

AT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

A Musical Play for Easter
by
Jewell Ellen Smith

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Nonprofit groups may perform any adaptation of this play without charge. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version. Stage directions are *italicized*, while editorial comments are [*italicized and in brackets*]. This play was originally performed at the Officer's Club of Ft. Rucker, Alabama, followed by a Cross of Flowers Ceremony.

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Time: The week of the Jewish Passover Festival, when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. About 31 AD.

Place: Jerusalem and Emmaus, a village seven miles out in the country.

Dominant Purpose and Theme: To tell the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection in a new way. To show that the cross on which Jesus the Christ died is a symbol of eternal life.

Key Verse: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

--John 3:14,15

Background Scriptures:

1. Simon of Cyrene compelled to take the cross: Mark 15:20-24; Matt. 27:32; Luke 23:26
2. Jesus talks to weeping Daughters of Jerusalem: Luke 23:27-30
3. On the Emmaus Road: Luke 24:13-35
4. Moses lifts up the brazen serpent: Numbers 21:4-9

(John 3:14-15; 8:28)

Music:

1. Dirge sung by Daughters of Jerusalem (with solo lines)
2. Solo by Miriam the Prophetess. [*this music is not available. Suitable music may be substituted*].
3. Solo by Simon of Cyrene.

Length of Play: About 45 minutes.

Players: 8 men, 25 women, 1 boy and 1 baby.

Characters: (In order of appearance):

NA-a-rah: a servant girl in Emmaus

HUL-dah: the wife of Cle-o-pas

CLE~o-pas: a follower of Jesus, who lives in Emmaus

Simon the Cyrenian: woodcarver from North Africa, kinsman of Cleopas

Mi-ca-iah (Mi-KA-ya): the wife of Simon

Alexander: six-year-old son of Simon

Rufus: one-year-old son of Simon

Daughters of Jerusalem: a women's charity group which furnishes drugged wine for prisoners crucified by the Roman authorities (20 singers)

Daughter Spokesman: leader of the women of mercy

Centurion: Roman army officer in charge of the Crucifixion

1st and 2nd Thieves: prisoners to be crucified (no lines)

CHRIST FIGURE: Jesus of Nazareth

Followers of Jesus: friends and disciples (some 5 persons, no lines)

First and Second Soldiers: members of crucifixion detail

Children of Israel: Israelite people en route from Egypt to Promised Land (25).

Miriam the Prophetess: sister of Moses.

1st, 2nd and 3rd Israelite Spokesmen: three of many bitten by serpents.

Moses: leader of the Israelites.

Notes *re* double roles: Huldah and Daughter Spokesman can be done by the same person.

Na-a-rah can be soloist for Daughters of Jerusalem.

All Daughters (except Huldah) can be Children of Israel.

Miriam can be a Daughter.

Five Followers of Jesus can be Children of Israel.

1st Thief can be Moses.

2nd Thief can be Israelite.

Résumé of action, Scene by Scene:

ACT I, Scene 1

On Thursday afternoon of Passover week, Cleopas comes home to Emmaus, bringing with him a kinsman from North Africa, Simon the Cyrenian, and his family, whom he has met by chance in Jerusalem.

Huldah, the wife of Cleopas, makes the kinsmen welcome, provides refreshments, and promises young Alexander that he can ride a goat -- "Old Zeb."

The men talk of how Simon will set up a woodcarving shop in Jerusalem, of how a yoke for an ox will be the perfect advertising sign to put up over the shop's doorway. Cleopas points out that Jerusalem is not the perfect place to live "now that Rome rules". He tells Simon much about his special friend Jesus of Nazareth and promises to take Simon to meet Jesus, on Friday when they plan to go back into the city.

Scene2

Early Friday morning Simon and Cleopas set out for Jerusalem, to rent a shop for Simon.

Just as they reach the outskirts of the city they encounter a group of women Cleopas identifies as the “Daughters of Jerusalem”. The women weep and sing as they carry drugged wine toward Golgotha, where a crucifixion is to take place. The wine is for the men who are to be put to death.

A Roman Centurion charges in, clearing the way for the procession of three prisoners who are to be crucified. Cleopas is horrified to see that one of the prisoners is Jesus. Roman soldiers drive the prisoners forward. Jesus collapses.

Before Simon can realize what is happening, the Centurion forces him to carry the cross for Jesus.

ACT II, Scene 1

Three days later (on the first day of the week) Simon and Cleopas walk back along the road to Emmaus, talking of the crucifixion and of the report that Jesus is risen from the grave. At the wayside well which marks the halfway point between Jerusalem and Emmaus, they meet a stranger (Jesus himself) who goes along with them. “But their eyes are holden that they should not know him.”

Jesus opens to them the Old Testament scriptures which tell of the Messiah and explains in detail how it was that Moses “lifted up the serpent in the wilderness” to save the Israelites.

Scene 1-A

In the wilderness, near Mount Hor, in the time of Moses. The Children of Israel, on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, have been bitten by fiery serpents because they sinned against God.

As the Israelites lay moaning and dying, the Prophetess Miriam tries to comfort them. Finally she goes to find her brother Moses, their leader, and asks him to pray to Jehovah that He will spare the people.

While Moses is away in the mountain praying, Miriam sings of trusting in Jehovah. “God’s mercies are new every morning,” Miriam declares in her solo.

Moses comes, bringing with him the brazen serpent that God has commanded him to make. Moses lifts up the cross on which the brass snake is fastened and quotes God’s promise that those who look at the brass serpent and believe will live. The people look, believe, and live.

Scene2

At dusk, in Emmaus, Huldah and Micaiah finish supper and are downstairs getting the children ready for bed when Simon, Cleopas, and their traveling companion arrive.

The three men sit down to eat, and when the stranger breaks the bread and blesses it, Cleopas and Simon recognize him as the Christ! Both are jubilant! While they’re talking excitedly to each other, the Christ disappears.

When the men turn around and discover that Jesus is gone, they decide to hurry back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples they have seen the risen Lord.

Young Alexander runs in, in his night clothes, anxious to tell his father about riding “Old Zeb,” the goat. Instead, Simon tells his son of carrying the cross for Jesus.

Alexander doesn’t know what a cross is. Using the two pieces of cedar he had planned to make into a “Yoke Sign” for his shop, Simon shows his son what a cross is and what it means. He vows that he will make the Cross his symbol for life.

Simon sings a solo “At the Sign of the Cross”. The entire cast joins him in the last refrain, for a Grand Finale effect.

