

## “Another Nativity Play” by Gervase Phinn

(In 1988 Gervase Phinn was made schools inspector for North Yorkshire)

I had volunteered to narrate the Christmas story to the infants but never reached the end. This was thanks to Dominic a boy with spiky ginger hair that stood up like a lavatory brush who positioned himself at my feet.

I began “It was cold and dark that December night many many years ago, and on the hillside, where the icy winds whistled through the dark trees”—

“I can whistle” said Dominic

“The grass was frosted and stiff with cold”—

“Do you want to hear me whistle?”

“Not now I don’t” I said “perhaps later. I continued with the story “It was on this kind of night that a very special baby was to be born.”

“Jesus.”

“That’s right, it was Jesus”

“I’ve heard this story already!” exclaimed Dominic. “I know what happens.”

“We all know what happens, Dominic” I responded, “and we are going to hear what happens again.”

“Why?”

“Because we are. Now” I continued “ a very special baby would be born and his name, as Dominic has already told us, would be Jesus”

“Was he induced?” asked Dominic.

“Pardon?”

“Was baby Jesus induced?”

“No, he wasn’t induced.”

“I was induced”

“Well baby Jesus wasn’t induced”

At this point a little girl raised her hand.

“What does seduced mean?” she asked

“I’ll tell you another time—when you are older” I said and hurried on. “In the dark sky there appeared a great shining star”—

“How much did he weigh?” asked Dominic “I was an eight-pounder. My Grannie said I was like a plucked turkey”—

“Dominic” I said very quietly and slowly. “Just listen to the story. You are spoiling it for all the other children.”

“But I know how this story ends,” he replied, undaunted.

“Then why don’t you come out here and tell us all.” I said, throwing in the towel.

And so he did. Like a seasoned actor taking centre stage he came out to the front of the class and recounted the Christmas story in such a simple, animated and confident way that we all listened in rapt silence.

There was silence at the end of Dominic’s story, then he looked at me and said

“O.K.?”

“O.K.” I replied “very O.K.”

On the way out a little girl approached me shyly “I liked that story” she said quietly.

“Did you?” I replied “I’m glad. Thank you for telling me”

“But Dominic tells it better than you do. Happy Christmas.”