End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
https://95church.com/sisters-of-jesus--pmaster

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
https://95church.com/sisters-of-jesus--pmaster

THE SISTERS OF JESUS

By Mary Satchell

Performance Rights

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy this script in any way or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing Co. Inc. Call the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Co."

PUBLISHED BY

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
95church.com
© 2003 by Eldridge Publishing Co. Inc.

DEDICATION

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary,
the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon?
And are not his sisters here with us?"
Mark 6:3 KJV

SYNOPSIS

Jesus' sisters, Elizabeth and Deborah, are worried because Jesus has decided to leave home to become an itinerate preacher. Jesus has been the head of his family since their father Joseph died. Elizabeth, the older, unmarried sister, resents what she sees as her brother's selfishness. Deborah, who is married and the mother of Nathan, fears how Jesus' plans will affect Mary, their mother. Their brother James, bitter and destructive, recently returned home after a failed attempt to live on his own.

On this last day before Jesus begins his ministry, the family home is charged with fear, bitterness, and resentment—all directed against Jesus. That afternoon, Mary and Nathan visit the neighbors while Elizabeth and Deborah prepare the evening meal. Jesus returns home accompanied by his youngest brother Simon and his niece Rachel. Another brother, Juda, a teenager and shepherd, feels rejected when Jesus refuses to take Juda with him. Jesus' siblings revile him. Rachel runs to defend Jesus, and James viciously strikes her. Mary suddenly appears screaming hysterically at the door. Nathan has been in a terrible accident. Jesus goes at once to the little boy's side.

In the final scene, Nathan is healed. Jesus encourages his brother through compassionate prayer, and James takes his place as head of the family. Elizabeth and Deborah give Jesus gifts and He blesses his sisters. When Jesus has gone, Mary tells her family about the events of Jesus' birth. The women are convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. Elizabeth and Deborah triumphantly present a festive table filled with food. The play closes with a joyous family dinner.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 3 w, 2 boys, 1 girl)

JESUS: (30) He has decided to be about his Father's business, and begin his earthly ministry. There is an air of peace and calm about him; however, his mind is set, no matter what his loved ones think or say about his decision. His patience, kindness, and love for his family never waver.

ELIZABETH: (Late 20s) Mary's second child, she has the aura of a much older woman, and is efficient as well as careful about her duties; yet, she never smiles. A little frown of discontentment has etched itself permanently into her forehead, and her mouth is always a grim line.

DEBORAH: (20) She is attractive, smiles easily—the complete opposite of her sister. She is married and the mother of a toddler son.

MARY: (Mid 40s) She is a widow. Her hair is graying though she still has fine, youthful features. Her trials in life have not made her bitter; she can smile often even though she's grown quieter, more withdrawn, and thoughtful over the years. There is no hint of self-pity in her; she knows her children well, and loves them with a rocklike loyalty. Family means everything to her.

JAMES: (Mid 20s) He is completely self-centered, destructive, disheveled, and surly with defeat. He bitterly resents Jesus, and feels he has had to live his life in his brother's shadow.

SIMON: (8-10) A typical, energetic, curious boy, he is always at his big brother Jesus' heels.

RACHEL: (6-7) She is Jesus' niece, the daughter of Joses, who is the most financially successful member of the family. She is a stubborn young girl, aggressive, spoiled, and fiercely devoted to Jesus, preferring to spend all of her time in a troubled household because her uncle Jesus lives there.

JUDA: (15) He is a shepherd, a hearty and mature teenager who lives mostly away from home. He looks up to his brother Jesus as a role model.

NATHAN: (2-3) He is Deborah's young son, and the darling of his grandmother's heart. He is a calm, obedient, quiet child, doted on by all the women in the family.

SCENES

Scene 1: Inside the family home; late morning.
Scene 2: Later that afternoon.
Scene 3: Several hours later, toward evening.

SETTING

The time is immediately before Jesus begins his teaching ministry. Jesus' family home consists of a large room that is simply furnished, well-tended, having basic comforts; the atmosphere is that of stark comfort with little warmth.

Jesus' work area, upstage left, shows a warm space filled with loving care. There is always a light here—the polished wood worked by Jesus' hands glows with soft, but startling beauty in contrast to other areas of the room. Carpenter's bench, tools, pieces of wood, and a small, half-assembled table are located in this corner.

Storage space and shelves are upstage center. This area is well-stocked with clay vessels, eating and serving utensils. Grain sacks, staples, baskets of fresh and dried fruits, nuts, etc. are stored on shelves. Upstage right is a wooden door exit to outside.

Two areas are downstage. First is the family's dining and relaxation area; it has a table with an oil lamp. There are also several chairs or stools with an arrangement of large and small pillows piled comfortably on the floor. Second is the women's workspace, downstage left. This area is used mainly for preparing meals. A large table is covered with a variety of clay bowls and dishes. Water and oil pots stand nearby on the floor. A smaller, low table has tools for grinding. A second exit, an archway, stage left, leads to the rest of the house.

PROPS

Clay pots and bowls; baskets; seasonings; figs and other fruits and nuts; utensils; plate of raisin cakes; grinding tools; carpenter's tools; partially-built wooden table; small bag; grain sacks; leather sandals; head coverings; table of food covered with a cloth.

SCENE 1

(At RISE: ELIZABETH is preparing supper. She moves to the large table with a plate of raisin cakes, sets it down, then carries a bowl up to shelves with grain sacks and scoops out some grain with her hands. She brings bowl downstage to low table, where she kneels and begins grinding briskly. Elizabeth works methodically with the grinding tools for some moments before DEBORAH enters through archway. The close bond between the sisters is immediately obvious. Deborah glances at the table, and bends over the raisin cakes. She sighs audibly with delight, and Elizabeth glances up from her work.)

