

First Christmas Chaos

By Rev. Craig Howard

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STORY OF THE PLAY

We all know the Christmas story as written in Luke, Chapter 2. We know the prophecies leading up to the birth of the Messiah but what must it have been like for Mary's family and friends? For Joseph especially? This play is written in modern English, not Bible-speak. It tells a fictitious story based on biblical truth of what it might have been like for the people closest to Mary. Their pain, anger, wonder and joy. It does not include Mary except for a short non-speaking nativity scene. Rather, it focuses on life for those faced with this chaotic situation and the struggles of the time brought on by Rome and tradition. Your audience will find laughter, drama, joy and maybe even a tear as you experience the *First Christmas Chaos*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 5 w, 2 flexible)

Men:

ASHER: Frustrated with the political conditions of the day. Would like to believe in the promises of the coming Messiah but it has been so long he feels God has forgotten them.

JOACHIM: Mary's father. Can't believe that his peasant daughter could give birth to the Messiah. Is a good man but his faith is weak.

JOSEPH: A young man who desperately wants to do the right thing but has no idea what the right thing is. He loves Mary but can't imagine where she could come up with this story.

EZRA: Asher's son. Friend of Joseph and Aaron. A young man full of himself who believes every woman in the village would love to have him as their own.

AARON: Common sense friend of Ezra who tries to keep him in check. Is just starting to understand love but it scares him.

SHEPHERDS: Ezra and Arron can double as shepherds, if necessary.

Women:

ESTHER: A woman of faith who can't believe that her friends have given up on God's promises.

MIRIAM: Mother of Ezra and wife of Asher. Has lost faith in the coming Messiah but is a good woman just trying to take care of her family and friends.

ANN: Mary's mother. Believes Mary and believes that God can do anything. A godly woman who loves her husband, though he frustrates her at times.

LEA: A brash, no-nonsense woman who speaks her mind no matter who is listening. Loyal to her friends and desires to see the Messiah but has her doubts.

MARY: Non-speaking part only seen during the Nativity scene. Should be played by a young teenager.

Flexible:

ANGEL: Voiceover.

NARRATOR: Reads the Christmas story from Luke 2.

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SET

The original production purchased three different backdrops: one of the town street, one of an outside wall of a house, and one of an adobe brick wall to look like the inside of the house. It was easily modified with some simple furniture to indicate the different houses. The set can be as simple or elaborate as you'd like.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Outside of Miriam's home.
Scene 2: It is early morning. The center of town.
Scene 3: Asher and Miriam's home.
Scene 4: Joachim and Ann's home.
Scene 5: Joseph's home.
Scene 6: Ann and Joachim's home. Some weeks later.
Scene 7: The center of town.
Scene 8: The manger to the side of the stage.
Scene 9: Joachim and Ann's home.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Outside of Miriam's home. ESTHER and MIRIAM are sitting on simple stools working on some sewing. There is a wooden table nearby with a bowl of fruit.)

ESTHER: I saw your son the other day, Miriam. I couldn't believe how tall he is getting.

MIRIAM: Yes, I have to look up to him now. He has begun to think of himself as a man and that he no longer needs to listen to his mother. I reminded him that I fix his food and he will never know what I have done to it if he doesn't start listening.

ESTHER: I bet that made him think.

MIRIAM: He didn't believe me so last night for dinner I put a little extra spice in his soup before I served it.

ESTHER: What did he do?

MIRIAM: First, he coughed, then he drank a whole glass of water. Then he looked at me and nodded his head and asked if he could have a new bowl of soup.

ESTHER: What did Asher say?

MIRIAM: He just started laughing. I told him not to get Ezra's bowl by mistake and what it was about. He just sat there and laughed.

ESTHER: When will children learn? They have a long way to go to get to the place they can match wits with their mothers.

MIRIAM: They will learn, just like we had to. I always thought my mother didn't know what she was talking about. Now I hear her words coming out of my mouth.

