

HOW CHRISTMAS CAME TO BE

Scene 1

*(As the **intro music** plays (**track 9**) the whole cast enters. All sit on and around the main stage. The five 'hosts', each a character associated with Christmas or winter festivals through the ages, stand centre-stage to address the audience. Their lines throughout can be read – they have quite a few!)*

All SEASON'S GREETINGS, ONE AND ALL!

Rudolph Well, here we are at the end of a very long term, but still with a few more days left at school! *(The whole cast groans!)*

Gabriel And seeing as school's not quite finished yet, we thought we'd cram in a bit more learning while we have the chance! *(The whole cast groans again!)* Oh come on, don't be like that! Learning can be fun, especially when the thing you're learning about is.....Christmas!

Charles Dickens Yes, Christmas! Everyone's favourite time of year! A decorated tree, turkey, crackers, mince pies and watching Great Granny dancing to an old festive pop song after one too many sherries!

Erika Winterbörn But it hasn't always been like that, which is why we're here to take you on an entertaining, musical journey through history, to show you how the Christmas we know and love came to be!

Festivus Maximus Now, apart from a couple of characters standing here, you may be looking at the five of us and wondering what on earth we have to do with Christmas! Well, let us introduce ourselves, then all will become clear. My name is Festivus Maximus, a Roman citizen. In a moment you'll find out how our ancient customs and festivals were an early influence on the modern Christmas.

Erika W. And I'm Erika Winterbörn, a pagan Norsewoman from northern Europe. Our people also held celebrations in the bleak mid-winter, which included strange customs that are still a part of Christmas today! We'll be sharing some of these with you later.

Gabriel I'm Gabriel, the famous angel, and I played an important part in the story that really started the ball rolling and which gave Christmas its name. More about that in a while.

Charles D. And I'm Charles Dickens, one of the best-known writers from the 19th century. You're going to learn how the Victorians (and my stories) started shaping Christmas into the festival we recognise nowadays.

Rudolph Well, my antlers and red nose are a dead give-away, aren't they! I'm Rudolph, a friend and helper to someone who has become the most recognisable character in our modern celebrations. You'll be hearing about his rise to Christmas super-stardom in a bit!

Gabriel But before all that, we promised you some entertainment and music, so let's have a song! *(to the cast)* Okay you lot, on your feet!

Song **A Time To Celebrate**

(tracks 1 & 10, lyrics p19)

(The whole cast)

(All then sit to the side and in front of the stage, apart from the five hosts who stand centrally.)

Festivius M. Right, let's crack on! First we're going to travel back to my era, ancient Rome. During the week before the winter solstice, the shortest day of our calendar year, around December 25th, we Romans celebrated the festival of Saturnalia. Hmm, December 25th? Does that date sound familiar?

Erika W. Saturnalia was a whole week of feasting and drinking, all done in honour of Saturn, the Roman god of Agriculture.

Gabriel Because it was a time for having fun, for exchanging gifts and also because of when it was celebrated, Saturnalia was a big influence on the development of Christmas as we know it.

Charles D. But what really made Saturnalia enjoyable was the tradition of 'social role-reversal'. For example, slaves would become masters of a household and the masters would become slaves for a whole week!

Rudolph Women would take part in gladiator fights and wealthy citizens would dress in rags and give away lots of money to the poor! Everything went kind of topsy-turvy in ancient Rome during Saturnalia and we reckon it might have looked a little something like this.....

*(To the sound of a **harp (track 11)** the five hosts exit. Leaning on a walking stick, a dodderly Roman grandfather, Senilius, enters and sits on a stool centre stage. He wears a traditional toga. His son, Tipsius, excitedly enters, dressed in rags and carrying a goblet.)*

Tipsius Happy Saturnalia, Father!

Senilius *(straining to hear)* Speak up Tipsius. You know I'm deaf.

Tipsius *(loudly)* I said happy Saturnalia! You should try this wine by the way, it's excellent. I'm on my third goblet already! Well, when in Rome!

Senilius Saturnalia? What are you talking about?

Tipsius It's our festival to celebrate the solstice, remember? We eat, drink and exchange gifts. Ooh, that reminds me....*(shouting)* Bratius! Moodica!

(Bratius and Moodica enter. They are also dressed in rags. Moodica carries a parcel.)

Tipsius Ah, children, there you are! Bratius, give your grandfather his gift.

Bratius *(handing Senilius the parcel and speaking loudly)* Happy Saturnalia, Grandfather. This is from all of us.

(Senilius unwraps the gift, which is an ear-trumpet. He looks at it with confusion.)

