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The Answer

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Abstract: This article is a one-act play of the first Christmas in America taken from the book of Alma.

The Answer

BY HELOISE DAY MERKLEY

A One-Act Play of the First Christmas in America

Characters:

Nephi the Prophet. Fifth in direct line from Alma. He wears the priestly vestments of Israel.

The robe makes him look tall, but not so tall as the soldier.

Gidgiddoni, the Nephite Captain. He is very tall and his helmet and armour emphasizes his height and strength.

Velma, the younger sister of Nephi. She is dressed in a light colored gown and wears her hair in long braids.

Voice of Comfort. It is strong and clear and sweet.

Singers without, who chant a chorus of praise to the new born Christ.

Scene:

The garden of the Prophet Nephi in Zarahemla at sunset on the eve of the birth of Christ.

There is a carved stone-seat on the right and trees, shrubs, and flowers all about.

The light of the setting sun streams brightly across the stage from the right side, casting long, purple shadows and touching the foliage with gold. At the last this golden light disappears, but the stage only becomes brighter. It is lighted then with a brilliant white radiance, which, during Nephi's prayer, blends with the vanishing sunlight, dispelling all shadows; and then replaces it, from the left.

As the curtain rises, Velma is discovered, seated despondently. Nephi enters from the left and comes to her.

Nephi (Sympathetically):

Sweet sister, do you weep for fear of death
Which unbelievers threaten to us all
Because we look in faith for signs of Christ?
Or is it something personal to you
Which brings these tears to mar your loveliness?

Velma:

Oh, Nephi, I can never hide from you
The secrets of my mind. Yes, fear of death
Is like a heavy cloud upon my heart;
But worse than that—like lightning's searing flame—
Is knowledge that the man who holds my heart,
Whether I will or no, within his hands,
Aligned with unbelievers on the morrow
Will lead the soldiers who perform the deed—. (*She weeps.*)

Nephi:

Your lover—but I did not know you loved!
He is an unbeliever? Soldier, too?

Velma:

His name is Gidgiddoni—called the Brave.
(*Gidgiddoni enters from the Right seeking them.*)

Nephi:

That captain who so bravely led our men
Against the Gadianton robbers bold?

Velma:

Yes, Nephi, that same captain, Gidgiddoni.

Gidgiddoni:

You speak of me, fair Velma, so I trust

Your voice makes welcome to the prophet's ear
 A name which he might otherwise despise,
 Since priests and soldiers seldom see alike.
 Your servants, Nephi, told me you were here
 And I desired to talk with you alone,
 So sought you boldly, unannounced, because
 My mission must be secret or 'tis vain.

Velma (Rising):

A secret mission? I shall leave you, then.

Gidgiddoni:

No, stay! Secret to enemies—not friends.

Nephi:

Speak, Gidgiddoni. Why have you sought me?

Gidgiddoni:

Five years have passed since one called Samuel,
 A Lamanite, who preached of Christ to come
 Foretold a sign—no darkness—a new star—
 The night to be like day—when Christ is born.
 In five years 'twas to come. Five years in vain
 Have Christians watched for it. Their enemies
 Decree the death of all who still believe.
 Tomorrow is the fatal day to all
 Who look for Christ. Am I not right, my friend?

Nephi:

'Tis true. Then why do you, rejecting Christ,
 Seek me, who worship him, thus secretly?

Gidgiddoni:

I come to prove myself your friend, this night.
 I am a soldier, yet I love not death
 Of such a wanton, wholesale, useless sort.
 I care not whether Christ shall come or no,
 Yet I cannot endure this massacre
 Of men and women, even helpless babes,
 Deceed upon the morrow through our land.
 My company of soldiers, loyal, brave,
 Will follow me in anything. Tonight
 If you desire our aid, gather your friends,
 The priests and lesser prophets of your faith
 And all you love, within these sheltering walls.
 Then, when the bloody dawn appears, I'll bring
 The bravest men in all the land to you
 And here we'll keep you safe to preach anew
 The gospel of your Christ—or what you will.

Nephi:

I thank you, Gidgiddoni. You are kind
 And generous, and truly brave I know.
 The aid you offer, if I sought man's aid
 Could not in Zarahemla be surpassed.
 Yet, in this crisis none but God can help.

Gidgiddoni:

But does not God use men as instruments?
 Perhaps he sends me as the aid you need.

Nephi:

Had you a means of saving every soul
Who looks for Christ to come, I might suppose
That God had sent you. But since you propose
To save but few, I think you are too weak
To represent his will on this sad day.

Velma:

O Gidgiddoni, is there not some way
That you can save us all—not just a few?

Gidgiddoni (Sadly):

I know not how—unless perhaps—The men
Whom I can always trust implicitly
Are few in number—yet I do believe,
Nephi, if you will go with me tonight,
With them behind me, every sword in hand,
We may surprise the judges of the nation
Assembled to consult on high affairs.
They trust me fully. Every man of mine
Will be instructed to approach one judge
And on my signal threaten all with death,
Unless a proclamation be sent forth
By swiftest messengers throughout the land
Declaring that no Christian may be slain
Although the sign of Christ should never come.