The End

SCRIPT

ACT I, Scene 1

It is late afternoon in Emmaus, on Thursday of the Jewish Passover Festival. At the home of Cleopas, his wife Huldah and the servant girl Naarah are packing cakes of unleavened bread into two baskets. These Huldah plans to take to the bane of her uncle, where residents of Emmaus are to celebrate the Passover feast. Huldah is impatient that Cleopas has not yet returned from Jerusalem. The room is simply furnished with a low table, some stools and benches. In one corner on a shelf are large water jars, a pitcher, two basins and towels.

NA-A-RAH: Ma'am, I never saw so mach unleavened bread in my whole life! you want me to stack all these cakes in the baskets?

HULDAH: Yes, Naarah. My uncle has invited everybody in Emmaus to come to the feast, and I promised I'd bring plenty of bread. Each person must have a piece of unleavened bread. That's part of the Passover tradition. *to herself* Ah, poor Uncle Euben! He's getting so old I know he thinks the feast tonight will be his last one. *turning to servant girl* Naarah, go look down the road to Jerusalem one more tine and see if you can see Master Cleopas coming!

NAARAH: Yes, Ma'am.

HULDAH: I can't imagine why Cleopas is so late! He was to be back at noon, and here it is almost sundown. When that man goes to Jerusalem, he never knows when to come home! Especially, if he meets up with his friends from Galilee.

NAARAH: Ma'am, what'd you say?

HULDAH: I was just thinking out loud. About my husband's friends from Galilee.

NAARAH: Yes, Ma'am. *goes to door, looks out* Oh, Ma'am! Master Cleopas is coming! And there are strangers with him!

HULDAH: *much irritated* Oh, no! What on earth will I feed them? Of all times for Cleopas to bring in strangers Our law of Moses tells us to show hospitality to strangers, but I don't think it means at Passover time! *runs to door to look for herself* You're right! A man, a woman, a small boy, and a baby. Quick, Naarah, go milk the goat! Those children will have to have milk to drink! Is there any plain bread in the cupboard?

NAARAH: *over her shoulder as she starts downstairs* Yes, Ma'am. And there's plenty of porridge left over, too.

HULDAH: Thank the LORD for that! *to herself* Of course I've got cheese and dried figs. And fresh grape juice. I had forgotten the grape juice. Getting refreshments for these people--whoever they are--won't be as bad as I thought! *smoothes down hair, brushes off dress, and hurries to the door to meet Cleopas and the strangers.*

Cleopas leads in Simon, his wife and children. Micaiah carries Rufus in her arms. Simon leads Alexander by the hand and carries several bundles. Cleopas has more of their luggage. All except Simon look quite weary.

CLEOPAS: *to his guests* Simon, I want you and Micaiah to meet my wife, Huldah. Huldah, these are our kinsmen from far away Cyrene--Simon and his wife Micaiah, and their fine sons, Alexander and Rufus.

HULDAH: *warmly* Oh, our kinsmen! I'm glad to know you!

SIMON: How do you do.

MICAIAH: How do you do. *to Alexander* Alexander, say "How do you do" to our cousin Huldah!

ALEXANDER: How do you do, Cousin Huldah.

HULDAH: *stooping over for Alexander's benefit* So you're Alexander! *To grownups* This is an unexpected pleasure! Welcome! Welcome to our home! Here, have a seat.

MICAIAH: Thank you. *sits on bench, still holding Rufus. Alexander climbs on bench beside his mother.*

SIMON: It's a blessing to be here! As I told Cleopas, it must have been Jehovah, the God of our Fathers, who caused us to meet this morning on the crowded streets of Jerusalem!

CLEOPAS: We hadn't been talking two minutes when we discovered our fathers were cousins! *relieving Simon of one of his bundles* Here, Simon, let me put these things over in the corner for you. And I'll get water for your feet.

Simon keeps talking as Cleopas goes for a basin of water and Huldah helps with the children.

SIMON: *to Huldah* Two months ago when we left North Africa, we had no idea we wouldn't get to Jerusalem till the very day of the Passover Feast! Every inn is filled! Every room taken! Except for the kindness of your husband, we'd be sleeping out on the streets tonight!

HULDAH: We're pleased to have you! *looks at Alexander and Rufus* It's been a long time since we had any children like Alexander and Rufus in our house!

ALEXANDER: *pulling on his mother's sleeve* Mother, I'm hungry!

MICAIAH: *whispering* Sh-h, Alexander! You're not hungry yet!

HULDAH: Of course Alexander is hungry! And tired, too, I know! Cousin Micaiah, let's take the children downstairs, where they can have something to eat, and some milk. *takes Alexander's hand and starts leading him toward the stairs* How old are you, Alexander?

ALEXANDER: I'm six years old! But Rufus is just one year old!

As the women and children are leaving, Simon plops down on a stool and groans to himself.

SIMON: Ah, I'm beat! Dead tired! *unlatches his sandals*

MICAIAH: Alexander, tell our Cousin Huldah what you are going to be when you get big!

ALEXANDER: When I get big, I'm going to be a woodcarver! Just like Father! Rufus is going to be a woodcarver, too!

HULDAH. Woodcarvers! Like your father! That will be very fine! I'll bet you and Rufus will grow up to be the best woodcarvers in the whole world! *voice trails off as group descends stairs*

CLEOPAS: *placing basin of water at Simon's feet* Here, Simon, bathe your weary feet in this. *places towel on nearby bench and draws up a stool for himself*

So, you plan to set up a woodcarving shop in Jerusalem?

SIMON: Yes, it'll be like a lifelong dream come true, to get to live in Jerusalem. Of course, as I told you, I was born in Cyrene but my father was born in Jerusalem, and he always wanted to come back. He brought me there once years ago--when I wasn't more than twelve years old.

The city has changed, but many trade routes come together there; so it's a good place for me to sell my wares.

CLEOPAS: Right! So many caravans pass through Jerusalem that the dust on the streets never settles! If it were not for the Romans, Jerusalem--all Judea, for that matter--would be a perfect place to live.

SIMON: The Romans are that bad, eh?

CLEOPAS: Rather bad. The officials always fear an uprising among our Jewish people. So they never let us forget that Rome rules! Of course, we have one law in our favor. The Romans can't draft our young men into their army. But there are other laws that are quite repressive!

SIMON: I didn't realize that!

CLEOPAS. Just as an example, there's a law that a Roman soldier can compel a man to carry his pack or his other gear for a whole Roman mile! *waves hand* Everything around here now is measured in Roman miles! From Jerusalem out here to Emmaus is seven Roman miles! And we Jews resent being made to serve the Romans like pack animals! But don't get me talking about the Romans! Let's talk about your work! What sort of items do you carve?

