

A CHRISTMAS CONFESSION

A sketch by Chris Neville-Smith

The cast:

Priest

Woman

Man

Wife

The part of the woman and wife may be doubled. The choice of all characters' genders except the priest's is completely arbitrary, and you are welcome to change them round as you please. The priest probably needs to be male though. Blame the Catholics for that one.

The set

The play is set in a confession booth not unlike those in Catholic churches. However, this only needs to be representation. Two chairs and maybe a dividing wall ought to do be sufficient.

*A confession box in a church vestry. A **priest** enters the scene, and makes the sign of the cross. Or rather, something that seems to be the sign of the cross and first glance. It isn't a cross, but that will be mentioned later. For now, he takes his seat in the box. A nervous **woman** then enters. She sits the other side, and makes the same sign.*

Woman: Bless me father, for I have sinned. It has been three days since my last confession.

Priest: May The Father of all mercies help you make a good confession.

Woman: I do not know if I have strength to confess my sins.

Priest: It is not like you to visit so soon after your last confession.

Woman: I know ... I do not come often. But today, I ... I committed a deplorable sin.

Priest: My goodness. Your hands are shaking.

Woman: My husband ... my husband says I shouldn't come – says it's nothing, but- ... (*breaks down*) I said a terrible thing – in a respectable house.

Priest: But you and your husband lead a most virtuous life ... Whatever did you say?

*No answer. The **woman** is too distraught to speak.*

Priest: Who did you say it to?

Woman: My son. He's only six ... (*upset again*) Only six, and I broke his heart!

Priest: Perhaps you should talk though what happened one step at a time. When did this begin?

Woman: This afternoon. He'd just come back from Sunday school so he was all excited about Christmas. He asked all about God and baby Jesus and Rudolph and Father Christmas and- ... oh, he's such a bright boy. I should have realised.

Priest: Go on.

Woman: He started asking how Santa Claus had time to visit all the houses in the world and how he could eat all those mince pies in one night, so I told him it's magic ...

Priest: Of course.

Woman: And then he asked how Jesus came back from the dead, and I said that was a miracle, but then he said "So Mummy, is magic the same as a miracle?" and I – I didn't know how to answer. I said something but I knew he didn't believe me, and he kept asking questions, and kept catching me out and I- ... Oh, he was so upset when I told him. I'm sorry, he won't be able to do the Nativity now. He was so looking forward to being a wise man.

Priest: So let me understand. You told your son there's no such thing as ...

Woman: Yes, I- ... I know we'd have to him them eventually, but I hoped it would be a couple more years. I told him – there's no such thing as God.

Priest: The terrible thing you told your son is that God doesn't exist?

Woman: It is.

Priest: And that's all?

Woman: Yes ... I suppose he'd have found out anyway. Maybe it was for the best ... it feels stupid telling you this now.

*The **woman** leaves the box and heads to exit.*

Woman: I'm sorry, I've been wasting your time tonight.

*The **priest** follows her and gestures her to stop. There is no sign of anger.*

Priest: No, not at all. Please, let us finish this.

Woman: But I'm supposed to be confessing my sins, not- ... My husband's right. It's hardly a sin, telling your children there isn't really a God.

Priest: Of course it isn't! Don't be ridiculous!

Woman: Do you know something? I realised it was nothing the moment I told you.

Priest: But that's what I'm here for. To help you get things off your chest, however silly it might seem.

Woman: I know.

Priest: Just out of interest, when exactly did you realise you'd have to come clean?

Woman: I'm not sure. I was asking so many questions, but there was one particular one that made me realise he'd seen through it. Oh, I remember. We were talking about King Herod and the infants and he said "But Mummy, why didn't God do a miracle to save all the other babies?" ... There isn't really an answer to that, is there?

Priest (chuckling): It's a ridiculous story, when you think about it. I mean, all that stuff about God loves you but you're going to hell and the only way out is to for God to have his own son executed as punishment for everything you've ever done but you're still going to hell unless you believe it happened ... That doesn't even make sense.

Woman: Yes, a six-year-old could see through that – what am I talking about? A six-year-old *did* see through it.

Priest: Kids are so smart these days ... But remember, all these things happen for a reason. The Father has gifted your son with intellect and wisdom beyond his years. I truly believe He has great plans for him.

Woman: But I must be penitent. I still feel terrible for the upset I caused him.

