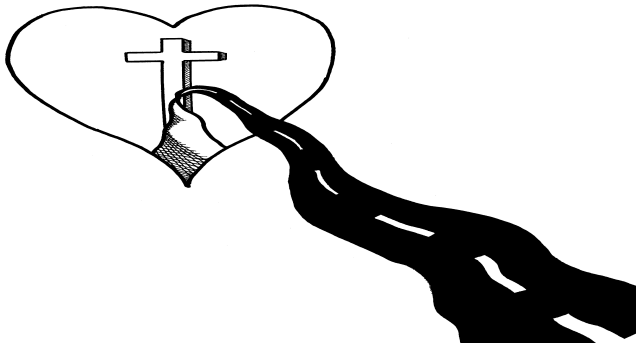
A HIGHWAY IN THE HEART

A Play for Easter by

JEWELL ELLEN SMITH



© Copyright 1985 Jewell Ellen Smith

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness 'Make straight the way of the Lord!' as said the Prophet Elijah ... The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together... And I (John the Baptist) saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

John 1:23
Isaiah 40: 3-5
John 1:34

Return to the Jewell Ellen Smith Home Page

TIME: About 30AD

PLACE: The countryside near the River Jordan, villages in Galilee, and the remote fortress of Herod Antipas, Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea.

THEME and PURPOSE:

To show the coming of the Christ, as revealed by John the Baptist, and, To say as clearly as did Isaiah: "Behold your God!"

This, by portraying Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings and deeds, especially those in which "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 to them."--Matthew 11:5; Cf. Isaiah 35:5-7

LENGTH OF DRAMA: About one hour. (4 acts, 9 scenes)

PLAYERS: Some 16 men, 12 women, one woman dancer, 16 boys all at least 12 years old, one 5-year-old girl, no teenagers.

Synopsis of A HIGHWAY IN THE HEART

ACT I opens at a camp site on the east side of the River Jordan, where John the Baptist has been baptizing and proclaiming: "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

As John and his disciple Andrew prepare for supper, Philip, another disciple, arrives, bringing a delegation from Jerusalem. Sent by the Pharisees, the three messengers demand of John: "Who art thou?"

John assures them that he is not "that prophet which is to come," nor Elijah, nor the long awaited Messiah. Instead, he declares: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight a highway for our God' ... I baptize with water, but there is now in Galilee One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, and with Fire!"

Amazed at this, and other things John says of Jesus of Nazareth, the three leave hurriedly to return to Jerusalem.

Minutes later, John, Andrew and Philip are surprised by two Roman soldiers, who seize John on orders from Herod Antipas. (Herod and his wife Herodias are irate with John because earlier he had told Herod that he should not have divorced his Arabian wife to marry Herodias, who is his niece and the former wife of his half-brother Phillip.)

As John is led away to prison, he sends Andrew and Philip on a mission into Galilee to find Jesus and to ask him this question: "Art thou he who is to come, or look we for another?"

On the Sabbath, several weeks later, Andrew and Philip find Jesus teaching in a village synagogue in south Galilee, and they see him heal a woman who has been bent double for 18 years.

To answer John's question, Jesus invites Andrew and Philip to travel with him for three days and then to report back to John what they have seen and heard.

ACT II takes place in the city of Nain, on that same Sabbath. Tobias, the son of a poverty-stricken widow, lies near death. As friends attend him, his mother brings in the Nain doctor, who prescribes an ancient folk remedy. But next morning the friends discover Tobias has died; and they begin preparations for the traditional funeral march.

ACT III shows Jesus and his companions en route to Nain. They encounter a crowd of people, many of them sick, lame, blind, deaf and dumb--all waiting for the "great physician." Andrew and Philip watch with awe as Jesus heals each one.

Jesus, Andrew and Philip reach Nain just at the funeral procession for the widow's son gets underway. Jesus stops the procession, raises the boy from the dead, and declares to the crowd:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

From Nain, Jesus goes to the next village and Andrew and Philip start their long journey back to John the Baptist.

In ACT IV Andrew and Philip arrive at Herod's isolated fortress on Herod's birthday. John's guards permit them to talk to John for only one minute. He rejoices greatly over their report.

Before John is dragged back to the dungeon, he talks with Herod--about the highway Herod wants Rome to build, about the straight road John says every man should prepare for his God.

That evening when Herod's birthday banquet is in full sway, Herodias has her daughter Salome dance for Herod. Herod is so pleased, and so drunk, he promises to give Salome any prize she wants, even half his kingdom. Herodias tells her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter. She does.

At the play's end, the two Roman soldiers who have been John's guards walk toward the banquet hall, carrying a blood stained sword and the prize. They talk of John's last words:

"... Every man should make straight in the desert a highway for our God:

A HIGHWAY IN THE HEART."

* * *

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Study of these passages will help players interpret their roles and effectively present the Biblical events in the plot.

Witness of John the Baptist to delegation from Jerusalem: John 1:15-34, Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-18

John's question, Jesus' answer: Luke 7:19-28, Matthew 11:2-13

Herod imprisons John: Luke 3:19-20

Jesus heals bent-over woman: Luke 13:10-17

Two blind men receive their sight: Matthew 9:27-31

Nain Widow's son raised: Luke 7:11-18

The banquet, how John was slain: Matthew 14:3-12 (See additional references in script), Mark 6:14-29

SETS:

(1) Outdoor camp site, with tent and fire.

(2) Village synagogue, with plain low benches, Menorah, lectern, low table with scrolls and colorful cloth.

(3) Bedroom, low narrow bed, couch, table, bench, lamp, bowl. (This scene requires a small live goat and a very large, freshly caught fish.)

(4) Roadside place, low trees, shrubbery, rocks.
(5) Village well in Nain, bench, shrubbery, water containers.
(6) Fortress courtyard, cage for prisoner, plants, flowers.
(7) Banquet hall, elaborately appointed table, benches, recorded music for dancer.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of appearance and according to Acts and Scenes):

Act I

John the Baptist, the cousin and forerunner of Jesus, who has come out of the wilderness to herald the coming of the Messiah.
Andrew and Phillip, disciples of John
Delegation from Jerusalem:
Sismai, a priest assigned to the Temple.
Pallu, a Levite and Temple guard.
Menahem, a Levite and member of Temple choir
First Roman Soldier, Atticus, a guard for Herod Antipas.
Second Roman Soldier, Claudius, a guard for Herod Antipas.
Ruler of the Synagogue
Christ Figure
Synagogue Congregation:
Seven Fathers and Grandfathers (no lines)
Five Sons, Grandsons (no lines; must be at least 12 yrs. old)
Merchant
Bent-over Woman, who has been afflicted 18 years.
Brother and Daughter of Bent Over Woman

ACT II, Scenes 1 and 2

First and Second Friend of Widow of Nain
Tobias, son and only child of Widow of Nain
Nain Doctor
Widow of Nain, a poor and devout woman named Myra.

ACT III, Scene 1

Crowd of People waiting by roadside for Jesus:
Old Man from Endor village
First and Second Wives
Father of Sarah
Sarah, a little crippled girl
Deaf and Dumb Woman

Sister of Deaf and Dumb Woman
First and Second Blind Men
Woman with leprosy

Scene 2

Mourners in Funeral Procession:
Cymbal Player
Chime Player
Four Stretcher Bearers
Four Women in Sackcloth
Many Nain Residents (5 or more, no children)
Gong Player

ACT IV Scenes 1, 2, 3

Three Servants (no lines)
Old Man Servant
Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea, under Roman authority
Herodias, wife of Herod Antipas and mother of Salome
Salome, step-daughter of Herod Antipas
Banquet Guests (10 or more men, 4 women)

Note to Directors: The scenes are so arranged that many players can do two or more bit parts and also appear where a large group is required. Examples are these:

(1) Three men from Jerusalem can be in the Synagogue.
(2) Bent Over Woman and her Daughter can be Mourners in Sackcloth, servants for Herod's banquet.
(3) Deaf and Dumb Woman and Sister and Woman with Leprosy can be mourners in the Funeral Procession, guests at Herod's Banquet.
(4) The Merchant (ACT I, Sc. 2) can be a Stretcher-Bearer and Banquet Guest.
(5) Old Man from Endor (ACT III, Sc. 1) Can be Old Man Servant in ACT IV.
(6) Ruler of the Synagogue can be in Funeral Procession and a Banquet Guest.
(7) Nain Doctor can be a Banquet Guest.
(8) Brother of Bent Over Woman could be Father of crippled girl, Cymbal Player, and Banquet Guest.

SCRIPT

ACT I, Scene 1

Sc. 1--Late in the afternoon at the camp site of John the Baptist, near Beth-ab-a-ra beyond the River Jordan. Andrew, a young fisherman and disciple of John, tends a fire and sweeps the ground around a tent where there are crude stools and three bedrolls. Now and then Andrew stops to stir an earthen pot of locust beans on the fire. Three utensils near the fire indicate that he is preparing supper for three persons.

John the Baptist, clad in a rough tunic of "camel's hair" with a leather girdle, comes striding up. He is exuberant. He carries a staff, a scripture scroll (Isaiah) and his worn out sandals. One sandal has a broken thong.

JOHN: Ah, Andrew, this has been a perfect day! *lays aside scroll and staff* Simply wonderful! Even breaking my shoe latchet *starts trying to fix broken sandal, tosses good one aside* didn't matter. At times, I wished the Jordan River were twice as wide!

ANDREW: *much interested*, *and in a tone of approval* Then you baptized many people today?

JOHN: Scores of people. From all over Galilee, from Jerusalem, and up and down the Jordan Valley! I must have baptized a hundred men!

ANDREW: Sir, that's great!

JOHN: I baptized rich men, and beggars! Tax collectors, even Roman soldiers! I couldn't believe it!

ANDREW: I'm glad for you. And for them!

JOHN: Maybe I'm not a failure. Maybe my crying in the wilderness to "make a highway for our God" is finally being heard.

ANDREW: Of course your voice is heard. For what you say is true. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And men must repent.

JOHN: *lifting cover off pot on fire* I see you have our locust beans cooking. *gives beans a stir with the spoon Andrew has been using and laughs lightly at the same time* Andrew, I much suspect people laugh about me. They think I'm some sort of wild prophet come out of the desert. They say "his clothes are old, ragged camel's hair, and he eats nothing but locust and wild honey!" *replaces pot cover and stands erect again* Where's Philip? I thought he was with you today.