Simon is drying his feet and putting his sandals back on.

SIMON: *with much enthusiasm* Oh, I'll show you, soon as I get this sandal latched. *gets up* I have only a few small pieces with me. The larger stuff I sold before we left Cyrene.

Cleopas removes basin of water and Simon talks as he unpacks hand made wooden items and places them on one end of the table. These include walking staffs, candle holders, fruit baskets, small chests, animal figures, a yoke for oxen and two rather large pieces of wood, one short, the other long.

I carve all manner of things. Anything from small, ornate jewelry chests to walking canes, fruit baskets. I even make plough stocks and other farm implements.

CLEOPAS: So I see.

SIMON: *handing Cleopas a fancy walking staff* Here, a present for you! May you make many happy steps with this staff in your hand!

CLEOPAS: Why, thank you! *takes staff, runs his hand over it, tests its strength* I appreciate this! A fine piece of work.

SIMON: *holding up yoke* See this oxen's yoke? It's going to be the sign hanging over my new shop--a sort of trademark. I want the buying public to be able to find my place and to remember it. So, I'll hang this yoke up over the doorway.

CLEOPAS: That ought to attract attention.

SIMON: As each customer leaves, I'll say: "Tell all your friends that at the sign of the yoke you'll find quality woodcarvings by Simon of Cyrene!" *holds yoke higher as if to visualize how it will look as a sign* At the sign of the yoke! That has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

CLEOPAS: At the sign of the yoke! That does sound like a good advertising slogan! I'll help hang it up as soon as you locate a place for your shop. Maybe you'd like to go into Jerusalem tomorrow morning, to look around for a few days.

SIMON: I surely would. The quicker I can rent a space, the better. *picks up two pieces of wood* I'll carve those words "At the Sign of the Yoke" out of this cedar. Cedar lasts for years and years.

Naarah enters with platter of bread and fruit and a pitcher of grape juice

NAARAH: *to Cleopas* Excuse me, Sir, but Mistress Huldah said you and your kinsman might want a bite to eat. And she said to say that she and the lady from Cyrene are going to put the little children to bed now, and I'm to watch over them while all of you go to the Passover Feast.

CLEOPAS: Fine, Naarah. Tell my wife that will be fine. Just set the food here on this end of the table. Ah, this will hit the spot! Pull up a stool, Simon.

Simon moves his carved items to one side and sits down. Naarah leaves as soon as she has poured the juice into cups.

SIMON: Ah, thank you. Grape juice! *takes a gulp* Delicious! Absolutely delicious. Grape juice is one of the things I remember about Jerusalem the time my father took me there when I was a child. This tastes different from what we get in North Africa.

CLEOPAS: Simon, tomorrow morning when we get to the city--even before we start looking around for a shop for you to rent--I want to introduce you to thirteen special friends of mine!

SIMON: Thirteen friends! Sure! I'll be glad to meet them. Jerusalem is their home, I suppose.

CLEOPAS: No, they're from Galilee, mostly. But they're all in Jerusalem this week for Passover. They are very unusual people.

SIMON: How do you mean, "unusual"? Rich? Or famous?

CLEOPAS: No, not rich or famous. Actually it's the leader of the group, Jesus of Nazareth, who is so unusual. The other twelve are ordinary men like you and me. But Jesus is like no man I ever saw before!

SIMON: Really?

CLEOPAS: *enthusiastically* He makes the blind to see! The lame to walk! He cures lepers! With my own eyes I saw him take two loaves of bread and five little fishes and feed five thousand people!

SIMON: *astounded* Heavens! That's unbelievable!

CLEOPAS. He has done many signs and wonders, performed many miracles. He can walk on water! Even the winds and the seas obey his voice! He has raised men from the dead!

SIMON: I never heard of such a man! By all means I want to meet him! You say his name is Jesus of Nazareth?

CLEOPAS: People call him a prophet, but *lowering his voice, and speaking confidentially* many of us believe he is the Messiah! The long-promised Redeemer of Israel!

SIMON: The Messiah! *pulls chair closer, listens more intently*

CLEOPAS: Ah, Simon, you must hear him teach! He has even taught his disciples exactly how to pray to Jehovah!

SIMON: Interesting! Very interesting!

CLEOPAS: Now if Jesus were sitting here at this table with you and me--ready to eat supper--he would take a loaf of bread like this. *reaches over and picks up loaf of bread which the servant*

girl brought I've seen him do it dozens of times. He would break it so *breaks loaf* and bless it. He would say a prayer much like this:

“Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
We thank Thee for this, our daily bread. And--“

Alexander interrupts by rushing in, barefooted, and in his night clothes.

ALEXANDER: *much excited* Father! Father! Guess what? *runs to Simon* Tomorrow I 'm going to ride a goat!

SIMON: *putting arm around Alexander* Alexander! Son, you shouldn't interrupt your elders like this!

ALEXANDER. I just wanted to tell you I'm going to ride a goat!

CLEOPAS: That's all right. Riding goats is very important to little boys! Tomorrow, Alexander, I'll show you and your father my whole flock. We have lots of goats! Some sheep, too!

Enter Huldah and Micaiah, ready to leave for the feast.

HICALAH: Alexander! Son, you're supposed to be in bed! Now run on downstairs and get back into the nice bed Cousin Huldah fixed for you!

ALEXANDER: *dejectedly* Yes, Ma'am. *runs over to Huldah* What's the goat's name?

HULDAH. Well, Alexander, the best one for you to ride is named “Zebediah.” But we call him “Old Zeb.”

MICAIAH: *shooing Alexander toward stairway* Cane on, Alexander! It's to bed with you!

ALEXANDER: *as he romps along* I'm going to ride “Old Zeb!” “Old Zeb!” *disappears down stairway*

CLEOPAS: Ah, children are such a delight! *turning to companions* Well, we'd best be going to our uncle's house for the feast. Let's go out the back door.

Men walk toward door, followed by women. Huldah suddenly remembers the baskets of unleavened bread.

HULDAH: *throwing up hands* Oh! The bread! I almost forgot those cakes of bread! *runs back to get baskets* Cleopas, would you carry this basket? *indicates larger basket*

SIMON: *hurrying back* Here, let me take that! *Huldah lifts cover to readjust it. Simon looks in at the cake* My, my, this is a lot of unleavened bread!