Priest: Really, it's not necessary. You've done nothing wrong.

Woman: Please, I must be absolved for my sin.

Priest (humouring her): Very well. Say Santa's prayer once and you shall be forgiven.

The woman kneels and prays. It is spoken quickly and fluently, something she knows off by heart and has said many times before..

Woman: Our Father,
Who art in Toyland,
Hallowed be Thy name,
Thy workshop come,
Thy will be done,
On Earth as it is in Toyland.
Give us this day our daily turkey.
And forgive us for our Christmas socks,
As we forgive those who buy Christmas socks for us,
And lead us not into Poundland,
But deliver us from Krampus.
For Thine is the workshop, the elves and the reindeer,
For ever and ever,
Amen.

Priest: Couldn't have done it better myself. Santa the Father of mercies, has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the elves among us for the forgiveness of sins; may Santa give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, the elves, and the reindeer.

Woman: Thank you. I'm sorry I wasted your time with such a trivial thing.

Priest: It was nothing.

Woman: The Nativity? ... Should my son still go?

Priest: Of course. It's only a bit of make-believe. As long as he doesn't spoil it for the children who still believe in God.

Woman: Yes, I'll make sure.

Priest: And Santa told me this morning that your son is on his list of *nice* children.

Woman: Of course he is! Santa's getting him a reindeer outfit. I can't wait to see him in it. It's a lovely furry one I found in- ... (*stops, corrects herself*) he found in a charity shop – which he must have made. In Toyland. Anyway, thank you for listening to me.

Priest: It's a pleasure.

Woman: Merry Christmas, Father.

Priest: Merry Christmas to you too.

The Woman exits, and the Priest re-enters the box. After a moment, a Man enters. He also looks nervous, but there is something different. If anything, there's hints that he's uncomfortable with where he is, rather than what he has to say.

Man: Hello.

Priest: You have come here to confess?

Man: Look, this is for my wife. She wanted me to talk to you about-

Priest: A confession cannot be heard until you acknowledge you have sinned.

Man: Fine. Bless me father, for I have sinned.

Priest: I believe this is your first confession.

Man: Yes. It's because-

Priest: Make the sign of the tree.

Man: What?

Priest: This is a house of The Father. You must make the sign of the tree.

Man: Right, fine.

The Man reluctantly makes the sign of the "tree", which is the points on the top, the base, and the two bottom corners of the branches. This is the sign that the woman made earlier.

Priest: Proceed.

Man: Look, I don't think it's a big deal what happened.

Priest: But nonetheless it prompted you to make your first confession.

Man: My wife insisted I speak to you. But I don't see what else I could have done.

Priest: You cannot be pennant for your sins if you excuse them to yourself.

Man: It wasn't a sin! I just said what I believed ... I couldn't carry on lying to my children.

Priest: And what is it you believe to be a lie?

Man: Look ... They ask the same questions every year. About God and Father Christmas. They're no fools.

Priest: Go on.

Man: They kept asking the difference between God's miracles and Santa's magic. My wife's good. She always has the answers – but the kids keep asking me when she's out the house. I couldn't keep it up and ... *(tailing off)* I ... I said ...

The Man suddenly leaves the confession box.

Man: No, this is ridiculous. I don't have to tell you this.

The Priest follows him.

Priest: But please. You came to tell me something. We must complete our business.

Man: There's no point. You won't understand.

Priest: Santa has set me many trials. Whatever it is you have to say-

Man: Okay, fine! I told my kids there's no such thing as Father Christmas!

A pause. From now on, the priest is more icy.

Priest: And why did you tell them that?

Man: Because I don't believe in him.

Beat.

Man: Look, I know *you* believe in Father Christmas, I respect that. But I just don't buy into it ... I'm sorry.

Priest: Then perhaps my trial is to understand why you've turned away from The Father. When did you stop believing?

Man: I don't know - I've never truly believed it. Even as a child, I remember thinking why Santa has to fly everything on a sleigh. I mean, why doesn't he just save time and magic presents into every child's house?

Priest: That is not for us to question.

Man: Then I noticed that rich children got more presents from Santa than I did. Why would a being who is all powerful and all loving do that?

Priest: Ah, now I see. Many people come to hate Santa when life is hard, but it's all part of a greater plan.

Man: No, you don't get it! I don't "hate" Santa, I just don't believe he exists. Come on, if he travelled at the speed needed to visit every child's house in the world on in 40 hours, he'd burn up.