ANDREW: He was, but he went into Beth-ab-a-ra to get--

Andrew stops abruptly as he sees Philip and three companions approaching. Philip wears the garb of an ordinary young man of Galilee, while the priest and two Levites--all elderly men--are richly robed. Their headdresses are turbans rather than the common headdresses worn by rural men. Sismai wears a priest's prayer shawl. Menahem carries an unlighted lantern.

Players, please read John 1:15-34 for details of the interview, which follows.

ANDREW: Here's Philip coming now! With strangers. Or, at least they're strangers to me.

JOHN: I never saw them before, either. But I see by their clothes they're not fishermen or merchants. The one wearing the prayer shawl is surely a priest.

My father Zechariah used to wear such a shawl, when I was a child. I remember begging my father to let me put on his shawl and play that I was in the Temple, burning incense as he did.

But he would say *changes tone to imitate voice of Zechariah*: "No, no, Child. You are not to grow up to be a priest. You are to grow up to be 'the prophet of the Most High!' You will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."

--Luke 1:67-80

I didn't know the meaning of my father's words then. But I would listen, and he would keep talking. *again imitates voice of Zechariah*

"My Child, it will be as Isaiah prophesied. There must be the voice of one crying in the wilderness 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' You will be that voice, John!" *See Isaiah 40:3-5*

ANDREW: *with awe* Then you've known, all your life, that you would be a prophet?

Philip and companions are now quite near.

JOHN: Yes, Andrew, all my life. *turns slightly and goes to meet Philip and his companions*. *John still holds broken sandal.*

Ah, Philip, you bring visitors! *bows to guests* Welcome, gentlemen!

PHILIP: These honorable men have come up from Jerusalem, to speak to you. First, is Sismai, a venerable priest assigned to the Temple.

Sismai bows

And this is the chief of the Temple guards. *turning to Pallu* Sir, I believe you said your name is, uh-- uh-- Pallu?

PALLU: *as he bows to John and Andrew* Yes, I am Pallu, master of the Temple guards. A Levite, of the old order.

PHILIP: And this *waving his hand toward Menahem* is Menahem, who is a member of the Temple choir.

Menahem bows

MENAHEM: Yes. I am Menahem. And I am proud to say that I, too, am a Levite.

JOHN: *with wave of hand toward Andrew* This young man here is Andrew, a fisherman from Beth-sa-i-da; and, like Philip, he is one of my disciples.

Andrew and Jerusalem men exchange bows.

As Sismai steps forward to speak directly to John, Andrew and Philip withdraw to background, busy themselves with the campfire and keep backs to audience.

SISMAI: *in brisk*, *business-like tone* John the Baptizer--for that's what you're being called, as you well know--we came here to ask you this question: WHO ARE YOU?

JOHN: *with considerable surprise* Who am I?

SISMAI: Yes! Our leaders of the Pharisees sent us to ask you--in all frankness--to tell us who you are, where you came from, and what all this baptizing in the Jordan means!

PALLU: You and your baptizing are all the talk in Jerusalem. And we understand people are flocking up here, in droves, to get you to baptize them in the River Jordan!

JOHN: Yes. Many come. From Jerusalem, and other places.

MENAHEM: It is reported that even our ruler, Herod Antipas, is interested in your teaching.

JOHN: Ah, that scoundrel, Herod Antipas! He is part of this generation of vipers! I told him so. I told him he has done more evils than his wicked father before him.

Men from Jerusalem gasp in astonishment that John was brave enough to say such a thing.

SISMAI: *with disbelief* You said those words to the powerful Herod Antipas?

JOHN: I did--this afternoon, not more than three hours ago. I told him he should not have divorced his wife, daughter of the King of Arabia, to marry this-- this--this Herodias! She is his niece! By law, he is forbidden to marry her. Besides that, I understand she was the wife of his half-brother!

SISMAI: *Shaking his head* Ah, John the Baptizer--and I say this kindly, as an old man to a young man--I doubt the wisdom of your trying to show Herod Antipas his errors or to even mention his marriages. We all know Herod Antipas is idle, vicious and extravagant.

Changes tone But, we stray from our subject. We three were sent here to talk about you, not the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Who are you? Did you spring up out of the desert, as people say?

JOHN: *with sincerity* You know my name. It is John. It is true that I have spent much time in the desert, but I was born in the hill country of Judaea, in the village of Ein Karem.

My father was Zechariah, a priest, like you. And he served in the Temple, as you do. My father was descended from the "Sons of Aaron." My mother was Elizabeth, also of the house of Aaron.

SISMAI: *much pleased* Well, then, if you are the son of a priest, you must know our ancient writings of Moses and the prophets.

JOHN: Many of them, yes.

SISMAI: There is one prophecy which says this: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto Moses.

Unto him ye shall hearken... I shall put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." *Players*, *see*: *Deut. 15:15* John the Baptizer, are you that prophet?

JOHN: No, I am not that prophet.

PALLU: Many people are saying that you might be the prophet Elijah, come back. Sismai, here, was telling us--as we journeyed today--that the holy writings foretell how Elijah will return "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord!" *See Malachi 4:5*

JOHN: No. I am not Elijah. I long, though, to have Elijah's spirit and power--to turn the hearts of the people and prepare them for the Lord. *Cf. Luke 1:17* No, do not call me Elijah. I am more "a reed shaken in the wind."

MENAHEM: One of our venerable leaders in Jerusalem believes you are the CHRIST!

JOHN: No. I am not the Christ. I am not so much as worthy to unfasten the latchet of his shoes. *looks at sandal in his hand, fingers the broken latchet*

MENAHEM: That is an odd thing for you to say. Just what do you mean?

JOHN: The Christ is far greater than I. He is like the bridegroom; I am like the bridegroom's friend.

I am his forerunner, come to prepare the way.

I am the voice of one crying in the Wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight a highway for our God! Isaiah prophesied this. *see Isaiah 40:3*

SISMAI: *with a hint of a taunt in his voice* Make a highway? Now, just where is this road you speak of supposed to be made? Did Isaiah foretell that?

JOHN: Man is to make the highway for God IN HIS HEART.

Man's heart is like a wild desert, a wilderness place. This, man must change for the coming of the Lord. "Every valley must be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low; and the crooked made straight, and the rough places plain!" *Isaiah 40:4*

SISMAI: *with some anxiety* Come, come, John the Baptizer! Your answers to our questions sound like the poetic words of old Isaiah; and that's highly interesting. But, you have told us nothing we can take back to Jerusalem! We have to have an answer for those who sent us. Excuse us a minute, please.

Sismai motions his companions to come aside. They huddle together, whisper among themselves, then return to John.

PALLU: Tell us this: If you are not "that prophet" promised of old, and if you are not Elijah, and if you are not the Christ, who will come someday, then WHY do you baptize?

JOHN: I was sent by God to baptize with water so that men may show their repentance.

So, I came, baptizing with water. But, there is now in Galilee One--whom you do not know--who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, and with Fire!

He is the one of whom I said "I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoes." *draws attention to his own broken sandal*

Men from Jerusalem, now seriously interested, step closer.

MENAHEM: You stir our curiosity. Who is this person? This man from Galilee.

JOHN: The one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit is Jesus of Nazareth. And "I bare record that He is the son of God!" *John 1:34*

Men from Jerusalem gasp in utter amazement. They all speak at the same time, as follows:

SISMAI: The Son of God? What are you saying?

PALLU: You must be mad! The Son of God, indeed!

MENAHEM: How could you say such a thing! That's blasphemy! *BLASS-fa-me*

SISMAI: *so upset he shakes his finger at John* Young man, the desert sun must have affected your mind! *taps own head to show he thinks John slightly off.*

JOHN: My witness is true.

MENAHEM: *in demanding tone* Explain what you're saying.

JOHN: Some days ago, as I was baptizing people in the River Jordan, this same Jesus of Nazareth came to me to be baptized. And when he was coming up out of the water, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it stayed on him.

MENAHEM: *with much eagerness* Yes! Yes! Go on!

At the same time Menahem is speaking Pallu and Sismai think out loud, so to speak, murmuring to themselves.

PALLU: *under his breath* Like a dove? Hmmm-mm, strange.

SISMAI: *rubbing his fingers across his beard* Most unusual. I wonder what the meaning is. A dove?

JOHN: When God spoke to me in the desert and sent me to baptize with water, he said to me: "John, son of Zechariah, you will see the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remain on a man; He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

And--as I told you--when this Jesus of Nazareth was being baptized in the Jordan, the dove came. And we heard a Voice from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

SISMAI: *highly excited* Would you swear all this is true? That you baptized this Jesus? And that you saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove?

JOHN: I--

SISMAI: *interrupting* Now, before you answer, remember our old code:

"In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." *Cf. Matt. 18:16b*

JOHN: "I saw. And I bare record that this (*Jesus of Nazareth*) is the Son of God." *John 1:34*

SISMAI: Amazing!

PALLU: *with astonishment* God has visited his people!

MENAHEM: All this is incredible!

SISMAI: *turning quickly to his companions* We must get back to Jerusalem! Immediately!

PALLU: Yes!

MENAHEM: I'm willing to travel all night, and there's oil in our lamp! *shakes lamp and listens to its swish*

SISMAI: Of course we'll travel all night! What this man John the Baptizer has just revealed to us will turn Jerusalem upside down!

Three start leaving. Sismai returns to John.

John the Baptizer, we thank you. *lays hand on John's shoulder*

And, Son, keep crying in the wilderness those things Jehovah our God has told you to cry!

JOHN: I will.

Sismai leaves hurriedly to catch up with his companions. The three are scarcely out of sight, and John is turning to join Andrew and Philip when two Roman soldiers come stomping into the camp area. The soldiers are boisterous, loud, and thoroughly disgusted with their assignment. They are talking to each other before they stumble upon Andrew and Philip.

ATTICUS: I've had some crazy assignments from the great Herod, but this beats 'em all! "Go get John the Baptist!" he yells.

CLAUDIUS: Yeah! But he didn't say which way to go. How does he expect us to find this guy John? And it nearly night! Atticus, it's gonna be pitch dark here in another hour. We could get lost!

ATTICUS: Yeah, I know we could get lost--easy. That's why I thought we ought to stay close to the river. If, and when, we find this fellow.

sees Andrew and Philip, the fire, John

Look! Maybe one of these guys is this John.

Atticus and Claudius hurry toward Andrew, Philip and John.

to Andrew, in demanding tone Say, there, you by the bean pot, what's your name?

Andrew and Philip scramble to their feet, John comes closer.

ANDREW: *somewhat taken aback* My name? My name is Andrew. Why to ask?

ATTICUS: *ignoring Andrew's question, addresses Philip* And you? What's your name? It wouldn't be John, would it?