Velma:

Oh, Gidgiddoni, here is hope indeed!

(A pause.)

But Nephi, brother, why are you so sad?
Do you not realize what he suggests?
He gives us hope of life, not just for us
But all believers, every soul may live!
Yet you are silent! Why do you not speak?

Nephi (Sadly):

He offers hope indeed—a hope in man.
But what can man perform, ignoring God?
Does God need such weak instruments on earth
When all the hosts of Heaven obey his will?
A slender thread of hope this soldier brings,
But men's plans fail in unexpected ways.
God never fails. Our God can send the sign
And save us all without the help of man.
Resist not evil. Faith our buckler is.
If I the Priest and Prophet have no faith
Where then is faith upon the whole great land?
If I must trust to man instead of God
Then why should any trust a Higher Power?
My hope for life I place in God. I go
To seek his mercy, ask his will—to pray. *(Exit Nephi.)*

Gidgiddoni (As Velma gazes silently after Nephi):

Sweet Velma, fairest of the fair, my love
Has long been known to you. You bade me wait.
Your answer I have waited long. How long
Only a lover knows, who counts the days

As years, each hour a month of agony.
 Now drawn to heaven by an eager hope
 Now feeling hells of doubt in long suspense.
 You know it was my love for you, dear heart,
 Which sent me here to offer him my sword.
 Like a fanatic, he rejects my aid,
 For faith in the unreasonable dream
 Of Christ to come unto a far off land
 A land tradition only tells about.
 A land unknown to any living man.
 The sign of Him a star, a day-bright night,
 But if He comes or if He does not come
 What matters it to us who see Him not?

Velma:

Have you forgotten how, five years ago,
 As boy and girl together, proud and gay,
 Because you'd won a prize for marksmanship,
 Returning happy to the city here,
 We paused to listen to the Lamanite?

Gidgiddoni:

No, Velma, I have not forgotten that.
 He stood upon the wall and told strange things.
 I half believed, I think, the things he said,
 Until they tried to stone him, but could not—
 I set an arrow to my bow, and half in sport
 Aimed it directly at his heart, and missed.

Velma:

Yet not three hours before you took the prize
 For marksmanship—the best in all the land.

Gidgiddoni:

I thought the sun was in my eyes. I moved
 To get a better angle—tried again—

Velma:

And failed again and yet again, as all
 Have failed who strove against the men
 Who preach to us of Christ and in His name
 Perform the miracles we've often seen.

Gidgiddoni:

Or do they not, as some have said to me
 By evil power work these mysteries
 We cannot understand; so keeping us
 Subjected to their will through ignorance?

Velma:

Oh, *Gidgiddoni*, can you not believe?

Gidgiddoni:

I cannot understand these mysteries.
 But this I know, sweet *Velma*—I love you
 And you are Christian. This I also know,
 That if a certain star, a certain light
 More marvelous than man has even seen,
 Appear not in the heaven this very night,
 All Christians die tomorrow by the sword.
 The sun is sinking. Nothing has occurred

This day to indicate a difference
 Between this day and any other day.
 The time is short. Your brother scorns my aid.
 Come, sweetheart, fly with me to life and love.
 Forget the signs and miracles, and tales
 That prophets tell—

Velma:

I never could forget.

Gidgiddoni (Taking her gently in his arms):

But I will tell you wond'rous tales of love.
 I'll take you where the Gadiantons were
 High on the mountainsides, where waterfalls,
 Eternal snows, fair flowers, and luscious fruits
 Can all be found within a day's short climb.
 I'll build a bower where our love shall live
 Where not a care or fear can follow us.
 Come Velma, come with me and live for love!

Velma (Slowly yielding):

I am so weary of anxiety.
 I've loved you long. I've prayed so hard that you
 Might see the truth, accept the Christ and give
 Your life to serve Him—is it all in vain?
 Can you not see as I see—ever—dear?

Gidgiddoni (Gaily):

You little preacher—can't you speak of love
 Without religion in the self-same breath?
 The child of Prophets—generations back—
 Perhaps you cannot—yet I love you so,
 That if you'll fly with me, I'll hush my tales
 Of love, to listen to our tales of faith—

Velma (Reproachfully):

Oh, Gidgiddoni, can you jest tonight
 When doom is hanging o'er so many souls?

Gidgiddoni:

You said you loved me. How can I be sad?
 Come, fly with me and death will miss one sweet!

Velma:

I love you, Gidgiddoni. But I love
 My brothers, friends, these Christians who must die,
 Unless the sign comes of the birth of Christ.
 I cannot leave them dying, and be happy.

Gidgiddoni:

You say you love me—yet you will not fly?

Velma:

I say I love you, yet I will not fly!

Gidgiddoni (Loosing his arms):

You'd rather die for Christ than live for me?

