

## THE OLD SHOEMAKER'S CHRISTMAS

NARRATOR: Long, long ago, and far, far away there was a tiny Russian village, almost hidden in the cold gray fog of a late December day. Bundled villagers scurried along the cobbled streets, the frosty air nipping at their noses and quickening their steps.

*(PAPA PANOVICH watches alone in his shop as VILLAGERS begin to cross back and forth along the street. A child chases another child, and another child peers into a neighbor's window while adults are busy with errands or plans. At some time during this opening scene the GANG OF FOUR BOYS wanders through, obviously up to no good. Of particular note is a YOUNG WIDOW with FOUR CHILDREN of varying sizes, one of whom is not yet seen.)*

WIDOW: *(Calling to the SECOND DAUGHTER not yet seen.)* Hurry, Lydia, or we will be late. *(Then to the OLDEST DAUGHTER.)* Did you remember the pudding, Marya?

MARYA: *(Carrying a bundled dish.)* Yes, Mama. And a heavy one it is!

*(Meanwhile LYDIA hurries in to catch up.)*

OLGA: Can we stop by Papa Panovich's shop, Mama?

WIDOW: Oh no, my dears. We'll have to give him our Christmas greetings tomorrow. *(The CHILDREN give PAPA PANOVICH a friendly wave but don't stop.)* We're getting a late enough start as it is. Come along now, children, we've a good hour's walk.

*(THEY hurry off together.)*

NARRATOR: Everyone knew the old shoemaker in town. His name was Panovich.

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(PAPA PANOVICH remains oblivious to it all and continues looking for JESUS. By now the lights are UP FULL and other VILLAGERS have begun to pass by, heading this way and that. Papa Panovich greets, nods or waves to all. The WIDOW AND HER FOUR DAUGHTERS come by. Each is carrying a bucket of water.)

GIRLS: I (Cheerfully calling out greetings.) Good morning, Papa Panovich! Hello, Papa Panovich. Good morning!

PAPA PANOVICH: Well, well, well, it's my dear neighbors. Back from the well, I see. Well, you be careful with that water now. You don't want to spill a single drop.

*Olga* ~~GIRLS:~~ We won't. We'll be careful, Papa Panovich!

PAPA PANOVICH: You have yourselves a good Christmas now, you hear?

*Katya* ~~GIRLS:~~ We will. Thank you, Papa Panovich. You, too. Yes, Papa Panovich, you, too.

WIDOW: (Carrying two buckets and puffing to catch up to GIRLS.) Why, happy Christmas, Papa Panovich.

PAPA PANOVICH: And to you, too, my dear neighbor.

WIDOW: (Setting HER buckets down.) Go ahead, my dears. Marya, make sure you start heating some water up right away.

MARYA: Yes, Mama.

(GIRLS begin to EXIT.)

LYDIA: May I stay with you, Mama?

WIDOW: No, Lydia. It's too cold to be out here long. I'll be in shortly myself.

(LYDIA obediently follows the OTHERS in EXITING.)

PAPA PANOVICH: (When LYDIA has disappeared.) You're finding this holiday pretty hard, aren't you?

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VILLAGE WOMAN #1: *(Calling to her SON.)* And be quick about it, Peter. I need a good fire if I am going to cook these cabbage rolls before Uncle Nicholas comes.

*(CHILD #1 begins to gather firewood dutifully as WOMAN disappears back into the house. CHILD #2 appears, excitedly skipping alongside an ELDERLY WOMAN.)*

ELDERLY WOMAN: Bundle up, child, it's a cold one today!

CHILD #2: *(Bouncing up and down.)* Hurray for Christmastime!

ELDERLY WOMAN: Here, let me wrap your shawl better. *(CHILD #2 still hops from foot to foot.)* Stand still, my child, I can't get this tied! There! Now hurry along so you don't catch cold.

CHILD #2: *(Calling out happily to the CHILD #1 who has now a full load of sticks.)* Hullo, Peter! We're going to my cousins' house!

CHILD #1: *(Somewhat grumpily.)* I wish I had cousins. I just have an uncle.

CHILD #2: *(While being dragged off hurriedly by the ELDERLY WOMAN.)* Have a good Christmas anyway!

POOR VILLAGE MAN: *(Knocking on PAPA PANOVICH'S shop.)* Hullo, hullo, Papa Panovich! Any chance those boots got done?

PAPA PANOVICH: *(Startled.)* Wha-? Oh, yah. Let's see, uh, here they are.

*(Hands boots to the MAN.)*

POOR VILLAGE MAN: *(Leaving in a hurry and calling over HIS shoulder.)* I'll pay you next week, Papa Panovich.

PAPA PANOVICH: *(Speaking almost absentmindedly to the empty shop.)* Wha-? Oh, next week? Should be fine, I suppose.

