

Merry Christmas, Scrooge
A Victorian Christmas Story

N1 The Year is 1843. Our monarch is Queen Victoria. She has been Queen of Great Britain and Empress of India and the British Empire since 1831. Charles Dickens has just published *A Christmas Carol* especially for this Christmas. It is the best selling book of the year.

*A group of scruffy Victorian carol singers (with lantern on stick) sing "God rest ye.." or similar.
Scrooge enters and chases them*

ES: Be off with you, scroungers, beggars, thieves..

CS1 : Merry Xmas Sir

ES What? Christmas? Bah! Humbug!

N1. Oh but he was a tight fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas

(excerpt from *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens)

ES Christmas? Bah Humbug

Enter two children carrying a Xmas tree. Poke ES with it

XT1 Sorry Sir, excuse us but we're rushing to get this tree to our home tonight

ES and what do you intend to do with it when you get it there?

XT2 Why, decorate it of course. Haven't you heard about Christmas trees?

XT1 They're the latest craze. Didn't you know?

ES And whose crazy idea was it to take a tree into your home to decorate it? What good does that do anyone? You can't eat it and it won't keep you warm unless you burn it of course hah hah

XT1 Why, the Royal family have their very own tree in Windsor Castle this year.

XT2 Yes it's on the front page of the *London Illustrated News* look (shows Newspaper - audience also have copy) it says- their Royal

Highnesses have this year decorated their home with a tradition brought by our regent Prince Albert from his native Germany, where the custom has been popular for hundreds of years.

XT1 It's said that it dates back to when St Boniface converted the pagans but we also know that Martin Luther put candles on the tree to show his children the beauty of stars shining through the forest night
ES That may be so but I know that the pagans before Christianity, used to bring evergreens indoors to decorate their homes so, you see, you're nothing better than pagans. Good evening. Christmas trees? Humbug!

XT2 Miserable old man- what shall we decorate our tree with?

XT1 Let's make ribbons and tinsel and coloured shapes- stars and streamers from coloured paper

XT2 And don't forget candles- we must light it up with candles

XT1 I can't wait to see the faces of everyone when we get home

Song by Carol Singers and all : Holly & Ivy ? Oh Christmas Tree ?

Enter postman carrying bag and handful of mail

PM Do you know what's going on? When I started this job and it wasn't SO long ago- I had a nice easy number- a few letters here, a few parcels there, and now! Suddenly! I'm inundated! And why?" I hear you asking. Well I'll tell you. About two years ago yes it was Christmas 1841 -some bright spark had the idea that he'd print some cards and send them to his friends to wish them a Merry Christmas and do you know what's happened? EVERYONE'S doing it! And I'm inundated!

And to make matters worse they've gone and invented a flipping post box- Yes! DO you know that the first post box in the world was in Carlisle, Yes! in Botchergate, as an experiment. And people liked it so much that now they've sprung up EVERYWHERE.

Enter carol Singers

PM Hello you lot. Have you made much today with your singing?

CS1 Enough for some stale bread and maybe even a cup of gruel.

CS2 Not enough for a doctor for our little brother though.

CS1 Come on Tim cuddle up close and we'll get you warm look down the street. There's the old man who sells roast chestnuts- perhaps if we ask him nicely he'll get us warm by his brazier

Old man appears and sets brazier up

CS3 Please sir can we warm ourselves by your fire? - the night is bitterly cold and our small brother is unwell.

C man Not well? who? This poorly-looking little tyke with the crutch?
What s your name then son?

Tim Tim

C Man Come here Tim and tell me about yourself. Where do you live?

Tim With my brothers

C Man And your parents?

Tim Don t have none Sir cos they re dead

CS1 We re orphans, Sir

CS2 And we don t have a home

Tim and I m cold

CS1 And were all hungry

C Man Poor little mite- where do you sleep?

CS3 Anywhere we can find- if we re lucky we get a place near the chimney
at the back of the baker s shop but you ve got to be lucky

CS1 And the police chase us anyway

C Man Tell you what you give me a song and I ll let you warm up and have
a few chestnuts into the bargain .

CS Sing a carol (everyone helps)

Dr Barnado What lovely singing, children. Did you learn it at school?

