

STORIES TOLD AT A FEAST

An Easter Play by Jewell Ellen Smith

Copyright © 1983 Jewell Ellen Smith. First performed at Ft. Rucker, Alabama, in 1984. Nonprofit groups may perform this play without payment, but we ask that you e-mail Jewell's older son David, DSmith1204@aol.com, particularly if you have any questions or suggestions. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

TIME: About 64 AD

PLACE: The City of Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee

THE STORY and PLOT STRUCTURE: Matthew, one of the twelve disciples (a former tax collector in Capernaum) returns to Capernaum to begin writing the book about Jesus, which is now called "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew."

Matthew's lifelong friend, Jairus, who is anxious to help Matthew gather eyewitness accounts of the deeds of Jesus, makes a feast in his honor and invites guests from far and near, guests whose lives were affected by the Prophet from Nazareth. Each guest offers his story about the Christ as possible material for Matthew's chronicle. During the feast Matthew has his scribe take notes as each story-like event unfolds.

LENGTH OF DRAMA: About one hour.

PLAYERS REQUIRED: Some 40 men and women and a few children. Many players can do several roles and be in the off-stage Crowd. Persons seated at the feast table remain on stage throughout the play.

CHARACTERS, in the order of appearance, are:

ACT I, Scene 1

Jairus--lifelong friend of Matthew and retired ruler of the Capernaum synagogue
Atticus--a Roman citizen known in Capernaum as "the old sad soldier."

Scene 2

Miriam--Jairus' daughter, whom Jesus raised from the dead when she was a child

First and Second Servant Girls

Levi--Miriam's teenage son, the pride and joy of Jairus.

Prologue to Scene 3, and Scene 3

Matthew--one of the twelve disciples, now a man well up in years

Jairus' Guests at the Feast Table:

Elhanan: an old gatekeeper from the Temple in Jerusalem

Jeriah: a former stable boy from Bethlehem

Tebah: the grandson of a leper from Samaria

Hoshea: a scribe employed by Matthew.

Tax Collector: Matthew before he became a disciple--when his name was Levi.

Assistant Tax Collector

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Taxpayers

Poor Widow of Capernaum

Christ Figure

Disciples of Jesus (no lines): Peter, James, and John

Scene 4

Joseph: a young carpenter in Nazareth, who is engaged to be married.

Mary: Joseph's bride-to-be.

Angel of The LORD

Scene 5

Stable Boy, named Jeriah

Innkeeper's Wife

Magi's Servant

The Magi: Balthasar, Caspar, and Melchior

Bethlehem Innkeeper

The Christ Child, at the age of some two years

ACT II, Scene 1

Voice from Heaven

Satan

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Angels

Scene 2

Ten Lepers (men and women)

Group of Sick, Lame, Crippled People (no lines):

(1) Man, Woman and Sick Child

(2) A girl and her feeble grandfather

(3) A boy and two blind men

(4) Two well women and a woman on crutches

Simon, a friend of the lepers

ACT III, Scene 1

Crowd (off-stage)

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Roman Soldiers

Barabbas, a notorious insurrection leader and murderer
1st and 2nd Thieves
Centurion, a Roman Army officer

Scene 2

Eleven Disciples (no lines)

ACTION and STORIES DRAMATIZED:

ACT I

Scene 1--Jairus announces Matthew's plan to write a book about Jesus and invites the old soldier, Atticus, to a feast in Matthew's honor.

Scene 2--Miriam, Servant Girls, and Levi set up the feast table. To Levi's delight, his grandfather Jairus lets him sit with the guests.

Scene 3--Matthew tells young Levi how his own name was once Levi and relates how Jesus called him to be a disciple and changed his name to Matthew.

Scene 4--Scribe Hoshea reads a part of Matthew's manuscript, which tells how the Angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream, telling him the Child conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit and that Joseph should call his name Jesus.

Scenes 5 and 6--Jeriah recalls his days as a stable boy at the Bethlehem Inn and describes the coming of the Magi to find the Child "born King of the Jews."

ACT II

Scene 1--Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. Three angels come and minister to the Christ.

Scene 2--Ten lepers, outside a certain city, bewail their lot as they watch numerous people--the lame, the halt, and the blind--go by on their way to be healed by the Christ. Jesus comes and heals the lepers, but only one thanks him.

ACT III

Scene 1--Atticus, "the old sad soldier," arrives at the feast late. The guests are surprised to learn that Atticus wears gloves, "day and night, year in and year out." Atticus explains that he cannot bear to look at his hands, because it was he who made the crown of thorns worn by the Christ on the day of the Crucifixion.

Atticus describes in detail how he and fellow soldiers made a great game of crowning Jesus with the thorns, bowing down before him, and hailing him as "King of the Jews."

Scene 2--Matthew explains to the guests at the feast table that he will end his proposed book by telling how the risen Christ appeared to the disciples in Galilee and how he gave them the Great Commission to "Go... therefore, and

teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

SCRIPT

ACT I, Scene 1

Scene 1. — A street corner in the City of Capernaum, one day in the spring. Jairus, the retired ruler of the synagogue, stands talking to his long-time acquaintance Atticus, a Roman citizen who was once a soldier stationed in Jerusalem and who now resides in Capernaum. Jairus is in good spirits and rather perky, despite his advanced age. Atticus, known throughout the city as "that old sad soldier," looks as dejected as ever; and he wears a large pair of cloth gloves. With the gloves, and with his toga, he keeps his hands hidden.

JAIRUS: Ah, Atticus, today I am a happy man! What's more, I'm planning a feast at my house, and you are invited. I want you to be one of my special guests.

ATTICUS: *Slowly, seriously* You are most kind. Thank you. And may I ask what makes you so joyous?

JAIRUS: An old friend is coming! Matthew! Thirty years ago Matthew lived here in Capernaum. Now he's coming back and the feast will be to honor him.

ATTICUS: This Matthew is a fortunate man to have you as his friend, Honorable Jairus.

JAIRUS: *In affable tone* I wouldn't say that that's true. But I have an idea how I can help Matthew. He's coming back to Capernaum on a splendid mission--to begin writing a book about Jesus the Christ!

ATTICUS: *Suddenly nervous, most disturbed* A book about-- Uh-- Uh-- Sir, I-- I'm--

Jairus disregards the reaction of Atticus and keeps talking.

JAIRUS: It's a great undertaking! Matthew is one of the chosen twelve. Not many of the disciples are left now. They've been persecuted! Put in prison! Put to death! And I'm sure Matthew wants to get this wonderful journal written before something happens to him!

ATTICUS: *Quietly* That's reasonable.

JAIRUS: *With enthusiasm* At the feast I'll have guests who knew Jesus well, men whose lives were changed by him! I'll invite men from Jerusalem and Bethlehem --maybe, even Samaria.

And we'll all sit around the table and talk and talk. Each man can tell what he heard Jesus say and what he saw him do. And Matthew can hire a scribe to be there and write these things down for his manuscript. So, I want you to be there, Atticus.

ATTICUS: But, Sir, I-- I-- I'm not worthy. You know what I did that terrible day of the Crucifixion! I have confided in you. *Wrings gloved hands, hides them under toga.*

JAIRUS: That won't matter. You could help Matthew piece together many things that happened to the Christ that day in Jerusalem. I know Matthew will want to talk to you. You're the only Roman soldier I know who was there and who cares about the Crucifixion.

ATTICUS: *Sadly* Honorable Jairus, I am not worthy so much as to mention the name of the One who wore that-- That--... How can I tell-- Oh, Sir, I--

JAIRUS: *Interrupting* You must come. Let us say it is your duty. The feast will be exactly one month from today--in the garden of my home. So, Atticus, my Roman friend, I will expect you.

ATTICUS: Thank you, very much. I will try to be there.

The two men go their separate ways.

CURTAIN

Scene 2

Scene 2 - One month later. It is late afternoon in Capernaum. In the garden of the aged Jairus' home preparations are underway for the feast honoring Matthew. Miriam and her two servant girls are getting the table set and benches and pillows in place. Miriam is trying to see that everything is arranged to perfection.

MIRIAM: *Standing near the table, a bowl of grapes in her hand* Girls, put that short bench over on this side of the table. *Motions to side of table nearest audience.* My father always wants each guest to have plenty of room and to be comfortable.

1ST SERVANT: Yes, Ma'am.

Servants move bench. Second Servant picks up pillow from stack of cushions.

2ND SERVANT: Ma'am, where do you want us to put Master Jairus' pillow?

MIRIAM: Down at that end. *Motions to end of table on left stage.* Now one of you run get a better cushion for the guest of honor. *Picks up thin pillow.* The Honorable Matthew is an old man, and this thin thing won't do him a bit of good. *Puts thin pillow on another bench.*

Servant girls leave. Miriam swaps some pillows from one bench to another, rearranges the food on the table, and picks a minute speck off the cloth. Levi comes bouncing in.

LEVI: Mother?

MIRIAM: *Without looking up.* Yes, Levi?

LEVI: Where's Grandfather Jairus?

MIRIAM: He's gone down to the synagogue to meet his out-of-town guests. He was afraid some of them couldn't find their way here.

LEVI: Mother, do you think grandfather will let me sit at his feast table? After all, I'm not a little kid anymore!

MIRIAM: If there's room, he might. I just don't know, though, if there will be enough room. But you could ask Father.

Servant girls bring in several more pillows. Miriam puts them in place, gives more instructions.

Girls, go see how brown the bread is. I'll just die if it gets burned. *Girls leave; Miriam calls after them.* And stir the lentils. I don't want that soup too thick.

LEVI: How many guests will there be, Mother?

MIRIAM: Well, let me see. *Begins counting on her fingers.* There is of course Father's dear friend Matthew, the guest of honor. He's one, and his scribe makes two. But the scribe may not want to set at the table. Come to think of it, we'd better set up some kind of a writing table for him. *Forgets what she had started to tell Levi.*

Still talking to Levi Son, run bring that little lamp stand by your grandfather's bed. That'll do. And hurry! They'll all be here before we can get this feast table ready. *Turns to look for servant girls* Girls? *With exasperation* Where are those slow-footed servants?