Moodica *(speaking loudly)* It's an ear-trumpet, Grandfather. Hold it to your ear and you'll be able to hear everyone without them having to shout!

Senilius Oh, thank you children. *(holding it to his ear)* Well, say something then.

Tipsius, Bratius & Moodica HAPPY SATURNALIA!

Senilius *(jumping in shock!)* Alright, alright! No need to yell at me! Now tell me, why are you three dressed in rags?

(Senilius keeps the ear trumpet to his ear for the whole of the following dialogue.)

Bratius Because it's Saturnalia, when everything gets turned upside down!

Moodica We're a wealthy family, so we dress like we're poor. It's great fun!

Senilius Well, it doesn't sound like fun to me. Those rags must be awfully itchy. And is your mother joining in too? Where is she?

(Dressed in armour, their mother, Violentia, enters, jabbing at the air with a sword.)

Violentia Take that! And that! And that! Oh, I tell you what, I can't wait for the big fight this afternoon! I'm drawn against that busy-body, Gossipa! I've been waiting ages for the chance to give her what for! Take that!

Tipsius And, Violentia my dear, we'll all be at the Colosseum to cheer you on!

Senilius Hang on! Why on earth are women taking part in gladiator fights?

T, B, M & V BECAUSE IT'S SATURNALIA!

Senilius Saturnalia – pfff! Where's our slave by the way? I need a cushion for this stool. Lavatoria! LAVATORIA! COME HERE NOW!

(Lavatoria enters, dressed in fine robes and jewellery.)

Lavatoria Don't shout at me, Senilius! It's about time you learned your place! And why is my lunch not ready? I've been waiting an hour!

Senilius Impudent girl! Have you taken leave of your senses?! And why are you dressed up in those fine clothes? You're a slave!

Violentia Ahem, Senilius, you can't talk to Lavatoria like that. She is *not* your slave, you're *hers*! You should really get her lunch if she's asked you.

Senilius What?! Don't be ridiculous! Me, a slave? To her? Why?

T, B, M, V & L BECAUSE IT'S SATURNALIA!

(The five crowd behind the stool, loudly explaining different aspects of Saturnalia to the confused Senilius. He stands up and walks to the front of the stage, the five following behind and still talking loudly. He then removes the ear-trumpet from his ear and we immediately can't hear his family's voices, though they carry on mouthing words as if they're still talking to him.)

Senilius *(to the audience)* Ah, peace and quiet. You know, I think I prefer being deaf than having to listen to all that nonsense, *(throwing down the ear trumpet)* so I won't be needing this thing! And as for Saturnalia...well, I guess there are some things that I'm just too old to understand!

*(As the **intro music** plays (track 12), the family gathers at the front of the stage for the next song. They are joined by more female gladiators, poor Romans and wealthy Romans. Fade the music when all are ready to sing.)*

Song Saturnalia *(tracks 2 & 13, lyrics p20)*
(The Roman family, supported by the whole cast)

*(As the **intro music** then plays (track 14), all sit and the stage is prepared for the next scene. When ready, the five hosts return and stand centrally.)*

Scene 2

Festivius M. How are we enjoying it so far? You see, learning can be fun! So, let's move things along here, shall we? Erika, over to you.

Erika W. Thanks Festivius. Well, in the early centuries AD, we pagans from northern Europe also celebrated the winter solstice. Like the Romans, we feasted and drank a lot to mark the start of the days getting longer. We called this celebration 'Yule', a word which might sound familiar to you.

Gabriel In Scandinavia, they would cut a huge Yule log to burn throughout the celebrations, which would last for twelve days. Hmm, twelve days of Yule and a log – a couple more things you might recognise!

Charles D. The cattle were slaughtered so they wouldn't need feeding throughout the remaining colder months. All this fresh meat provided plenty to feast upon during Yule and for the rest of the winter. Also, with barrels of fermented ale ready to crack open, Yule really was a time for merriment, with the toast 'Skål!' being shouted at every opportunity!

Rudolph Evergreen leaves were used to decorate homes, to represent long life and good fortune. One particular plant, mistletoe, was hung up in dedication to Frigga, the Norse goddess of love. We all know what goes on under mistletoe these days, and it was the same back then.

Erika W. We reckon it might have looked a little something like this.....

*(To the sound of a **harp (track 15)** the five hosts exit. Three cows enter – **see staging suggestions/costumes** – and stand to one side of the stage. Olaf enters, carrying a large log which he places on top of a small pile of twigs centre-stage. The cows watch him.)*

Olaf There, that should easily burn for twelve days. Right, let's get it lit!

(Just as he bends down, off-stage we hear the raucous voice of his wife, Astrid!)