PHILIP: Why no! My name is Philip.

JOHN: I'm John. Known to some as John the Baptizer. What do you soldiers want?

ATTICUS: You! *grabs one of John's arms as Claudius grabs the other* We've been looking for you for three hours.

CLAUDIUS: Orders of Herod! Come on!

Soldiers start marching John along. He drops his broken sandal but does not resist. Andrew and Philip are much upset. John remains calm.

ANDREW: What do you soldiers think you're doing?

PHILIP: *to John* Master! Don't go with 'em! *follows three*

JOHN: *looking back over his shoulder* It's all right. I'll come back.

ATTICUS: *with a tinge of scorn* Ha! I doubt that! Herod is plenty mad at you.

CLAUDIUS: Yeah, and his wife is even madder. I don't know what you told 'em, but whatever it was sent her into a rage.

ATTICUS: *slowing down and turning to other soldier* Claudius, let's give this fellow a little time to tell his friends goodbye.

Three halt, soldiers allow John to turn around

CLAUDIUS: Yeah, we might as well.

ATTICUS: *to John* If you've got anything to say to your friends, say it now, 'cause you re not on your way to Herod's birthday party. We've got orders to lock you up in his new fortress, way over east of the Dead Sea.

Andrew and Philip hurry to John's side.

ANDREW: We'll come with you!

PHILIP: We sure will! If Herod is going to put you in a dungeon, he can put us in, too!

JOHN: No, no, I won't hear of that!

PHILIP: Tell us what to do!

JOHN: *with deliberate calmness* I want you to go on a journey for me. Go to Galilee. Find Jesus of Nazareth, and--

ANDREW: *interrupting* We'll get him to help us get you set free!

JOHN: No, Andrew. There's no need to bother him with my troubles.

ANDREW: What shall we say to him?

JOHN: You are to say that I-- *hesitates* Say that I am "like a reed shaken in the wind." No! Maybe you shouldn't say that. Ask him this question:

"Are you he who is to come? Or look we for another?" *Luke 7:19-23; Matt. 11:2-15*

PHILIP: *with great surprise* Look we for another? We heard you tell those men from Jerusalem that Jesus is the Christ! And just last week you said--

ANDREW: *with disbelief* You've told us he is "the Lamb of God!" That day we saw him, you said "Behold the Lamb of God!" What--

JOHN: *interrupting and speaking in a tone to reassure his disciples* Yes, yes. He is the Christ! He is "the Lamb of God!" This, I know. And this I have told you--

many times--just as I have explained that Jesus is my kinsman. Our mothers are cousins.

But, I want to hear again, from his own lips, that he is the Christ. I want to hear it so I can feel that I have not been a failure, that all my crying in the wilderness was not in vain.

ANDREW: We'll find him, and we'll ask him the question.

PHILIP: We'll cross the Jordan and bear to the west, and we'll go all over Galilee if it's necessary.

ATTICUS: *interrupting* That's enough talk. Come on.

Soldiers march John away. Andrew picks up John's broken sandal.

CURTAIN

End of ACT I, Scene 1

Scene 2

Scene 2--A Sabbath morning, some two weeks later. At the door of a synagogue in rural Galilee. The ruler of the synagogue is standing at the door, watching Andrew and Philip approach. He is anxious to get them to come inside so that he can close the door and the lesson session can begin.

RULER of the SYNAGOGUE: *beckoning to Andrew and Philip* Come, come, strangers. And please hurry. It's time for the lesson to start.

ANDREW: Sir, my name is Andrew, and my friend is Philip.

RULER: Welcome to our synagogue.

PHILIP: We are looking for a man called Jesus of Nazareth, and we were told he would be here at the synagogue this morning.

RULER: *enthusiastically* He is here. And he's going to give the lesson for us again. Just wait till you hear him! He's just the son of a carpenter, but he teaches as one having authority. What he says is far better than what the scribes tell us. *Matthew 7:29*

ANDREW: We've heard he is a great teacher.

RULER: He goes all over Galilee, teaching people about the kingdom of God. That, and healing the sick. The sick and afflicted flock to him in droves! But of course you won't see him doing any healing today, this being the Sabbath. But you know that. Everybody knows it's not lawful to do such things on the Sabbath. *changes tone* Let's go on in, and you just sit wherever you like.

Three pass through doorway as curtain opens on interior of the synagogue. The village men and their sons and grandsons are seated on rows of low, backless benches, placed one behind the other. At the front of the room is a simple lectern, a table with an ornate cloth over it and in its center a seven-branched candlestick, or Menorah, and several worn scrolls. The Christ Figure is seated on the front bench,

holding a scroll. As soon as the Leader and Andrew and Philip are settled, the Christ Figure goes to the lectern and begins to read from the scroll in his hand.

CHRIST FIGURE: *holding up scroll of the book of Isaiah* Hear now the words of the Prophet Isaiah... *reading* "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." *Luke 4:18,19, Isaiah 61:1,2*

hands scroll to Ruler and speaks to audience in Synagogue

This same Scripture is being fulfilled here and now, today, in your village, before your very eyes.

If you have eyes that see, you can behold these things come to pass. You see many come unto me who are burdened and heavy laden, and I give them rest. "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear." *Luke 7:22b*

If you have ears that hear, listen, little flock, as I tell you that the kingdom of God is at hand.

RULER: Good Teacher, tell us what the kingdom of God is like. How will we know the kingdom of God when it comes?

CHRIST FIGURE: The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be <u>seen</u>. You cannot say, "Look, here it is!" Or, "There it is!" Because, the kingdom of God is <u>within you</u>. *Luke 17:20-21*

The kingdom of God "is like a grain of <u>mustard seed</u>, which when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds.. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all the herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it." *Mark 4:30-32*

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto <u>a treasure hid in a field</u>; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found <u>one pearl of great price</u>, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." *Matt. 13:44-46*

Therefore, I say unto you: <u>Seek first</u> the kingdom of God. Seek it above all else. And all other things will be added unto you.

"Life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment." *Luke 12:23* "Do not spend your days fretting over what you shall drink, or what you shall wear. Your Father in heaven knows that you have need of these things.

"Does he not feed the fowls of the air and clothe the lilies of the field? You are worth far more than the ravens and the sparrow and the flowers of the field.

It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." *Luke 12:32b* Your heavenly Father "gives you the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." *Luke 1l:13b*

Moreover, you must "provide yourselves ... a treasure in the heavens ... .For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." *Luke 12:33-34*

"A man is profited nothing if he tries to gain the whole world and loses his own soul."

Hear this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?' And he said, 'This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry.'

"But God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?'

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." *Luke 12:16-21*

Take heed, then, and beware of greediness. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." *Luke 12:15*

Christ Figure starts to sit down, but stops as Merchant stands up to ask a question.

MERCHANT: *on front row* Good Teacher, I am a merchant who travels from village to village, and I have just come from beyond the Jordan. There, many people are talking of John the Baptist, and they say he teaches his followers to pray. Do you teach about praying? *sits down*

CHRIST FIGURE: We should pray without ceasing. Listen, as I tell you a parable: Two men of Jerusalem went up to the Temple to pray. One was a very righteous Pharisee, the other a hated tax collector. The Pharisee stood near the door of the Temple *steps to one side*, *to imitate the Pharisee*. and lifted his eyes toward heaven and prayed: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. *gives wave of the hand to indicate tax collector* I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess ..." *lets voice trail off*

Resumes storytelling tone But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, *imitates tax collector* saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

C.F. moves over a pace or two, resumes teaching tone

I tell you that <u>this</u> man, not the self-righteous Pharisee, was in the right. Every one that tries to make himself great will be humbled, and every one that humbleth himself shall be made great. *Luke 18:10-14*

MERCHANT: Then, is the temple in Jerusalem the best place to pray?

CHRIST FIGURE: *with much patience* No. You can pray in the temple, in the synagogue, on the street corner, in your own home. Just beware that when you pray that you "be not as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

"When you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut the door, pray to the Father who is in secret; and the Father which seeth in secret shall reward you openly.

"Moreover, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not like them; for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." *Matt. 7:7*

Crowd murmurs approval and agreement; Christ Figure steps nearer to congregation and speaks in conversational tone.

CHRIST FIGURE: You men here are fathers, and grandfathers. Your sons are sitting by your side. Let each of you consider this:

If your son were hungry and asked for bread, would you give him a stone? Or, if he asked for a fish, would you give him a snake? Or, if he asked for an egg, would you give him a scorpion?

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Crowd murmurs approval.

MERCHANT: *standing again and showing much enthusiasm* Good Teacher, this is a wonderful teaching! Please tell us...

A man and two women come bursting in the door, interrupting the meeting. The Ruler of the Synagogue rushes over to them. The older woman, literally bent over double, wails because of her pain. Her daughter and brother support her as best they can and try to reassure her. The three do not realize that a Sabbath lesson is in progress, for they are talking as they enter.

BENT-OVER WOMAN: *wailing* Ohhh-hhh-hh! Ohhh-hhh-hh! Will we ever get to where he is? You said he'd be in the synagogue!

BROTHER: This is the synagogue. We're here, Sister, and that's Jesus of Nazareth. *points to C.F.*

BENT-OVER WOMAN: I can't see him! Turn my head the other way.

DAUGHTER: *slowly and gently turning her mother around* Here, Mother, look this way. *points toward C.F.*

RULER: *loudly, to Brother* What's the meaning of this? What are you strangers bursting in here like this for? And this the Sabbath!

Men and boys of congregation turn around at the commotion, but they remain seated. C.F. comes slowly toward Bent Over Woman.

BROTHER: *to Ruler* It's my sister, here, Sir. She's been bent over like this for eighteen years! We didn't know you were having a lesson. We heard that the Great Physician from Nazareth is here.

RULER: He's here, but this is--

DAUGHTER: *still holding her mother, but looking Ruler squarely in the face* We know that he can heal her.

RULER: Woman, are you out of your mind? Don't you know this is the Sabbath! *turns to Christ Figure* Great Teacher, you re not going to-- to-- *breaks off as C.F. starts speaking*

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Ruler* Hold your peace, Ruler of the Synagogue.

BENT-OVER WOMAN: *crying out* Can you heal me, Sir? Can you? I have been bent like this for eighteen years!

CHRIST FIGURE: Ah, Daughter of Abraham, with God, all things are possible. If you believe. Do you believe the Father has given me the power to heal you?

BENT OVER WOMAN: I can believe if you help me to believe.

Christ Figure stoops, clasps woman's hands in his and very gradually straightens her up, as he speaks.