LEVI: Mother! You sent 'em to look at the bread and stir the soup. And you were going to tell me how many guests Grandfather has invited.

MIRIAM. *Still fussing over the table appointments* Ah, yes, so I was. I'm so worried about the feast I forgot what I was saying. *Resumes counting on fingers* The Honorable Matthew is one. The old man from Jerusalem is two. The old man from Bethlehem--if he gets up here--will be three. And the Samaritan--the one whose grandfather was a leper--is four.

LEVI: *Brightly* That's not many.

MIRIAM: Father also invited that old sad soldier who lives near the synagogue. He may not come, and then again, he may.

LEVI: Mother, I don't think the old sad soldier has good sense.

MIRIAM: Son! You mustn't talk about people that way.

LEVI: He wears those big funny gloves, all the time. Even in the hot summer. And that's stupid!

MIRIAM: Levi, you be careful you don't ever say anything to that old Roman about his gloves.

LEVI: I'm not! But I sure hope he doesn't come tonight--so there'll be room for me at the table.

Servant girls return, empty-handed.

MIRIAM: Son, go get that little table, like I told you!

Levi darts out.

1ST SERVANT: Ma'am, what should we do next?

2ND SERVANT: We could bring in the apples and oranges now, couldn't we?

MIRIAM: Yes. That'll be all right.

Servants leave. Miriam picks up a dishcloth on the table and carefully wipes out the individual wooden bowls at each place.

MIRIAM: *To herself* If we just didn't have any dust in this world, life would be so much better. *Pauses* Now isn't that a silly thought!

I ought to be thankful to be in this world. After all, I did die when I was a little girl and Jesus came and brought me back to life. I wish I could remember that. But I can't. Father says it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened in Capernaum. People are still talk--

A minor catastrophe interrupts Miriam's thoughts. Both servant girls enter, each with a large bowl of apples. But Levi comes in at the same time, with the lamp table upside down on his head in such a way that the table tapestry covering has fallen down over his eyes and he can't see where he is going. He bumps into the servants and their apples spill in all directions. The girls shriek; Miriam is exasperated. All three speak at the same time.

Miriam: For mercy sakes!

First Servant: Levi, watch where you're going!

Second Servant: The apples! Just look!

MIRIAM. Son! That is not the way to carry a table!

Girls scurry around, picking up apples. Miriam takes the table and puts it in place. Levi sheepishly takes the tapestry piece off his head, gives it to Miriam.

MIRIAM: Help the girls pick up those apples and then you run down to the synagogue and find out when your grandfather's coming. Tell him everything is ready.

LEVI: Yes, Ma'am. *Picks up two apples and then scoots out*

MIRIAM: Girls, you'll find out as you grow older that boys like Levi can be a problem! *Half laughs.*

1ST SERVANT: That's all right, Ma'am.

2ND SERVANT: We'll run wash the apples.

Servants go out the door as Levi runs in the other, out of breath and much excited.

LEVI: They're coming, Mother! They're coming! An' the old sad soldier's not with 'em. So I'll get to sit at the table--if Grandfather will let me.

MIRIAM: Son, you just stand over there out of the way, and wait and see. And be sure you don't bother your grandfather.

Miriam hurries out, Levi moves aside as Jairus ushers in his guests: Matthew with his scribe Hoshea; Elhanan, Jeriah, and Tebah. Hoshea carries numerous scrolls and writing materials.

JAIRUS: *With pleasant, hospitable manner and tone.* Come in; come in, my friends. The feast table seems to be ready; so let's find our places. Matthew,

perhaps you might like to be here in the center. And your scribe? Where do you want him--on your right or left?

MATTHEW: Makes no difference.

HOSHEA: *Noticing small table* Sir, that's all right. I wouldn't care to eat just now. Let me sit over here. That way, I can take notes as all of you talk.

Scribe settles himself. Levi hovers at his grandfather's side as Jairus continues seating instructions.

JAIRUS: Elhanan, since you're from Jerusalem, you sit here. And Jeriah, you please sit next to Elhanan--because Bethlehem is not far from Jerusalem. Tebah, let's have you at this place. The empty bench we'll save for Atticus. He should be here, any time now.

Guests sit down. Jairus turns to seat himself. Levi whispers to him. Matthew begins speaking.

MATTHEW: Ah, it's good to be back in Capernaum, good to be at this table. Jairus, you were kind and most generous to bring these gentlemen together to help me with the chronicle, and, to make this feast! What delicious looking food!

Other guests murmur their agreement.

JAIRUS: It's my pleasure. Places arm around Levi's shoulders. Friends, let me introduce my only grandson, Levi. He wants to be with us. Will this be all right with you?

Guests agree, saying at the same time:

Elhanan: of course.

Jeriah: By all means.

Tebah: There's plenty of room.

Matthew: Sure! Come sit across from me, Levi.

Levi sighs with relief and pleasure, grins, and takes his place. Jairus signals to Miriam, who is standing at the door, to bring more food. She sends one servant in with a huge loaf of bread, the other with a bowl of wet apples. Matthew, meanwhile, has begun talking to Levi.

MATTHEW: Son, so your name is Levi?

LEVI: Yes, Sir.

MATTHEW: Many years ago, Levi was my name!

LEVI: *With much interest* It was? How did you change it?

MATTHEW: Jesus the Christ changed my name. He changed my whole life.

All at table turn to Matthew and listen, intently. Levi leans forward so he won't miss a word.

MATTHEW: Yes, Son, I was Levi, the chief tax collector of Capernaum. All the people here hated me because I worked for the Roman government. They called

me a "publican," and said I was dishonest and mean. And I was. I was a rascal of a fellow.

Then one day as I was sitting in my booth, and people were lined up to pay their taxes, Jesus came by. I remember it--oh, so well. And... *Voice trails off.*

Spotlight directs audience attention to Scene 3, set up on another part of stage. There is no break between Scene 2 and Scene 3. All players at feast table remain in place—except Matthew, who eases himself out and into the tax-collecting booth. This, while the taxpayers' grumbling dialogue is in progress.

Scene 3

Scene 3 - A street corner in Capernaum, during the year of about 30 AD. A poor widow and three other taxpayers are standing in line, waiting for the tax collectors to open their booth. The widow is first in line. In the background, their backs to the audience, stand the Christ Figure, with Peter, James and John. As the curtain opens the men in line are talking among themselves.

1ST TAXPAYER: If you ask me, we Jews ought to quit paying taxes to Rome.

2ND TAXPAYER: You're right! That great emperor sittin' over there in Rome doesn't do a thing for us here in Capernaum.

3RD TAXPAYER: For two shekels I'd go cram my taxes down his throat!

1ST TAXPAYER: And I'd help you. I wonder when the lazy publicans are going to open their booth?

POOR WIDOW: I've been waiting here one solid hour. I wish they'd hurry up.

3RD TAXPAYER: Lady, I think we ought to warn you. That tax collector named Levi--who's usually here by this time every morning--is a crook, if ever I saw one!

POOR WIDOW: Thank you for telling me. A widow like me has to watch how she spends every mite.

Assistant tax collector pulls back curtains of tax booth with a flourish, revealing Levi, the tax collector, seated in the booth.

ASSISTANT TAX COLLECTOR: Step right up, folks. The Honorable Levi is ready to receive your taxes. Lady, you're first. *Goes back and sits by Levi.*

1ST TAXPAYER: *Under his breath, to his friends.* Honorable! Did you hear that?

Other two men chuckle. Widow comes closer to booth.

POOR WIDOW: How much do I have to pay this time?

LEVI: Lady, your custom payment this year is 14 denarii. (*de-NAR-I*)

POOR WIDOW: *With a gasp.* Mercy!

Three men swear under their breath, comment to each other as follows:

1st Taxpayer: Did you hear what I heard?

2nd Taxpayer: I can't believe it!

3rd Taxpayer: The very idea! Charging a widow fourteen denarii!

POOR WIDOW: Fourteen denarii? Publican, you must be out of your mind! I won't pay it! I can't pay it! *Shakes finger at Levi and assistant.* I'm a poor widow and you tax collectors are thieves! Plain, out and out thieves!

LEVI: *With condescension* Lady, don't be calling me a thief. It's the Roman government that's demanding high taxes this year. Not me.

POOR WIDOW: *Defiantly* Well, I just can't pay fourteen denarii today. Maybe later I can scrape together that much money. But not today. *Turns, walks away.*

LEVI: *With a shrug of the shoulders* Have it your way--today or tomorrow. But you'll have to pay, eventually. Next!

Three Taxpayers come to booth.

1ST TAXPAYER: How much?

LEVI: *Waving his hand to include all three* For each of you Capernaum citizens, the tax is thirty denarii. Thirty, apiece.

ALL TAXPAYERS: *In chorus* Thirty denarii?

1ST TAXPAYER: Why, you publican! That's thirty days' wages!

2ND TAXPAYER: There must be a big mistake. Last year I paid only twelve.

3RD TAXPAYER: That poor widow was right! You tax gatherers are robbers and thieves.

One by one the men dig into their money pouches, grudgingly count out their coins and hand them over to Levi. They all leave. Then First Taxpayer comes back long enough to shake his fist in Levi's face.

1ST TAXPAYER: You are a curse on Capernaum! *Exits with companions*

Levi turns to assistant, a smirk on his face, as he piles the silver coins up in a heap.

LEVI: Not bad! Right? *Both laugh; Matthew begins separating coins into three stacks, talking as he counts them out.*

Now these twelve are for Rome. These two are for you. *Plunks two coins down in front of assistant, who grabs them up with much satisfaction*

And these are for the purse of Levi! *Pulls bulging coin bag from under counter and pours in the new take. One of these days, I'll be a rich man!*

Puts away bag, turns to call Christ Figure and disciples.

LEVI: *Raising his voice* Gentlemen! Step right over here. *Beckons* Today is a good day to pay your taxes. Caesar demands that we all pay.