ELIZABETH: *(Not unpleasantly.)* You'll ruin your appetite if you start eating cakes before suppertime, Deborah.

DEBORAH: *(Lightly.)* I won't touch, Elizabeth. I just want to enjoy that delicious smell. *(Closes HER eyes.)* It brings back wonderful memories of the cakes Mother used to make when we were children.

ELIZABETH: *(Pausing from HER grinding.)* You really miss this place, don't you?

DEBORAH: *(Moving to ELIZABETH.)* Of course, I do. I grew up in this house; it will always be home to me. Even though I have my own home now, and a husband and baby. Whenever I come back here to visit, I feel like a happy child.

ELIZABETH: *(Exploring the word as if it were strange.)* Happy. *(Pause; resuming work.)* There's little enough happiness in this house these days. *(Softening.)* I'm glad you decided to bring Nathan for a visit.

DEBORAH: I should have come home sooner, but I've been so busy. *(Sobering; glancing toward archway; lowering HER voice and kneeling beside ELIZABETH.)* Mother isn't really happy. She's pretending to be joyful for our sakes. *(Taking the grinding tools and working.)*

ELIZABETH: *(Standing.)* We both know the reason for her sadness. *(Frown deepens.)*

DEBORAH: *(Anxiously.)* Is this the day?

ELIZABETH: *(Nodding.)* Yes, he's leaving this evening. Mother begged him not to go. We need him here. *(Uncovering a pot on the table, tasting it, adding salt, and stirring it before covering the pot again.)*

DEBORAH: Can't you talk him out of it? If he leaves, our family will never be the same. James is too irresponsible to become the head of this house. Joses has his own family to worry about, and Simon and Juda are too young.

ELIZABETH: *(Impatiently.)* Don't you think I know all that, Deborah? *(Bitterly.)* Our brother knows it, too. Mother's always depended on him more than anyone else.

DEBORAH: *(Bewildered.)* How can he be so ... so selfish? *(Standing and moving to table.)* It's just not like him. *(Pause.)* He's always been the most loving, the kindest one in our family. *(Impulsively.)* Elizabeth, don't you remember? When I was a little girl—if I were hurting, I always ran to him, and he never turned me away.

ELIZABETH: Well, he's turning his back on us now. *(Angrily.)* Ever since he was baptized in the Jordan River by that madman, John the Baptist—he hasn't been the same.

DEBORAH: *(Chiding.)* That madman, as you call him, is our cousin. And you were named after his mother.

ELIZABETH: *(Waving HER hand.)* It doesn't matter. I still think John's partly responsible for all this trouble.

(MARY appears in the archway.)

MARY: Has Jesus come?

(ELIZABETH and DEBORAH turn.)

DEBORAH: No, Mother. We haven't seen him since early this morning.

ELIZABETH: Jesus promised to do some repairs for Caleb; then he said he was going to deliver the yoke he made for Isaac's oxen. *(MARY is thoughtful for a moment; she turns back and then turns again to her DAUGHTERS.)*

MARY: Let me know as soon as he comes home.

DEBORAH: *(Moving quickly to MARY's side; putting arm around her.)* Mother, why don't you visit Miriam for a while today? You've been spending too much time in the house ever since I got here.

ELIZABETH: *(Working among the pots on the table.)* That's a good idea. The fresh air would do you a world of good, Mother.

MARY: *(Smiling.)* You're both right. I've been staying inside far too much lately. *(Glancing back through archway.)* When Nathan wakes up, we'll pay Miriam a visit. The last time she saw my grandson, he was only two or three months old.

DEBORAH: Nathan should be waking from his nap soon.

MARY: I'll sit beside his bed until he gets up. Nathan's such a peaceful child. He reminds me of Jesus when he was that age. *(MARY exits back through archway; the SISTERS wait a few moments to be sure their mother has gone.)*

DEBORAH: *(Moving urgently to ELIZABETH.)* Tell me again, Elizabeth. Why is Jesus leaving?

ELIZABETH: *(Shaking HER head.)* He keeps talking about his duty, that he must attend to his father's business.

DEBORAH: *(Incredulous.)* But our father is dead. He died five years ago.

ELIZABETH: None of this makes any sense. *(Wiping HER hands with a cloth.)* But there's no time to worry about it now. We have a houseful of hungry mouths to feed. *(Turning.)* And that lamb still has to be prepared.

DEBORAH: I'll go in and sit awhile with Mother. *(Moving to the arch; smiling over HER shoulder at ELIZABETH.)* My Nathan has to look his best when Mother shows him off to the neighbors.

(SHE exits. ELIZABETH putters for several moments. The door opens abruptly and JAMES enters. Elizabeth turns, sees James' empty hands; her face becomes set for another battle.)

ELIZABETH: *(Exasperated.)* James, where have you been? You left here two days ago to bring back supplies. *(Demanding.)* Where are they?

JAMES: *(Sarcastically.)* And good-day to you, my dear sister. It's always a pleasure to receive a warm welcome when I return home. *(Brushing past ELIZABETH.)*

ELIZABETH: You should be ashamed of yourself. Showing up here empty-handed when you left with the money Jesus gave you to buy carpenter's supplies. I know you've wasted every penny on those no-good friends of yours! *(JAMES grasps the edge of the table to steady himself.)* Mother worries about you when you're gone.

JAMES: Do you worry about me too, Elizabeth? *(SHE is caught short, and JAMES enjoys his bit of triumph.)* Of course, we both know the answer to that, don't we? *(JAMES leans heavily on the table; wipes his face with his hand; speaks gruffly.)* Give me a drink of water. I'm thirsty.

ELIZABETH: *(Turning away.)* You can get your own water. I'm too busy helping to care for this family. *(Accusing tone.)* You've been carousing with friends. *(Lashing out.)* Why must you be so irresponsible, always running away from life? *(JAMES moves to get himself a drink from water pot.)* When you left home three years ago, you told Mother that you needed independence, your own life.

