Papa Panovs Special Christmas by Leo Tolstoy

Enter story teller with a group holding candles from the back and sides of the auditorium. They are humming "Silent Night” They walk forward and onto the stage. (background sound effect - wind growing louder)

Story Teller - This is the story of Papa Panov, it all began one Christmas Eve many, many years ago, far far away in a land called Russia

(Wind sound effect builds and they all blow their candles out at the same time)

Curtains close

(Music Ivan Rebroff singing Silent Night)

Curtains Open

Story teller - Imagine if you will a little village huddled under a pale moon in a valley of silver snow 9 music continues in background)

Story teller - It was Christmas Eve and although it was still afternoon, lights had begun to appear in the shops and houses of the little Russian village, for the short winter day was nearly over. Excited children scurried indoors and now only muffled sounds of chatter and laughter escaped from closed shutters

Old Papa Panov, the village shoemaker, stepped outside his shop to take one last look around. The sounds of happiness, the bright lights and the faint but delicious smells of Christmas cooking reminded him of past Christmas times when his wife had still been alive and his own children little. Now they had gone.

His usually cheerful face, with the little laughter wrinkles behind the round steel spectacles, looked sad now. But he went back indoors with a firm step, put up the shutters and set a pot of coffee to heat on the charcoal stove. Then, with a sigh, he settled in his big armchair.

Papa Panov did not often read, but tonight he pulled down the big old family Bible and, slowly tracing the lines with one forefinger, he read again the Christmas story. He read how Mary and Joseph, tired by their journey to Bethlehem, found no room for them at the inn, so that Mary's little baby was born in the cowshed.

Papa Panov - Oh, dear, oh, dear! if only they had come here! I would have given them my bed and I could have covered the baby with my patchwork quilt to keep him warm."

Story teller - He read on about the wise men who had come to see the baby Jesus, bringing him splendid gifts.

Papa Panov - "I have no gift that I could give him,"

Story teller - Then his face brightened. He put down the Bible, got up and stretched his long arms t the shelf high up in his little room. He took down a small, dusty box and opened it. Inside was a perfect pair of tiny leather shoes.

Papa Panov - These are the best shoes I have ever made; I should give him those.

Story teller - He was feeling tired now, and the further he read the sleeper he became. The print began to dance before his eyes so that he closed them, just for a minute. In no time at all Papa Panov was fast asleep.

And as he slept he dreamed. He dreamed that someone was in his room and he know at once, as one does in dreams, who the person was. It was Jesus.

Jesus - You have been wishing that you could see me, Papa Panov, then look for me tomorrow. It will be Christmas Day and I will visit you. But look carefully, for I shall not tell you who I am."

Story teller - When at last Papa Panov awoke, the bells were ringing out and a thin light was filtering through the shutters.

Papa Panov - "Bless my soul, It's Christmas Day!"

Story teller - He stood up and stretched himself for he was rather stiff. Then his face filled with happiness as he remembered his dream. This would be a very special Christmas after all, for Jesus was coming to visit him. How would he look? Would he be a little baby, as at that first Christmas? Would he be a grown man, a carpenter- or the great King that he is, God's Son? He must watch carefully the whole day through so that he recognized him however he came.

Papa Panov put on a special pot of coffee for his Christmas breakfast, took down the shutters and looked out of the window. The street was deserted; no one was stirring yet. No one except the road sweeper. He looked as miserable and dirty as ever, and well he might! Whoever wanted to work on Christmas Day - and in the raw cold and bitter freezing mist of such a morning?

Papa Panov - Come in! Come in and have some hot coffee to keep out the cold!"

Story Teller - The sweeper looked up, scarcely able to believe his ears. He was only too glad to put down his broom and come into the warm room. His old clothes steamed gently in the heat of the stove and he clasped both red hands round the comforting warm mug as he drank.

Papa Panov watched him with satisfaction, but every now and then his eyes strayed to the window. It would never do to miss his special visitor.

Street Sweeper - Expecting someone?

Story teller - So Papa Panov told him about his dream.

Street Sweeper - Well, I hope he comes, you've given me a bit of Christmas cheer I never expected to have. I'd say you deserve to have your dream come true.

Story teller - When he had gone, Papa Panov put on cabbage soup for his dinner, then went to the door again, scanning the street. He saw no one. But he was mistaken. Someone was coming.

The girl walked so slowly and quietly, hugging the walls of shops and houses, that it was a while before he noticed her. She looked very tired and she was carrying something. As she drew nearer he could see that it was a baby, wrapped in a thin shawl. There was such sadness in her face and in the pinched little face of the baby, that Papa Panov's heart went out to them.

Papa Panov - "Won't you come in, you both need a warm by the fire and a rest."

(The young mother let him shepherd her indoors and to the comfort of the armchair. She gave a big sigh of relief.)

Papa Panov - I'll warm some milk for the baby, I've had children of my own- I can feed her for you

(He took the milk from the stove and carefully fed the baby from a spoon, warming her tiny feet by the stove at the same time.)

Papa Panov - She needs shoes

Young Mother - I can't afford shoes; I've got no husband to bring home money. I'm on my way to the next village to get work."

Story teller -Sudden thought flashed through Papa Panov's mind. He remembered the little shoes he had looked at last night. But he had been keeping those for Jesus. He looked again at the cold little feet and made up his mind.

Papa Panov - Try these on her

Story teller - The beautiful little shoes were a perfect fit. The girl smiled happily and the baby gurgled with pleasure.

Young Mother - You have been so kind to us, may all your Christmas wishes come true!"

Story teller - But Papa Panov was beginning to wonder if his very special Christmas wish would come true. Perhaps he had missed his visitor? He looked anxiously up and down the street. There were plenty of people about but they were all faces that he recognized. There were neighbours going to call on their families. They nodded and smiled and wished him Happy Christmas! Or beggars- and Papa Panov hurried indoors to fetch them hot soup and a generous hunk of bread, hurrying out again in case he missed the Important Stranger

All too soon the winter dusk fell. When Papa Panov next went to the door and strained his eyes, he could no longer make out the passers-by. most were home and indoors by now anyway. He walked slowly back into his room at last, put up the shutters, and sat down wearily in his armchair.

So it had been just a dream after all. Jesus had not come.

Then all at once he knew that he was no longer alone in the room.

This was not dream for he was wide awake. At first he seemed to see before his eyes the long stream of people who had come to him that day. He saw again the old road sweeper, the young mother and her baby and the beggars he had fed.

(As they pass each whisper, "Didn't you see me, Papa Panov?")

Papa Panov - Who are you?

(Then another voice answered him. It was the voice from his dream- the voice of Jesus.)

Voice of Jesus - I was hungry and you fed me, I was naked and you clothed me. I was cold and you warmed me. I came to you today in every one of those you helped and welcomed."

Story teller -

Then all was quiet and still. Only the sound of the big clock ticking.

A great peace and happiness seemed to fill the room, overflowing Papa Panov's heart until he wanted to burst out singing and laughing and dancing with joy.

Papa Panov - So he did come after all!

Music – Joy to the World