HULDAH: I just hope it will be enough! Everybody in Emmaus will be at the feast.

MICAIAH: Emmaus seems like such a nice village. Simon, I wish you could set up your shop here instead of Jerusalem.

SIMON: That would be nice, Micaiah, but I have to be where the customers are. By the way, tomorrow morning Cleopas and I are going into the city to look for a place to rent. I hope I can find something before the Sabbath, but it may take several days to settle on just the right location.

all leave
End of Scene 1

ACT I--Scene2

Early Friday morning, on the Emmaus Road. Simon and Cleopas, enroute to Jerusalem, have almost reached the roadside well that marks the halfway point of the journey. Cleopas carries his new walking staff, Simon one well used. Simon also has the yoke that is to be his shop sign. Both are in good spirits, anxious to reach the city.

SIMON: Cleopas, I believe you said yesterday that the well here is halfway between Emmaus and the walls of Jerusalem.

CLEOPAS: Exactly half way. It's three and a half miles back to Emmaus *waves hand* three and a half on to Jerusalem. *indicates other direction* We can stop and rest a bit, if you like.

SIMON: Why, no. I'm not the least bit weary. This oxen's yoke is bulky, but it's not heavy. I'd just as soon go on to Jerusalem.

CLEOPAS: In that case, let's draw a jar of water, quench our thirst, and keep walking. *lets rope-tied jar at the well dawn, brings up water; both take a quick gulp and walk on* We should get into the city about eight o'clock, and we'll go straight to the Temple courts.

SIMON: The Temple courts? You think I ought to look for a shop to rent in that part of the city?

CLEOPAS: No, no! That's where we'll find Jesus of Nazareth!

SIMON: Oh, yes! It's going to be a pleasure to meet him! Maybe we'll get to see him perform a miracle!

CLEOPAS: Hundreds of people flock to the Temple grounds to hear him teach, for he tells us new things about the kingdom of God!

Daughters begin singing softly, off stage.

SIMON: *stopping* What's that I hear? *pauses* It's singing. But it sounds strange. Sad, too. Like a dirge of some kind.

Daughters come into view, their singing changed to low humming.

SIMON: Cleopas, look! A whole company of women!

CLEOPAS: *with much dismay* Oh, no! That's the "Daughters of Jerusalem!" With their drugged wine! That means a crucifixion!

SIMON: Drugged wine? A crucifixion?

CLEOPAS: Those women are taking wine, mingled with myrrh, to Golgotha for crucifixion victims. The Romans are going to crucify three men this morning! *shakes head* What a pity!

SIMON. Three? How do you know?

CLEOPAS: Notice that the women are carrying three long reeds with sponges?

SIMON: Yes. And I see several bottles of wine.

CLEOPAS: At every crucifixion just before the Roman soldiers nail the prisoners to their crosses these women of mercy come and give wine with either myrrh or the potent gall weed in it. To help kill the pain!

Then, as the day wears on, and the victims hang there, they dip the sponges into the wine again and again and lift it to the lips of each dying man,

Women, still humming, come nearer. S. and C. step back.

SIMON: I'd hate to watch a crucifixion! It must be just horrible!

CLEOPAS: It is.

SIMON: Who do you suppose is being crucified today?

CLEOPAS: Probably just some common thieves!

Daughters sing hymn. The final refrain is scarcely finished when the Centurion strides up to clear the way for the cross procession, which now comes into view.

CENTURION: *loud, harsh* Move aside! Move aside! Get out of the street! You "Daughters of Jerusalem" are a nuisance! Every time we have a crucifixion here you are in the way! Clear the street!

DAUGHTER SPOKESMAN: We have a right to be here! It's our duty! Solomon our great king gave us the Proverb that plainly says "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish!"

CENTURION: Hush, woman! I'm not here to listen to the Proverbs of Solomon! I'm here to carry out the orders of Pontius Pilate! Get to the side of the street! Here come the prisoners! Get back!

Women move back, but only slightly. Enter Two Thieves, followed by Christ Figure, each bearing a heavy wooden cross. They are driven by two Soldiers with whips and followed by grieving friends of the Christ. The Thieves handle their crosses well enough, but the Christ Figure stumbles and falls, gets up and struggles again, falls, gets up.

FIRST SOLDIER: *yelling at prisoners* Move on! Move on! *cracks whip* We don't have all day! Move on!

CLEOPAS: *grasping Simon's arm* Oh, God of Abraham! It's Jesus! *pointing to Christ Figure* They're going to crucify Jesus!

SIMON: Your Friend! Oh, no! Which one is he?

CLEOPAS: The last one! With the crown of thorns!

SIMON: LORD, help him!

Three of Daughters (Spokesman and two others) rush to the prisoners, with three cups of wine. The soldiers and Centurion are outraged at the interruption. Only the First Thief gets a drink before the Second Soldier pushes the Daughters aside.

CENTURION: Get back! Get back! You cursed Daughters wait till we get to Golgotha! Then you can give your wine! *To soldiers* Men, get this procession moving! Come on!

Soldiers crack their whips. Centurion strides ahead, leading the way. Two Thieves, goaded by First Soldier, follow slowly; but when Christ Figure starts to move again, he collapses. Cleopas and Simon rush to Christ Figure. So does Daughter Spokesman. Five Followers of Jesus move closer.

CLEOPAS: Master! What have they done to you?

DAUGHTER SPOKESMAN: Let's take these horrible thorns from his head? *tries to remove crown of thorns but is pushed aside by Second Soldier, who next turns around to force Cleopas out of the way.*

SECOND SOLDIER: Get away from the prisoner! *Second Soldier leaves Christ Figure, to run after Centurion. Spotlight follows Soldier momentarily.* Sir, we have a problem back here! *Spotlight focuses on Christ Figure, who is in half kneeling, half-sitting position, with the cross leaning across his shoulders.*

DAUGHTER SPOKESMAN: *kneeling beside C.F.* Here, quick! Take this cup! Before the Soldier gets back! It's wine with myrrh! *offers drink, but Christ Figure declines*

CHRIST FIGURE. No, no, my daughter. You do not understand "the cup" I will drink this day. It is the cup from my Father's right hand. It is the Cup of Salvation for all men.

All Daughters begin weeping softly, again.

DAUGHTER SPOKESMAN. We weep for you, Sir. Take the wine, to dull the pain! *holds out cup again, but C.F. gently moves her hand and the cup aside.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *turning to all Daughters* Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. The days are coming when people will say "Happy is the woman who never bore a child, the woman who never nursed a babe."