JAMES: *(Sourly.)* Why I decided to come back here, I'll never know.

ELIZABETH: I can tell you why—

JAMES: *(Whirling on HER angrily.)* Don't use me as your scapegoat, Elizabeth! We both know your frustrations have nothing to do with anything I've done. It's not my fault you were betrothed to a man who died before your wedding day. Don't blame me because you've never had a husband, or children—a family of your own!

ELIZABETH: *(Cut to the quick; hissing.)* Don't you dare!

JAMES: *(Cutting deeper; cruelly.)* Look at yourself! You've grown so bitter that no man will come near you. You talk of my running away from life.

JAMES: *(Continued.)* You're the one who's running away. This house is your escape, Elizabeth. You don't give love here; your whole life is only duty.

(DEBORAH appears at the archway.)

DEBORAH: Stop it! Mother can hear you fighting. *(Glancing back quickly; taking a few steps into room.)* If you don't care about each other, think about her. *(Pleading.)* I came home to make Mother happy, and you're spoiling everything.

JAMES: *(Contritely.)* I'm sorry, Deborah. *(Hoarsely.)* It's good to have you home. *(HE kisses HER cheek, but she barely responds.)*

DEBORAH: *(Coldly.)* Go to Mother, James. She'll be glad to see you. *(JAMES bows his head, exits through archway. ELIZABETH avoids DEBORAH's eyes by getting a small basket from the shelf. She puts fruits and nuts inside basket, deliberately keeping her back to Deborah, who watches stonily.)* If there can't be any peace in this house, Elizabeth, it will be a long time before I come again.

(DEBORAH exits through the arch. ELIZABETH kneels and begins grinding again but looks up when MARY appears with NATHAN, holding the toddler's hand.)

MARY: *(Brightly.)* Nathan and I are going to visit the neighbors. *(DEBORAH follows them in with a small bag. MARY smiles; her face radiates a grandmother's pride.)* Everyone will be amazed at how much Nathan's grown. *(Bending to the child.)* Wave goodbye to your Aunt Elizabeth, Nathan. *(HE waves obediently to ELIZABETH, who stands up.)*

ELIZABETH: *(Frowning slightly.)* You won't be too long, will you, Mother? I've planned a special meal for this evening. *(With an edge.)* In honor of Deborah and Nathan's homecoming.

(DEBORAH checks the contents of the bag.)

MARY: *(Indulgently.)* We'll only be gone for an hour or so. Miriam would never forgive me if I didn't take Nathan to see her.
DEBORAH: *(Giving the bag to MARY.)* Here are Nathan's things. He'll get fussy around one o'clock, when I usually feed him.
MARY: We'll be back before then. I promise.

(ELIZABETH picks up a little basket and brings it to MARY.)

ELIZABETH: These snacks should keep Nathan busy while you're out. *(MARY gives basket to NATHAN.)* Don't let him eat too much.
MARY: *(Smiling knowingly.)* We won't do anything to spoil your meal, Elizabeth.
DEBORAH: She's gone to so much trouble.
MARY: Well, this isn't an ordinary day— *(Interrupting HERSELF; a shadow comes over her face for a moment before she continues.)* How often do we get to see you?
ELIZABETH: *(Pointedly.)* Deborah should visit the family more often, Mother.

(MARY, agreeing with ELIZABETH, looks at DEBORAH.)

DEBORAH: *(Guiltily.)* I'll try to come home more often, Mother. *(MARY nods; ELIZABETH turns away to hide the triumph in her eyes.)*
MARY: *(Covering her head.)* We should be on our way before the sun gets high. *(Taking NATHAN's hand; starting to exit, then turning back to speak firmly.)* Elizabeth, Deborah. *(THEY turn immediately to face their MOTHER, who speaks in quiet tone. Now it is clear that Mary has not abdicated her place in this home.)* There will be no more arguing. It's a very special day.
DEBORAH and ELIZABETH: *(Together.)* Yes, Mother.

MARY: Come with me, Nathan. *(Leading NATHAN to door; turning back.)* When Jesus comes, tell him Eli will send for the table early tomorrow morning. *(Pointing to unfinished table.)* Eli said if it's finished ahead of time, he will pay double.

DEBORAH: *(Rushes to smooth NATHAN's hair.)* Obey your grandmother. *(Shaking finger near HIS nose.)* And don't wander off. *(Kissing HIM.)* Goodbye. *(MARY and NATHAN exit. DEBORAH turns to ELIZABETH and smiles in reconciliation.)* I'm really glad to be home.

ELIZABETH: *(Nodding.)* It's good to see Mother happy again.

(DEBORAH takes over the grinding while ELIZABETH moves UPSTAGE and gets a basket of vegetables or fruit. She returns DS to work with it; sighs with discontent.)

ELIZABETH: *(Continued.)* I'll be glad when this day is over. Everyone's nerves are on edge.

DEBORAH: Everyone except Mother. She's always calm before a storm.

ELIZABETH: Heaven knows, this family's seen more than its share of storms. And now, this latest one just may destroy us.

DEBORAH: Oh, Elizabeth, that isn't going to happen. Why, we've never gone hungry one day in our lives. In fact, we've lived well compared to many of our neighbors. *(Working.)* I think we've been very fortunate.

ELIZABETH: *(Coldly.)* That's just the point, Deborah. Jesus has taken good care of us. He's been the head of this family ever since our father died.

DEBORAH: *(Nodding.)* Jesus is the best carpenter within miles of Nazareth. People come long distances to buy his beautiful work.

ELIZABETH: Our brother provides the only reliable income this family has. *(Dropping corn in the basket; standing up, very upset.)* What on earth are we going to do after Jesus leaves home to wander about the countryside, teaching things that few people want to hear? *(Pacing.)*

ELIZABETH: *(Continued.)* never dreamed Jesus would do this to us. *(Petulantly.)* This whole thing is such a problem!