(The GANG of FOUR BOYS, half in sincere thievery and half in sport, accidentally run right into the waiting PAPA PANOVICH, who collars the SAUSAGE-HOLDER until the BUTCHER, panting, catches up. The rest of the boys scatter to find hiding places until the reprimand is passed.)

PAPA PANOVICH: (Calmly.) I believe this boy has something that belongs to you?

BUTCHER: (Panting.) Yes, yes. Thank you very much, Papa Panovich. (Taking sausages and sputtering angrily.) Oh! These kids, they're terrible these days!

PAPA PANOVICH: (To the BOY.) You have something to say, lad?

Boys 2

BOY: (Hanging head.) 'M sorry, Butcher Borski.

BUTCHER: (As angry as ever.) Well, see to it that you keep away from my shop! You hear? (HE stomps offstage without waiting for a reply.)

Boys 2

BOY: (Slowly.) I guess.

(Fellow GANG MEMBERS slowly come out of their hiding places to join BOY and together they slink offstage.)

PAPA PANOVICH: (Calling to the exiting BOYS.) You boys be good now!

(PAPA PANOVICH begins to look again for JESUS. A few more VILLAGERS pass by, including one ELDERLY LADY who hobbles slowly from the other side of the stage.)

PAPA PANOVICH: Merry Christmas, Mrs. Pachinski!

MRS. PACHINSKI: Papa Panovich, is that you? (Hobbling towards PAPA PANOVICH.) Well, so it is. How nice of you to notice an old woman like me. People don't pay much attention to us old people. Just cast us off like an old shoe, they do. All these young people – so busy all the time. With what? With what, I say! People don't have much respect for their elders these days. (Sighs.) I suppose it is good I won't live long enough to see what this world is coming to.



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(HE clears his throat loudly and holds out his hand. The BOYS look surprised and reluctantly turn over the wallet.)

PAPA PANOVICH: Sergei! (SERGEI, who was just about to exit at the far side of the stage, turns back.) These boys would like to return your wallet to you.

(The BOYS hang their heads in shame.)

SERGEI: (Sputtering with shock and panic and feeling in his pocket for his wallet, which is indeed missing.) Oh! Oh my! Oh, thank you! That was the entire sum needed to close this deal! (The BOYS look up in unison with surprise and together snap their fingers as if to say, "Rats!") Oh, my ... I didn't even notice! Oh, how terrible! Well, uh, thank you. (HE takes the wallet and quickly EXITS.)

PAPA PANOVICH: Goodbye, my friend. (SERGEI doesn't reply. PAPA PANOVICH turns to the BOYS now.) What is this about, boys? Why do you keep stealing other people's things?

BOYS: We're hungry, Papa Panovich.

PAPA PANOVICH: Hungry?

BOY #1: Starved! You see, we're too old to be taken in ... and too young to get a job with a trade.

PAPA PANOVICH: Oh? Hmm. Well, listen, I don't know much, but I do know that stealing will get you nowhere but jail! (HE gets out two loaves of bread and breaks off half a loaf for each of the FOUR BOYS.) There! That ought to help you out today. (Pause while the BOYS begin to gobble the bread.) Tell you what - show up here tomorrow morning. I happen to know an older lady as well as a neighbor lady - both of whom are widows. They could use some strong boys to do some work. If they can't afford to pay you, you eat with me. And ... if you can prove yourselves there, maybe I can help you get a job with a merchant in town. They're usually willing to hire boys who work hard ... providing they are honest!

PAPA PANOVICH: *(Shakes HIS head as though marveling at what he has just read.)* Ach my! What an honor was given Mary – to be the mother of the Messiah, God's Son! What a blessing! What a blessing! *(Turns, as though thinking, "On the other hand...")* Yet, too ... what a lot was asked of her. Why, for sure the pregnancy would be misunderstood. Ach! Yah! Who would believe her story of the angel! She would be criticized ... perhaps scorned. *(Pause with hand to chin, as if in great sadness at the thought.)* Poor, poor Mary. Yet ... she believed. *(Looking heavenward.)* I'm sure You loved to see that, God. She honored You by trusting You. And, and ... she agreed to Your plan. What was that she said? *(HE looks it up again.)* "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered, "may it be to me as You have said." Yes, *(Looking up.)* dear sweet Mary gave You not only her faith but her willing obedience as well. *(Sighs and shakes head thoughtfully.)* Hmmm. I wish I had been there.

*(Leans back in chair as if in thought. OPTIONAL: MARY sings. When she exits, PAPA PANOVICH begins to read again.)*

PAPA PANOVICH: This is how the birth of Jesus Christ ...

NARRATOR: ... came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. *(Matthew 1:18, 19.)*

*(JOSEPH enters pacing outside, looking very worried and concerned, as though he is thinking through what to do. After awhile he sits down on the ground, leans up against a house, and falls asleep. Suddenly we see the ANGEL GABRIEL hovering behind him, looking at the sleeping form.)*

GABRIEL: Joseph, Joseph! Joseph, son of David!