Christ Figure approaches booth; disciples linger some distance away.

CHRIST FIGURE: *With much kindness* I've come not to pay taxes to Caesar, Levi, but to call you to follow me.

LEVI: *Showing great surprise* Why, you're that Man from Nazareth!

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes.

LEVI: Folks say you're some sort of a prophet--maybe even Elijah come back to earth!

CHRIST FIGURE: They do?

LEVI: Why, Sir, everybody in Capernaum is talking about the signs and wonders you do!

ASSISTANT TAX COLLECTOR: They say you perform miracles, day and night!

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes. I show signs and miracles--to teach men that the kingdom of God is at hand.

LEVI: The kingdom of God?

CHRIST FIGURE: The kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great price. A merchant man seeking goodly pearls would sell all his goods to buy the pearl. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in a field. The man who finds it will hide it again and go and sell all his possessions, and for joy buy the field. *Cf. Matthew 13:44-46*

LEVI: *Wistfully* I'd like to have such a pearl, such a treasure.

CHRIST FIGURE: Then come with me. Be one of my disciples--even as Simon Peter, James, and John here are. *Waves hand toward disciples.* They left their fishing to become "fishers of men."

LEVI: Sir, I'm just a hated tax collector by the name of Levi.

CHRIST FIGURE: Follow me and leave your tax gathering. You can have a new life, a new birth, and a new name. You shall no longer be called Levi, the hated tax gatherer. You shall be known as "Matthew," which means "gift of the Lord."

LEVI: I-- I-- Master, I--

CHRIST FIGURE: Matthew, take my yoke upon you. And learn of me. I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your soul. "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." *Plays, see Matthew 11:28-30*

Christ Figure turns slowly, rejoins disciples, and all four begin walking away. Levi grabs out his moneybag, looks at it, looks at the Christ Figure and then tosses the bag to his assistant.

LEVI: Here, I won't need this! *Runs to catch up with Christ Figure, calling out:* I will, Master! I will! I will follow you!

CURTAIN

Spotlight returns to feast table, where Miriam and the servant girls are bringing in another course of food. During their to-do over the serving Matthew slips back into his place at the table.

MIRIAM: *Placing large platter of food in front of Jairus* Father, is everything all right?

Servant girls pour wine.

JAIRUS: Why, yes, Miriam. All seems to be in order. The food is delicious. The guests are enjoying it.

MIRIAM: Maybe you should urge them to eat more. This is only the second course, as you can see. There's much, much more to come.

Miriam and servants ease themselves out. Matthew resumes his narrative.

MATTHEW: So, my friends, from that day to this--some thirty years--I have been Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, our Redeemer. I took his yoke upon me. And I still wear it--not as a burden, but as a joy. That is why I must make a written record of my Lord's life on earth. I must show that he is the long-promised King. That he is the fulfillment of the old prophecies. That he is the Son of God!

JAIRUS: *Enthusiastically* It will be a marvelous record, Matthew!

All others nod their heads, murmur their agreement

ELHANAN: *To Matthew* Sir, you mentioned that you want to show how Jesus the Christ was born our King. Will you tell how he is a descendant of David the King?

MATTHEW: Yes, Honorable Elhanan, that is my intent.

ELHANAN: *Obviously pleased* Then let me give you this record I brought from Jerusalem! *Gets up and takes a document to Matthew. Matthew rises to take the document.*

All my life I've been a gatekeeper at the Temple in Jerusalem, and I used to see Jesus come to the Temple. And I heard him teach there, many times. So, the very day Jairus sent me word to come to this feast I went to one of my friends--a scribe there at the Temple--and got him to copy this. *holds out scroll from the ancient records*

MATTHEW: *Taking scroll* What is it, Sir?

ELHANAN: It is a list of all our Jewish generations, from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob on down--with each man's name and the name of his firstborn son.

MATTHEW: *Much surprised and highly delighted* Why, this is wonderful! All the generations from Father Abraham on down to the Christ?

ELHANAN: *Proudly* That's what it is. And as you read through it, you'll notice this fact: the total number of generations from Father Abraham to King David is fourteen generations. And from King David till our forefathers were carried away into Babylon is fourteen generations. And, from the carrying away into Babylon till the Christ there were fourteen generations.

All at the table murmur aloud at this bit of unusual information. All speak almost at the same time, as follows:

Jairus: That's remarkable!

Jeriah: All the generations!

Tebah: That's very interesting.

Levi: *Counting on his fingers* That would be fourteen and fourteen and fourteen.

Lem'me see--forty-two generations!

MATTHEW: Honorable Elhanan, you don't know how glad I am to have this! Thank you very much.

ELHANAN: *Murmuring* You are welcome. *Returns to his place.*

Matthew takes scroll to scribe.

MATTHEW: Here, Hoshea, we'll put this at the very first of the chronicle.

HOSHEA: *Taking scroll.* Yes, Sir. How should I start it off?

MATTHEW: Make the first line read: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham," and so on.

HOSHEA: Yes, Sir.

Matthew returns to table, where others are eating and talking quietly among themselves

JAIRUS: *As soon as Matthew is seated* Matthew, we all know that Jesus is the fulfillment of the old prophecies. But how will you show that? There were countless prophecies.

MATTHEW: First, comes the birth of the Christ and the prophecy of Isaiah. We all know that one by heart...

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is God with us." Cf. *Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14*

JAIRUS: Yes, of course. It's been read in the synagogue a thousand times.

MATTHEW: *Turning to scribe* Hoshea, read out that passage I dictated to you last week, about how "Mary was espoused to Joseph and how before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit." Cf. *Matthew 1:18-25.*

Guests turn to listen; scribe comes to Matthew, unrolling and shuffling his papers.

HOSHEA: Sir, you mean this part that begins *Reads* "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary..."

MATTHEW: That's it. Read it out--all of it. *Turns to companions.* Joseph, himself, told me what you're about to hear--many, many years ago, the first time I went to Nazareth.

HOSHEA: *reading* "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was..." *Voice trails off as Scene 4 opens on center stage.*

Scene 4

Scene 4. Late one afternoon in Nazareth, in the year 4 or 5 BC, Joseph is in his carpenter shop, working on a plow stock. He is in a happy mood and whistles as he planes the handles of the wooden farm implement.

JOSEPH: *Rubbing his fingers over the plow stock handle, and talking to himself* Ah, smooth as a king's scepter! *Backs away from handiwork to further admire it.* That is a fine plow stock! Even if I did make the whole thing myself. I'd say it's the best plow stock ever seen in Nazareth.

Mary appears at the door, but Joseph doesn't notice her until she speaks.

MARY: *Timidly* Joseph?

JOSEPH: *Turning around, much surprised* Why, Mary! It's you! What a nice surprise. Come on in. You can watch and see how your future husband does his excellent carpenter work! *Laughs* I've just finished this plow. See? *Holds up piece of work* Isn't it a beauty?

MARY: *without enthusiasm* It's nice. *Hesitates* Joseph? *Does not face Joseph* Joseph, I have something to tell you--something I must tell you.

JOSEPH. *Coming over to Mary and speaking fondly and tenderly* What do you want to tell me, my little Lilly of the Valley, my little Rose of Sharon? *Clasps Mary's hands in his*

MARY: Joseph, I-- I--

JOSEPH. *With much adoration* Ah, Mary, you are like a flower! So lovely! So fragile!

MARY: *Drawing away* Joseph, I-- I-- *Begins weeping, bows down her head.*

JOSEPH: *With serious concern* Mary! What's the matter? *Puts tips of fingers under her chin to lift her face* The tears run down like rivers of water! Why are you sad? I am the happiest man in all Galilee, and you should be happy too. Soon we will be married! And you will be my bride. You should be laughing, not crying!

MARY: *with much distress* Joseph, I am with child!

Mary runs from carpenter shop. Joseph, stunned almost speechless, runs a few feet after her, stops at door.

JOSEPH: Mary! You couldn't be! *Stands looking at the empty doorway a few seconds, then turns and sinks down on carpenter bench, burying head in hands and groaning in anguish.*

Oh my God in heaven, what will I do! *Pauses*

What can I do? *Gets up, begins pacing back and forth.*

What should I do? I can't make a public example of Mary. Not my sweet Mary. She's little more than a child--not yet fifteen! *Sinks down on bench again, leans against the wall.*

If I follow custom and our age-old tradition, I will have to put her away. *Pauses* But I'll put her away privately. No! I won't do it! But I have to--if she is with child. That would break her heart, and mine. Oh my God in Heaven, this is too much. *Leans head against wall.*

Poor Mary, poor little Lilly of the Valley, poor Little Rose of Sharon. *Closes eyes, voice gradually subsides, final words are as a half prayer.*

God in heaven, what is to become of me and my Mary, my little Lilly, my little Rose?

Joseph falls into something like sleep. ANGEL OF THE LORD enters, goes directly to Joseph. She does not wake him.

ANGEL: Joseph, son of David, do not grieve. There is no need for your heart to be troubled. God has sent me to you. Take Mary to be your wife, as you had planned. And have no fear. The child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Mary "shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins."

Angel starts to leave, but returns to speak to Joseph again.

Joseph, all this was foretold by the prophet of old. It is the fulfillment of the plan of the Lord, as revealed to Isaiah: "Behold a virgin shall be with child." Mary is that virgin, Joseph. The holy child will be Emmanuel, or "God with us."

CURTAIN

Interlude between Scene 4 and Scene 5 - Spotlight is on feast table.

HOSHEA: *Reading, as if there had been no interruption* "Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he called his name JESUS." Cf. *Matthew 1:24, 25*

All players listen attentively to the scribe. Jeriah, the old man from Bethlehem, begins waving his hand to get Matthew's attention, and speaks excitedly in a quivering voice. The gatekeeper from Jerusalem also shows keen interest and can scarcely wait to add his bit to the story.

JERIAH: Sir, I saw the Holy Child! And Joseph the carpenter! And the little mother. They stayed in Bethlehem for some time.