DEBORAH: *(Quietly.)* Maybe that's our problem.

ELIZABETH: *(Turning.)* What do you mean?

DEBORAH: Jesus has never said no to any of us before. He's always done what we've wanted him to, and now, he's doing something for himself—something that we can't control.

ELIZABETH: You make it seem as though we're the problem, Deborah.

(Sounds of merry laughter are heard before door opens. JESUS enters with RACHEL on his shoulders, followed by SIMON. Jesus is laughing heartily with the children, and their joy forces ELIZABETH to retreat to her seat in haste. DEBORAH stands up, smiles, eager to take part in this happy moment.)

DEBORAH: What's all the laughing about?

SIMON: *(Excitedly.)* Jesus was telling us a story.

RACHEL: *(JESUS sets RACHEL on her feet; giggling.)* Jesus, your stories always make us happy.

JESUS: My stories make you and Simon happy, Rachel, because your hearts are already filled with joy.

ELIZABETH : *(Resentfully.)* I'm glad someone can feel joy today. *(Resuming HER work.)*

DEBORAH: *(Heading off trouble.)* Jesus, you'll have to hurry if that table is to be finished before you leave. Mother said Eli's willing to pay double if it's ready by tomorrow morning.

JESUS: *(Moving to workbench.)* The table's almost finished, Deborah. There's no need to worry. All is well.

ELIZABETH: *(Unable to keep it in.)* That's what you always say, Jesus. "All is well."

JESUS: *(Turning; quietly but firmly.)* I mean it, Elizabeth.

(RACHEL follows JESUS to work area; he sits, begins to work on unfinished table. SIMON moves to table with cakes. When he reaches for one, ELIZABETH pounces.)

ELIZABETH: Don't touch those cakes, Simon! *(HE drops the cake, startled.)* They're for the evening meal.
DEBORAH: *(Smiling.)* Here's a fig, Simon. It won't spoil your appetite. *(SIMON takes the fig.)*
SIMON: Thanks. *(Looking spitefully at ELIZABETH.)* Deborah, you're the best sister in the whole world. *(HE bites into fig and moves to stand beside JESUS.)*
RACHEL: Where's Grandmother Mary?
DEBORAH: She and Nathan went visiting.
RACHEL: Will they be back soon?
ELIZABETH: *(Sullenly.)* I certainly hope so. If they don't return on time, supper will be ruined. *(Grumbling.)* Nobody seems to care that I've spent all day trying to make this meal special.
JESUS: *(Patiently.)* We're grateful for everything you do for us, Elizabeth.

(The CHILDREN move closer to JESUS as ELIZABETH simmers. RACHEL pushes her way into Jesus' lap.)

RACHEL: Tell us another story, Jesus. *(HE smiles.)*
SIMON: *(Eagerly.)* Yes. Tell us the one about—
ELIZABETH: You see, that's the trouble, Jesus. You encourage the children to interfere with your work even though you know how important it is. *(Standing up to shoo the CHILDREN away.)* Simon, Rachel, find something else to do.
DEBORAH: You can help me bring more water from the well.

(CHILDREN protest, but stand up and move toward DEBORAH.)

JESUS: *(Stopping HIS work; beckoning.)* Come. I want to tell you one more story that you must never forget.

(CHILDREN eagerly move back.)

JESUS: *(Continued.*) This story is the most important of all. *(An unusual calm and peace settle over the room as JESUS puts aside his tools; takes RACHEL into his lap. SIMON sits comfortably at Jesus' feet. Stage LIGHTS grow dim in cooking area, where SISTERS are; they work quietly, listening too.)* There was a shepherd who had one hundred sheep.

RACHEL: *(Proudly.)* A shepherd like my father?

JESUS: Yes, Rachel. This shepherd was like your father Joses.

RACHEL: *(Resting against JESUS' chest.)* We have many sheep.

SIMON: What happens to the shepherd in the story, Jesus?

JESUS: The shepherd took good care of his sheep. He protected them from all kinds of danger, making sure they were healthy and safe. *(Pause.)* But one of his sheep—a very young one like you, Rachel—wandered away from the others.

RACHEL: *(Concerned.)* Did the little lamb get lost?

JESUS: *(Nodding.)* The lamb lost its way and didn't know what to do.

RACHEL: It must have been very scared. *(Cringing.)* Suppose it were killed by a wolf or a lion!

SIMON: *(Shrugging.)* What's a little sheep worth? With so many left, why should one missing sheep matter?

JESUS: You've brought up an important point, Simon. Can you guess what this shepherd did? *(CHILDREN shake their heads.)* He left the ninety-nine sheep that were safe, and went into the wilderness to find the lost one.

RACHEL: *(Anxiously.)* Did he find it?

JESUS: *(Joyously.)* Yes. The Good Shepherd found the lost lamb. Then he put it on his shoulders and took it to safety.

RACHEL: *(Relieved.)* I'm glad the story has a happy ending, Jesus.

JESUS: But that's not the end of the story.

SIMON: What else happened?
JESUS: When the shepherd returned home, he rushed to tell his friends the good news.
RACHEL: What did his friends do?
JESUS: They rejoiced with him. *(Clapping HIS hands enthusiastically.)* Everyone was laughing and singing!
RACHEL: *(Impulsively jumping from JESUS' lap and whirling happily.)* And dancing!

(JESUS nods deeply; claps in rhythm to RACHEL'S impromptu dance.)