Weep for yourselves, I say. There shall come a time when people will call out to the mountains "Fall on us!" And, cry to the hills, "Cover us!"

Centurion begins shouting at Second Soldier. Spotlight shifts to these two, who are now coming back to Christ Figure.

CENTURION: *very loudly* Don't tell me that, Soldier! Why in the name of the gods of Mount Olympus can't you make the third prisoner move on?

SECOND SOLDIER: Sir, this prisoner is in bad shape. Pontius Pilate had him flogged so he can't half walk, much less carry his cross! What'll we do?

CENTURION: That's simple enough. Make somebody else carry it! You know the law! When we order someone to carry something, he has to take it! That's the law! *glances around until he sees Simon of Cyrene* Hey, you! You there with that yoke! Come here!

SIMON: *bewildered* Me? *doesn't move*

CENTURION: *grabbing Simon by the collar* Yes, you! Pick up that cross there and take it on up the hill!

SIMON: *much distressed, turns to Cleopas* Cleopas, what must I do?

Cleopas nods his head, but says nothing; takes Simon's staff and yoke.

CENTURION: Ha! What must you do? You make me laugh! If you value your neck, you'll take up that cross and move! Now! Not next week!

Simon, still dazed, takes the cross from shoulders of Christ Figure. Second Soldier gets Christ Figure up on his feet, moves him forward. Simon follows with the cross. Next came the dejected followers and then the Daughters. Followers and Daughters are weeping. Daughters hum the refrain of their hynn. Cleopas follows the procession.

-- Curtain --

END OF ACT I

ACT II, Scene 1

Three days later, in the afternoon. Simon and Cleopas have just left Jerusalem and are walking along the road to Emmaus. Simon carries his yoke and staff, Cleopas his new staff. They are in a serious mood, rather dejected.

SIMON: Cleopas, so much happened in the past three days I just can't take it all in! If Jesus is risen from the grave--as his followers say--it's the most incredible thing in all history! It's the miracle of all miracles! We saw him die on the cross! We saw him buried!

Do you believe Jesus has risen from the grave? Like your friends say?

CLEOPAS: Yes! Mary Magdalene and other women saw him! They talked to angels sitting at the empty tomb! Then, Peter and John ran to the tomb and found his grave clothes--folded up in two neat stacks! I know he is risen!

SIMON: This means that Jesus is the Messiah! Doesn't it?

CLEOPAS: Yes! His resurrection proves that!

SIMON: I wish I could see him again!

CLEOPAS: *stops abruptly to wipe his eyes with corner of headdress* Simon, my eyes feel so strange. They don't exactly burn, but everything looks fuzzy. Do you notice dust or something in the air?

SIMON: Now that you mention it, there does seem to be a sort of low hanging haze. My eyes feel as if I had been through a sandstorm. It's probably dust from that earthquake Friday. Soon as we get to the well, let's bathe our eyes.

CLEOPAS: A good idea.

SIMON: What I can't understand about Jesus the Christ is why he had to suffer and die! *points toward well* Look, Cleopas, there's a man at the well! Probably one of your neighbors.

Neither recognizes Christ Figure, who is seated on a bench by the well.

CLEOPAS: *shades eyes with hand, speaks slowly* No. That's a stranger. I don't recognize him at all.

SIMON. I guess you don't see too many strangers on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus.

CLEOPAS: No. Emmaus is such a small village few travelers pass through. *The two are almost at the well.*

SIMON: Let's ask this man if he has heard that Jesus of Nazareth is risen from the grave!

CLEOPAS: *to Christ Figure* Good day, Sir. I am Cleopas of Emmaus, and this is my kinsman, Simon of Cyrene.

CHRIST FIGURE: Peace be with you both.

SIMON: Peace be with you, Sir.

CHRIST FIGURE: *pouring water into the cups at the well* Would you care for water?

Both accept. Each takes a drink and then pours a bit in the cup of his hand and begins to wipe his eyes, as talk continues. Both sit down.

CLEOPAS: Thank you.

SIMON: The dust has made our eyes blurry, or “holden”, as our forefathers used to say.

CHRIST FIGURE. Yes. It is evident that your eyes cannot even see me as I am. And I couldn't help noticing that as you came along--just now you talked to each other so earnestly--as if something were troubling you. Is something the matter? *Sits down*

SIMON: We were talking of Jesus of Nazareth and all the things that happened in Jerusalem these past three days.

CHRIST FIGURE: What things?

SIMON: *with surprise* Why, didn't you know? Sir, you must be the only man in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what happened to Jesus of Galilee! The chief priests and rulers of the Jews had the Romans crucify him! *voice takes on more excitement* They made me carry his cross! Oh, it was dreadful! Darkness came at high noon! There was an earthquake! Finally, about three o'clock, Jesus died, and his friends buried him as the sun was going down.

But today, his followers have seen him alive!

CLEOPAS: We can't understand why it all happened the way it did!

CHRIST FIGURE: It must be that you men do not know, much less understand, what was said about Jesus of Nazareth in the Holy Scriptures. That is, what the prophets foretold, what is written in the books of Moses, and in the Psalms. All these things had to come to pass.

SIMON: We don't understand.

CHRIST FIGURE: I must show you why Jesus of Nazareth poured out his soul unto death. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, he went as a lamb to the slaughter.

He was lifted up on the cross to be the Savior, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness--to save the Israelites.

Both of you do know how God commanded Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up for the people to see, don't you? When Moses was leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt into the Promised Land?

SIMON: *shaking head* I am sorry. I, for one, have been a foolish man--slow to know and understand the Scriptures.

CLEOPAS: I, too, know very little of the book of Moses.

CHRIST FIGURE: Then let me open for you the book of Moses so that just as the Children of Israel understood the meaning of the brass serpent, you can understand the meaning of Jesus on the cross.

It took some 40 years for the Israelites to come from Egypt to this, the Promised Land. One year, as Moses led them near Mount Hor, by the way of the Red Sea, the people became much discouraged and rebellious. And they spoke out against God and against Moses.

In speaking against the Lord they sinned. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people. And many Israelites died. *Numbers 21:5-9*

Scene 1A

Stage curtain opens to reveal large group of rebellious Israelites, i. e., Children of Israel, some half sitting and some lying on the ground--all moaning, groaning, and crying out to Miriam. She walks among the Children, with a basin of water and small white hand cloths. She is bathing their foreheads and placing the wet cloths on their foreheads. The Three Spokesmen are beating at the snakes with sticks. Others cry out loud enough for the audience to hear.