Velma (Turning toward the left and looking upward):

I may not die. The sign may come tonight.

Gidgiddoni:

Oh, stubbornness! Oh, blind unreasoning faith!
 Why must I love her so? I'll try once more.
 Sweet Velma! Listen! Will you promise this?

When darkness follows on this sinking sun,
 When no more hope is left—no star appears
 Except the stars that shine forth every night,—
 Will you in quiet and with secrecy
 Gather such Christian friends as wish to live
 And meet me just outside the city gate?
 We'll take your friends unto a secret place
 Among the mountains. Bring the records, too,
 That Christians hold so dear—and we will be
 A Christian colony, till we dare come
 And preach to others—so shall faith be served
 And some few Christians saved this threatened death.
 Will you do this, O Velma, not for me
 But for the faith you seem to love so much?
 Look now, the sun is setting—Speak, my love.

(Nephi reenters. Velma hesitates to answer Gidgiddoni, watching Nephi. He ignores them, comes forward, lifts his arms and prays):

Nephi:

O Mighty Father! Answer Thou my plea!
 All day I've prayed! Oh, hear me! Answer now!
 Thou art all-powerful! In Thy great name
 The prophets have performed great miracles.
 They told us of the Christ. They promised us
 A wondrous sign when He should come to earth.
 In this tradition has our faith grown strong.
 We are about to be destroyed for it!
 Only this night between us and our fate!
 Oh, hear my prayers! Oh, save these faithful ones!
 Send Thou the sign, the star, the glorious light!
 That we may live and praise Thee evermore!
 O Heavenly Father, send the sign of Christ!

(Nephi sinks to his knees. Gidgiddoni and Velma watch and listen.)

Voice of Comfort (Strong and clear and sweet. Soft music sounds with it.)

Lift up your head, be of good cheer, for lo,
 The time's at hand, this night the sign is given,
 And on the morn come I into the world,
 To show unto the world that I fulfil
 All that which I have bade my prophets speak.
 I come unto my own, fulfil all things
 Which I've made known unto the sons of men
 From the foundation of the world. I do
 The will both of the Father and the Son—
 The will of the Father because of me;
 The will of the Son because of my flesh.
 Behold, O Nephi, the time is at hand
 And this night the sign shall be given!

Nephi (Rising to his feet, points toward the right, where the golden sunset light vanishes; then turns toward the left, whence comes the white flood of brilliance):

The sun is set, and yet the day is bright!
 No darkness comes! Behold a wondrous star!
 The sign of life! The sign of Christ appears!

(He extends both arms toward the star as if praying.)

Gidgiddoni (After following *Nephi's* gestures with his eyes):

The sign of Christ! The Light! The wondrous star!
 The sun has set and yet no darkness comes!
 The Christians live! But woe—ah, woe is me!
 This darkness of the night within my mind!
 This bitterness of death within my soul!
 My hard heart would not yield unto the faith!
 My dim eyes would not look upon the truth!
 My stiff neck would not bend unto the Christ!
 Ah! Woe unto my proud unyielding soul!
 The sign is given! The son of God is born!

(*He prostrates himself.*)

O Christ, forgive me now, I bow to thee,
 O Son of God, redeem me from my sins!

Velma (Kneeling beside him, one hand on his head, the other pointing toward the star):

At last we see the truth together, love!
 The light of Christ has touched you, heart of mine!
 O Savior! Unto Thee I give my praise!
 With Faith and Love united, Joy is mine!

(*All hold the pose while outside the chorus of voices chants a hymn of praise unto the new-born Christ. The curtain slowly falls. It rises again to show Nephi still pointing toward the star, while Gidgiddoni, his helmet lying at his feet and his head bare, stands with his arm about Velma, and both gaze joyously toward the star—the white radiance shining on all their faces.*)

THE STAR OF CHRIST

(*Sung by chorus without. Tune: High on the Mountain Top.*)

High in the Heavens above, the star of Christ appears,
 The sign of peace and love to banish all our fears.
 The wondrous light so bright proclaims the Savior's birth.
 The dawn of gospel light through all the earth.

Rejoice, believers, all rejoice and praise Him now,
 The powers of evil fall, to him the earth must bow!
 The son of God enthroned, the star proclaims his birth!
 He brings unto his own, true Peace on Earth!!

Rexburg, Idaho.

Historical Illustrations

Top: Niagara Falls. Center: Logan Square chapel, Chicago, fronting left; to the right, the mission office, and the mission home. Bottom: Rachel Grant Taylor, President S. O. Bennion, and Sisters Squires and Bennion standing on the cornerstone of the Far West temple-site, which was laid April 26, 1839, and about which there is a remarkable story. See Doc. and Cov. 115:6-12; 124:49-54; *History of the Church*, vol. III, pp. 336-340. It would serve as a good subject for an exercise in the Y. M. M. I. A.

These scenes were recently photographed by President John H. Taylor. Many of our readers will remember him as Church Scout Leader before he was appointed to the presidency of the Northern States mission, a position he now occupies.