Priest: Yes, I'm aware of that theory ... *(More coldly)* We know of the literature you read. All the most dangerous unbelievers ... Richard Dawkins ... Sam Harris ... John Montgomery ... the Wright Brothers ... Isaac Newton.

Man: Gravity? ... Are you saying you don't believe... Wait a second, how do you know what books I've got?

Priest: Your neighbours. They are concerned for your soul. You know what happens to people who are naughty?

Man: This is ridiculous. I knew this is how you'd react! ... I'm going.

The Man moves to leave, but as he is about to exit his stony-faced wife appears in the doorway.

Man: Darling? I thought you were at home.

Wife (to priest): Well?

Priest: I'm sorry. I tried reasoning, but your husband is blind to the truth.

Man: Darling, we're going home.

Wife: Our marriage ... our marriage is a sham.

Man: What? ... What are you talking about?

Wife: Our vows ... we made our vows before The Father ... you don't even *believe* in The Father.

Man: Hang on, I thought you didn't believe in- ... how *can* you believe in him? We put the presents in the kids' stockings ourselves!

Wife: Only because I prayed to Santa every day. It's not his fault he can't visit every house on Christmas Eve. But our jobs, our money, our Christmas joy, that's all down to the love of Father Christmas. And this means nothing to you!

Man: Darling, please, hear me out for a moment. I love Christmas as much as you do. I love being with my wife and family, I love seeing the joy of our children's faces. But it's not Santa doing this. It's us.

Priest: Stand aside. That is not your husband speaking. That is the voice of Krampus himself!

The wife kneels down and swiftly recites Santa's prayer, repeating if necessary. The priest starts putting on a Santa hat and then picks up a miniature Christmas tree.

Wife: Our Father, who art in Toyland, Hallowed Be Thy Name. Thy Workshop come, Thy will be done, / On Earth as it is in Toyland. Give us today our daily turkey *(etc.)*

Man: Darling, what are doing? Stop this, please stop this! *(etc.)*

The Man continues his protestations. The Priest now uses the tree like a crucifix.

Priest: I command you, unclean spirit now attacking this child of Santa, by the mysteries of the sleigh ride, I command you to obey me to the letter, I who am a minister of the Father despite my unworthiness; you shall BEGONE!

A beat.

Wife: Is he gone?

Priest: The infernal spirit of Krampus is banished. Now all that remains is the body he corrupted.

Man: That's it! I'm out of here! For both our sakes, I hope our paths never cross again.

Priest: Oh, I'm quite sure they won't. Not in this world.

During this, the sound of a baying mob outside slowly grows.

Man: What? ... What's going on?

Priest: Word has got round. The whole town knows of your heresy. They want justice.

Man: What are they doing?

Priest: I advise you not to wait and find out. Who knows, if you make a break for it now, you might have a chance.

Man: No ... no, you can't do this! This is insane! ... *(To wife)* Darling, stop this, please stop this. Go out there now and tell them it's a mistake. For pity's sake, I'm your husband!

Wife: I have no husband.

Priest: You never learn, do you? When the apostates said there were only eight reindeer, we saw to them with our Holy War. Didn't you think we'd be ready for people like you? Thinking you know it all, rejecting the love of The Father with your so-called "science". But there's one question you can't answer, isn't there? If there's such a thing as gravity, why don't reindeer fall out the sky?

Man: No ... no ... you're all mad!

The man runs off.

Priest: Yes. Run, run, as fast as you can. *(To wife)* He won't get far.

The baying mob's sound by now has become a chant of "Burn him! Burn him!" Sound of a fire being lit.

Wife: Is it done?

Priest *(looking outside)*: Yes. It is done.

Wife: My husband ... will the Father have mercy on him?

Priest: I'm afraid it's too late for him. The evil Krampus claimed his soul a long time ago ... We must see he does not get your children.

Wife: But what about what my husband told them?

Priest: I shouldn't worry. Another Sunday School and they'll be cleansed on those heathen ideas.

Wife: Of course, next week, it's the lesson of ...

Priest: Yes, that tale. How Santa destroyed two cities that didn't leave out enough sherry and mince pies. A cautionary tale for ...

Wife: ... children who are naughty.

Priest: Now do you fancy some roasted chestnuts?

Wife: I'd love some.

Priest: Then let's go outside. There's a lovely open fire out there.

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