MATTHEW: You were in Bethlehem then? When Jesus was born?

JERIAH: I was there. And I saw the aged wise men who came to worship the Holy Child.

MATTHEW: What were they like? I've heard that they were magi, from the East.

JERIAH: Well, for one thing, they seemed to be rich.

ELHANAN: *With much enthusiasm* I saw those wise men, too! They came through Jerusalem--following a star, they said.

MATTHEW: Can either of you recall exactly when this was that the wise men came?

ELHANAN: It was in the days of Herod the King. Oh, I tell you King Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem was troubled with him.

JERIAH: You ask how long ago this was. I can't remember the exact time, but I'm sure it was at least sixty years ago--maybe longer. I was just a stable boy, working for the innkeeper in Bethlehem. *Voice takes on tone of storyteller.*

I remember it was late one evening--about twilight--and I had lighted my lamp and was bundling up some hay to put in the stable. The innkeeper's wife came out the door, yelling at me to hurry. She was always yelling at me to hurry... *Voice trails off as Scene 5 opens.*

Scene 5

Scene 5 - In the courtyard of the Bethlehem Inn, some two years after the Christ Child was born. It is twilight, and Jeriah the Stable Boy is bending over a pile of hay not far from the inn's doorway. He is tying the hay into bundles, stacking the bundles near his oil lantern. The Innkeeper's wife appears in the doorway, hands on her hips.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Jeriah! Hurry up, boy! Get that hay into the stable and come inside. I need you to grind the meal. Meal doesn't grind itself, you know.

STABLE BOY: Yes, Ma'am. I'm hurrying! *Drops half-tied bundle, fumbles about, gathers up hay, begins re-tying it.*

WIFE: You don't look to me like you're hurrying! I told you hours ago to get this hay moved. And here you are, still tying bundles. You're slow and clumsy, Jeriah!

STABLE BOY: *Sadly* Yes, Ma'am.

Innkeeper's wife notices hay lying near lantern. She throws up her hands in dismay, runs to grab up the oil lantern.

WIFE: *Speaking loud and fast* The Lord have mercy on you, Jeriah! You are the biggest dunce in Bethlehem!

STABLE BOY: *Near tears.* I am?

WIFE: *Grabbing up lantern.* Don't you know you ought not stack hay so close to a lamp?

STABLE BOY: Yes, Ma'am! I mean no, Ma'am! I mean yes, Ma'am!

WIFE: *Without pausing for breath* This hay could catch on fire and burn down the whole inn and everything in it! Then where would you be? *Sets lantern down a safe distance from hay, starts back toward doorway.*

STABLE BOY: I don't know, Ma'am.

WIFE: *Continuing the tirade* Don't ever put hay near a fire! And you hurry up! And don't leave any hay scattered on the ground. Pick up every straw.

STABLE BOY: *With spirits shattered.* Yes, Ma'am.

WIFE: *Standing in doorway* Tonight's travelers will be coming in, anytime now; and things have got to look neat around here. *Disappears through inn doorway.*

Stable Boy laboriously ties several bundles of hay together, bends over, swings them up on his back, and picks up the lantern. He makes a few steps, the rope around the bundles comes untied, and all the hay falls. Stable Boy sighs, shakes his head. He deliberately places the lantern far away from the hay and is tying the pile of bundles together again when the magi and their servant enter. The servant is carrying an ornate chest. Stable boy does not see or hear travelers until the servant walks up beside him and speaks. Stable Boy, already upset over his scolding from the innkeeper's wife, is so startled he almost jumps out of his sandals.

MAGI'S SERVANT: *Pleasantly* Good evening, Young Fellow.

STABLE BOY: *Gasps, then regains composure* Uh-- Uh-- Good evening.

SERVANT: My masters here *Indicates magi* are strangers, come from far away. Is this the village of Bethlehem?

STABLE BOY: Oh, yes, Sir. This is Bethlehem, all right.

SERVANT: My masters are looking for a young child who was born here in Bethlehem--born to be a king. Perhaps you could tell us which way to go to find him.

STABLE BOY: Sir, I don't know any babes or any kings--except the baby who was born here in the stable. *Brightens tone.* But the innkeeper's wife will know! She knows everything. I'll go get her.

Stable Boy darts inside, servant sets chest aside and waits near doorway. Magi talk among themselves.

CASPAR: There can be no mistake. I'm sure the Child King is here, in Bethlehem.

MELCHIOR: It's just a matter of finding the right house. Last night his star was shining straight down on this village.

BALTHASAR: Of course this is the place. The stars make no mistakes. Besides, that prophecy King Herod had read to us in Jerusalem made it plain that Bethlehem is the place.

CASPAR: Somehow or other, I didn't put much confidence in King Herod. But the ancient prophecy was plain.

BALTHASAR: Ah, that prophecy! I got one of the Jerusalem scribes to read it to me three times, and I thought surely I could remember it. But I can't. *Taps own head.* My memory is not what it used to be. Too many years have passed by.

MELCHIOR: Don't worry over the passing of the years, Balthasar. But, didn't that Jewish prophecy go something like this? *Quotes in chanting, singsong tone:*

"And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, are not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

BALTHASAR: That was it--word for word. Thank you, Melchior. *Turns toward inn door, changes tone* I wonder what's keeping the poor servant boy and the Bethlehem lady who "knows everything"?

Stable Boy returns accompanied by Innkeeper and his wife. Boy stops to speak to Servant. Innkeeper and Wife go directly to Magi, not to give them any information but to convince them that they should spend the night at the inn. Wife remains slightly behind Innkeeper.

STABLE BOY: *To M. Servant* Sir, that's my master and his wife. They can tell you what you asked--about the king baby, that is. *Resumes trying to tie hay bundles*

SERVANT: Thank you, young fellow. *Rejoins magi.*

INNKEEPER: *Rubbing his hands together and bowing.* Ah, Strangers, welcome to Bethlehem. It is an honor to have such distinguished travelers come to our old City of David.

WIFE: *Aside to her husband* The inn! Tell 'em about the inn! Tell 'em our inn has the best accommodations--as fine as any in Jerusalem!

INNKEEPER: *Facing magi again* Gentlemen, our inn has the finest accommodations this side of Jerusalem.

SERVANT: We thank you. Let me introduce my masters. They are magi--scholars, holy men who study the stars--come from the East. First, the Honorable Balthasar.

Balthasar bows.

The Honorable Melchior.

Melchior bows

And the Honorable Caspar.

Caspar bows.

INNKEEPER: You honor all Judah with your presence. The stable boy over there *Gives a wave of the hand* said you are on the trail of some king or other.

WIFE: *Pulling her husband aside again and speaking vehemently to him* He did not say they were looking for a king. He said they are looking for a child! You never half listen when somebody tries to tell you something! Besides, you ought to know there's no king hiding out here in Bethlehem!

INNKEEPER: *turning to magi again* Well-- Uh-- Maybe the stable boy said you were looking for a child. Boys sometimes get things mixed up. *Laughs halfheartedly* You know how that goes.

MELCHIOR: Ah, my dear innkeeper, as a matter of fact we are searching for a king, and a child. He is a Holy Child, born here in Bethlehem to become King. One prophecy we heard along the way is that he will rule a kingdom that has no end.

BALTHASAR: We saw this Child King's star rise in the East--some two years ago. Tonight, his star will shine down on Bethlehem. So please be so kind as to show us the house where we may find him.

INNKEEPER: Certainly, gentlemen. Certainly. Right now, though, won't you come inside? Have supper and sleep and rest yourselves. And tomorrow morning we will guide you to see every child in the village--till you find the one born to be a king.

WIFE: *Coming closer to group* Yes, yes. Tomorrow we'll help you find him. It happens that I am the only midwife in Bethlehem; so I know every child born here in the past forty years!

Magi huddle together, with Servant, to talk among themselves in undertones. They step back, and Servant addresses Innkeeper.

SERVANT: Sir, my masters have traveled so far, for so long that they wish very much to find the Child King now, before they retire for the night. And they will take lodging here at your inn.

Innkeeper and Wife fairly beam.

INNKEEPER: Fine, fine. Just a minute please.

Innkeeper and Wife step aside, talk in heated undertones, with the wife doing most of the talking, and much waving of her hands. Finally, she makes a statement so loud the audience can hear it.

WIFE: Well, if you don't believe me, ask the stable boy. I say it's the child of that couple from Nazareth! The baby that was born in the stable! Just ask the stable boy!

INNKEEPER: But, he--

WIFE: He talked to those shepherds who had seen the angels that night. Remember? And I said at the time that that baby born in the stable was the most beautiful child ever born in Bethlehem. Remember?

INNKEEPER: *Trying to quiet his wife* Shh--Not so loud.

WIFE: Call the stable boy and ask him. *Innkeeper beckons to Stable Boy; wife keeps talking.* I know as well as I know my name that if any Bethlehem child ever becomes a king, it will be that baby!

Stable Boy hurries over, the three talk in undertones. Innkeeper comes back to magi and servant.

INNKEEPER: Gentlemen, I may as well be honest with you. We don't know which child it is. But we think we know. So, we'll have the stable boy here show you the way to the house of a couple that came here from Nazareth about two years ago--during Caesar's census. Joseph is the man's name. He's a carpenter, a real good carpenter. I sure hope he stays here, because Bethlehem needs a good carpenter. I've got to have some work done on my inn, and--

MELCHIOR: *Interrupting* The Child? You were going to tell us how--

INNKEEPER: Yes, I'm coming to the Child. The night this Child was born, all the shepherds out in the fields came running into the village, saying they had seen angels come down from heaven. And the angels said that the Christ was born in Bethlehem! And the stable boy talked--

MELCHIOR: *With much excitement* That's the Child! That's the one! If angels announced his birth, he is the Holy Child King!

BALTHASAR: Take us to him!

CASPAR: *Calling* Come, come, Stable Boy! Show us the way!

STABLE BOY: *Greatly pleased* Oh, yes Sir, I will! *Grabs up lantern.* Just follow me! I know exactly where the carpenter lives!