CHRIST FIGURE: Be free from your infirmity! Be straight!

BENT-OVER WOMAN: *as she is straightening up* O, my God! Can this be true!

crowd gasps in astonishment

CHRIST FIGURE: Your faith has made you whole.

BENT-OVER WOMAN: *with much elation* I am straight! I am straight! Look everybody! I'm standing up! Just like all of you! Praise be to God!

MERCHANT: *to crowd* This is a glorious thing we've seen!

CROWD: *in unison* A glorious thing!

Daughter embraces her mother; both of them and Brother kneel in adoration before Christ Figure.

MERCHANT: *to Christ Figure* Great Teacher, you are sent from God!

BROTHER: *looking up at C.F.* Thank you, Master!

CHRIST FIGURE: Go in peace, all of you.

As three are leaving, Ruler of S. addresses congregation. Christ Figure follows the woman he has just healed and her brother and daughter to the door.

RULER: *with much indignation* If you ask me, somebody here has forgotten that commandment which says we have six days in which men ought to work. And people ought to come to be healed on those six days and not on the Sabbath!

CHRIST FIGURE: *as he returns to congregation* Ruler of the Synagogue, be careful not to be a hypocrite. All of you know that when you have an ox tied in the stall on the Sabbath, you loosen him and lead him away to drink water. Don't you?

CROWD: *not in unison, but each one agreeing* Yes.

CHRIST FIGURE: For 18 years this poor woman was bound by a dreadful infirmity. Should she not be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?

CROWD: *in unison* Yes.

CHRIST FIGURE: The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Crowd murmurs its agreement.

CHRIST FIGURE: I leave you now, for I must go into the next village. I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God in <u>all</u> the cities and villages.

As Christ Figure starts out, Andrew and Philip quickly get to their feet.

ANDREW: *calling after C.F.* Sir, we wish to speak with you.

CHRIST FIGURE: Come outside.

Andrew and Philip follow Christ Figure out. Curtain closes.

The scene above is based on Matt. 7:9-11; Luke 11:11-13

<u>Scene 3</u>

Scene 3--Immediately following Scene 2. Just outside the synagogue door, please see: Luke 7:19-30; Matt. 11:2-15; Luke 3:18-20.

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Andrew and Philip* You wish to speak to me?

ANDREW: Yes, Great Teacher. We were sent by John the Baptist. This is Philip, and my name is Andrew.

PHILIP: We're disciples of John the Baptist.

CHRIST FIGURE: *pleasantly* Yes. I saw both of you with him, not long ago. You are from Beth-sa-i-da, and fishermen.

ANDREW and PHILIP: *not in unison, but at about the same time* We are.

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Andrew* You are the brother of Simon, whom I call Simon Peter, aren't you?

ANDREW: Yes, Great Teacher. Simon's my older brother.

CHRIST FIGURE: Is John the Baptist well?

ANDREW: Not exactly. He didn't want us to <u>tell</u> you, but we think you should know that Herod Antipas has thrown John into prison.

CHRIST FIGURE: In prison? That <u>fox</u> Herod! I am sad to hear this.

PHILIP: John sent us to ask you a question.

CHRIST FIGURE: Ah, I would answer any question for him. John the Baptist is like a lamp, burning and shining. *John 5:35*

ANDREW: I fear he is feeling very dejected just now. One of the last things we heard him saw as Herod's soldiers took him away was that he is like "a reed shaken in the wind."

CHRIST FIGURE: John must not let his heart be troubled. He is not "a reed shaken in the wind." I say to you that "among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist!"

For me, he is the fulfillment of that Scripture: "Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

John has prepared my way. He has made a highway in the wilderness.

changes tone

What is the question John would ask of me?

ANDREW: The question is: "Are you the One who is to come, or look we for another?"

CHRIST FIGURE: *in a reflective tone* So, John, my forerunner and my cousin**,** is anxious to hear me say I <u>am</u> the One. The One promised by God**.** *pauses*

Come, Come with me. And spend three days. See what I do, and tell John what you have seen and heard. <u>That</u> will be your answer.

Tomorrow we will travel toward the north and then later I must pass through Nain and all the villages near the city of Nain. It is my work to spread the good news of the kingdom of God to every city, every village; and to heal the sick and to bind up the broken-hearted; and to reveal the Father. The people who sat in darkness shall see a great light. *Matt. 4:16a*

Andrew and Philip follow Christ Figure off stage.

END OF ACT I

ACT II, Scene 1

Scene 1 That same Sabbath, late in the afternoon, at the home of Myra, a poor widow in the city of Nain.

The widow's only child, Tobias, a boy about 12 years old, lies gravely ill in the bedroom of his mother's house. He is delirious and slips now and then into a deep sleep.

Two of his mother's friends attend him. One is bathing his forehead with a wet cloth, which she dips frequently in a basin of water. The other friend slowly fans the ill youth. Furnishings in the room are sparse. Besides the low bed on which Tobias lies, there is a small table near the bed, two benches. And, a low couch on which the widow has been sleeping during her son's illness. The widow has gone to try to get a doctor for Tobias

1st FRIEND: *slowly waving the fan back and forth* I'm here to tell you now, this is a sad situation if I ever saw one. This boy *nods head toward Tobias* is going to

die! His mother thinks when she gets here with the doctor, that he can do some good. But I doubt it.

2nd FRIEND: The doctor may not even come, this being the Sabbath.

TOBIAS: *groaning and trying to turn over* Ohhh-hhh-hh-hh-h. Mother? Where are you Mother? *reaches out hand in groping motion* Mother?

2nd FRIEND: *trying to comfort lad* Shh-hh-h, Tobias. You must go back to sleep. And rest. Your mother's gone to get the physician, and she'll be back in just a little while. *straightens bed covers*

Tobias, his face turned toward audience, goes back into a restless sleep. Second Friend sets water basin on the table and steps closer to First Friend so that the two can converse without disturbing Tobias.

2nd FRIEND: I feel so sorry for Myra, Tobias being her only child and him dying.

1st FRIEND: Yes, and her being so poor makes it even worse. I know for a fact she doesn't have two thin mites to rub together. The year her husband died she had to start selling everything she had--even her herd of goats! Now, she's just down to nothing.

2nd FRIEND: I Know. I watched her sell those goats, one by one. The only one left is a scrawny little pet that belongs to Tobias here.

TOBIAS: *Delirious*, *and calling slowly*, *as if talking to his goat* Benji! Com'ere, Benji! Benji!...*voice trails off*

1st FRIEND: What's he saying?

2nd FRIEND: Poor boy. He's calling his goat. His little goat's name is Benjamin. And he's saying "Com'ere, Benji:" *changes tone* We'd better not talk so loud:

1st FRIEND: *still fanning* I guess I ought not to mention it, but there's something I've been thinking about and worrying about.

2nd FRIEND: What?

1st FRIEND: *lowering voice* If Tobias here does die, his poor mother won't be able to hire any mourners: She can't even have a decent funeral procession.

2nd FRIEND: We'll just have to help her, that's all. Myra doesn't have any money, but she does have friends. Everybody in Nain would help with the funeral procession.

Both friends hear Widow and Doctor talking off stage

1st FRIEND: Shh-hh-h: This must be Myra coming back. *runs to doorway to look out* Yes! The doctor did come. *steps back to bedside and resumes fanning*

Widow and Doctor enter

DOCTOR: *with impatience as he follows Widow through the doorway* But, madam! You don't seem to understand that this is the Sabbath: A physician is like anybody else. He can't work on the holy day.

WIDOW: I know it's the Sabbath, Sir, but my poor Tobias is dying! See him. As I mentioned to you earlier, you can just decide what's wrong with him and what I can do for him. That won't be you working on the Sabbath.

Both Friends move back from bed. Second Friend keeps fanning, very slowly. They watch the doctor intently.

DOCTOR: *sitting down on bench beside bed* Well, it's against my better judgment, but I'll have a look at this boy.

Pulls sheet back to boy's waist, takes up his limp hand--looks at it and feels pulse at wrist. Next he feels boy's cheeks as if testing for swelling, and gently presses area under boy's ears.

DOCTOR: *To widow* Madam, how long has your son been like this?

WIDOW: *Wringing her hands* About seven weeks. That is, he got sick seven weeks ago today. But at first he wasn't so bad off. He's been in a sort of deep sleep and talking out of his head since yesterday.

DOCTOR: *prying open boy's eyelids and looking at his eyes*, *slowly* When did he begin to turn yellow?

WIDOW: *with alarm* Turn yellow? I didn't know he was yellow! *bends to look closely at son*, *takes up his hand and looks at it*, *gasps* He is! Yellow as can be! *beckons to two friends* Come look:

Friends come closer to see, shake their heads and murmur as they step back. They whisper to each other.

WIDOW: Doctor, what does this mean?

DOCTOR: *getting up and stepping away from patient* Madam, it's not good. In fact, it's bad. It means that the demon he has is a yellow demon.

WIDOW: *plaintively* Demon? No! No! Don't say that, Doctor! My Tobias doesn't have a demon! He couldn't have.

DOCTOR: Madam, what do you think causes sicknesses? Especially, this dread yellow illness.

WIDOW: *much flustered* Why, I-- I-- don't know. I'm not a physician.

DOCTOR: A demon is the cause. We who are professional physicians have long recognized that. Sometimes, it's more than one evil spirit that enters a person.

Why not long ago--and my cousin in Magdala told me this, because he knew her--there was a woman in Magdala who had seven devils.

Friends step closer to listen.

Her name was Mary. Now, understand, she wasn't sick in the bed, like your son here. It was her mind *taps his head* and her heart, so to speak. *taps his chest* She was plain mean, and wicked. Some people said she could even cast evil spells, that she was like that famous witch of Endor who talked to King Saul in olden times.

My cousin said everybody called her "Mary, the witch of Magdala," behind her back, that is. This went on for years.

WIDOW: *interrupting* Did she die?

DOCTOR: Oh no! A wonderful thing happened to her. A very unusual thing--just a couple of months ago. A traveling physician came through town and saw her. He felt sorry for her and cast out all seven demons, just as quick as that! *snaps fingers*

Friends and Widow are amazed. All speak almost at the same time.

FIRST FRIEND: My goodness!

SECOND FRIEND: I never heard of such a thing!

WIDOW: Well, I'm glad for her!

DOCTOR. Now, my cousin says that this Mary is a good woman, a fine woman. People just call her Mary of Magdala, or Mary Magdalene. And that physician! My cousin vows he must be some sort of magician, too. Not long ago he was at a wedding over in Cana, and the guests drank up all the wine. So, this man turned the water into wine!

