



When did we see you a stranger?

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An EMBRACE NI resource for advent

THE PRAYER

A play for Christmas set in Belfast in more recent times.

Bible Ref. John 1: 1-5; John 3: 13; Luke 10: 25-37; 1 Cor 13

God Angela

Angela Yes, God?

God I've a wee job for you.

Angela OK, will I need my wings?

God No, not this time. It's Christmas again, and I've had so many prayers this week, I would like you to go and visit some people for me ... and give them this message.

Angela Anyone in particular? ...

God Oh you'll know who they are.

Angela I'd maybe better take a coat and hat - its cold down there.

Angela arrives on the streets of Belfast all decorated for Christmas. People are busy doing last minute shopping. She sees a man sitting in a doorway surrounded with bottles and cans, just staring.

Angela Hello

Man Hmmm what, who are you?

Angela A penny for them.

Man What?

Angela Your thoughts

Man I'm skilled butcher from Poland; I recruited here to do job and now contract has ended, I've had to leave the flat the bosses provided; I sent all savings to my family in Poland. I'm not entitled to state support as I have not worked for full year. Now I am mugged and robbed of all my travel money; my phone, my bags. I can't get back and now I'm away from home; out on the street without a shelter. *(He cries, bitterly. Angela gives him a hanky to blow his nose).* My family think I am still working but I can't even get money for the fare and little enough from begging to get food - eh, it's cold but who cares, eh? I only pray I get some help soon.

Angela Stephan, I have a message for you.

Stephan You have? ... for me? Who from? How do you know my name?

Angela Read it ... It's from God. He knows you and has heard your prayer. *(Angela leaves while he reads the message.)*

Stephan Tell me, who are you? Hello ... *(Gets up, looks around and goes)*

Angela notices a teenage girl pushing an old woman out of her way. She stops to watch.

Girl Oh, hurry up you silly old bag. Can't you see I'm in a hurry? *(Sees Angela)* And what are you looking at? Do you want a fight?

Angela Alice

Alice What, how do you know my name?

Angela I have a message for you

Alice Oh no, my Mum didn't send you did she? She's always moaning about something - wants me to look after the guests at the inn I, suppose? Or Dad, probably looking me to work in the bar - it's so busy and crowded coming up to Christmas. ... I'm fed up with complaints, hassle and the lot o' them - I'm leaving home! Who'll miss me anyway? Nobody cares.

Angela The message is from God.

Alice God - what does He want? (*Alice takes the message and reads it as Angela moves on*) Here what's your name? Who are you anyway? (*Alice reads and wanders off.*)

Angela stops to watch a man looking in a window

Angela Hello

Man Oh, hullo there. Terrible prices the things are now. I can't afford Christmas this year, with the way things are back at the farm. I've just sold half o' me sheep an' I haven't enough out o' that to even clear a third o' my debt. I don't know why I'm telling you this. My wife thinks we're doing great - how am I going to tell her?

Angela I've a message for you, Sam.

Sam How do you know my name? Is this from my wife? Do you know her? Has she found out? Is she leaving me?

Angela So many questions ... This is from God.

Sam What? (*Angela leaves as he reads*)

Stephan Strange ... Hello (*speaking to audience*) ... You know something? A most wonderful thing has happened to me ... You want me to tell to you? You promise not to laugh? ... You know what I've just seen? ... An angel - she gave me message, and I am so filled with hope for first time in days; I ask myself what if there's someone who can help me get home to my wife and son? You know what? I went to Welcome Centre and they help me when I tell my story - found some people to pay my fare ... I'm going home this very night. What do you think of that? I'm going home (*exit*)

Alice Mum, Dad?

Billy Alice, is that you? ... Come here girl we've been worried sick about you, your mother an' me. We've been on to the school, and your friends. ... We're that sorry we shouted at you this morning - it's just the strain of running this place at Christmas time. Don't mind us love.

Alice Oh Dad (*gives him a hug*) ...Dad do you know something? - promise you won't laugh. ... I saw an angel ... She gave me a message so she did. That's why I came home. I was going to leave you all, but I just felt loved an' I couldn't do it anymore.

Billy Thank God, Alice - come on in, your Ma's been saying her prayers an' she's just about to phone the police. (*Exit Alice and Billy*)

Sam Here, (*to audience*) did you see that angel? You know I thought that's what she must have been, for she gave me a message from God an' it gave me the courage to say to my wife what I've needed to say for a long time. An' you know something the wife was great about it - in fact sharing our problems has just brought us closer together. This is going to be the best Christmas ever (*exit*).

Angela Well I delivered God's message yet again to the stargazer, the innkeepers and the shepherd. The message is old and simple, and is for all of us at Christmas. Do you want to know what it is? ... Do you? There ... read it yourselves, (*You can copy the words several times on small pieces of paper and let Angela share them with the audience - "I love you, love from God."*) Don't forget will you? Happy Christmas!

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What do you consider to be the greatest gifts of the Christmas season?
- Can you share any similar stories from the Christmas period?
- What do you know about the rights of economic migrants, particularly from the A2 countries within the European Community - Romania and Bulgaria? See advice guides available from the Law Centre.
- What is your understanding of 'angels'? Read Mary Hoffman's book, *An Angel Just Like Me* (London: Frances Lincoln), 1997. *This is a Christmas story about a little boy who wonders why there aren't any black or boy angels!*

Activities:

- Make a scrapbook with press cuttings about some of the folk both inside and outside the European Community who have had a similar experience to Stephan.
- Find out more about the Welcome Centre beside St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, homelessness organisations such as the Simon Community and Homeplus, EMBRACE *on the Streets* project and the EMBRACE Emergency Fund. See website page for EMBRACE projects.

Resources:

- *Inter-Cultural Insights - Christian reflections on racism; hospitality and identity from the island of Ireland*, downloadable from the EMBRACE resources page of the EMBRACE website.
- Hard Gospel resources available from <http://www.hardgospel.net> including the Good Samaritan Course.
- The Welcome Centre:
<http://www.stpeterscathedralbelfast.com/index.php?option=content&task=blogcategory&id=25&Itemid=79>
- The Law Centre:<http://www.lawcentreni.org>
- Simon Community:<http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk>

Resource Prepared for EMBRACE by Yvonne Naylor, Nov 2008