FIRST ISRAELITE SPOKESMAN: Serpents! And more serpents! Help us! *Flings away snake he has just killed* We're dying! We've sinned against God!

SECOND SPOKESMAN: Send for Moses! The serpents are killing us! Tell Moses to pray to Jehovah!

THIRD SPOKESMAN: Ask Jehovah to save us! We're all dying!

FIRST SPOKESMAN: *grasps hold of Miriam's skirt* Oh, Prophetess Miriam, send for your brother Moses! Before we all die for our sins!

MIRIAM: Something has to be done! I'll go to the mountains and try to find Moses.

Miriam hurries toward "mountain" [see diagram of stage setting] on ballroom stairway. Curtain does not close. Israelites continue to writhe and groan and beat at the snakes. Miriam meets Moses.

MIRIAM: *out of breath* Oh, Moses, thank goodness you're back! I was going up to Mount Hor to look for you! You had better start praying to Jehovah!

MOSES: What's happened?

MIRIAM: Serpents are killing the people! They sinned against God and he sent deadly snakes! The people said it's God's fault that we're out here in the Wilderness, that we should have stayed in Egypt!

MOSES: The Children of Israel will never learn!

MIRIAM: Pray for them, Moses! Before they all die!

MOSES: I've tried and tried to tell the people of Israel that God has commanded us to love him and obey him--not to blame him for every hardship that comes!

MIRIAM: They'll all die in their sins if something's not done! Beg Jehovah to forgive them! To save them!

MOSES: You go back to the people, and I'll go back to the mountain and pray. I will ask Jehovah to forgive the people and take away the serpents. When his answer comes, we will do what God commands.

MIRIAM: All right! But please hurry!

Miriam hurries back to people on stage. Moses goes off in opposite direction.

THIRD SPOKESMAN: *to Miriam* Did you find Moses?

MIRIAM: Yes, I found him. Even now Moses is praying that God will take away the serpents!

SECOND SPOKESMAN: *moaning* Oh, why did we sin against God! We were so foolish!

MIRIAM: *walking among the moaning people, who gradually become quiet or almost quiet* All of you, take courage!

Our God is able to deliver us! Remember how when we were starving, he sent manna down from heaven. Remember how when we were perishing of thirst, He made water cane forth out of a rock! And when we had no bridge to cross the sea, he opened the waters and we walked across on dry land!

Jehovah will save you! His mercies are new every morning!

Miriam sings solo.[the sheet music for this solo is missing. Any suitable song or hymn may be substituted--Ed.] Then, Moses approaches, carrying a long T-shaped cross, with a metal-like snake twined about the top.

THIRD SPOKESMAN: *raising up to a sitting position* Moses is here!

SECOND SPOKESMAN. What's that strange staff? It looks like a serpent made out of brass!

Moses, we've got enough real snakes! We don't need any made of brass!

ALL ISRAELITES: *wailing together* Moses, Moses, beg Jehovah to save us!

MOSES: *raises up T-cross with brass serpent* Jehovah our Cod commanded me to lift up this brazen serpent before you. These are his words:

Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a standard. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.”

So, I fashioned a serpent of brass and put it upon this cross. *looks at serpent, raises it a little higher* Those of you who will look at it, as our God commanded, will live. Our God is offering you life! Trust Jehovah and live! You have only to look and believe!

Children of Israel slowly turn, one by one, and look toward the serpent of brass. They assume a position of prayer, i.e., kneeling with hands held together and with faces lifted up toward the standard Moses holds.

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: *in unison* We believe.

Curtain closes

End of Scene 1A of Act II

Act II, Scene 2

The same afternoon as in Scene 1.--It is assumed that Simon, Cleopas, and Christ Figure are still walking along the Emmaus Road.--At the home of Cleopas in Emmaus, Huldah, Micaiah, Alexander and Rufus are at the table, just finishing supper. Na-a-rah is serving.

HULDAH: Well, Alexander, have you had enough supper?

ALEXANDER I'm stuffed. I can't eat any more!

HULDAH: That's good.

NAARAH: Ma'am, when you finish, do you want me to set the table for Master Cleopas and his Cousin Simon?

HULDAH: Yes. Do that. *turns to Micaiah* Didn't Simon and Cleopas say they'd be back this evening?

MICAIAH: Yes. Simon was sure it wouldn't take more than three days to find a shop to rent. And today is the third day.

HULDAH: Naarah, bring up a fresh loaf of bread for the men. They'll be hungry after their long walk from Jerusalem.

NAARAH: Yes, Ma'am. *picks up half empty bread tray, looks at piece of loaf* This bread we baked today seems the best, the lightest, we ever made! I'll bring up the biggest loaf! *goes downstairs*

MICAIAH: *getting up from table* It's time for bed, my little boys. Rufus, you look half asleep now! *hugs baby* Core along, Alexander, *pats his shoulder* It's time to go to sleep.

ALEXANDER: That's all I ever get to do! Sleep! Sleep! Sleep!

HULDAH: *taking Alexander's hand* I know a new bedtime story to tell you tonight!

Naarah returns with bread and more fruit. Women take children downstairs.. While Naarah is fixing the table, Cleopas, Christ Figure and Simon enter, talking as they come.

CLEOPAS: Please come in and make yourselves at home. I'll find out about supper. *goes over to speak to servant girl.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Simon* Possibly I should have gone on, instead of accepting our host's invitation.

SIMON: We want you to stay! We want you to tell us more about the Messiah! You make the Scriptures seem real! Besides, night is almost here. A man should not travel alone when darkness comes. It's not safe--even in a small village like Emmaus. *puts down his yoke and staff* Here, let me lay your staff over here in the corner. *takes staff of C.F.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *looking down and pointing to yoke* That oxen's yoke? Did you buy it in Jerusalem?

SIMON: Oh, no! I made it! *picks up yoke* This yoke is to be my symbol, my trademark. I'm a woodcarver, and I'm going to open up a shop in Jerusalem. This yoke is to hang up over the doorway!

CHRIST FIGURE: Isn't the yoke a symbol of bondage?

SIMON: *with surprise* Bondage? Why-- I-- I-- I hadn't thought of that! A yoke is a symbol of bondage! It just hadn't occurred to me!

CHRIST FIGURE: The Father created man to be free! The Son of Man came that man might have life and have it more abundantly!

SIMON. Tell me more about--

CLEOPAS: *interrupting* Won't both of you come to the table! All is in readiness. *three move toward table* Sir, *addressing C.F.* please sit here. Simon, this is your place.

