

HOW CHRISTMAS CAME TO BE

shorter script

Scene 1

*(As the **intro music** plays (track 9) the 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 But we still have a few days left at school! *(The whole cast groans!)*

Gabriel So how about we cram in a bit more learning! *(The whole cast groans again!)* It's okay! We're going to be learning about....Christmas!

Charles Dickens Yes, Christmas! A decorated tree, turkey, crackers, mince pies, Great Granny drinking sherry.....that kind of stuff!

Erika Winterbörn Well, we're here to take you on a journey through history, to show you how the Christmas we know and love came to be!

Festivius Maximus But first, let us introduce ourselves. My name is Festivius Maximus, a Roman citizen. You're going to find out how our customs and festivals were an early influence on Christmas.

Erika W. And I'm Erika Winterbörn, a pagan Norsewoman. Our people had some strange winter customs that are still a part of Christmas today! We'll share these with you later.

Gabriel I'm Gabriel, the angel, and I was part of the story which gave Christmas its name. More about that in a while.

Charles D. I'm Charles Dickens, the 19th century writer. You're going to learn how the Victorians (and my stories) helped shape the modern Christmas.

Rudolph And of course I'm Rudolph, a friend to Santa Claus. You'll be hearing about his rise to Christmas super-stardom in a bit!

Gabriel But before all that, let's have a song! *(to the cast)* Everyone, 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 and travel back to ancient Rome. During the week before the winter solstice, around December 25th, we celebrated the festival of Saturnalia. Hmm, December 25th.....sound familiar?

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

Gabriel A time for having fun and exchanging gifts, Saturnalia was a big influence on the Christmas we know today.

Charles D. Saturnalia was also a time for '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 money to the poor! Everything went kind of topsy-turvy 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 doddering 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!

Senilius Saturnalia? What's Saturnalia?

Tipsius Our festival to celebrate the solstice, remember? *(shouting)* Bratius! Moodica!

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

Tipsius Children, 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, so you can hear everyone without them having to shout!

Senilius *(holding it to his ear)* Well, say something then.

Tipsius, Bratius & Moodica HAPPY SATURNALIA!

Senilius *(jumping in shock!)* No need to yell! So, why are you dressed in rags?

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

Bratius Because it's Saturnalia! Everything gets turned upside down!

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

Senilius 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 Oh, I tell you what, I can't wait for my gladiator fight this afternoon! I've been in training for ages!

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

Senilius Why 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!

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

Lavatoria Don't shout at me, Senilius! And why is my lunch not ready?

Senilius How dare you! You're a slave! Err, why are you dressed up in those fine clothes? Get changed immediately!

Violentia Senilius, you can't talk to Lavatoria like that. She is *not* your slave, you're *hers*!

Senilius 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! 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. 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 would also feast and drink a lot to mark the solstice. We called our celebration 'Yule'.

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

Charles D. The cattle were slaughtered and the meat provided lots to feast upon during Yule and for the rest of the winter. Barrels of ale were opened and the toast 'Skål!' was shouted at every opportunity!

Rudolph Mistletoe was hung up in dedication to Frigga, their 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 Right, let's get this Yule log lit!

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

Astrid Olaf! Oh, Olaf! Where are you?

Olaf *(jumping up)* Oh no! My wife, Astrid! I need to hide!

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

Astrid Olaf! 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 crack open those barrels of my famous home-brewed ale!

(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? OLAF!

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

Cow 1 Oh no! A log, barrels of ale and mistletoe? *(gulping nervously)* It can mean only one thing! Yule is here!

Cow 2 Lots of drinking and feasting. And what will they be feasting on? Us!

Cow 3 Well my friends, 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 Ale sorted! Right....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! 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! 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 Great! We've got no meat for our feast! 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.

Gabriel But things really took a turn when, in the 4th century AD, under Constantine, Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire.

Charles D. Now, the bible never mentioned a date for the birth of Jesus, so no holiday or festival could be organised to celebrate it.

Festivius M. Pope Julius 1st declared that it should be celebrated on December 25th, to tie in with Saturnalia. The Romans could still have a merry time during the solstice, but the reasons for celebration had changed.

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.

Gabriel

It's a story we love to tell again and again, especially at school, and it looks a little something like this.....

End of script sample.