

THE SISTERS OF JESUS

By Mary Satchell

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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.

Sisters of Jesus

- 4 -

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.

End of Freeview

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