SIMON: *(Standing; jumping up and down.)* They had a big feast to celebrate!
RACHEL: *(Stops dancing. SHE and SIMON collapse happily on the floor.)* Oh, I love stories with happy endings.
JESUS: *(Standing.)* Our Father in heaven is like that shepherd. *(CHILDREN, calm again, look up at JESUS.)* He cares for His little ones.
RACHEL: Does the Father in heaven care about me?
JESUS: Oh, yes. More than you will ever know.
SIMON: *(Proudly; pointing to HIMSELF.)* And He cares about me.
JESUS: You're worth more than all this world's treasures in your Father's eyes. *(HE puts his arms around THEM.)* I want you to remember this story, always. Your Father in heaven loves you, and he will make sure that you're never lost.

(ELIZABETH stands up impatiently; LIGHTS come up again.)

ELIZABETH: *(Crisply.)* Jesus, you shouldn't waste so much time with the children. There's much to be done before you leave this evening.
JESUS: Elizabeth, your days are filled with many worries. You should learn to enjoy the more important things of life.

ELIZABETH: That's easy enough for you to say, Jesus. In a few hours, you'll be gone away—never to return except, perhaps, as a visitor.

DEBORAH: *(Standing up; moving between JESUS and ELIZABETH; speaking guardedly to Elizabeth.)* The children deserve one last happy day with Jesus. *(Defiantly giving raisin cakes to RACHEL and SIMON, who sit in a corner and snack happily.)*

ELIZABETH: I can't pretend that everything is fine, and overlook important matters such as food and money to keep this family going. *(Raising voice.)* How will we live after you've gone, Jesus? Answer that for me.

JESUS: I keep telling you, Elizabeth. *(Emphatically.)* All will be well.

ELIZABETH: Humph! *(Moving back to HER cooking.)*

(The door swings open and JUDA enters carrying a large sack of grain on his shoulder. The CHILDREN shout, "Juda! Juda!" and rush to him. JESUS sits, begins to work on table again.)

JUDA: *(Cheerfully.)* Hello, everybody. I came as soon as I heard you were leaving, Jesus. *(Swinging the heavy bag to the floor.)*

JESUS: *(Smiling.)* Juda, you look as though you ran all the way here.

JUDA: I couldn't run very well with this load.

DEBORAH: *(Pointing.)* What on earth have you got there, Juda?

JUDA: Grain for making bread, Deborah.

ELIZABETH: *(Moving nearer; excitedly.)* There must be enough to make two hundred loaves!

JUDA: Oh, more bags are outside. I had to bring a mule to carry all the barley, wheat, corn, and oil that Joses sent to you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH & DEBORAH: *(Together; incredulously.)* Our brother? Joses sent food to us?

(JUDA is amused.)

ELIZABETH: He's never done that before. Nobody's stingier than our brother, even though he's doing very well as a shepherd.

RACHEL: *(Looking hurt; then frowning at ELIZABETH.)* You can't talk about my father like that. You're just mean, Elizabeth. *(Angrily; shouting.)* Papa said you're the meanest person in our family! *(Exits running through archway. SIMON starts after HER, but ELIZABETH roughly pulls him back; he sits.)*

ELIZABETH: *(Angrily.)* Rachel, you come back here! I won't have any child speak to me that way. I don't care if you are my niece.

(ELIZABETH starts after RACHEL, but stops short when JAMES appears, blocking the archway.)

JAMES: *(Yawning.)* What's all the noise about? *(Looking over HIS shoulder.)* Why's Rachel crying? *(To ELIZABETH.)* I wouldn't be surprised if you had something to do with it.

(ELIZABETH scowls at JAMES, but turns away, grumbling about bad-mannered, spoiled children. JESUS continues working calmly.)

JUDA: *(Laughing heartily.)* Did we wake you, James? *(Beckoning.)* Come and see the gifts from Joses.

DEBORAH: Juda says more bags are outside.

JAMES: *(Moving into the room.)* So, Joses decided to share some of his bounty with us, did he? Because our brother throws us a few tidbits, I suppose we should dance and celebrate.

JESUS: *(Looking up from HIS work.)* When a selfish man repents and begins to share what he has with others, that's a good reason to celebrate.

JUDA: *(Starts for the door.)* I'll bring in the bags.

JAMES: *(Frowning; holding up HIS hand.)* Stop right there! *(JUDA turns.)* Nobody's going to bring any handouts into this house.

JAMES: *(Continued.)* Juda, you can just take all this stuff right back to Joses and tell him we don't need his charity.

DEBORAH: *(Aghast.)* What?

JAMES: You heard me. Joses is only trying to soothe his guilty conscience.

ELIZABETH: *(Moving DS.)* James, are you out of your mind? We'll need all the help we can get after Jesus leaves.

JAMES: *(Sourly.)* So that's the way you feel, is it? *(Sneering.)* Without Jesus, everything will go to ruin around here. *(Exploding.)* Because James is no good!

DEBORAH: *(Touching HIS sleeve.)* James, no one said that about you.

JAMES: *(Pulling away roughly.)* You didn't say it, Deborah, but you're all thinking it! *(Glaring at the OTHERS; growing livid when HIS eyes reach JESUS; pointing accusingly.)* You're the reason for all the trouble, Jesus. I've always had to stand in the shadow of my big brother who can do no wrong! *(JESUS calmly continues to work on the table.)*

JUDA: *(Moving from door.)* Don't listen to him, Jesus. I came home today because I want to go away with you. *(JESUS stands up now.)* You'll need someone to help you, and I'm willing to follow wherever you may go.

(JESUS is about to speak, but ELIZABETH flies into JUDA.)

ELIZABETH: *(Very upset.)* Juda, you're only a fifteen-year-old boy—too young to be leaving home.

DEBORAH: *(Strongly.)* Think what it would do to Mother.

ELIZABETH: It's bad enough that Jesus would desert her, but your leaving would be too much for Mother to bear! *(To JESUS; angrily.)* Why don't you take James with you? *(Cutting.)* No one would miss him since he doesn't do much of anything for this family anyway. *(JAMES turns away.)*

JESUS: *(Pausing; quietly.)* The day is coming when James will follow me.