C.F. sits on left, Cleopas in middle, Simon on right, next to stairway. Servant girl leaves as men sit down.

CLEOPAS: *placing bread in front of Christ Figure* Will you bless the bread and return thanks for us?

C.F. takes loaf of bread and breaks it exactly the way Cleopas described to Simon in Act I, Scene 1.

CHRIST FIGURE: Our Father which art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
We thank thee this day for this, our daily bread.
Bless this loaf, O Lord.
Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, Forever. Amen.

Awe struck, Simon and Cleopas jump to their feet! They have suddenly recognized the Christ. He starts to offer them pieces of bread, but they don't even see the bread. They speak with utmost excitement and joy. Both came closer to Christ Figure.

CLEOPAS: When you broke the bread, we knew! Our eyes are opened!

SIMON: You died on the cross! And now you live!

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes.

SIMON: The cross! Now I understand! And the brass serpent Moses lifted up! I understand it too!
You were lifted on the cross so that WE may live!

CHRIST FIGURE: *rises* Yes, Simon, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the Wilderness to give life to the dying Israelites, so was I lifted up on the cross, "that whosoever believeth in me should not perish, but have eternal life!" *John 3:14-15*

SIMON: *highly elated* Eternal life! Think of it! *In more somber, reflective tone* Eternal life! Now, *slowly and deliberately* That's life forever!

CLEOPAS: Oh, master, we rejoice! *Turns to Simon* Simon, I don't know about you, but my heart burned within me while he talked with us along the road and opened up the scriptures to us! My eyes just didn't see him! But I should have known who it was!

As Simon and Cleopas are looking at each other, the Christ Figure "vanishes out of their sight."

SIMON: My eyes were blind, too! But my heart was warmed by his words! Now, my eyes see and my heart understands! You heard him say that the cross means eternal life, didn't you?

CLEOPAS: Yes, yes!

SIMON: *turning to where Christ Figure was standing* Oh, Master, this is-- where-- where is he?

CLEOPAS: Why-- he's-- he's gone! Oh, Simon! Simon! We must go back to Jerusalem this very hour and tell the disciples our Lord was here!

SIMON: And tell the Daughters of Jerusalem that they need weep and wail no more! The Redeemer is here! Let's go tell our wives and then be on our way! *starts toward stairway* Micahiah! Good news!

CLEOPAS: *going toward stairway, in front of Simon* Huldah?

Alexander canes running up from downstairs, darts around Cleopas and grabs Simon. Cleopas hurries on downstairs.

ALEXANDER: Father! Father! I have something to tell you!

Simon swoops up his son and swings him round and round for sheer joy.

SIMON: Oh, my son, I have something to tell you!

ALEXANDER: *when his feet again touch the floor* I rode the goat! Old Zeb! I rode Old Zeb!

SIMON: That's fine! But I want to tell you something wonderful! Very wonderful, Alexander!
Sits down, takes Alexander on his knee When I went to Jerusalem, it happened that some Roman soldiers made me carry a cross for a man! His name was Jesus! And Jesus died on that cross! But now he is alive! And--

ALEXANDER: What's a cross?

SIMON: *puts Alexander down and hurries to corner where his shop supplies are stacked, and picks up the two large pieces of wood.* A cross, Alexander, is a high post, made like this. *holds two pieces in shape of cross* But it's more than that! This Jesus made the cross into a symbol of life!

Life forever, Alexander! For you! For Cousin Cleopas! For everybody! The cross is for everybody!

Enter Cleopas, two women, baby and maid

ALEXANDER: *touching pieces of wood and letting his two fingers on his right hand "walk" up and down* It's for me?

SIMON: The cross is for the whole world, Alexander!

Simon turns to Cleopas, in a new burst of excitement.

Cleopas, I have it! I have it! I know what I'll do! Of all men on earth, I have been the most favored! I carried the cross for the Christ!

The cross--not a yoke--will be my emblem! I will put it on my doorway! I will hang it above my shop! I will carve it my heart! I will let the world know that I live AT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS!

Simon sings solo: "The Sign of the Cross." As the hymn ends the entire cast gathers on stage and joins him in repeating the final refrain.

THE END

CAST SERVES AS CHOIR, SINGING MEDLEY OF HYMNS FOR CROSS OF FLOWERS CEREMONY.

A Lament in Jerusalem

Jewell Ellen Smith

From: "The Sign of the Cross." Dirge to be sung by the "Daughters of Jerusalem."

Slow, mournful refrain. Repeat 3 times offstage.

Piano

O - o O - o O, our God! We pray, we weep,

5

we wait. Wait, wait, wait. O - o!

10

Cresc. *> f* Decres. Cresc.

O - o! O, our God! We cry for sor - row of heart! O - o!

16

Sweetly Decres.

O - o! O, our God! Our tears run down like a riv er.

20 As howling wind, decres. *Cresc.*

O - o! O - o! O, our God! dost thou for-get us for ev-er? And for-

25 Decres. *p* End of refrain. Begin Soloist's lament

sake us for so long time? O, our God! Je

30

ru sa lem! for her we weep! she is be-come a den of thieves; All

34

Ju - dah is down trod-den! The wick-ed bear rule; The peo - ple per-ish!

Soloist & choir
now together:

Chorus cries out: Soloist: *Cresc.*

38

O, our God! There is none to com - fort Zi - on! O - o!

As howling wind, *decesc.*

Cresc.

43

O - o! O, our God! Dost thou for - get us for - ev - er? And for -

Decres.

f Soloist:

End of Soloist's lament,
begin Daughter's lament.

47

sake us for so long time? O, our God! We pray, we weep, we

tolling bell

52

wait. Wait. Wait. Wait. How long?

57 smoothly

How long? How lom - g must we wait? Wait. Wait.

62 smoothly

Wait. how long be - fore our King will come? How long be - fore we shall

66 *pp* sweetly

see our re - de - mer? For him we wait. The one who shall save all

70 *p*

Is - ra - el! For Him we wait. The one who will be E - man - u - el! For

74 howling wind, decresc.

Him we wait. O - o! O - o! O, our God! Dost thou for-get us

79 Decres. Soloist cries out:

for - ev - er? And for - sake us for so long time? O, our God!

84 Refrain. Slow, mournful

O - o! O - o! O, our God! We pray, we weep, we wait!

89 Cresc.

Wait. Wait. Wait. O - o! O - o! o, our God!

95 *f* Decres. Cresc.

We cry for sor - row of heart! O - o! O - o!