WIDOW. What's the wonderful physician's name?

DOCTOR: *rubbing his beard* Let me see if I can remember. My cousin called his name several times. It'll come to me in a minute.

I know it wasn't Joseph. My cousin mentioned that he was the son of a carpenter named Joseph, who lives up in Nazareth.

And it wasn't Simon. One of the physician's friends was Simon, a big fisherman from the Capernaum area. Well, I just can't think of his name right this minute.

But, I can tell you this: If I ever get to see him, I'm going to find out his secret, or his magic, or whatever it is he has. I could make a fortune.

WIDOW: *with some impatience, because the doctor seems to have forgotten Tobias* Doctor, I'm sure that would be fine. But now what about my son?

What remedy do you have for him? I'll pay you well, as I promised.

DOCTOR: I hesitate to say. Yes, this is a case where I really hesitate.

WIDOW: *anxiously* Surely there must be some tonic or some potion you could give him to swallow. Or, I could rub it on him. Or maybe there's some poultice we could put on this chest. Or something.

DOCTOR: Well, Madam, I will tell you the strongest remedy I know of to get rid of a demon. It was given to me by my father, and to him by his father. And it's even older than that.

You can try it tomorrow. Not today, because it is absolutely not lawful to treat the sick on the Sabbath.

I could get into trouble with the city elders, not to mention the ruler of our synagogue.

WIDOW: I'll wait until tomorrow, Doctor. And I promise to pay you well, as I told you. I will. I don't have any money now, but I'll do some weaving for a merchant who comes to Nain from Magdala. Your cousin probably knows him. He pays well, and I'll pay you well. Just please tell me how to save my son!

DOCTOR: Here is what you are to do: Take a large fish--

WIDOW: *Eagerly*, *echoing doctor's words* A large fish.

DOCTOR: Slice the fish open carefully--

WIDOW: *intently* Carefully.

DOCTOR: Take out its gall, its heart, and its liver.

WIDOW: *still in echo tone* Gall, heart, and liver.

DOCTOR: Burn the heart and liver here in this room. Then, 24 hours later anoint your son's eyes with the gall. Can you remember that?

WIDOW: Oh, yes! Burn the heart and the liver here in this room. And, next day, rub the gall on my son's eyes.

DOCTOR: Be sure the fish is large. *starts toward door*

WIDOW: I will! I will! *following doctor toward door* I'll get an enormous fish.

DOCTOR: *turning at the door and speaking in stern business-like tone* You can pay me at your convenience, Madam. And, if you don't mind, please ask your friends there *gestures to two friends* not to mention to anybody in Nain that you called me to attend the sick on the Sabbath.

Leaves, *then quickly sticks his head back inside the door*

Madam, I just remembered! That physician from Nazareth is named Jesus.

Leaves without waiting for a reply

WIDOW: *in a contemplative tone*, *to herself* Jesus. A physician named Jesus of Nazareth.

Widow turns and goes back to her son's bedside. Friends hurry to her.

WIDOW: *shaking her head* Somehow, I don't put much confidence in our Nain doctor. *to her Friends* Do either of you think what he said will do poor Tobias any good?

1st FRIEND: Well, it might.

2ND FRIEND: You could try it.

WIDOW: Of course, I'll try it. I would try anything. *sighs* To buy the fish, I'll have to sell the last little goat. I hate to. I had given that one to Tobias. But he has to be sold. A big fish will cost much.

1st FRIEND: Don't worry. Tobias will understand.

2nd FRIEND: When he gets well, maybe you can buy him another goat.

1st FRIEND: Myra, tomorrow morning my husband could take the goat to market for you. Real early.

2nd FRIEND: My husband could go with him; then they could get the fish right away.

WIDOW: That's very kind of you. And I would appreciate it. I appreciate all you've done for Tobias and me these last seven weeks. When I'm lying over there on that couch *gestures toward low bed* trying to sleep, I thank God for my friends.

1st FRIEND: I know you keep the goat tied out in your yard. So I could take him home with me now, and that would save time in the morning.

WIDOW: Well, all right. If you're not in too much of a hurry, though, let me bring the goat in to say good-bye to Tobias.

starts toward door, Friends exchange knowing looks

WIDOW: *turning around at door* I know this may be foolish, but I never do things that I don't tell Tobias. And Tobias loves his little goat so much! And it won't take a minute.

goes out, Second Friend again fans Tobias

1st FRIEND: *whispering* The boy's so far gone he won't ever know that goat's been sold.

2nd FRIEND: Right. *resumes normal tone* It's getting late; I'd better get a lamp in here for Myra. *goes out*

Widow comes back, carrying a small goat in her arms. She goes immediately to boy's bedside, sits down on bench, close enough for Tobias to see and touch the goat--if he were able.

WIDOW: *calling*, *gently* Tobias? I know you're asleep, Son, but maybe you can hear what I'm saying. I have your little Benji here. Tomorrow I--

TOBIAS: *weakly*, *as he reaches out for the goat* Benji!

Widow moves goat closer, First Friend takes hand of Tobias and lays it on goat's head.

TOBIAS: Benji, you-- *voice trails off*, *hand slips off goat*, *Tobias falls back to sleep*.

WIDOW: Tobias, tomorrow we must sell Benji. But I'll buy him for you! I'll buy him back--soon as you get well. I will! I'll buy him back.

Second Friend brings in lamp, puts it on table. Widow goes over with both friends to the door, where she hands over the goat to First Friend. Friends leave. Widow returns to son's bedside.

WIDOW: *Taking boy's limp hand in hers and speaking slowly*, *with much feeling* Oh, Tobias, Tobias. You're all I have. Get well, soon. Don't die.

When you were born, Tobias, your father and I had great hopes for you. We were so thankful to have you.

Your name, "Tobias," the name your father chose for you, means "God is good." I don't believe He will let you die.

Widow gently lays son's hand down, rearranges the blanket which covers him. She then pulls her couch closer to her son's bed, moves the lamp to a convenient spot, and kneels beside her couch.

WIDOW: *praying*, *hands clasped and looking up* Unto thee, O Lord, I lift up my prayer.

O my God, I trust in thee; hear my cry. You <u>are</u> good.

Let not my son, the only son of my womb, die.

Look upon his affliction and deliver him.

"Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindness; for they have been ever of old." Amen. *Cf. Psalm 25*

Widow lies down to sleep, leaving lamp burning.

<u>End of Scene 1,</u> CURTAIN

Scene 2

Scene 2--Early the next morning, in the same room. The lamp is still burning, and the Widow is still asleep on her couch, not knowing that during the night Tobias has died. The two friends come in quietly. First Friend carries a basket of food. Second Friend has a large, freshly caught, whole fish. Of course they are not aware that Tobias has died.

1st FRIEND: *in moderate tone*, *just as she enters* Myra, we have fish. And I've brought you a bite of breakfast, and-- *stops short*, *turns to companion* She is still <u>asleep</u>: Should we wake her?

2nd FRIEND: Maybe not yet. She needs all the rest she can get. *tiptoes over to boy's bed* I hope and pray this poor child is <u>better</u>. He looks-- *sees that Tobias looks different*, *drops the fish and quickly feels boy's brow* He's dead! *throws up hands in alarm*

1st FRIEND: *puts down basket*, *runs to boy's bed* Oh, LORD, have mercy on us all!

2nd FRIEND: *wringing her hands and looking down at Widow* Poor Myra! Poor Myra! She will have a sad road to travel.

1st FRIEND: Yes. Now we'll <u>have</u> to wake her. *pulls blanket over face of Tobias*.

2nd FRIEND: Then, we'll have to start preparations for the mourning, and the sad procession.

CURTAIN, End of ACT II

ACT III, <u>Scene 1</u>

Scene 1--The following day, at noon, at a grove of trees beside the road leading into Nain. A large group of people, many of them sick or afflicted, have assembled near a grove of trees to wait for Jesus of Nazareth to pass by. There is an old man from a village near Endor, a father with his crippled little girl, two blind men and

their wives, a deaf and dumb woman and her sister, and a woman who is a leper. All are weary, impatient, worried.

OLD MAN: *in trembling voice* Do any of you know for sure that this physician from Nazareth is coming along this road?

FATHER: *holding little Sarah in his arms* Yes, Sir. I'm sure. My brother told me. He overheard this Jesus of Nazareth say he planned to go to Nain, and this is the only road leading in from the east.

SISTER of DEAF and DUMB WOMAN: *to Father* Do you think he can heal somebody like my sister, who's deaf and dumb?

FATHER: I believe he can. My brother saw him heal a woman who had been bent double for eighteen years! And my brother said I was plumb crazy if I didn't bring my little Sarah to him. *gestures toward child's right leg which is in a homemade splint from the knee to the ankle* I've been waiting here since daylight. *eases Sarah down to ground* Sarah, hon, you sit down here a little while and let my arms rest. You can play with your ball. *Hands child a ball. Sister of deaf and dumb woman begins rolling ball back and forth with Sarah.*

BLIND MAN: *seated on ground, loudly* Will some of you good folks with eyes please tell me when you see this famous physician coming?

2nd BLIND MAN: *Surprised that there is another blind person present* Say, over there! Are you blind, too? I thought I was the only one here with no eyes!

1st BLIND MAN: *loudly* Yes, I'm blind! I never would know which is day and which is night, if my wife here didn't tell me. *Tugs at wife's skirt and speaks to her* Take me over there to talk to that blind gentleman.

Wives lead blind husbands to one side so they can sit together and talk. Wives remain standing and converse loud enough to be heard. Audience does not hear what men have to say to each other.

1st WIFE: How long has your husband been blind?

2nd WIFE: For years and years. He took a bad spell of sickness, soon after we were married. And that sickness settled in his eyes. He can't work. He can't do anything. And he refuses to beg, like most blind people.

1st WIFE: Sounds just like my husband! *gives wave of the hand toward deaf and dumb woman* Let's speak to that poor woman. She looks strange, somehow.

Wives of two blind men approach Deaf and Dumb Woman.

2nd WIFE: *looking down at D & D Woman* Madam, have you ever seen Jesus of Nazareth?

Woman looks at her intently but says nothing.

2nd WIFE *continued*: You know-- The one we're all waiting for, the one who can heal all manner of diseases? Have you ever seen him?

DEAF AND DUMB WOMAN: *with very thick tongue, mumbles and gurgles, opens her mouth, sticks out her tongue and points to it. Mumbles some more, points to her ears.*

Sister quickly leaves crippled Sarah and her ball and hurries to wives of blind men. Father picks Sarah up again.