JAMES: *(Turning to face JESUS incredulously.)* I follow you? Jesus, you never make any sense.

JESUS: *(Placing hand on JUDA's shoulder.)* Juda, the time has come for me to begin the Father's work, and I must go alone.
JUDA: *(Bewildered.)* Our father taught you to be a carpenter, which was the only work he ever did.

(RACHEL runs back through the archway to JESUS; catches the hem of his robe.)

RACHEL: *(Pleading.)* Don't leave us, Jesus!
SIMON: *(Rising.)* Don't you care about us anymore?
JAMES: You're always talking about loving others. Is it love that's making you leave your family?
JESUS: *(Strongly.)* I am leaving because of my love for you. *(Earnestly.)* I have to start my teaching ministry, but first, I must prepare—go away alone to fast and pray so that I'll be ready to do the Father's work.
JUDA: *(Disappointed and angry.)* Why can't you have a ministry right here at home in Nazareth?
JAMES: *(Shouting.)* You're just doing this to be spiteful, Jesus! You want to ruin my life— *(HIS voice breaks.)* Load all the problems of this house on my back.
DEBORAH: I've always looked up to you because I thought you loved us. *(Sobbing in anguish.)* But now, I can see that you're willing to hurt Mother. She doesn't deserve this. I'm so disappointed in you, Jesus! *(Turning away from HIM.)*
ELIZABETH: *(Waving JESUS away angrily.)* Go to your new life.
JUDA: *(Brushing JESUS aside.)* James is right about you, Jesus. Why don't you admit it? You just don't want to live with your family anymore. *(Moving to stand beside JAMES.)*

(ALL surround JESUS, pointing, yelling, accusing: "You're selfish!" "Ungrateful!" "Irresponsible!" "Thinking only of yourself!")

ELIZABETH: *(Hurtful, biting tone.)* What do you have to say for yourself, Jesus? *(HE stands with head bowed.)*

JAMES: *(Harshly.)* Mother always treated you as if you were special. *(Demanding.)* If you're so special, tell us why!

(JESUS remains silent. RACHEL rushes to defend Jesus; tugs at JAMES' robe.)

RACHEL: *(Crying.)* You stop it! Stop saying those mean things to Jesus!

(JAMES turns angrily; strikes RACHEL, sending her sprawling on the floor. JESUS, who has been silent and calm, suddenly raises one hand.)

JESUS: *(Full of authority and power.)* Peace!

(HIS FAMILY is stunned into silence. No one moves for several long moments; the silence is profound. Suddenly, without warning, the door flings open; MARY stumbles to the threshold and, screaming hysterically, brings them all back to life.)

MARY: *(Unspeakable anguish from the depths of HER soul.)* JESUS! *(ALL turn, speechless; MARY slumps against the door; she can hardly speak.)* Nathan. *(Pausing; struggling.)* There's been a terrible accident. *(DEBORAH gasps.)* He wandered off—while I was talking to Miriam. *(Clutches doorway to keep from falling. JUDA rushes to hold HER up.)* He fell down a ravine and smashed his head against a rock. *(ELIZABETH moans; DEBORAH cannot move.)* Nathan. They say—he's dead.

DEBORAH: *(Screams!)* NO! *(Running toward door.)* Nathan—my baby! *(SHE exits.)*

(MARY gathers strength; gestures to JUDA to stand back. JAMES moves toward her; Mary shakes her head.)

(James stops in his tracks; Mary holds out her hands imploringly to JESUS; she speaks in a pleading moan.)

MARY: Jesus, only you can save Nathan. Please go to him now.

(HER strength fails her and she leans heavily against the door. JESUS moves to the door as his SIBLINGS stand aside to make a path for him. He looks at no one, but keeps his eyes straight ahead; strides with purpose; exits. Mary and the CHILDREN follow. Juda quickly exits. Elizabeth and James look at each other; they are contrite, humbled, and ashamed.)

ELIZABETH: *(No longer angry.)* Is our brother Jesus special? *(Covering HER head with a shawl.)* The answer to that question may be *(Brokenly.)* Nathan's life. *(SHE exits hurriedly; JAMES, facing audience, sinks onto a stool; bent almost double with shame and despair. LIGHTS fade slowly.)*

CURTAIN

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Stage is dimly lit. JAMES sits in the same place with his head bowed. Soon, the WOMEN and CHILDREN enter, followed by JESUS, who carries NATHAN. Stage LIGHTS come up. The women are extremely joyful and can't keep their hands off Nathan as they all speak at once. They ad lib happy, maternal talk, surrounding the little boy.)

DEBORAH: *(Rushing to JAMES with overwhelming joy.)* Look, James! Nathan is fine now! Jesus healed him!

(Silent, JAMES stands up as if dazed; moves to touch NATHAN; turns to frown at JESUS.)

JAMES: *(More to HIMSELF than to the OTHERS.)* Why am I not surprised?

DEBORAH: Jesus, how can you ever forgive me? *(Falling to HER knees before JESUS; voice breaking with emotion; ELIZABETH puts her arm around her.)* You've given me back my son and my life today. *(Sobbing softly.)*

ELIZABETH: *(With a new gentleness.)* Come, Deborah. You should lie down for a while. *(Helping DEBORAH to stand.)*

JESUS: *(Smiling at NATHAN.)* There's no need to worry about Nathan anymore. All is well. *(MARY smiles gratefully at JESUS as he sets NATHAN on his feet.)*

MARY: *(Quietly; knowingly.)* Yes, all is well.

(RACHEL and SIMON take NATHAN'S hands and lead him through the archway. The WOMEN follow. JAMES turns away, unable to face JESUS.)

JESUS: James.

JAMES: *(Turning; bewildered.)* You healed Nathan ... and somehow, Mother knew you had that kind of power. *(Pause.)* But, how could she have known? *(JESUS is silent; JAMES pauses; this is hard to say; speaks earnestly.)* Jesus, I'm afraid to see you go.