ESTHER: Don't you hate that? I do the same. The problem is, my mother lives with us so when she hears me say something like that she says, "That sounds familiar. Wish I had thought of that when you were young."

MIRIAM: What do you say when she says that?

ESTHER: I say, "You did, and I listened and that is why I was such a good child." She just throws her hands up in the air and shakes her head.

MIRIAM: You know your daughter is going to use that on you some day.

ESTHER: Yes, but it is mine to use for now. Anyway, enough about us. Have you heard any new gossip lately? I know you get to the well with the early crowd. I can't get there that early. Levi always wants his breakfast early before he heads out, so I have to take care of him first. Most of the ladies I am at the well with are older and spend more time talking about their aches and pains.

MIRIAM: I heard one of the women say that her husband had been roughed up by some Roman guards the other day because he looked them in the eye and didn't look away.

ESTHER: He should have known better. You never challenge those animals.

MIRIAM: True, but I have heard some of the men talking together. They get so tired of being forced to act like slaves. It is hard for a man. You can only push a man's pride so far.

ESTHER: It is hard for us all. Some of those soldiers treat us like dogs. I was carrying some fresh fruit home from the market the other day in a basket. Soldiers stopped me to see what I was carrying.

MIRIAM: Let me guess, they helped themselves to what they wanted, and they took the best in the basket?

ESTHER: Of course, and I couldn't do a thing. I didn't even dare look at them in anger or they could have arrested me or worse.

(Enter LEA.)

LEA: Who in the world are you ladies gossiping about?

ESTHER: What makes you think we are gossiping?

LEA: Because your eyes are open, and your lips are moving.

MIRIAM: For your information, we were just talking about how badly the Roman soldiers have been treating our people. Esther had fruit taken from her just the other day and could say nothing for fear of what they would do.

LEA: That is just the way life is these days. *(Sarcastically.)* Maybe the Messiah will show up soon and put Rome and those soldiers in their place.

MIRIAM: I am beginning to believe that the Messiah is just a tale told by the priests to keep hope alive.

ESTHER: You don't believe?

LEA: Well, you have to admit, it is getting hard to believe given the condition of things. I mean, if God really cared about us, why would He allow this Roman persecution to continue?

ESTHER: It is not the first time that our nation has endured persecution. Remember Egypt and Babylon? But each time we were persecuted, God brought deliverance. I refuse to lose hope.

LEA: I wish I could have your optimism. My husband has come to think of the Messiah as just a legend. He doesn't want to have hope because he says hope makes you do crazy things. He said it is just better to keep your head down and go about your life than to hope for something that is never going to happen.

(Enter EZRA, a young man in his late teens. He speaks to MIRIAM.)

EZRA: Mother, when will we be having dinner? I'm starving.

LEA: If he is like my son, he is always starving. I have no idea where they put all that food.

EZRA: *(HE makes a muscle and pats it.)* Right here. That is why I am so strong and handsome.

LEA: Does he always hallucinate like that or is he sick? *(Puts her hand on HIS forehead.)* Do you have a fever? When my husband gets a fever, he says all kinds of crazy things too. He once thought he was a Roman guard, our house was the prison he was guarding and I was his prisoner.

EZRA: I remember that. He stood outside the house with a broom stick and pointed it at anyone who walked by and told them to stay back or face the wrath of Rome. Everyone thought he had lost his mind. That being married to you had finally got to him and he cracked.

LEA: That's no crazier than you thinking those scrawny arms of yours are something to be admired. If that is the result of your mother's cooking, you need to find a girlfriend to cook for you.

MIRIAM: Hey, leave me out of this. What did I do to you?

ESTHER: Well, I think he is a very handsome young man that will make some girl very happy someday.

EZRA: Of course, I will ... when I'm ready. I'm just playing the field right now. Checking out my options. I'm just sort of like the Lord, I love them all. And I am still hungry!

MIRIAM: There is some fruit over there on that table in a bowl. Help yourself to a piece but only one. As for loving them all, you better start narrowing that down or you will find all the desirable young women taken.

