

If We Had Only Known

By Hilary Mackelden

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DEDICATION

For my Dad, John Large, who taught me that everyone is the most important person on earth.

STORY OF THE PLAY

The host of a television talk show investigates the recent birth of a King. She interviews several people, all of whom give her insight into the nativity of the new King of the Jews, and at the same time, display prejudices – theirs and ours – against those who are different. Her guests include a gossip, who looks down on the pregnant Mary; two unsympathetic officials; a greedy business owner; a selfish, materialistic guest; and an Egyptian who feels threatened by asylum-seekers. At the end, the TV guests all come back on stage and argue that the host made them look bad because she exposed their treatment of the child. Their excuse is, “If we had only known it was Him....”

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

This play was originally produced at All Saints Church Centre, Crowborough, England, 2004. The show raised funds for World in Need, a Christian charity which works mainly in Muslim countries. Through aid, education, and love, this organization brings Christ to those who would otherwise be unable to know Him. The original cast included:

HOST: Suzanne Goulding-Huckle, Mary Corney

RACHEL: Fiona Grunwell

MARCUS OFFICIUS: Gareth Owen-Williams

SIMON: Brian Wright

SMITH: Jen Ward

ZEDEKIAH: Chris Gale

ZAYNA: Jane Caisley

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3m, 3w, 1 flexible, extras.)

HOST(S): Young female reporter. (Lines may be divided with a co-host.)

RACHEL: Middle-aged woman from Nazareth.

MARCUS OFFICIUS: Roman officer.

SIMON: Inn's landlord.

SMITH: Wealthy traveler; flexible role.

ZEDEKIAH: Civil servant.

ZAYNA: Egyptian woman.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS: Non-speaking cameraman (complete with cardboard camera) and a stage manager. Also musicians and singers for optional song.

PERFORMANCE TIME: 30 minutes without optional music.

SETTING and PROPS

TV studio with two chairs or a sofa and chair. Introductory music for TV program. Props include a document, water glass, and handkerchief for Zedekiah.

COSTUMES

Wearing modern-day clothes has the dual advantage of being easy and inexpensive, and it also makes the audience more aware of the story's relevance in today's world. The Roman officer can wear a soldier's uniform, and Zedekiah should look like a politician's spin doctor. Smith wears a power suit and Simon wears slacks and a casual shirt. The Egyptian, Zayna, can wear a slightly exotic outfit to accentuate the fact that she is foreign. Rachel wears cheap, unattractive clothes and a pious demeanor. The host(s) should wear typical TV attire, smart and understated.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: A partially lit TV studio. RACHEL and the HOST(S) are seated on the chairs in the dark. MUSIC starts. The Host stands and steps forward toward the audience into the lighted area, smiling brightly. MUSIC fades.)

HOST: Good evening, and welcome to this week's edition of "Behind the Headlines," the show that gives you the human stories behind the stories. *(SHE moves further forward, looks to a different angle as if to a different camera.)* Recently in Judea, a boy was born. He is, so some say, destined to be King of the Jews. His birth and the events surrounding it have made headlines. But what about the story behind the story? Tonight, we take a look at the family who has found themselves in the midst of this event. What is it like for the couple to become parents to such a special baby? We talk to people who have come into contact with them, and we find out the impact this has had on the lives of this couple. So join us now as we go "Behind the Headlines."

(The MUSIC starts again as the LIGHTS go up to reveal RACHEL. Rachel is in her forties, a little nervous and awkward, but excited. The HOST sits and leans toward her in a practiced pose, designed to put a guest at ease.)

HOST: Rachel, I understand you know Mary, the baby's mother?

RACHEL: Yes, I do. I've lived next door to her family for – ooh, it must be going on 25 years now. Her mother and I are good friends. Confidantes.

HOST: Confidantes? So you'll really be in a position to tell us about this story?

RACHEL: I know everything. Not that I'm going to divulge any secrets, mind you. If things were told to me in confidence, well –

HOST: Absolutely. I admire your loyalty to your friends. But tell us a little about Mary. What was she like as a child? Was she wild?

RACHEL: Who, Mary? No. *(Laughs at the absurdity of that idea.)* No. Very proper little girl. Quiet. Shy. Which just goes to prove that what they say is right. It's the quiet ones you have to watch. What she did to her poor mother ... to her whole family ... *(SHE sighs and shakes her head.)*

HOST: Were they a good family?

RACHEL: *(Starts to say "yes," then hesitates, frowns.)* I always thought so. Until this all blew up. Never had any reason to think they weren't. 'Course, you don't know what goes on behind closed doors, do you? People can seem perfectly all right. As good as you and me. But there could be bad blood lurking. *(SHE moves closer, conspiratorial.)* I've heard a rumor that, if you look back into the family tree ... *(SHE looks around, as if for eavesdroppers.)* ... there's a prostitute in there. Rahab, her name was. Worked in Jericho. *(SHE looks affronted.)* Twenty-five years. And I never guessed.

HOST: *(Shocked.)* You're not saying Mary was a prostitute?

RACHEL: Of course not! Just that there are things in her family background ... and no one knows who the father is. When I first heard that she was pregnant, I thought to myself, "I must go and see Ann." That's her mother. "She'll need a friendly face," I thought. A shoulder. And perhaps, she'll need to tell someone who the father is. *(SHE thinks for a second, then talks again, quickly.)* Not that it mattered to me, of course. But, if my neighbor wanted to unburden herself, well, she'd have to tell someone.

HOST: You thought she would? Unburden herself?

RACHEL: Wouldn't you? And I figured, better it was me than one of those old crones down at the well. You see them there, every morning, putting the world to rights and passing judgement on their neighbors. Don't know how they've got the nerve. They're no better themselves. If I was the type to gossip, which I'm not, I could tell you a thing or two about them. For instance –

HOST: (*Quickly.*) So Mary's mother didn't tell you who the father was?

RACHEL: She didn't know. Poor woman. If the little minx had been mine, she'd have told me. I'd have thrashed it out of her. But they were always more "understanding."

HOST: I hadn't realized there was such a question mark over the issue. I thought Mary was betrothed to Joseph, the village carpenter.

RACHEL: (*SHE looks indignant.*) It wasn't him. He would not have got her in that state. He's a righteous man. God-fearing. And anyway, you only had to look at him to see he was as shocked as everyone else. No. It wasn't him.

HOST: No ideas at all?

RACHEL: None. I said to Anne, I said, "You're too soft on that girl." If she was mine ... "You're making a rod for your own back," I told her, "letting her get away with this nonsense. There she is," I said, "pregnant, unmarried, and likely to stay that way. Ruined. What decent man would look at her now?"

HOST: Anne must have found your "friendly concern" a great comfort.

RACHEL: (*Pleased with the "praise."*) One tries. And you can't help feeling for Anne. There's that little minx, not only pregnant, but making it worse with her lies.

HOST: Lies?

RACHEL: Lies. And not little ones. No, hers were great big ones.

HOST: Such as?

RACHEL: The way she explained her pregnancy. Now, most girls would have kept completely quiet about it and then gone to visit some distant cousin for a few months and come back with no one being any the wiser. Or if news had gotten out, they'd have said, "Oh, I don't know ... it was a Roman soldier who forced himself on me." Something like that. But not Mary. She has to be different. She has to come up with visits from angels, carrying messages from God himself. And not just any angel. An archangel, if you please. She thinks big. I'll give her that.

End of Freeview

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