JAMES: *(Continued.)* I don't think I can take on these responsibilities that you've handled so well. *(Sighing.)* It's hard for a man to admit he's afraid. *(Sitting in defeat.)* I just don't measure up to you, Jesus, and I never will. *(Bowing head.)*

JESUS: *(Placing HIS hand on JAMES' head; looking up prayerfully.)* Father, I know You will give strength to James the same as You've given strength to me. Guide his way and make his path straight so that, after I have returned to you, he will have eyes that see and ears that hear Your truth. *(Letting HIS hand rest on JAMES for several moments. When James looks up, Jesus speaks.)* Don't be afraid, James.

JAMES: *(Standing up.)* I don't know what this is all about, but I feel .... *(Frowning; bewildered.)* I feel different … changed. *(Studying HIS hands.)* And yet, I'm the same as I've always been. *(Earnestly.)* I don't understand.

JESUS: *(Nodding.)* You will understand ... someday.

JAMES: *(Still baffled, HE turns, remembering.)* Those sacks of grain from Joses ... did Juda take them back?

JESUS: No. They're still outside. Juda decided to return to his sheep tonight.

JAMES: *(Nodding.)* Juda will always be a shepherd.

JESUS: *(Amused.)* And so will you. *(JAMES' look is quizzical.)*

JAMES: I've never understood you, Jesus. I was always jealous of that special bond between you and Mother. *(Turning; pacing.)* The neighbors whispered about you. Of course, you know that. There was always some kind of mystery surrounding you. *(Shaking HIS head.)* I didn't understand, but I knew that Mother did. *(Pause; continuing quietly.)* She never said anything. *(Placing HIS hand on JESUS' shoulder.)* My brother, everything you do makes absolutely no sense to me. And yet, with you around, things always manage to turn out all right. *(Studying JESUS.)* And now, you say you're going into the wilderness to pray. Elizabeth and Deborah are afraid for you, out there all alone. They're worried about those dangerous wild beasts. *(Grinning at JESUS.)*

JAMES: *(Continued.)* But I have a feeling that the wilderness will never be the same again. *(HE and JESUS chuckle, sharing the joke. James turns.)* I'll bring those sacks inside.

JESUS: Let me help you.

JAMES: *(Raising HIS hand.)* No. I'll do this alone. *(Wryly.)* Might as well get used to it. I'll have a lot of things to do by myself from now on. *(JAMES exits. JESUS moves back to his workbench, sits, picks up table, and begins to work on it as LIGHTS fade.)*

CURTAIN

Scene 3

(AT RISE: The large table DS is filled with dishes covered by a white cloth. The table Jesus has been working on is now finished, and JESUS kneels in prayer beside workbench. His eyes are raised toward the ceiling. He continues to pray for several moments. MARY appears in the archway, and she studies Jesus briefly with gentle wonder and concern. Jesus senses her presence; looks around and stands up.)

MARY: The time draws near when you have to leave, my son.

JESUS: I will return, Mother. My ministry won't take me far from here.

MARY: *(Moving nearer.)* You'll come back, Jesus, but your visits will be short. Never again will you belong to us.

(JESUS reaches toward MARY; she puts her hand to his face.)

MARY: *(Continued.)* When the angel came to me before you were conceived I knew, from that day, you would be born into this world for a special purpose. *(Pause.)*

MARY: *(Continued.)* Jesus, God has honored my life and my home with your presence. But today, you must begin the work for which you were born. *(As if to HERSELF.)* Yes, you must leave, and there will be an empty place here in my heart. *(Putting hand to HER heart.)* I'm afraid for you, Jesus. *(Peering into HIS face; imploringly.)* Why should I feel this way? You're about to begin your ministry as a holy man of God. What could be dangerous about that? *(JESUS remains silent. MARY tries to shake off her worries.)* I remember what the angel Gabriel told me about you. *(Pause; recalling.)* He said—His name will be Jesus. He will be great, the Son of the Highest. He will be a King, and His kingdom will never end. *(Turning, looking in wonder at JESUS.)* Jesus, the angel said you are the Son of God and that with God, nothing is impossible.

(There is a deep silence. JESUS takes MARY's hand to comfort her. The intimate, tender mood disappears when ELIZABETH enters briskly, assuming a take-charge manner.)

ELIZABETH: Jesus, you must eat something before you go. Everything's ready.

JESUS: Don't bother yourself, Elizabeth. If I'm to find a place to rest tonight, I should be leaving right away, before the sun sets.

ELIZABETH: *(Frowning; starting to protest.)* But I've spent all day preparing a special meal just for— *(MARY places her hand lightly on ELIZABETH's arm. Elizabeth stops short; changes her tone.)* Well, I suppose your time to fast and pray is more important than one evening meal. *(Brightening.)* And after what you did for Nathan today there must be something special I can do for you, Jesus.

MARY: *(Moving quickly to the arch and calling.)* Come, children. Jesus will be leaving soon.

(RACHEL runs in first, followed by SIMON. They rush to JESUS, hugging him tightly. DEBORAH and JAMES enter; Deborah holds a pair of new sandals close to her breast.)

RACHEL: *(Crying.)* Don't go, Jesus!
SIMON: Yes, Brother. Please stay here with us.
MARY: *(Gently pulling the CHILDREN away.)* Jesus has important work to do.

(THEY reluctantly move away. JAMES comes nearer as ELIZABETH exits through archway. The CHILDREN, holding on to MARY, stand beside JESUS.)

JAMES: *(Earnestly.)* No one can ever take your place.
JESUS: Our Father has already made a place just for you, James.
JAMES: I won't disappoint you, Jesus. *(HE and JESUS embrace; then James stands on opposite side of Jesus. DEBORAH comes forward with the sandals.)*
DEBORAH: I have a gift for you. *(JESUS smiles when he sees the shoes.)* You'll do a lot of walking, and these new shoes will last a long time.