Astrid Olaf! Oh, Olaf! Where are you? I have a surprise for you!

Olaf *(jumping up)* Oh no! My wife, Astrid! I bet I know what she's after! I need to hide, quickly!

(He hides behind the cows. Astrid enters, scouring the stage, holding up a sprig of mistletoe!)

Astrid Olaf! Come out, come out, wherever you are! I've got mistletoe! Olaf! OLAF!

(Astrid exits in search of her husband. Olaf then emerges from behind the cows.)

Olaf Phew! That was a close call! Right, I'd better go and get those barrels of ale tapped. Solstice celebrations are not the same without Olaf's famous home brew!

(He exits in the opposite direction to Astrid. She returns, still holding up the mistletoe, but looking a bit more annoyed.)

Astrid Olaf! OLAF! *(to the audience)* A kiss once a year is hardly asking too much, is it? Oh, where is the wretched man. OLAF!

(She exits in the opposite direction to Olaf. The cows watch her go and hang their heads.)

Cow 1 Did you catch all that? Him bringing in a log and cracking open his home brew, and her pacing around with mistletoe? *(gulping nervously)* It can mean only one thing!

Cow 2 Yule is here! There'll be lots of drinking and lots of.....feasting. And what will they be feasting on? Us!

Cow 3 Well my friends, it's been a pleasure growing fat with you these past months, but it appears our numbers are finally up. Happy Yule!

*(As some famous **mournful music** plays (track 16) the cows shake hands with each other and, if you think it appropriate, each pretends to light up a large cigar – the last act of a condemned cow! As the music fades, Olaf then enters with a barrel which he places by the fire.)*

Olaf There, that's the ale sorted! Right, let's think about the meat.

(He approaches the cows, takes hold of the ropes round their necks and leads them to the front of the stage. Astrid, unseen by Olaf tiptoes on with the mistletoe held up. She then grabs him from behind and he drops the cows' ropes!)

Astrid Gotcha! Oh, Olaf, my big, bearded beauty! Give us a kiss!

(As Astrid tries to kiss Olaf, he keeps her at arm's length and a comical struggle follows. During this, the cows nudge each other and nimbly tiptoe off stage, making their escape! Astrid finally manages to plant a kiss on Olaf's cheek then releases him! Olaf grimaces and wipes his cheek!)

Olaf Astrid! Please! We have Yule celebrations to prepare for. If you really want to put your energy into something, you can help with the cows.

(Both turn to where the cows should be!)

Olaf Where have they gone?! Oh no! We've got no meat for our feast! That's your fault, Astrid! What are we going to do now?

Astrid *(holding up the mistletoe)* Oh, I'm sure we can think of something!

*(As the **intro music** plays (track 17), Olaf bolts off stage with Astrid in hot pursuit! Other Norsemen and women, plus the cows, enter and stand centre-stage. Olaf and Astrid then return, holding hands. Fade the music when ready to sing the next song.)*

Song Banish The Winter Blues

(tracks 3 & 18, lyrics p21)

(The Norse people, supported by the whole cast)

*(As the **intro music** then plays (track 19), all sit and the stage is prepared for the next scene. When ready, the five hosts return and stand centrally.)*

Scene 3

Erika W. So, we're learning that the old festivals had a big influence on modern celebrations, with lots of features we still see today. I must say, mistletoe is definitely one of my favourites!

Gabriel But things really took a turn when the life and teachings of Jesus Christ became important to the Romans. In the 4th century AD, under the emperor Constantine, Christianity became the main religion of the Roman Empire.

Charles D. Now, the bible told of the people, places and events surrounding the birth of Jesus, but there was no date mentioned and so no holiday or festival could be organised to celebrate it.

Festivius M. But then in the middle of the 4th century, Pope Julius 1st declared that Jesus' birth should be celebrated on December 25th, when the festival of Saturnalia was happening. In that way, the Romans could still have their merry time during the winter solstice, but the reasons for celebration would now be different.

Rudolph

And so the 'Festival of the Nativity' was introduced. The story of the birth of God's son in a stable in Bethlehem would now and forever be at the heart of winter festivities. Although the actual word wouldn't be used until the 11th century, 'Christmas' had truly arrived!

Gabriel

And it's a story we love to tell again and again, especially at school. The familiar characters of Mary, Joseph, a donkey, shepherds, wise men and of course me, the angel Gabriel, all come together to help us understand why we really celebrate Christmas. And, of course, it looks a little something like this.....

End of script sample.

If you would like a shorter, simpler version of this script, one is included in the digital download and CD-ROM versions of the production pack. If you have purchased the printed book version, please contact us and a copy of the shorter script will be emailed to you free-of-charge.