby angels onstage, and I'm going to hand out shepherd's crooks and then push them onstage... When do I do all that?

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GLADYS:

(As the Angel of the Lord appearing to the Shepherds in the Pageant) Hey!...Hey!.. Unto you a child is born!...It's Jesus, and he's in a barn...Go see him! *(Shepherd hesitate)* Go on, he's over there!

FEMALE (Teen / Young Adult)

ALICE:

I didn't dare raise my hand. Imogene would have killed me! She said, "I'm going to be Mary in this play, and if you open your mouth or raise your hand, you'll wish you didn't." And I said, "I'm always Mart in the Christmas pageant." And she said, "go ahead then, and next spring when the pussywillows come out I'll stick a pussywillow so far down your ear that nobody can reach it...and it'll sprout there and grow and grow, and you'll spend the rest of your life with a pussywillow bush growing out of your ear!" And she would too! Herdmans will do anything. You just watch, they'll do something terrible and ruin the whole pageant...and it's all your mother's fault!

IMOGENE:

My God! They didn't have room for Jesus? Didn't Mary know [who he was]? *(Pointing to Ralph who is playing Joseph)* Didn't he know? What was the matter with Joseph, that he didn't tell them? Her pregnant and everything...[and] you mean they tied him up and put him in a feedbox? Where was Child Welfare?

BETH:

(Referring to the pageant) It did seem real, as if it might have happened just that way. We all thought the pageant was about Jesus, but that was only part of it. It was about a new baby, and his mother and father who were in a whole lot of trouble – no money, no place to go, no doctor, nobody they knew. And then, arriving from the East – like my uncle from New Jersey – some rich friends. Because of the Herdmans, it was a whole new story – Imogene, burping the baby, and the Wise Men bringing such a sensible present. After all, they couldn't eat frankincense! And even Gladys – "He's in the barn. Go see him"...so the shepherds didn't have to stumble around all over the countryside. But I guess it wasn't like that for Imogene. For her, the Christmas pageant turned out to be all wonder and mystery, as if she just caught on to what Christmas was all about.

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FEMALE (AGES 18 and Up)

MRS ARMSTRONG:

(Talking on the phone) I'll tell you again, Grace, how important it is to give everyone a chance. Here's what I do – I always start with Mary and I tell them we must choose our Mary carefully because Mary was the mother of Jesus... Yes, and then I tell them about Joseph, that he was God's choice to be Jesus' father. That's how I explain that. Frankly, I don't ever spend much time on Joseph because it's always Elmer Hopkins, and he knows all about Mary and Joseph... but I do explain about the Wise Men and the shepherds and how important they are. And I tell them, there are no small parts, only small actors. Remind the angel choir not to stare at the audience, and don't let them wear earrings and things like that. And don't let them wear clunky shoes or high heels. I just hope you don't have too many baby angels, Grace, because they'll be your biggest problem.

MRS MCCARTHY:

Could you believe that was Imogene Herdman? And all the rest of them? Irma, this was the best Christmas pageant we ever had, and I'm not sure why, but I think it was them. Could that be? There was just something... different... Had lots of spirit. Sometimes you can't even hear the angel of the Lord. I must find Grace and tell her.