EZRA: I have plenty of time. Every time I walk down the street, I see the girls watching me and whispering. I know what they are saying. They tell each other, "There goes Ezra. I wish he would smile at me. He is so handsome."

LEA: Miriam, you have raised such a humble son.

MIRIAM: (*Putting her hand to HIS forehead.*) Maybe you do have a fever.

EZRA: Facts are facts.

LEA: Did you ever think that they may be whispering something else?

EZRA: Like what?

ESTHER: Like, there goes that boy who can't handle his soup.

EZRA: (*To MIRIAM.*) You told them about that?!

LEA: About what? This sounds good.

EZRA: Never mind. (*MIRIAM and ESTHER are laughing.*) Ha, ha, very funny. You could have damaged my mouth with that soup. (*The WOMEN laugh even harder.*) That does it. I am not going to stand here and be abused. (*HE exits in a huff.*)

ESTHER: Maybe we shouldn't have been so hard on him.

LEA: It keeps him humble. The truth is, he is a good-looking boy that any girl in the village would be proud to have for a husband. But the last thing we need is for him to think that. There is enough arrogance running the streets in Roman uniforms these days. And arrogance in a Jewish man can get him killed.

(*THEY nod their heads in agreement and go back to working on their sewing when ASHER enters.*)

ASHER: So, what made Ezra in such a hurry to leave a second ago? He looked like he had a thunder cloud forming over his head.

MIRIAM: Oh, you know Ezra - he can dish it out but can't take it. We were just picking on him a little. Anyway, what has you home so early in the day? I thought you would still be out in the vineyards working. Is something wrong?

ASHER: The master of the vineyard got word that soldiers were on their way to conscript men into working on the roads outside of town. He was afraid they would take all of us so he told us to go home before they got there and to stay in our home for a couple of days until they have gathered up all the help they are looking for. He was afraid he would end up with no workers if we stayed there.

ESTHER: He is probably right. We were just talking earlier about how we Israelites get no respect from Rome, and especially from their soldiers. They treat us like cattle.

LEA: Esther is looking for the Messiah to come and put them in their place.

ASHER: That is a nice dream, but I am afraid that is all it is. We have been looking for the Messiah for thousands of years. I sometimes wonder if God even remembers we are here.

ESTHER: Don't any of you believe the prophecy of Isaiah that we have been taught all of our lives?

ASHER: I would like to, but it is hard after all these years. That prophecy talks of a virgin conceiving. That would be a miracle. When was the last time you saw or even heard of a miracle? We are taught them in the old writings. The things Elijah and Elisha and others did, but who is alive that can say they really saw these things happen. Stories get exaggerated in the retelling over and over.

MIRIAM: You better not let the Pharisees hear you talk like that.

ASHER: All any of the religious leaders care about is whether or not we are keeping their laws and if we are paying the temple all we owe. Money and power are all that matters to them.

ASHER: (*Cont'd.*) I'll tell you one thing, if the messiah does come, he will have to straighten out more than Rome. Our so-called spiritual leaders will need some correcting too.

MIRIAM: Asher! You shouldn't say things like that. If word gets out to any of them that you are thinking and talking this way, only Jehovah himself knows what would happen.

ASHER: I don't think Jehovah cares anymore. I'll see you at home. (*HE exits.*)

LEA: He seems really discouraged.

MIRIAM: Can you blame him? Can you blame any of them? We hear the stories of our history. How great this nation was under King David and Solomon. Men could walk with their heads held high, proud to be an Israelite. Other nations respected us, even feared us. Now, the men have to run and hide in their homes to keep from being treated as a slave. It is no wonder their faith is shaken.

ESTHER: I still believe the day is coming that the Messiah will arrive and make this all right. He will restore Israel to the kind of nation you are talking about, and we will all be proud to call ourselves His Chosen People.

LEA: I pray you are right. I fear you are only dreaming.

(*LIGHTS out.*)

End of Freeview

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