SISTER: *in apologetic tone* Ladies, it's no use trying to talk to my sister. She's both deaf and dumb.

1st WIFE: Oh, I'm sorry.

2nd WIFE: That's too bad. She's such a pretty woman, too.

1st WIFE: The last time I visited my parents in Capernaum, I saw this Jesus. People there were saying he is sent from God, and that he can heal all manner of diseases.

2nd WIFE: Nobody can heal leprosy. *motions toward leper, who is seated a long distance from the group* Whoever brought this poor woman here to wait shouldn't have done it.

Father of little Sarah has walked some paces down the road and is there when Christ Figure, Andrew and Philip come into view.

FATHER: *With enthusiasm as he hurriedly rejoins group* Say, folks! I just saw three men coming! Let's hope one of them is Jesus of Nazareth!

1st BLIND MAN: Go ask, fellow! Go ask!

1st WIFE: *Shading her eyes against the noonday sun* That's him! The one in the middle! He's the one I saw in Capernaum.

There is a general commotion as all who are seated scramble to their feet and rush toward the Christ Figure. Each wants his patient to be first. Many call out at the same time, as follows:

1ST BLIND MAN: *calling loudly* Jesus of Nazareth! Have mercy on us! Heal us!

2ND WIFE: *loudly* Sir, we have two blind men here!

SISTER: Master, have pity on my poor sister! She's deaf and dumb!

FATHER: *going close to C. F., holding up Sarah* See my little girl? Please heal her crippled leg!

LEPER: *calls loudly and piteously but does not move toward C.F.* Son of David, have mercy on a poor leper!

Christ Figure approaches group; Andrew and Philip linger in background.

CHRIST FIGURE: *raising his hands in greeting, and, to get the crowd to be quiet* My peace to all of you. *turns to Father and Sarah* My little one, your leg is crooked, isn't it? *child nods head* And your little foot is growing the wrong way. *C.F. begins unwinding splints and bandages*

FATHER: *eagerly* Sir, she was born that way.

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Father* Do you have faith that I can heal your child's little lame leg? *stops unwrapping, continues to hold Sarah's foot.*

FATHER: Oh Sir, I've heard that you are going all over Galilee, healing any and all diseases. And I believe you can help my Sarah.

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes, I have healed many--to bring glory to the Heavenly Father and to show all men that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Places one hand on child's knee, the other on her foot and prays

CHRIST FIGURE: *with face lifted toward heaven* Our Father, glorify thy name through this little child.

Completely unwraps leg. Crowd gasps to see that it is whole. Each (except blind men and D. and D. woman) murmurs approval under his breath.

SARAH: *to her father, as she points to her foot* Look, Father!

FATHER: *almost overwhelmed* Oh, Master! Thank you! You are THE GREAT PHYSICIAN! *moves aside*, *hugs child* Sarah, baby! Now you can walk--just like other children!

As SISTER leads Deaf and Dumb Woman up to Christ Figure, Andrew and Philip, still standing in the background, speak to each other in tones audience can hear.

ANDREW: We must tell John the Baptist about this.

PHILIP: Oh, I wish John were here to see these miracles!

SISTER: *holding D & D Woman's arm, as she speaks to Christ Figure* Master, please have mercy on my poor sister. Her ears are closed! Her tongue is tied! She was born this way. And we don't know why! Maybe our father sinned. Or maybe our mother sinned. We just don't know why she's like this.

CHRIST FIGURE: *Kindly* Neither your father nor your mother sinned. Sin did not cause your sister's affliction. She is like this so that her healing can make God known to her. She will know that her healing is the work of God. *turns to entire group* Let all of us see the power of God in this, for "I work the works of Him that sent me." *Cf. John 9:1-4*

Christ Figure places hands over woman's ears, looks up, moves his lips in a silent prayer.

CHRIST FIGURE: Ears, be opened! *removes hands*

Woman smiles broadly, opens her eyes widely to show amazement and delight. Christ Figure takes Woman's left hand and places her fingers on her lips. Again, he lifts eyes toward heaven and prays silently.

CHRIST FIGURE: *still holding Woman's fingers in place with his hand* Tongue, be loosened, be straight, and speak! Speak praise to our Father in heaven!

Woman cries out in joy and falls at his feet. Sister, too, kneels in adoration.

SISTER: Master! Master! You are from God!

HEALED WOMAN: *Speaking very slowly* From-- From God!

CROWD: *to show amazement*, *and*, *praise* From God!

CHRIST FIGURE: *placing one hand on healed woman's head*, *the other on the sister's head* Go in peace. Go to your home, and tell what great things God has done.

Both women rise, move aside. They are much elated; joy shines in their faces. As they are moving, Andrew and Phillip speak to each other.

ANDREW: We never saw anything like this before!

PHILLIP: When we tell John, he will be utterly amazed.

OLD MAN: *to entire group* Friends, friends, I tell you this day God has visited Israel!

CHRIST FIGURE: Let the blind men come to me.

Wives lead men forward. Men kneel. Women step aside. Christ Figure addresses men. Crowd listens intently.

CHRIST FIGURE: So! You blind men believe I can give light to your eyes!

1st BLIND MAN: Yes, I believe you can.

2nd BLIND MAN: You can! The power of God is in your touch! You hold light in your hands!

CHRIST FIGURE: I have come into the world to be "the light of the world." "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The prophet Isaiah spoke of me when he said, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

Cf. John 8:12; Isaiah 42:6-7; Matt. 4:14-16; Isaiah 9:2

C. F. places hands on heads of kneeling men.

CHRIST FIGURE: Be it unto both of you, according to your faith. *steps back a pace or two*

Both men rub their eyes, as a child does when he is sleepy; both cry out at the same time, as follows:

1ST BLIND MAN: I can see! God be praised! *jumps up*, *looks at crowd* I can see all of you!

2ND BLIND MAN: *jumping to his feet* My eyes! They're open! I can see! I can see everything! Everything is beautiful! *turns to C.F.* Master, praise be to God for you!

At same time Blind Men are rejoicing, the Crowd shows great amazement and approval by murmuring among themselves, each pointing toward the Blind Men who have received their sight. Andrew and Philip murmur to each other.

OLD MAN: to *father of Sarah*, *but in tone for all to hear* I am an old man, but never have I seen such in Galilee!

Both wives hurry to their husbands, speaking as they come.

1st WIFE: Praise be to God in heaven!

2nd WIFE: *directly to C.F.* Blessed are you! And blessed is the woman who gave you birth! Blessed is she!

CHRIST FIGURE: It would be well to say "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." *Cf. Luke 11:28*

Christ Figure looks about him, but does not notice leper. Are there no others to be healed?

LEPER: *crying out* Master! Have mercy on me! I'm a leper! Just walk by me. And let me touch the hem of your garment! *reaches out a trembling hand* That will heal me.

CHRIST FIGURE: Come to me. *starts to meet leper*

Entire crowd moves back in fear of the leper, as she approaches Christ Figure. They exclaim to each other, as follows:

1ST WIFE: Look! He's going to touch the leper!

2ND WIFE: I can't believe what I'm seeing!

SISTER: *to sister who was deaf and dumb* Look, Sister, this Man from God is going to heal a leper!

FATHER: I say it again: He is the great physician!

1ST BLIND MAN: My eyes are seeing a miracle!

2ND BLIND MAN: Surely God is in this place!

OLD MAN: I thank God I lived to see this day!

Leper kneels low before Christ Figure, weeping as she kisses the hem of his robe again and again without lifting her eyes

CHRIST FIGURE: Woman of Galilee, arise and go in peace. *helps her stand* Your faith has made you whole. Go offer the sacrifice required of lepers by the law of Moses. Go tell what great things God has done this day.

LEPER: Thank you, Master! *starts rolling up her sleeves and looking at her arms, as she steps away* It's all gone! *other women crowd her on side of stage to see and to rejoice with her*

Andrew and Philip come to Christ Figure

ANDREW: *breathlessly* Oh, Master, we will tell John the Baptist the wonders we have seen today!

PHILLIP: *with awe* You have made the lame walk, the blind see, and now you've healed a leper! If only John were--

OLD MAN: *interrupting* Please let an old man speak to him!

Andrew and Philip move aside

Master, now I know why your fame is spreading through all Galilee! Come to my village now! Go with me.

CHRIST FIGURE: Where is your village?

OLD MAN: Not too far from here. Just half a day's journey. It is toward the northeast, near where the old city of Endor once stood. Will you come?

CHRIST FIGURE: I will come. But, first, I must go on to Nain, to show the people there that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

OLD MAN: *nodding his head* Yes, yes, of course. At my village we will wait for you, and you and your companions are to break bread with me at my house. *bows and turns away*

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Andrew and Philip* Come, we must be on our journey to Nain.

Three leave stage. Crowd gradually disperses, all going in the opposite direction from that taken by Christ Figure and companions.

End of Scene 1

Act III, Begin Scene 2 Christ raising son of the Widow of Nain from death

Note to all players: Please see Luke 7:11-18. Also the resurrection of Lazarus: John 11:1-45

Scene 2--Mid-afternoon of the same day. At the village well in Nain. The Christ Figure, Andrew and Philip have stopped at the well to rest. C.F. is seated on a bench beside the well, Philip on the ground. Andrew is drawing up water and serving his companions.

PHILIP: *just after he gulps down a drink* You can say one thing for Nain. The water here is good.

ANDREW: It's strange we don't see any people on the street. I thought Nain was a rather big place.

PHILIP: Maybe they just don't come to draw water in the middle of the afternoon.

Off stage there is the distant sound of gongs and cymbals and wailing.

PHILIP: What's that I hear?

CHRIST FIGURE: You hear the answer to your question as to where the people of Nain are.

First portion of funeral procession comes into view.

ANDREW: Look! It's a funeral procession!

The whole town has turned out to help the grieving Widow mourn and to transport Tobias' body to the grave site. The playing of the gong and cymbal and other instruments gets louder and the wailing increases as the procession comes nearer.

Heading the line is a man slowly clanging cymbals together. Next is a man with an oriental chime. Then come four men bearing the body on a stretcher. The stretcher is draped in black, the body wrapped in white linen-like cloth.

Behind the bier walks the weeping Widow, supported by the Two Friends. Behind them are four women, dressed in sackcloth and black veils such as professional mourners wore in Biblical times (and still wear in the Far East). These four wail loudly, bow down and rise up, flail the air with their arms, and toss ashes into the air and on their heads.

Next to the four who are acting as hired mourners are many other townspeople, who also wail and wipe their eyes with white crying towels The last person is a man who is slowly beating a gong, as one would toll a bell.