Magi follow Stable Boy. He keeps talking as he leads them off stage.

And I know that baby's name. His name is JESUS-- 'cause an angel told the carpenter to name him JESUS. And he did. The carpenter told... *Voice trails off*
Magi Servant picks up treasure chest and follows magi and Stable Boy. Innkeeper begins picking up bundles of hay. Wife stands, watching.

CURTAIN

Spotlight directs audience attention back to feast table. Old Jeriah continues his narrative, and his account of the presentation of the gifts to the Christ Child-- Scene 6 is done in pantomime, even as he is talking.

Scene 6

Scene 6 - The house in Bethlehem where Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child have been living some two years. Joseph is seated near a table, doing simple carpenter work, mending a basket. The Christ Child sleeps in a cradle. There are household items such as water jars, crocks, and a bench and stool in the room. A light burns on the table. Now and then Mary leans over to rock the cradle.

JERIAH: *To his companions at the Capernaum feast table. I still remember how proud I was that night to get to show the magi to where the carpenter Joseph and the little Mother and the Holy Child were. The house was not far from the inn...
*Voice trails off as Scene 6 gets underway**

There is a knock at Joseph's door. He answers. The Stable Boy shows him his visitors. And Joseph, exhibiting much pleasure, ushers the magi in, brings them to Mary and the Child. Mary takes Child up in her lap to show him to the magi. They approach him with awe.

JERIAH: When the magi saw the Child Jesus, they bowed down to worship him. And the Servant and I sank to our knees.

Magi bow low. Stable Boy and the Servant kneel in corner. Servant still holds chest.

JERIAH: *Speaking slowly.* And then, the magi opened up their treasures.

Servant brings chest to magi. Melchior opens it.

And they gave him gifts.

Caspar takes bag of gold out of chest.

Gold!

Balthasar lifts out container of Frankincense.

Frankincense!

Melchior takes up container of Myrrh.

And Myrrh!

Magi kneel side by side in front of Child, lift up their gifts.

CURTAIN: END OF ACT I

ACT II

Interlude before Scene 1 - Spotlight returns to feast table, where Miriam and servant girls are bringing in more food. The servants place their platters in center of table. Miriam brings her container and places it in front of her father.

JAIRUS: *Warmly, to his guests* Ah, my friends, as you can see, my daughter Miriam and the servant girls are here with another course.

Guests murmur their pleasure.

JAIRUS: Let us continue our feast. Help yourselves. And let us continue our stories for Matthew.

Guests take food into their individual bowls, Jairus talks on.

I had hoped the old sad soldier I invited would be here by this hour. *Turns to Miriam* Daughter, be on the watchout for old Atticus.

MIRIAM: Father, Levi could run look for him, if you want him to.

LEVI: *Enthusiastically* Sure, Grandfather! I'll go find him for you! *Starts to get up* And I'll tell him if he doesn't hurry, we'll eat up everything!

Grandfather and all guests chuckle

JAIRUS: No, no, Levi. That won't be necessary. Besides, I want you to hear all these great things about Jesus the Christ.

LEVI: Yes, Sir.

JAIRUS: *Turning to Matthew* Matthew, what is to come next in the book? Will you tell how Jesus went to the River Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist?

MATTHEW: I've already written that down. And I told how the Spirit of God descended on him as a dove. And how a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." *Pauses.* But, there is so much to say I don't know what should come next.

JAIRUS: Why not record what happened immediately after his baptism? Wasn't that when he was tempted in the wilderness?

MATTHEW: *In appreciative tone* Yes! His temptation. I will tell that next. Jesus talked about it many times.

LEVI: *Whispering to his grandfather* What does "temptation" mean?

JAIRUS: Shh, Son. Just wait a minute.

MATTHEW: *Turning to all guests* Perhaps I should explain to all of you what Jairus and I are talking about.

ELHANAN: Yes, please do.

Others nod heads, murmur interest.

MATTHEW: Right after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, the Spirit led him up into the wilderness--to be alone, to pray.

Curtain opens on Scene 1. Matthew keeps talking.

Scene 1 - A wilderness area, where there is little but stones and scrubby plants and where there is an elevated area with a mountain rising in the background. The Christ Figure is kneeling in prayer, his hands folded, his eyes looking toward the sky.

MATTHEW: *Continuing explanation to guests at feast table* And Jesus was in the wilderness forty days and forty nights. And he fasted those forty days and forty nights. And when he laid down to sleep, he had only a stone for a pillow.

Christ Figure lies down, using a rock for a pillow and his cloak as a blanket.

The Master never said so to us, but surely in his waking hours, and in his dreams, he could hear again and again the voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son..." *Matthew's voice trails off.*

VOICE FROM HEAVEN: *Offstage, in deep, warm tones* "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

VOICE: *Fainter, as if farther away* "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

VOICE: *Still more faint, but distinct* "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Satan comes prancing in, looks down at the sleeping Christ Figure, walks around him, talking to himself as he goes, and rubbing his hands with glee. The devil is much pleased with the situation, with himself, and with the power he thinks he possesses.

SATAN: Ah, ha! So here we have the great Son of God! Jesus of Nazareth! Come down to earth as a man! He has just heard his Father say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Sarcastically How touching. Well, we will see how long he can please his Father. *Pauses* In heaven, he could live as God. But here on this wretched earth he is a man! So, I, the ruler of demons, the prince of the power of evil, will tempt him! Ha! It's so easy to tempt a man. And it gives me such great glee!

Clasps hands together, in anticipation

When this Son of God and Son of Man yields to my temptation, his Father in Heaven won't be so pleased with him. He will disown him! But I'll be good to him. I'll let him be one of my angels! And he will be in my power.

Sits down beside a boulder, his back to the sleeping Christ Figure.

I'll sit myself down here, to wait for the sun to come up and for this Son-of-God-Son-of-Man to wake up. I don't mind waiting--especially when I'm waiting for a sweet victory.

Assumes thinking position, with chin resting on hand; begins planning details of temptation

I know that after fasting for forty days and forty nights, he is half starved. So, first, I'll appeal to his hunger.

Then, I'll trick him another way, and... *Voice trails off*

Christ Figure wakes, stands up to pray. Since his back is toward the boulder which hides the devil, he does not see Satan.

CHRIST FIGURE: *Praying* Oh Father in Heaven, thank you for another night of rest. Let your will be done this day, from the rising of the sun till its going down.

Prepare me, Father, to spread the good news of your kingdom come on earth.

Guide me. Let me teach all men to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

If this means a bitter cup, I will take the cup. If it means--

SATAN: *Coming up beside Christ Figure and interrupting* Ah, so you are up at the dawn, and praying already!

CHRIST FIGURE: *Turning quickly* Satan! What are you doing here?

SATAN: I just came to keep you company, to chat a little while, and, to make a few suggestions. You see, I want to help you. You must be very hungry after fasting for forty days and forty nights. Of course you are. But there's no problem. If you are the Son of God, just command that these stones be made bread! And it will be so--just like that! *Snaps fingers*

CHRIST FIGURE: *Sternly* Satan, it is written: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

SATAN: *Shrugging shoulders* Have it your way. Come over here a minute. *Guides Christ Figure to another part of stage* I want to show you something. *Pauses* Now just imagine that we're in Jerusalem, and that we're standing way up on the pinnacle of the temple. You know what you could do, if you were standing high up there on the temple? That is, now, if you are the Son of God! You could just cast yourself down. For, it is written: "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou smash thy foot against a stone."

CHRIST FIGURE: *With disdain* Satan, you are the wicked tempter. It is written: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!"

SATAN: *Lightly* Well, if you don't like that suggestion, come over here, and let's say that we're going up onto an exceeding high mountain.

Two walk up onto elevated area on section of stage that has mountain in background.

SATAN: Now, look to the north, and to the south, and to the east, and to the west.

Makes appropriate gestures, speaking slowly. Spread before you are all the kingdoms of the world. With untold riches! With glory, beyond imagination.

And power! Think of the power! It can all be yours! All the kingdoms, all the riches, all the power and glory will I give to you, if you will fall down and worship me.

CHRIST FIGURE: *Angrily* Leave, Satan! It is written: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

SATAN: *Throwing up his hands and speaking flippantly, as if he does not care.* I give up on you--for the time being, that is.

Satan hurries away. Christ Figure steps down from elevated area, kneels to pray.

CHRIST FIGURE: *Gazing up* Oh My Father in Heaven, I will praise thee with all my heart, and I will glorify thy name forever more. You have led me out of temptation. You have delivered my soul from the evil one. Great is thy mercy toward me. The kingdom of heaven is thine, Oh Lord. The kingdoms of this world are as thy footstool. All power is thine, Oh Father. All glory. So be it forever. *Bows head. Cf. Psalms 86:12, 13 and Lord's Prayer.*

Three angels enter. One bears loaves of bread, one a platter of fruit, the third a pitcher of water. Angels go to kneeling Christ Figure, form a semi-circle around him.

1ST ANGEL: Jesus, thou Son of God and Son of Man, we bring you food and water.

2ND ANGEL: God has sent us to you, for you are his beloved.

3RD ANGEL: Your Heavenly Father is well pleased. And, as it is written, He will "keep thee in all thy ways."

CURTAIN

Interlude between Scene 1 and Scene 2.

Spotlight returns to the feast table. All express their pleasure in the way Matthew has told them of the Temptation. All speak, practically at the same time, as follows:

Jairus: Remarkable! Absolutely remarkable!

Elhanan: What an unusual event! Satan himself was there!

Tebah: Thank you, Honorable Matthew, for telling us this!

Jeriah: Jesus was tempted, even as we are tempted.

Levi: Grandfather, now I know what "temptation" means.

JAIRUS: Yes, Son. Temptation is real. *turns to Matthew* Your scribe should write that in the book just as you told it.

MATTHEW: Hoshea, did you hear our host's suggestion?

HOSHEA: Yes, Sir, and I've already done it. I wrote the whole thing, as fast as you were telling it.