(SIMON gets a chair, brings it DSC.)

SIMON: Put them on, Jesus.
RACHEL: *(Eagerly.)* You should wear them now.

(As JESUS sits, the CHILDREN kneel and take off his old sandals. ELIZABETH appears in the archway carrying a shawl folded over her arm. DEBORAH kneels at Jesus' feet to put on the new sandals. Deborah stands up; backs away in reverent attitude. Elizabeth comes to Jesus.)

ELIZABETH: *(Carefully unfolding shawl.)* Here's my gift to you, Jesus.

(SHE covers JESUS' head and shoulders with the cloth and backs away. Jesus stands up; turns to audience. ALL look on him, in awe of his regal and powerful, yet humble presence.)

JESUS: *(To himself.)* It is time.

(HE looks toward the front door. RACHEL whimpers; buries her face in MARY robe.)

ELIZABETH: *(Humbly.)* Bless us, Jesus.
JESUS: *(Smiling; gently.)* Come here, my sisters.

(THEY kneel before JESUS, who puts his hands on their bowed heads. He lifts his eyes and prays aloud "The Lord's Prayer." ELIZABETH and DEBORAH stand up; back away reverently. Jesus is ready to leave; his eyes are fixed on some invisible place beyond the front door. He moves with purpose, looking ahead. SIMON opens the door wide and Jesus steps through; turns back; raises hand as if giving a benediction; then is gone. Simon closes the door. RACHEL cries softly in MARY'S arms.)
(Despair threatens to overwhelm the peaceful mood which had been present before Jesus left. Mary sits in chair DSC and beckons her family to gather around her. JAMES stands beside Mary. Elizabeth sits on opposite side. Rachel and Simon sit on the floor in front of Mary, and Deborah brings a pillow; sits beside children.)

SIMON: What are you going to tell us?
MARY: I think it's time you knew the truth about your brother's birth. I've never told you that Jesus' birth was announced by an angel, even before Jesus was conceived.
RACHEL: *(Astonished.)* An angel?
MARY: *(Nodding.)* Yes, Rachel. An angel told me that I would have a son, and he would be called Jesus.
DEBORAH: *(In wonder.)* What else did the angel tell you, Mother?
MARY: He said Jesus would be born in Bethlehem and that was true.
JAMES: What were you and Father doing in Bethlehem in the first place?
MARY: In those days, Roman law required that everyone under Roman rule be taxed. Your father Joseph and I journeyed to Bethlehem to be registered.

MARY: *(Continued.)* It was almost time for Jesus to be born when we started out for Bethlehem, and when we arrived the city was filled with people who had come for the same purpose.
SIMON: So that's why Jesus was born in Bethlehem?

(MARY nods.)

ELIZABETH: I suppose that Father rented a room for you before Jesus was born.
MARY: Well, he tried to find a place, but all the inns were full.
DEBORAH: Where was Jesus born?
MARY: In a stable. *(ELIZABETH and DEBORAH gasp.)* It was the only place we could find. We had no choice. *(SHE smiles at the memory.)* But that was a wonderful night! You see, not long after I had wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger, some shepherds came to the stable.
JAMES: Shepherds? What did they want?
MARY: *(Eagerly.)* This is the most wonderful part. The shepherds wanted to see the babe in the manger. They were on their night watch with the sheep in the fields, and an angel came to them, announcing the birth of Jesus. The shepherds told us that many angels had appeared in the sky, and the angels sang, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" *(Silence for a few moments.)*
DEBORAH: *(Echoing.)* Glory to God in the Highest. *(Looking at OTHERS in amazement; speaking eagerly.)* That explains what happened today. Jesus only had to touch Nathan to heal him. It was truly a miracle! *(Standing up.)* I believe that Jesus is the Messiah!
ELIZABETH: *(Standing up.)* I saw it with my own eyes. *(To JAMES.)* Do you believe Jesus is the Messiah?
JAMES: *(Pondering.)* I don't know, Elizabeth. *(Pause.)* I don't understand. Jesus prayed that one day I would have eyes to see and ears to hear the truth.

MARY: *(Standing up.)* I am sure that everything the angels said is true. The whole world will know this truth someday.
RACHEL: *(Innocently.)* Is that the end of the story?
MARY: *(Smiling radiantly.)* No, Rachel. The story of Jesus is just beginning!
SIMON: *(Standing up; pulling RACHEL to her feet.)* I'm hungry. Elizabeth, you've been cooking all day. Can't we eat now? *(ALL laugh. Suddenly, the mood is quite merry. JAMES slaps SIMON on his back.)*
JAMES: I'm hungry too, Simon. *(Teasing.)* Our sisters have been cooking all day, and what have they to show for it?
ELIZABETH: *(Defensively; with humor.)* We have plenty to show for our hard work.

(DEBORAH follows ELIZABETH to the covered table DS where they lift the cloth. ALL eyes are wide. The table is crowded with many dishes, enough for a feast.)

SIMON: *(Happily.)* This is a real celebration!
RACHEL: Like when the little lost lamb was found.
JAMES: Elizabeth, you and Deborah have prepared a superb feast!
ELIZABETH: *(Beaming.)* I wanted this day to be special, and it is!
DEBORAH: Somehow, I feel that Jesus is still here watching over us.
MARY: *(Smiling; gently.)* Jesus will never be very far from our hearts ... or our home.

(ALL gather around the table. The SISTERS serve the food; RACHEL and SIMON clap their hands and dance for joy; and everyone talks happily, ad-libbing. JAMES pours wine, and MARY presides with deep gratitude at their family dinner party. OPTIONAL: seasonal MUSIC, offstage to add a more festive atmosphere.)

CURTAIN