PHILIP: *getting to his feet* Somebody important must have died!

CHRIST FIGURE: *with compassion* That poor woman is grief stricken! *gets up* Her face! It's the saddest face I ever saw! Wait here for me.

Christ Figure steps in front of procession, lifts his hand for the group to stop. Musicians and mourners get quiet. All stand still. Christ figure goes directly to the Widow.

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Widow* Do not weep!

WIDOW: *much surprised that anybody, especially a stranger, would say such a thing to her* Do not weep? Stranger! What do you mean? Why do you say such a thing to me? My son is dead!

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes. I know.

WIDOW: How can I not weep? I have nothing now. I prayed to GOD that my Tobias would live. But he died, on the Sabbath.

CHRIST FIGURE: Your son shall live again.

WIDOW: *with disbelief* Live? How can we live again? Maybe he will live again when the resurrection comes again on the last day.

Many of mourners quietly move closer, listen with awe.

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Widow* "I am the resurrection and the life! He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

WIDOW: *much-interested* Sir, who are you?

CHRIST FIGURE: I am the One who was to come into the world, the One whom the prophets foretold. My name is Jesus.

WIDOW: *with surprise* Jesus? Are you from Nazareth?

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes, I am from Nazareth.

WIDOW: Oh Sir, you're that physician we've heard about! *changes tone to one of regret* Oh, if you had only come sooner! If you had been here on the Sabbath, my Tobias would not have died.

CHRIST FIGURE: I am glad for your sake--and for all gathered here--that I did not come on the Sabbath. *Cf. John 11:15*

WIDOW: But why?

CHRIST FIGURE: So that you may believe in me. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. *pauses* Do you believe this? *John 11:26*

WIDOW: Sir, I believe that one day the Messiah will come, and he will tell us all things about life and death.

CHRIST FIGURE: The Messiah has come. He stands before you.

WIDOW: *much astonished* You are the MESSIAH?

A murmur of amazement sweeps through the crowd. They look from one to another, make comments under their breath. What three say can be heard by audience, as follows

MAN WITH CYMBALS: Can this be true?

1ST STRETCHER-BEARER: The Messiah come to Nain?

2ND STRETCHER-BEARER: I can't believe this man is the MESSIAH!

A hush comes over the Crowd.

CHRIST FIGURE: *to entire group* Do not be surprised when I tell you that the Father in Heaven has sent me. Or, that this widow's son shall live again.

The father is the source of life, and he has made His Son to be the source of life. *Cf. John 5:26*

Moreover, "the hour is coming, when all that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God...They shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." *Cf. John 5:24-29*

Christ Figure places hand on the head of shrouded boy and, looking up to heaven, prays.

Father in heaven, you hear my prayers always. Hear me again. Let me show these people of Nain, through this child, that you have sent me into the world and that your kingdom is at hand. Let them learn this day, that he who believes in me shall have eternal life!

Christ Figure looks down at Tobias and addresses him

Young man, arise! For the glory of God! Arise!

Tobias sits up. The napkin covering his face falls off. Crowd members gasp in amazement. All, except Widow and Stretcher-Bearers, kneel down in adoration.

TOBIAS: *looking around in bewilderment, as Christ Figure unwraps his hands* What's happened? Where am I? Where is my mother? *calling* Mother?

CHRIST FIGURE: *still holding hand of Tobias* Your mother is here. *to stretcher bearers* Let down the stretcher. *takes shroud from around Tobias and leads him toward widow* Come, Widow of Nain, here is your son. *Widow and Tobias run to embrace each other. Both speak at the same time.*

WIDOW: Tobias! My son! My son!

TOBIAS: Mother! *clings to mother's arm*

WIDOW: *caressing Tobias' head* You are alive! God has given you back to me! *turning to C.F.* Oh, Jesus of Nazareth, you are the MESSIAH!

CHRIST FIGURE: *to Widow* Yes. *turns to Crowd* Go now, in peace, all of you. You have seen with your own eyes the power of God.

Crowd moves away, very quietly, as Christ Figure goes back toward the village well. Andrew and Philip hurry to meet him. Both are much elated.

ANDREW: Master! You amaze us!

PHILIP: I don't know what to say!

ANDREW: We can't imagine what John the Baptist will say when we go to his prison cell and tell him all these things we have heard and seen.

CHRIST FIGURE: John will rejoice with exceeding great joy. He will know that his work is finished. He has prepared the highway for his God. *changes tone* Come, we must go to the village near Endor, as I promised. My work is to do the will of the father.

Three move off stage, going in opposite direction from that taken by Nain crowd.

End of Scene 2

END OF ACT III

Begin ACT IV, Scene 1

Players, for John's imprisonment and slaying see: Luke 3:19-20, Matt 14:3-12, Mark 6:14-29

Scene 1--About two weeks later. In the courtyard of the fortress Machaerus, the isolated outpost of Herod Antipas, where John is imprisoned. It is late afternoon, and preparations are underway for a banquet in Herod's honor, but Herod is little concerned. Instead, he has sent orders for John the Baptist to be brought up from the dungeon and placed in the portable cage set up in the courtyard. This, so that he can talk to John. Herod continues to hold John prisoner only because of his wife Herodias.

Meanwhile, Andrew and Philip have arrived at the fortress and have asked permission to speak to John.

As the scene opens, several servants carrying water jars and large containers of fruits, bread, wine and other foods scurry. The last servant to pass is old; he limps and he carries a conspicuously large bowl of oranges.

Two Roman soldiers, Atticus and Claudius, are bringing John in, to place him in the cage. There is a bench near the cage, some other garden furniture and water jars nearby. The soldiers are on either side of their prisoner. John walks with difficulty; he is barefooted; and he keeps shielding his eyes with his hands.

JOHN: *blinking and rubbing his eyes* The sunlight! I've been down in that dungeon so long the light hurts my eyes!

ATTICUS: Yeah, I imagine so.

JOHN: Where are you taking me?

CLAUDIUS: We're putting you in this cage, on orders of Herod. Herod wants to talk to you.

JOHN: *brightening his tone* Herod? He must be going to release me.

ATTICUS: *shaking his head* I wouldn't count on it, if I were you. But we do have some good news for you. *opens door of cage*

CLAUDIUS: *as he thrusts John inside the cage and begins fastening the chain on the door* Yeah! Your two friends are here.

JOHN: Andrew and Philip?

ATTICUS: It's those two fellows you sent over to Galilee to look for somebody--I don't know just who. You remember--that day Herod sent us to get you.

JOHN: *cheerfully* Then it's Andrew and Philip! Let them in! I must talk to them! Please! Just for a minute. See, Herod's not even here yet. *waves hand toward other corner of courtyard.*

ATTICUS: *reluctantly* Well, it will have to be just for a minute. *turns to other soldier* Claudius, go tell the two guys from Galilee that they can come talk to their friend. But just for one minute.

CLAUDIUS: Right. One minute. *hurries out*

Three servants pass through courtyard, carrying more banquet food.

ATTICUS: *easing himself down on the bench beside cage* I understand today is Herod's birthday, and they're having a big banquet tonight. I bet they've got enough food cooked up to feed a whole Roman legion.

OLD SERVANT: *as he limps by the cage, carrying a huge silver bowl of oranges* Make that two Roman legions.

Servant trips, falls spilling oranges in all directions.

groaning Oh, my back. *gets to his feet with difficulty* Atticus, you're young and strong as an ox. And I've done you some favors. Help me pick up these cursed oranges!

ATTICUS: Sure! *starts helping Old Servant* The real favor I want you to do for me is to get me transferred back to Rome!

Helps old servant balance bowl of oranges on his shoulder

OLD S.: I'll try. And I'll go with you. *limps away, staggering under his load*

At the same time, Claudius ushers in Andrew and Philip.

CLAUDIUS: *as three enter* Remember now, one minute!

ATTICUS: Yeah! Talk fast. *turns to Claudius* Come on, Claud. Let's you and me give the dice a twirl or two.

Soldiers go to corner of courtyard, begin rolling dice. Andrew and Philip rush to John.

JOHN: Andrew! Philip! *reaches out between the bars to grasp hands of his friends* I'm glad to see you two!

ANDREW: It took us a long time to find this fortress.

PHILIP: We got here as soon as we could.

JOHN: *eagerly* Did you see Jesus?

ANDREW: *enthusiastically* Yes! He was down in south Galilee, and we traveled with him for three days.

PHILIP: I wish you'd been with us. The things we saw him do! They were miracles! Plain miracles!

ANDREW: It was almost unbelievable!

JOHN: Did you ask him the question?

ANDREW: We did. We used your very words. We said: "Are you the One who is to come, or look we for another?"

JOHN: *anxiously* His answer?

ANDREW: He didn't answer. Instead, he invited us to travel with him a few days and then to come and tell you what we saw and heard.

As Andrew and Phillip remember the deeds of the Christ, they become almost carried away in telling their story.

PHILIP: First, we heard him teach in a synagogue! Such teaching! Wonderful things! He said God knows what we need even before we pray to Him! And he said the Kingdom of God is like a treasure hid in a field. And at the same time it is within us!

ANDREW: And right there in the synagogue he healed a bent-over woman, on the Sabbath! Next day, he gave two blind men their sight! And healed a child's crooked leg!

PHILIP: He cured a woman who was deaf and dumb!

ANDREW: He even cured a leper! And that same afternoon, just as we got to the village of Nain, a funeral procession came by. Jesus stopped the procession and RAISED THE BOY FROM THE DEAD!

JOHN: *breathlessly* He is the one! We need not look for another. This fills my heart with gladness!

ANDREW: Master, Jesus said many kind things about you. He said you have fulfilled the prophecy about preparing a highway for our God.

JOHN: I'm glad you told me that. It means that my crying in the wilderness was not in vain. I wish I could tell both of you how I feel. Here I am, in prison. Perhaps I should feel bitter. But I don't. I feel joy and exaltation.

I was born to be the "Prophet of the Most High," and the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the highway of the Lord!" These things I have done. Now--

Soldiers interrupt John as they see Herod entering the courtyard.

ATTICUS: Your time is up! *hurries toward cage*

CLAUDIUS: *right behind Atticus, and speaking to Andrew and Philip* Come on, you two! Herod's coming.

Starts ushering Andrew and Philip out

Maybe you can talk to your friend some other time. *Herod goes straight to John's cage, talking as he arrives.*

HEROD: *briskly* John, the Baptizer, I've been wanting to talk to you.

JOHN: *without emotion* Very well. I hope you're going to tell me that you're setting me free.