MATTHEW: That's good. *Turns to man from Samaria* Honorable Tebah, I'm anxious to hear you tell the story of your grandfather and the day he met Jesus the Christ.

TEBAH: It will be a pleasure to tell my grandfather's story. *Stands up* My grandfather's name was Tebah, the same as mine, but he was always called "the Leper of Samaria"--even after Jesus healed him. "The Leper of Samaria!" That

name followed him all the rest of his days, and he was proud of it. He never tired of telling what had happened. He would gather all of his grandsons around him--like a rabbi teaching a class--and he would say:

"My sons, had it not been for Jesus the Christ, the great physician sent from heaven, I would not be here. And you would not be here. Many years ago I was a leper, living outside the gates of a certain city--with nine other lepers. We had been cast out, as the custom was. We lived as best we could. Ragged, sick beggars we were--waiting for people to throw us bread.

"Because of the law, no one could come near us. And when we saw anyone approaching, we had to be forever crying out: 'Unclean! Unclean! Unclean!...'"

Voice trails off; light shifts to Scene 2.

Scene 2

Scene 2. Outside a city wall, not far from the gate. Ten ragged lepers, some men, some women, sit and lie on the ground--bemoaning their fate.

1ST LEPER: Of all people on earth, I know we lepers are the most wretched. Here we sit, day after day, waiting to die.

2ND LEPER, *a woman*: I'm so hungry.

3RD LEPER: I could stand the hunger, if there were any hope. But there is no hope. I know we will die, right here beside this city gate.

A man and woman come out of the city gate. The man carries in his arms a listless looking child, wrapped in a blanket. The woman has a large basket.

4TH & 5TH LEPERS: *Loudly, not in unison* Unclean! Unclean! Unclean!

1ST LEPER: *Wailing tone* Bread! Bread! Give us bread!

The man and woman are startled. They hurry away from lepers. The woman covers the child's face with the blanket, then glances back at the lepers. She places her hand on her husband's arm and he stops momentarily until she can take a loaf of bread out of her basket and tosses it back toward the lepers. The couple hurries on. Second Leper runs and grabs up the bread and tears it into pieces for her companions. All eat ravenously.

10TH LEPER: I wonder if our friend Simon will bring food today.

2ND LEPER: I pray to the Lord he does. But he may not, because tomorrow is the Sabbath.

7TH LEPER: Raising himself up on his elbow. Friend, I don't know why you bother to keep up with the days of the week. Every day is so bad.

Five people come through the city gate. The first two are a teenage girl and her tottering, enfeebled old grandfather. She leads him, and it is apparent the old man suffers from palsy. The second three are a boy and two blind men. The boy leads the first man, and the second man holds on to the other's cloak sleeve.

4TH & 5th LEPERS: *Loudly, not in unison* Unclean! Unclean! We're lepers!
Unclean!

The five travelers get away from the lepers and hurry on.

2ND LEPER: They didn't have any bread to throw to us.

8TH LEPER, *an old woman*: Patience, my child. Patience. I see more people coming. Two of the women have baskets!

2ND LEPER: Yes! Maybe they have bread in those baskets!

Two women, helping a third one who is on crutches, come through the city gate.

4TH & 5th LEPERS: *Loudly* Lepers! Lepers! Unclean! Unclean!

Woman nearest lepers tosses a cake of bread to group; the three hurry on as fast as the cripple can walk. Second Leper picks up bread, divides it with others.

4TH LEPER: These are sick and afflicted people passing by! Where do you suppose they're all going?

5TH LEPER: I have no idea. It seems strange, doesn't it?

Citizen Simon comes to gate with basket of food, but does not approach lepers.

SIMON: *Calling* My friends! A bit of food for you! *Sets basket down, spreads a cloth on the ground and lays the food on it. Picks up basket and backs away.*

ALL LEPERS: *Not in unison; rather, some say one thing, some another.* Thank you, Simon! You're our only friend! Simon, you keep us from starving! God bless you for the bread! Thank you! Thank you!

10TH LEPER: *Calling* Friend Simon, can you please tell us where all those sick people were going?

SIMON: *Calling back* To see the Great Physician! Jesus of Nazareth! He's over in the next village--healing everybody! I'm not sick myself. I just like to see him.

And I like to hear him teach! He teaches in parables! *Hurries on*

Second Leper and another woman leper dash to get the food. They gather up the four corners of the cloth and bring the whole lot to their companions. All crowd in and begin to devour the food.

1ST LEPER: *Calling after Simon* Tell this Jesus to come heal us!

4TH LEPER: *To First Leper, as both go where food is laid out.* Have you lost your mind? Nobody can heal a leper!

1ST LEPER: *Resignedly* I know. That was just wishful thinking. No physician can touch us, much less heal us.

10TH LEPER: I've heard of this Man from Nazareth. One day, I hope to see him--whether he can heal me or not.

5TH LEPER: That's a strange thing for you to say--you being a Samaritan. This Jesus is a Jew, and as you well know, Jews and Samaritans don't have any dealings with one another. That is, of course, unless you're lepers--like all ten of us. Somehow, things like that don't matter anymore to us.

10TH LEPER: I know he's a Jew. Folks say he is a great prophet.

By this time all the food is gone. Second Leper leans over to pick up last crumb.
2ND LEPER: Well, this is the last crumb. *Puts food in her mouth, takes up cloth, folds it and hands it to Eighth Leper, a woman who is very old, very ragged.*

Here, Old Grandmother. Your dress is worn so thin you need this. Tonight you can wrap up in it to keep warm.

Old woman takes cloth, wraps it around her shoulders, with help of nearest leper.
8TH LEPER: Oh, thank you! *Draws cloth closer I'm always cold.*

Citizen Simon and the Christ Figure, accompanied by the many people the Christ has just healed, approach.

1ST LEPER: Here come all those people back! Look! The blind ones can see! The lame can walk! They're all well!

2ND LEPER: That's the Prophet of Nazareth with 'em!

A ripple of excitement runs through the group of lepers. Several shield their eyes against the sun, to get a better view.

4TH, 5th, 10th, 2nd LEPER: *Crying out* Unclean! Unclean!

7TH, 8th LEPER: *At same time as others* We're lepers! We're lepers! Don't come near!

Crowd and Simon hurry on to city gate and stop to watch. Christ Figure comes on towards ten lepers.

ALL LEPERS: *Much disturbed* Unclean! Unclean! Unclean! *Those who can walk scramble back. Others drag themselves along the ground to move away from the Christ Figure.*

CHRIST FIGURE: Do not run away. Come to me. *Beckons.*

Lepers come back a pace or two, stop. Christ Figure moves closer to them.

CHRIST FIGURE: Do you not know who I am? Do you not know that our Father in Heaven has given me power to cleanse you of your disease?

10TH LEPER: Sir, how could you cleanse us? No man can heal a leper!

CHRIST FIGURE: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." *Matthew 19:26* "Since I am come into the world, the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." *Matthew 11:5*

10TH LEPER: *falling to his knees before the Christ* Then, Master, have mercy on us and heal us! All ten of us!

All lepers kneel. Christ Figure walks among them, placing his hand on each one's head. He speaks slowly as he goes from one to another.

CHRIST FIGURE: Be it unto each of you, according to your faith. Be cleansed of the dread leprosy.

One by one the lepers un-bandage their arms, or legs, or hands or feet and gasp in delight to see their sores gone. The Christ Figure keeps talking.

Go to your priest. You know what the Law of Moses requires. Go show yourself to the priest that he may declare you clean. Obey the Law and offer the gift which Moses commanded.

Lepers leap to their feet, filled with joy and laughter. They throw aside their bandages and all speak at once, to each other, to themselves--as all except Tenth Leper hurry to the city gate and go in, not even looking back. The crowd at the gate moves aside. The exclamations are as follows:

1st Leper: Look, everybody! It's a miracle!

2nd Leper: I'm cured! Look! We're all cured!

3rd Leper: My leprosy is gone! Completely gone!

4th Leper: Oh, this is wonderful! Wonderful! Look!

5th Leper: He cured us! Look! It's true!

6th Leper: I can't believe what I'm seeing! I'm clean! Clean!

7th Leper: What a miracle! The leprosy has left us!

8th Leper: We're all well! Just look at us! This is great!

9th Leper: Let's go! This is the greatest thing I ever saw!

10th Leper: Never in my life have I seen such a wonder!

As Tenth Leper is about to enter the city gate, he turns abruptly and hurries back to the Christ Figure. Kneeling before Him, Tenth Leper tries to express gratitude. Players, please see St. Luke 17:11-19

10TH LEPER: Master, Master, thank you! Glory be to God! You've healed us. Even me, a Samaritan. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you forever! All glory to God, forever!

CHRIST FIGURE: Were there not ten of you healed? Should not the other nine return and give glory to God?

10TH LEPER: Yes, Master, they should.

CHRIST FIGURE: Arise and go your way, Samaritan. Your faith has made you whole.

CURTAIN

Spotlight returns to the feast table.

TEBAH: *Concluding his story* And so, my grandfather returned to his native country, Samaria. And there he lived a long life, a good life. Each time Grandfather told his story, he would end it by saying: "The last thing Jesus the Christ, the great physician sent from heaven, said to me was, 'Your faith has made you whole.'" *Sits down.*

MATTHEW: Thank you, Tebah. It was good of you to tell this story. Many times when Jesus healed the sick, his final word to each was, "Your faith has made you whole." During the three years I walked by his side, the Master healed multitudes of people.

Some, he even raised from the dead! Like our host's daughter Miriam. He raised her from the dead, when she was a little girl, here in Capernaum.

JAIRUS: Ah, yes! And every day of my life I thank God that Jesus brought my only child back to life! Matthew, write all his miracles in your book.

MATTHEW: I plan to record as many miracles as I can. And his teachings! And as many parables as I can remember.

Miriam slips in, whispers to her father, leaves. Matthew continues talking.

And, of course, I must list the names of the Twelve he chose to be his apostles. There was Simon Peter, and James, and John--

JAIRUS: *Getting up and interrupting Matthew* Matthew, forgive me for interrupting. Miriam just told me that my Capernaum guest, the old sad soldier, is arriving.

