

One act pantomime, to be presented while a speaker tells the story.

4 women (poor widow, 3 guests)

(the three guests act out their visit. Jesus' part is a voice-over.)

Props: broom, card table, two chairs, small square cloth, loaf of bread on a simple plate, blanket (throw), pair of men's shoes.

Visitor in the Wood
(adapted from a classic story)

There once was a poor widow woman who lived in a little house on the edge of a great wood. Her husband had died many years before, and she had no children. She was alone, but not lonely, for she woke every morning with great joy of heart and thanked God for a new day. She cared for her small vegetable plot and baked bread for her daily nourishment. Her neighbors were few and lived far away, but she was a happy person.

Each day she lit her humble fire, and swept her little house clean. But she was growing old and finding it more and more difficult to sustain herself. Times were hard, and many people in her little village were suffering. Still, she trusted her God who had always taken care of her.

One day at twilight, the old woman was praying, praising the Lord for his good gifts. She thanked him for the shafts of golden light that shone across the dirt floor of her little house when the sun rose each day. She praised him for the beautiful pine trees that stretched across the horizon from her window, for the twinkling stars that appeared in a black velvet sky. She thanked Him for the last few potatoes growing on her tiny plot of ground. For memories of her dear husband, for laughter and yes, for tears.

And then one day, as the sun pulled down its crimson curtain, she lifted her heart to heaven in prayer once more, and she was told a startling secret. She was to be honored by a visit from Jesus himself on the very next day. He was coming to her little house. She could barely contain her joy. To think that she was to actually host the Lord himself was more than she could ever have imagined.

But how was she to entertain such a holy guest? She had only her poor humble dwelling and so little to offer him. She would like to make a grand feast to be served on dishes of silver or even of some very fine china--but alas she had nothing but a few cracked dishes. And what would she serve him? It must be something worthy of his kingly person.

She began to plan very carefully. If she sacrificed her meager rations she would be able to bake a fine golden loaf of the finest wheat. Bread to nourish him. He would need a warm blanket to give him warmth, for winter was upon them. She would carefully clean the wool blanket from her own bed so it would be fragrant and fresh for her special guest.

But what special treasure could she give him to show him how much she loved him? She had but one real treasure. So she opened a chest and drew out her husband's shoes--fine leather shoes, well crafted. All his other belongings she had sold for food long ago, but the shoes she had kept out of love. Often she would take them out and polish them tenderly, as though her dear one would return some day and need

them. If so, he would find them shining and ready.

On the morning of the Lord's expected visit, she woke with great excitement and began as usual her daily work. All through the long day she hummed as she worked, occasionally looking toward the door of her little house, and thinking of the joy of seeing her Master. When suddenly there was a knock on the door, she hurried to answer, and flung the door wide. But to her great surprise, she saw a woman dressed in rags. Her face was gaunt with hunger, and her hands trembled with cold. With great pity, the woman brought out the loaf of fine wheat bread and gave it to the woman. She was sorry that she would now have nothing to offer to Jesus, but how could she turn away the poor woman who was so hungry?

She went back to wait for Jesus when another knock sounded on her door. Thinking this must be her expected guest, she rushed to open her door. She was greatly surprised, to see a young woman carrying a baby in her arms. It had begun to snow. The young woman's hands were blue with cold, and the baby had nothing but a thin ragged towel around its tiny body. Oh, thought the poor widow. That child will die from exposure. I must do something for her. And so she took the warm woolen blanket from her bed and gave it to the woman for her baby.

Her heart warmed because the young mother was so happy. These were hard times, and many people were in great need like the mother and her baby. And yet the widow woman was troubled. What was she to give to her special guest who was yet to come? But at least, she had the very best gift--her husband's shoes. She would present these with great love to show that she honored the Lord.

The shadows were growing longer. The day would soon end, and it would be night. Surely Jesus would come soon. When a knock came at her door the third time, she was sure this had to be her special guest. Flinging the door wide, she prepared to kneel in welcome. But, with great surprise, she recognized the old, gnarled man who lived under the bridge. Snow was falling around him and he shivered in his tattered garments. The widow looked down and saw that his feet were bare and bleeding from walking the long miles from town.

Her heart went out to the homeless old man, and she bathed his feet and gave him her last gift--the most precious gift of all--her husband's shoes. Now she would have nothing left to offer the Master when he came. She would have nothing but herself to give him.

All was quiet in her little house, and she waited, and waited. Her heart grew heavy as midnight fell, and still Jesus had not come as promised. She knelt for her evening prayers and poured out her disappointment that the Lord had not come. Perhaps he was angry that she had given away all the presents prepared for him. "Oh, she prayed, I waited and waited all day long and into this dark night, and you have not come. Why didn't you come to my humble house?"

Suddenly, in the midst of her prayers, she heard a voice full of kindness and warmth. Looking up she saw him. He was looking into her tear-filled eyes with great tenderness. "My child," he said, "I did come to you. I came three times this very day! First, you gave me a loaf of the finest wheat bread because I was hungry. I was also the young mother with her baby to whom you gave the warm woolen blanket. Again, when my feet were bleeding and sore, you bathed them and put shoes of finely crafted leather on my feet. "My child, 'Inasmuch as you have done these things for my brothers and

sisters, you have done them for me." (Matt 25:40).