Detailed description: This system contains measures 95 to 100. It begins with a dynamic marking of *f* and a decrescendo instruction. The melody features a half note followed by a quarter note with an accent, then a dotted quarter note. The accompaniment consists of chords. The system concludes with a crescendo instruction.

100 sweetly, decresc. howling wind

O, our God! Our tears run down like a riv - er! O - o! O - o!

Detailed description: This system contains measures 100 to 105. It starts with a decrescendo instruction labeled 'sweetly, decresc.' and a 'howling wind' effect. The melody includes a dotted quarter note, a quarter note, and a half note. The accompaniment features chords and a moving bass line. The system ends with a decrescendo instruction.

105 Cresc. Decres.

O, our God! do not for-get us for - ev - er! Nor for - sake us for so long

Detailed description: This system contains measures 105 to 110. It begins with a crescendo instruction. The melody has a dotted quarter note, a quarter note, and a half note. The accompaniment includes chords and a moving bass line. The system concludes with a decrescendo instruction.

110 dim., softly *p* *pp* *ppp*

time! O - o! O - o! O, our God! O! O! O!

Detailed description: This system contains measures 110 to 115. It starts with a decrescendo instruction labeled 'dim., softly'. The melody features a dotted quarter note, a quarter note, and a half note. The accompaniment consists of chords. The system ends with a final decrescendo instruction.

At the Sign of the Cross

Theme song and solo for Simon the Cyrenian,
"At the Sign of the Cross."

Jewell Ellen Smith

PRELUDE:

Piano

To live at the sign of the cross is to live near God!

6 VERSES:

SIMON: 1. I count it an hon - or to car - ry the cross! I
SIMON: 2. The wise man will live at the sign of the cross. The
CAST: 3. O, sing to God prais - es for lov - ing the world, for

11

count it a bless - ing to call it my sign; For
wise man will see there God's grace and beau - ty; For
send - ing us Je - sus to set all men free; For

15

on the day the Christ was cru - ci - fied, He made the cross a
he will know the Lord laid down his life, He ing the cross his
when God's on - ly Son died on the cross, his gift to man was

18 > REFRAIN:

sym - bol, the sign of signs! an - y man may car - ry the cross.
 glo - ry, his ma - jes - ty. An - y man may make it his sign.
 life for e - ter - ni - ty.

22

The cross means faith! The cross means hope! the cross means life!

26

Life, ev - er - last - ing to all who be - lieve!

29 POSTLUDE (entire cast):

Car - ry the cross! Make it your sign! for, to

33

live at the sign of the cross is to live near God!

Directions:

Simon, sing: Prelude, Verse 1 with refrain, Verse 2 with refrain.

Entire cast, sing Verse 3 with refrain, postlude.

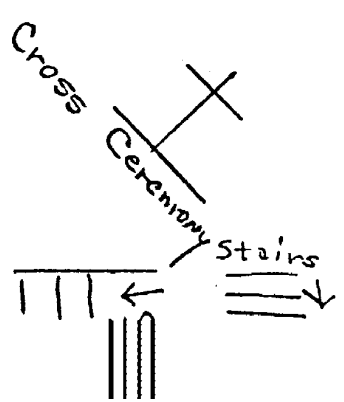
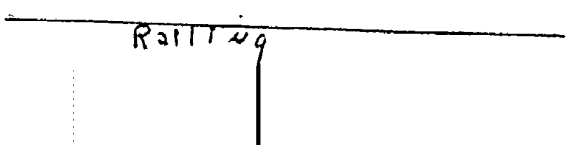
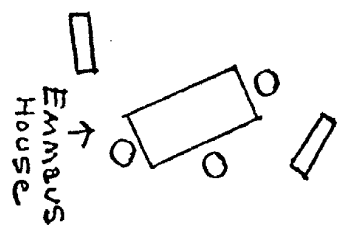
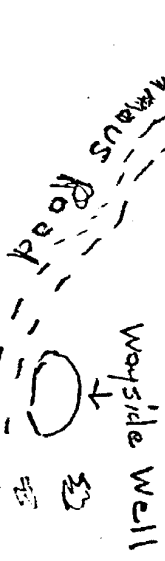
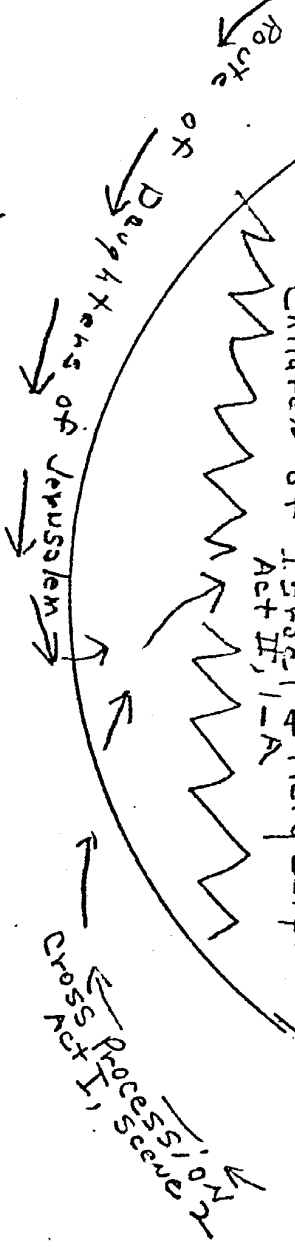
AT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS
 By Jewell Ellen Smith
 Easter Play for Good Friday, 1979
 Doors Closed

Steps

The Sets and Scenes
 (Using ball room floor and stage of Ft. Rucker Officers Club)

Children of Israel, + fiery serpents

Stage Act II, 1A



Doors Closed

Steps

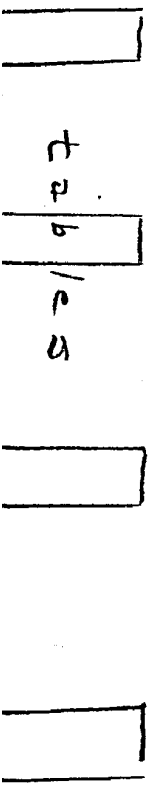
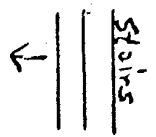
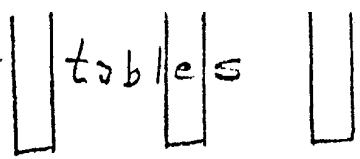


Diagram of original staging at the Ft. Rucker, Alabama Officer's Club

--Jewell Ellen Smith
Feb. 20, 1979

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