HEROD: *As he sits down on bench*, *with a sigh of relief to get off his feet* No, I can't do it, just yet. I'm sorry. And, to tell you the truth, I would set you free this very day if it were not for my wife Herodias. She has a grudge against you.

Claudius returns. He and Atticus start up their dice game again.

JOHN: Yes, I know.

HEROD: *leaning forward and speaking confidentially--after he has looked and there's nobody listening* But let's forget about her! *resumes normal tone* That day I heard you speaking down by the River Jordan you were saying something about making a highway in the desert. And about making the mountains and hills low and the crooked places straight, and the rough places plain.

JOHN: Yes. I'm glad you're interested. I was quoting the old Prophet Isaiah, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God!"

HEROD: A highway! Yes, a straight highway! That's what we need on this side of the Jordan. And that's what I'm going to tell Emperor Tiberius. *slaps hand on his knee*, *for emphasis*

JOHN: Emperor Tiberius?

HEROD: Sure! Why not? I'm going to Rome in a few weeks, and I'll just plain tell Tiberius he ought to build a new road, between here and the coast. If I don't tell him--

JOHN: *interrupting and throwing up his hands in despair at Herod's misinterpretation of his message* You don't understand! Isaiah wasn't talking about a real road. It's for God. The highway every man must make is in his heart!

HEROD: *much perplexed* In the heart? That doesn't make sense!

JOHN: It means a man must repent! Before God!

HEROD: I never heard of this repenting business. Explain it to me.

JOHN: The Greeks have a word for it. It means "to change the heart." And it means--

Herodias comes storming out, interrupting with loud, scolding talk. She is irate with Herod because he is doing nothing toward the banquet preparations, and, because he is talking with John.

HERODIAS: Herod Antipas! Get yourself into this house! Never have I seen the likes of you!

HEROD: *meekly and wearily* Yes, my dear! *gets up*, *slowly*

HERODIAS: *literally grabbing Herod by the ear and leading him to the banquet room door and talking all the while without so much as catching a breath* It's your birthday! Remember your honor! We're having a big banquet tonight.

Remember? You've got to help me with the seating arrangement. All the important people we know will be here! Remember?

HEROD: Yes my dear! I remember.

HERODIAS: *letting go of Herod's ear as they pause at the doorway* And another thing! I've told you not to waste your time talking to that wretched John the Baptizer! He's nothing but a crazy prophet who hollers in the wilderness!

gets more and more wrought up

The very idea of saying you ought not to have divorced that-- that-- Arabian woman to marry me! She was a witch! And--

HEROD: *in soothing tone* Now, now, Herodias, don't let yourself get all upset again.

HERODIAS: I'm not upset! That crazy man in the cage should have had his head chopped off, long ago!

Herod goes on inside. Herodias lingers, looks back at John and speaks to herself; for, it has just occurred to her how she can have John beheaded.

Yes! *pauses* His head! It could be chopped off! I don't know why I hadn't thought of this before.

Soldiers quietly take John away. But the spotlight remains on Herodias. Salome comes hurrying out, looking for Herodias. Salome wears her banquet gown and carries a very large red veil and a white one.

SALOME: *eagerly* Mother?

HERODIAS: *with considerable impatience* What is it, Salome?

SALOME: Mother, may I ask you a question?

HERODIAS: This is no time for questions, Salome! You go and practice your dance for tonight! Like I've been telling you this long day. And for goodness sake, tonight don't dance like a stiff beanpole!

SALOME: *pleading* The question is about my dance tonight.

HERODIAS: *very impatiently* Well, what is it? What about your dance?

SALOME: *spreading out first one veil and then other* Should I wear this white veil or this red one?

HERODIAS: The red one, of course. You don't know a thing about colors, Salome. Now go practice! With the musicians. They're already here.

Salome runs inside. Herodias walks in, slowly.

(End of Scene 1)

Scene 2

Scene 2--That same evening, in the banquet room of Herod's fortress. The birthday celebration is well underway. The U-shaped table is crowded with guests. Herod sits in the middle, Herodias down at the far-left side. All guests are eating and

drinking, with much merriment. Herod is already so drunk he scarcely knows whose birthday is being celebrated.

The soldiers Atticus and Claudius stand guard at the door. Three servants hover in the background, wine pitchers in hand. The loud talk and laughter can be heard before the curtain opens. The music begins.

The curtain goes up, and Salome comes sashaying in, flouncing her red veil as she begins her dance before Herod. Her audience gets caught up in the spirit of the dance. All begin clapping their hands, stomping their feet.

When Salome ends her dance and bows before Herod, there is a wild applause.

HEROD: *raising his wineglass and speaking with a thick tongue* A toast to our-- To our S'lom-- To our Sa-lo-me!

ALL GUESTS: *raising their glasses* To Salome!

HEROD: *raising his glass again* Another toast! To the bes' li'l dancer in th' whole kingdom!

ALL GUESTS: *raising glasses* The best dancer in the whole kingdom!

HEROD: *beckoning to Salome with his forefinger* C'm'ere, ya pretty one! Come give you' ol' stepfather a littl' kiss!

Salome hurries to his side, kisses him on the forehead.

HEROD: Honey, sit here on my knee a minute! *Salome reluctantly sits on Herod's knee* You're sweet an' pretty as a pomegranate. That's what ya are! A pomegranate! An' ya dance like-- like a doll! I'm gonna give ya somethin'! Anything ya want! Any-thing! Half my kingdom, if you say so. *kisses her on the cheek*; *Salome leans away* Now what do you say, Pretty Pomegranate?

SALOME: *breathlessly* I'll have to go ask mother! *glad to get away from Herod, Salome hurries to Herodias, whispers with her, and then backs away, wide-eyed and horrified.*

Guests resume eating and drinking, but their talk is quiet

SALOME: But mother, not that!

HERODIAS: *adamantly, as she grabs the silver tray of oranges, dumps out the oranges and hands the tray to Salome* Do as I say!

Guests quiet down and watch with keen anticipation as Salome slowly returns to Herod, the tray in her hands.

HEROD: *putting down his wineglass* Ah, here ya are, my Pomegranate Pet! And what did ya decide ya want?

SALOME: *with much reluctance* The-- The-- The head-- The head of John the Baptist!

Herod and all guests gasp and groan in disbelief.

SALOME: On this platter! *plumps the platter on to table in front of Herod and darts from the room*

HEROD: *much upset* Oh, no! No! Not that! I can't behead a man for nothing!

Herod looks to guests, first on one side and then the other, as if appealing for help The child didn't know what she was sayin'! Did she? She didn't know.

ALL GUESTS: *murmuring and mumbling their agreement with Herod*, *but not in unison* No. She didn't know.

HERODIAS: *shrilly, as she comes running over to Herod* Oh, yes, Salome did know, too! And you've got to keep your promise!

HEROD: But, my dear, I can't. The man hasn't done anything! Except baptize a few people in the Jordan River!

HERODIAS: What's the matter? Are you chicken? *turns to guests* I think Herod is chicken! Don't you? *starts clapping her hands and chanting*, *over and over* Herod is chicken! Chicken! Chicken! Herod is chicken!

ALL GUESTS: *chiming in with Herodias on 3rd "chicken"* Herod is chicken! Herod is chicken! Chicken! Chicken!

HEROD: *throwing up his hands in resignation* I give up! I give up! *turns, beckons to Atticus* Soldier! *gets up, pulls out his sword as Atticus comes*

ATTICUS: Yes, Sir?

HEROD: *Handing sword to Atticus* Go behead that man in the dungeon. *half sits*, *half falls back into his chair* Tell him-- Tell 'im-- Th' highway-- *breath gets short* Tell 'im I don't know how to make th' highway.

Herod passes out, slumps over on table

ATTICUS: *coming closer to Herod* Sir, what did you say? What did you say about a highway? *looks around in bewilderment, first at Herodias and then at guests* What should I do?

HERODIAS: *adamantly* Well, don't just stand here! You heard Herod's orders. *grabs up silver tray and thrusts it at Atticus* Bring us the head of John the Baptist, on this platter!

ATTICUS: *reluctantly taking platter* But, Madam Herodias, I-- I--

HERODIAS: *quickly grabbing her shawl from around her shoulders* Here! If you're squeamish, you can wrap it up in this shawl! *wads up shawl and plumps it on to platter*

ATTICUS: *with much reluctance* Yes, Ma'am. If you say so, Ma'am. *starts out*, *calls to other soldier* Come on, Claudius. *tries to hand sword to Claudius* Here, Claudius, you take this!

CLAUDIUS: *vehemently* No! Not me! Give me the tray. *takes tray and shawl*

Soldiers leave.

HERODIAS: *loudly* On with the party!

ALL GUESTS: *some with drunken accent* On with the party!

HERODIAS: Our guest of honor here seems to have passed out. *gives a wave of the hand toward the slumped-over Herod* But we can celebrate his birthday. *turns around toward servants*, *claps hands together twice* Servants! More wine!

Servants hurriedly refill guests' glasses. Guests resume their loud laughing and talking--as if nothing has happened. Herodias returns to her place at the table, sits down.

HERODIAS: *shrilly, as she lifts her glass* To Herod's birthday!

ALL GUESTS: *lifting their glasses, and speaking in a semidrunken mumbling* Herod's birthday!

CURTAIN

End of Scene 2 of ACT IV

Begin Scene 3 of ACT IV (Soldiers with "John's head.")

Scene 3--A few minutes later. In the courtyard of the fortress. Soldiers Atticus and Claudius come striding through, on their way back to the banquet room--their mission accomplished.

Atticus carries the bloody sword, Claudius the silver tray holding the "head" of John the Baptist. What the audience sees is the bloodstained shawl which does not quite cover the wig John wore in earlier scenes of the play. This, attached to some sort of head-sized lump, depending on what the special effects chairman chooses.

The soldiers are somewhat shaken and bewildered by what they have done.

ATTICUS: I don't understand it! I simply don't understand it!

CLAUDIUS: Me neither.

ATTICUS: He didn't lift a finger to resist!

CLAUDIUS: He sure didn't. He just whispered that prayer, and that was all-- 'cept what he told us about that road. And I didn't know what he was talking about. Did you?

ATTICUS: Well, as best I could figure it out, Herod had been talking to him about a highway, somewhere. And when I told him that Herod had mumbled something about not knowing how to build the highway, John the Baptist looked me square in the eye and said:

"Soldier, every man must make a highway for our God: A HIGHWAY IN THE HEART."

Soldiers exit

THE END

Return to the Jewell Ellen Smith Home Page