MATTHEW: *All guests murmur their pleasure* That's good.

JAIRUS: *Hurriedly, confidentially* This old Roman has an unusual story to tell. He was in the band of soldiers assigned to Pontius Pilate when Jesus was crucified.

Starts toward doorway, returns

Perhaps I should warn you that he will be wearing gloves. Just don't pay that any attention. He wears them day and night, year in and year out!

Matthew hurries to doorway, where Miriam is ushering Atticus in. Guests at table lean together in a huddle, murmur their amazement at and interest in the late-arriving guest. Their comments are as follows:

Tebah: Gloves, day and night?

Elhanan: I never heard of such a thing!

Jeriah: How odd! Wonder why he wears gloves!

Matthew: Perhaps he will tell us why.

Levi: He has never told me.

MATTHEW: Sh-h! Here they come.

All straighten up, become quiet.

JAIRUS: *Leading Atticus in.* Atticus! Good to see you! Come in, come in. Welcome to my feast! *Stops at table* I want you to meet all my out-of-town guests.

Guests and Levi stand up momentarily and each bows and sits down as he is introduced.

JAIRUS: Gentlemen, this is Atticus, my Roman friend. Now, Atticus, this is Tebah, from Samaria.

This is Elhanan, from Jerusalem.

This is Jeriah, from Bethlehem.

This is our guest of honor, my old friend Matthew the apostle.

And, of course, you know Levi, my only grandson. *Turns toward scribe.*

And back over here we have Hoshea the scribe, who is writing down details of all the events we talk about.

Hoshea bobs up, nods, and sits back down.

ATTICUS: It is my pleasure to meet each of you. I am not worthy to come to such a gathering. But Jairus--I call him "Jairus-the-Generous"--insisted.

JAIRUS: Here, sit down, sit down. *Gets Atticus settled.*

MATTHEW: *To Atticus* Sir, I'm sure Jairus has told you that I have begun a fascinating task: the writing of a book about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, our Redeemer King!

ATTICUS: *Uneasily.* Yes. Uh-- Yes, he told me about your book.

MATTHEW: Part of the manuscript is finished. But much is yet to be written. It is my great desire to give an accurate account of how Jesus was crucified and then tell of his resurrection. But there will be a part missing, unless you--or some other soldier who was in Jerusalem that day--can help me.

You see, that dreadful night of the Passover--right after we had finished the Passover feast--Jesus was seized and carried before the authorities. And we disciples fled! We hid! It was exactly as the Master had said it would be. The shepherd was smitten, and the sheep scattered.

Next morning, some of us slipped our way to the place where Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate. We could hear the crowds crying "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

ATTICUS: *Nodding his head.* Yes, I heard the crowds, too.

MATTHEW: We saw Pontius Pilate wash his hands so ceremoniously *Rubs hands together* and we heard Pilate order that Jesus be put to death. Then, the Master was led away. But none of us know what took place next. *See Matthew 27:27-32*

ATTICUS: *With much feeling and remorse.* Oh, Sir, a dreadful thing took place! Daily, I grieve that I had a part in it! With my own hands! My hands, Sir!

Stands, holds out gloved hands.

These hands are my ruin! I cannot bear to look at them! They did it! These very hands! They made that crown of thorns!

Atticus goes into something of a frenzy.

ATTICUS: Your God in heaven will never forgive me! I can't forgive myself! I can feel the thorns in my fingers! I can see the blood on his brow!

Oh that crown of thorns! That crown! That crown!

It haunts me! It drives me almost mad! Night after night I dream--

Jairus hurries to Atticus, lays his hand on his shoulder to comfort and calm him.

JAIRUS: *Interrupting, in soothing tone* Yes, Atticus. We know. We know your remorse. And we understand. *Brightens tone* Maybe you could describe for Matthew what went on in the governor's palace, or tell him what duties the

Roman soldiers had that day. Then, if you can bear to do it, tell him how it came about that the soldiers mocked Jesus and made sport of him.

Leads Atticus back to table. Both sit back down.

ATTICUS: *Now composed* Ah, Sir, there was a whole cohort of Roman soldiers assigned to Jerusalem during the Passover festival--between five and six hundred men. The rumor was that Pontius Pilate was afraid there would be an uprising during the festival. A good number of us soldiers were sent to the Antonia, the fortress where Jesus was brought before Pilate for trial.

That Friday morning, we all knew there was to be a crucifixion but we didn't know who it would be. The detail I was in had been assigned to guard three prisoners--two wretched old thieves and a notorious murderer named Barabbas.

Curtain opens for ACT III, Scene 1, as Atticus continues narrative.

The thieves knew they couldn't break out of their chains; they didn't even try. They just sat huddled over in the corner. But we had to watch that Barabbas. He was a wild one.

While Jesus was outside, standing before Pilate, we had us a dice game going. And I remember our commanding officer had left his scarlet cape there in the cell... *Voice trails off.*

Scene 1 - A cell in the Antonia, adjacent to the Judgment Seat where Pontius Pilate is questioning Jesus of Nazareth. Three Roman soldiers squat on the floor, rolling dice. Two listless thieves and the wild-eyed Barabbas are chained in one corner. The only furnishings are one stool, a bare table and bench, a water pitcher and cup. A scarlet cape, part of a Roman Centurion's dress uniform, is lying half on the table, half on the bench. Second Soldier has the dice.

CROWD: *Off-stage--loudly, in unison* Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!

1st SOLDIER: I wish that crowd would quiet down.

2nd SOLDIER: Yeah! *Throws dice, laughs at poor score.* Ha! Guess this is just not my lucky day. Your turn, Atticus.

1st SOLDIER: *Reaching for dice.* All right! Gim'me those cold bones! Lem'me warm 'em up! *Shakes dice, blows his breath on them.*

Come on, you bones! Get hot! This is my lucky day! Roll your little selves right! *Casts dice.* Six! Not bad! Not bad! *Scoops up dice, hands them to Third Soldier.*

CROWD: *Offstage, very loudly, in unison* Crucify! Crucify! He deserves to die!

3rd SOLDIER: I wish that crowd would leave! I can't concentrate with all that racket. *Throws dice* Rats! *Picks up dice, hands them to Second Soldier.*

2nd SOLDIER: *Shaking dice* I wonder who's gonna be crucified.

CROWD: *Offstage, chanting loudly* He's not our king! He's not our king! He's not our king! Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!

BARABBAS: *Coming as close to soldiers as his chain will allow.* You want to know who's going to be nailed up this morning? I can tell you. Jesus, that prophet from Nazareth! That's who!

1ST SOLDIER: Don't be too sure, Barabbas. I heard it's gonna be you!

BARABBAS: Not me! I'm not dying today.

Soldiers continue game.

1ST THIEF: Yeah, Barabbas. It's gonna be you and us thieves.

2ND THIEF: *With disgust* Yeah. Somehow, down in me, I got a feelin' that today's the day. All three of us are gonna get it.

BARABBAS: Oh, no! Not me!

1ST SOLDIER: I wonder what this Nazareth fellow has done.

BARABBAS: Nothing, except perform miracles. And some of his followers want to make him king.

1ST SOLDIER: *To Barabbas.* Is it true that every year during this big festival the governor sets one prisoner free?

BARABBAS: That's the custom. Every year, one poor wretch gets out of his chains and goes free.

1ST SOLDIER: You Jews have strange customs. *Rolls dice again.*

CROWD: *Offstage, in unison, distinctly* Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas!

Barabbas jumps to his feet. Soldiers abruptly stop dice game.

BARABBAS: *So excited he can hardly speak.* Did-- Did-- Did you soldiers hear what I heard? They said: "Release Barabbas!" I'm free! I'm free! I'm free!

Amazed soldiers and thieves speak practically at the same time, as follows:

1ST Thief: You lucky dog!

2ND Thief: Maybe they won't crucify anybody today!

2ND Soldier: I can't believe such a thing!

1ST Soldier: Barabbas, Pilate surely won't let you go! You started an insurrection, and I heard that you're a murderer!

3RD Soldier: You can't tell what Pilate will do.

BARABBAS: *Holding out chained hands* Quick! Take off these chains! I'm free and I'm leaving this place!

1ST SOLDIER: Hold your camels, Barabbas. We don't do nothin' without orders.

Soldiers squat on floor, resume game.

BARABBAS: *Exasperated.* But you heard the crowd! You know the custom! *Tugs at chains*

Centurion enters, bringing the Christ Figure, whose hands are bound with a rope. Centurion is wearing his scarlet plumed helmet, but he has forgotten his cape, which is still lying in the cell.

CENTURION: *Sternly.* Break it up there, soldiers!

Three hop to their feet, come to attention

We have a change of prisoners. Orders of Pilate. *Leads Christ Figure over toward Barabbas.* Let Barabbas go, and--

BARABBAS: I'm free! Free! Free!

CENTURION: Quiet, Barabbas. *Turning back to soldiers* Put the chains on this prisoner.

1ST SOLDIER: Yes, Sir!

CENTURION: The crucifixion is set for nine o'clock, but I'll assign that to another detail. And I'll send in Felix to do the flogging. Is that all clear?

1ST SOLDIER: Flogging, Sir?

CENTURION: Pilate ordered the limit--thirty-nine lashes.

All soldiers, thieves, even Barabbas groan at the thought of such cruelty.

CENTURION: Atticus?

1ST SOLDIER: Yes, Sir?

CENTURION: When the crucifixion detail comes to get these three prisoners, tell them that Pontius Pilate is having a special sign made up to nail up over this new man. It's to read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS.

In case the detail forgets it, Atticus, I'm holding you personally responsible to see that the sign gets nailed on his cross.

1ST SOLDIER: Yes, Sir.

CENTURION: You can release Barabbas now. That's all.

Soldiers salute. Centurion returns salute, leaves.

BARABBAS: *Impatiently* You heard your Centurion! Get these things off!