Tim We don t go to school Mister cos we aint got no money

CS1 But kind gentlemen like yourself sometimes gives us a penny for
singing

CS2 then we can get something to eat

DrB And where will you children be sleeping tonight?

CS3 Maybe under the arches or by the river or perhaps under a bush in
the park

Dr B Do you have any friends like yourselves?

CS3 Any friends? There s thousands of destitute kids like us sleeping on
the streets of London except on a freezing night like tonight there ll be
a few less by morning

Dr B And we call ourselves a Christian country! I will raise money and we
will build a home for all homeless orphans. A place where they will be
cared for and kept clean and warm and fed. Things must change!

N2 Dr Barnado was a great reformist- he saw that Victorian society did
not take care of the poor and weak. He started a charity to give homeless
children a caring home. Dr Barnado s homes are still with us today and we
remember him for his courage and hard work to make life better for
many thousands of children.

ES I tell you no good will come of it! Once you start encouraging these children- who knows where it will stop? How will the Mills and factories make a profit without the boys to clean the machines? What about our coal mines? For a few pence a day you can get a small boy to work 12 hours in those little tunnels- you could never get a man as cheap! And how would you get your chimney cleaned without a climbing boy- Why, many a five year old gets a roof over his head and a crust in his mouth by working for a chimney sweep they should be grateful!

N2 Lord Shaftsbury saw the terrible conditions that very young children were forced to work in. Many children as young as five years old were killed, terribly injured or their health ruined by the horrible working practices of Victorian industry. He too decided that things must change.

ES Change? There s only one good kind of change and that s the kind that rattles in your pocket!

Dr B Do you not hold to the spirit of Christmas then old Scrooge?

ES Christmas ? Bah! Humbug!

Tim What s the Spirit of Christmas then Sir?

Dr B It s a story that may well warm your heart young man- It began nearly two thousand years ago and that was a cold night too!

Lets listen whilst we hear the story- and perhaps you can help us with some songs.

N Mary and Joseph had been travelling for days. By night they rested and through the day Mary sat on a donkey whilst Joseph walked beside. Mary was expecting a baby very soon.

Enter M&J

N At last they reached the city of Josephs birth- Bethlehem! the city of David. But everywhere they went it was crowded. People had arrived in Bethlehem from all over the country to be counted for the census.

N Mary and Joseph went from inn to inn seeking a comfortable place for a night or two. Everywhere they went was full. Mary was very tired. She realised that the baby would be born soon and she must find somewhere to stay.

N At last a kind innkeeper suggested that the couple might find a place in the stable at the back of his inn. It was a place where the cattle and donkeys were kept but at least it had a roof and warm straw and was out of the cold winter weather.

N That night Mary's baby was born. She gave him the name Jesus because an angel had told her that she was having God's son and that is what he should be called. She wrapped the baby in warm cloths and laid him in the straw of the manger.

A place that was usually used for the cattle to eat from.

N And that night all the world sang out that God's son had been born on earth. An angel appeared to some shepherds who were guarding their flocks on the hills outside Bethlehem. They were very frightened.

Fear not said the angel For I bring you glad tidings. A baby has been born this night who shall be the saviour of the world. Leave your flock and go to visit him. You will find the baby with his mother and father in a stable. You will know it by the star shining above the place.

N The shepherds left their flock and set off to find the holy baby. When they found the stable with the star, they knelt and gave the gift of a lamb that they had brought.

N Meanwhile, Wise Kings had travelled many miles from the East. They had seen the birth of the baby king in the stars and had come to find him. They were guided by the stars and they brought rich gifts to give to the new born king. Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh.

Tim So the baby Jesus was given special gifts at Christmas- he was lucky!

Dr B Yes! and we still celebrate his birth today by giving gifts to one another

C Man All except that miserable old Scrooge

Dr B But come Ebenezer. Has the story of our Lord's birth not melted the ice from around your heart?

Scrooge. I'd forgotten! I haven't heard the story since I was a young boy and I've just been too interested in my business and making money that I've forgotten what it's for! Here Dr Barnado have a shilling for your home- no have a pound. In fact have ten pounds.

I'm off to buy a goose and invite all my neighbours to share it come on everyone, join my celebration and have a Merry Christmas

All Merry Christmas Scrooge
Tim God Bless us, every one