First and Second Soldiers take chains off Barabbas, fasten them on Christ Figure.

BARABBAS: *Running towards door, clasps hands together to utter a spontaneous prayer, of sorts--not a real prayer.* Oh, God in heaven, if you're up there, thank you for sending somebody to die in my place! *Dashes on out.*

Third Soldier sits down on corner of table, idly picks up scarlet robe and looks at it. He quickly hops down from table, rejoins his companions--taking the robe with him. He is fairly bubbling with the idea that has just occurred to him.

3RD SOLDIER: Say fellows, I've got a brilliant idea!

2ND SOLDIER: What?

3RD SOLDIER: It's not every day that we get to guard a king! I think we ought to show our prisoner a little respect! Pay him a little homage!

1ST SOLDIER: Right!

3RD SOLDIER: First, O King, let's take off this thing you have on. *Rips cloak off Christ Figure.* And we'll let you wear this robe of scarlet! *Drapes Centurion's cape around Christ Figure. Christ Figure's cloak falls to floor.*

Scarlet is far more regal than this drab cloak. *Picks up Christ Figure's cloak, holds it, and turns it over in his hand*

Why, your old cloak doesn't even have one seam in it! Must'a been made in Nazareth! Your hometown! Right? I hesitate to tell you this, O King, but they tell me that "nothing good ever comes out of Nazareth!" *fusses over the way the robe hangs on Christ Figure, as he continues to hold Christ Figure's cloak in one hand*

Furthermore, I heard that it's only in Nazareth that these cloaks without seam are Tmade! *Tosses Christ Figure's cloak aside, bows, backs away*

2ND SOLDIER: A king is not a king without a throne! *Grabs up stool and takes it to Christ Figure. Here, O King, is your throne! Sit upon your throne and reign! Roughly forces Christ Figure to sit down on stool, backs off to look at him--Christ Figure shows no emotion*

Somehow, you don't look much like a king! But you are! Pontius Pilate says you're "KING OF THE JEWS."

1ST SOLDIER: What our king needs is a crown!

3RD SOLDIER: By all means, a crown! *Turns to First Soldier Atticus, Go get the king's crown!*

1ST SOLDIER: Where is his crown?

3RD SOLDIER: Why, offhand, I'd say it's right out in the courtyard--growing on one of those thorn bushes. You get the crown, and I'll find the king a scepter. No king can reign without a scepter.

First and Third Soldiers exit.

2ND SOLDIER: *Pouring a cup of water, with a flourish* O King, perhaps you would care for a bit of wine! *Holds out cup to Christ Figure, who pays no attention*

What? You don't care for prison wine that's somehow as clear as water? As you please. *Sets water back on table, turns to thieves.*

Would one of you gentlemen like to entertain the king? Tell him a story! Tell him some of your exploits! Your great adventures! Kings like to hear long stories.

1ST THIEF: I don't know no stories.

2ND THIEF: Me neither.

2ND SOLDIER: Then, sing him a song! A song of the thieves! Come, come, cheer him up! See how sad the king looks!

1ST THIEF: I can't sing no song.

2ND THIEF: Me neither.

2ND SOLDIER: Aw, you two fellows don't know how to have a little fun! Here it is, your last day on earth, and you're not even trying to enjoy it!

Third Soldier enters, talking, and carrying a long reed. He bows before Christ Figure.

3RD SOLDIER: O King, I bear in my humble hands your scepter! See! It is of purest gold. Take it, O King! Hold it in your right hand. *Tries to give Christ*

Figure reed, gives up and leans it up against Christ Figure in such a way that it rests on his shoulder. This beautiful scepter is a symbol of your authority!

Christ Figure merely closes his eyes.

2ND SOLDIER: *Grabbing up reed and hitting Christ Figure O King, I think we'll have to wake you up with your own scepter. Laughs, whacks Christ Figure a second and third time, puts reed back against shoulder of Christ Figure.*

3RD SOLDIER: *Laughing Who ever saw such a king as this!*

First Soldier comes striding in, carrying a freshly made crown of thorns that still has one long sprig dangling from the side.

1ST SOLDIER: *Putting last dangling sprig in place O King, here is your magnificent crown! holds it out for Christ Figure to see*

But I am going to let one of your other loyal subjects have the honor of placing it on your head! Hands crown to Third Soldier Because, O King, I tore my hands to pieces getting the cursed thing made! Nurses his hands, rubs fingers and sucks out thorns. To other soldiers: Look at the blood on my fingers!

3RD SOLDIER: *Dropping crown, picking it up again, and speaking to First Soldier, all at the same time Atticus, you rat! I never saw so many thorns! Turns crown carefully, examines it I ought to put this thorny thing on your head. But I won't.*

Third Soldier goes to Christ Figure, shoves the crown onto his head. Christ Figure remains silent, motionless.

3RD SOLDIER: *This lovely creation was intended to adorn the brow of the KING OF THE JEWS! Steps back and turns to other soldier and to thieves*

Come, oh loyal subjects, let us--thieves and soldiers alike--humble ourselves and bow down before the king!

ALL SOLDIERS: *bowing low, speaking loud, in unison Hail! King of the Jews! Hail! Hail!*

Thieves laugh loudly, slap their hands against their legs, but do not bow. While soldiers are still bowed down to the floor, the Centurion comes bursting in--looking for his scarlet cape.

CENTURION: *Has anybody seen my robe? Sa-aaay! What's going on here?*

Soldiers snap to attention, stuttering in their confusion. Third Soldier grabs scarlet cape from the Christ Figure, to hand it to the Centurion.

1ST SOLDIER: *Uh— Uh-- Uh, nothing, Sir! Just a little fun!*

2ND SOLDIER: *Sir, We-- We-- We're just trying to while away the time!*

3RD SOLDIER: *It's nothing, Sir! We meant no harm! Here's your robe, Sir!*

Centurion snatches cape from soldier.

CURTAIN

Spotlight directs audience's attention back to feast table. Soldier, ATTICUS, talks on.

ATTICUS: *Gravely* So, gentlemen, you can understand why all my days are sad, why I still feel those thorns in my hands.

I made that crown of thorns. And the One who wore it was THE SON OF GOD!

My Centurion said so! That afternoon when the prisoner from Nazareth was hanging there on the cross, between those two thieves, a great darkness came over all Jerusalem. And there was an earthquake! All of us soldiers were frightened. Even our Centurion was afraid. He looked up at the one you call the Christ and said, "Truly, this was the SON OF GOD!" *Turns to Matthew*

Sir, you are writing a book about the SON OF GOD!

MATTHEW: *Quietly* Yes, Old Soldier, I know.

ATTICUS: Tell in your book about the crown of thorns, if you must. But please don't mention my guilty hands. *Looks at hands, sits back down at table*

MATTHEW: Atticus, take off your gloves.

ATTICUS: *As if he can't believe what Matthew has said* Take off my gloves?

MATTHEW: That day of the crucifixion we disciples were there--standing close enough to hear every word Jesus said. He spoke to the thieves, to his mother, to others. He prayed to his Heavenly Father. Long before the great darkness and the earthquake, he uttered these words:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Atticus, he was praying for you and the soldiers who nailed him on the cross. That means you, and your hands, were forgiven that day! So, throw away the gloves.

ATTICUS: Is this true?

MATTHEW: Yes.

Atticus slowly removes gloves; all at table murmur approval.

ATTICUS: Joyously. I'm forgiven! This is a wonderful thing! *Turns to Matthew.*

Sir, I'll use my hands! I'll help you finish the book! I'll do anything! Anything you say!

MATTHEW: That's most kind of you.

JAIRUS: Matthew, I've been wondering how you will end the book. What will be the last thing you tell about the Christ?

MATTHEW: I will close the book with the Master's last words to us--His Great Commission. It was his command to us to go to all nations.

I remember it was some forty days after his resurrection. And we disciples had gone back to Galilee, to the place where he had said he would meet us. There on the hillside... *voice trails off, curtain opens on Scene 2*

Scene 2

Scene 2 -- A hillside in Galilee, where, after the resurrection, the eleven disciples are standing--and some sitting on the ground--waiting for the Christ to appear. Players, please see St. Matthew 27:16-20. Christ Figure walks in, wearing an all-white robe. Disciples rise and then kneel before him, in attitude of worship.

CHRIST FIGURE: *Placing his hands on the shoulders of the two disciples nearest him* Now, my beloved, my chosen ones, soon I shall go to the Father. Yet, I shall always be with you.

You have seen how "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go... therefore, and teach ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

CURTAIN

Spotlight returns to feast table.

JAIRUS: *Rising from table* Come, my dear guests. The East Wind has come up, and the garden here is a bit chilly now. Let's go inside, and talk more.

Guests start to get up, settle back down as Matthew speaks.

MATTHEW: Jairus, before we go inside, let me say a word to all your guests.

JAIRUS: Of course.

MATTHEW: *Sincerely* Thank you, each of you, for the four stories, and more, you have told this night about Jesus the Christ. "The blessing of the Lord be upon you..." *Psalms 129:8.*

JAIRUS: *Warmly* Ah, Matthew, "We bless you in the name of the Lord." *Psalms 129:8b.*

ALL OTHERS AT TABLE: *Murmuring in unison* "In the name of the Lord." *All rise, leave garden area slowly, talking pleasantly in undertones. Atticus leaves his gloves on table. Levi picks them up, looks at them briefly, puts them down, and hurries to catch up with Jairus. Matthew stops at scribe's table and takes one of the scrolls.*

LEVI: *Tugging at his grandfather's sleeve* Grandfather?

JAIRUS: What is it, Levi?

LEVI: May I ask the honorable Matthew a special favor?

JAIRUS: Why, Son, I-- I-- I suppose--

MATTHEW: Of course, Levi! What sort of favor? *Comes over to Levi and Jairus*

LEVI: Sir, when you get the stories about Jesus finished, may I read 'em?

MATTHEW: Sure, son. *Unrolls scroll for Levi to see* These will be stories for you, for everybody! Stories for all nations!

Three follow others, go inside.

THE END