

BEHOLD THE KING

A Christmas Trilogy

A Play in Four Acts
SAMPLE NOT FOR PERFORMANCE

Written by

Bill Ruegg

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Preface

"Behold the King" is a trilogy of dramas folded into a single comprehensive production. Each of the three is able to stand alone in completeness and message, or together they meld into one grand overview of the entire Christmas story. Act I, the first drama in the sequence, "Let Us Go with Him to Bethlehem" pictures the betrothal and reception of the Bride of Christ through the romance, engagement, marriage and trials of Joseph and Mary. Act II, "Unto You is Born This Day" centers on the virgin birth and signs pointing to the Word become flesh. Acts III and IV, "One Small King" is a drama of contrasts: Jesus Christ and Herod, prophecy and pedigree, Scripture and science, danger and deliverance. Individually or collectively they challenge our traditional notions of Christmas against the testimony of the exact truth of the Word of God.

As previously stated, each drama may be performed separately and has been written with complete introductory background and theme, set design, and costume and character profiles. For this reason, there is much redundancy in direction guidelines between the Acts/dramas in regard to these many features. Helpful suggestions and notations for the complete production, as well as potential combinations of the dramas, are as follows:

"Behold the King: A Christmas Trilogy" A play of four acts.

Act I: "Let Us Go with Him to Bethlehem" (25 min.)
Act II: "Unto You is Born This Day" (40 min.)

Intermission: 15 min.

Acts III & IV: "One Small King" (70 min.)

Presentation time: 150 min. (including intermission)

Narration: Delete final narration from Act I and place it at the end of Act IV beginning with the phrase: "and the child continued to grow . . ."

“Behold the King: A Christmas Trilogy”: A play of three acts.

Act II: "Unto You is Born This Day" (40 min.)

Intermission: 15 min.

Acts III & IV: "One Small King" (70 min.)

Presentation time: 125 min. (including intermission)

Narration: Recite the final narration from Act I at the end of Act IV beginning with the phrase, "and the child continued to grow . . ."

“Behold the King”: A play of two acts.

Act I: "Let Us Go with Him to Bethlehem" (25 min.)

Act II: "Unto You is Born This Day" (40 min.)

Presentation time: 65 min. (no intermission)

Narration: The entire final narration from Act I is placed at the end of Act II to finish the production.

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Let Us Go With Him to Bethlehem (Act I)

Introduction

God began to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival through Mary and Joseph, as well as Zacharias and Elizabeth. Ultimately, Israel was being prepared to receive their King by John the Baptist who would "make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." This core group of believers, along with some shepherds, Anna and Simeon, and the Magi, were privileged to see the "Word become flesh."

Most Christmas programs center on the actual birth or Nativity of Christ. This story differs by focusing upon the intervention of God in the lives of two special people prior to the birth of the Son of God. It is a Bible-centered perspective of the virgin conception seen through Mary and Joseph, whom God gave the blessing and responsibility to receive His Son into their budding family.

The romance, betrothal, marriage and trials of this couple vividly demonstrate the sovereignty of God and the picture of the betrothal and reception of the Bride of Christ, the Church.

An excellent discussion of this imagery is found in Behold, the Bridegroom Comes. Written by, Dr. Renald Showers, and can be obtained from:

Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.
475 White Horse Pike
West Collingwood, NJ 06107.
www.foi.org

This was an invaluable resource for the writing of this play and is an excellent tool to present the gospel and communion worship following this drama.

Let Us Go With Him To Bethlehem: presentation time: 25-30 minutes.

Acknowledgments:

God was at work on this program for years before I was obedient to His call to write it. During this time, Elder Dave Forgard sensed God could use me in our church's drama ministry; but I was not ready. Whenever I mentioned this project, others in our Body encouraged me.

As I finally submitted to undertake this work, I prayed for resources to accomplish it. I sensed the importance of understanding Jewish betrothal/marriage customs as I meditated upon the message God had given through Joseph and Mary.

I prayed and God answered with a visit to Mildred Zech, to whom I go with intercessory prayer requests (nearly all of us in our church do). Mildred just happened to be studying this very subject (Providentially I'm sure!) and lent me the Friends of Israel pamphlet.

I thank my wife, Elizabeth, for putting up with my single-mindedness to finish this play. Also to my children who gave me Phil Keaggy's True Believer CD which helped to inspire and encourage me as I wrote this; and also Phil Keaggy whose beautiful ballad, "And On That Day", showed both the human and biblical sides of Mary. The Holy Spirit led me to scripture after scripture as I put this together. In fact, nearly all of the dialogue is simply scripture that this would be for His glory, and His alone.

The Lord also answered prayer with a willing typist and capable editor, Gloria Best, and I am trusting that He will equip cast and production crews to use this as a springboard for worship and evangelism as we await our Lord's shout.

Bill Ruegg
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Cast and Costumes

- NARRATOR:** Unseen man with excellent reading skills.
- MARY:** The Lord Jesus' mother played by a sweet young woman who exudes a gentle and noble character. She wears a light-colored or pastel, long gown and headdress. She will need a small pillow and support to appear pregnant in Scene 5. This scene will also require she have in place over her headdress a sheer (not lace) white pullover veil.
- JOSEPH:** A young and strong but sensitive man of few words. He wears a robe of coarse material (earth-tones) with a sash around his waist and a headband. He has a thin dark beard (obtain realistic glue-on beard from costume shop) and a wooden mallet in his sash. In Scene 4, he should have a cloth matching his garment that can be easily and loudly ripped in his grief.
- ELI:** Mary's father played by a distinguished, godly older man with a graying beard. He wears the usual Bible-time robe and headdress.
- MARY'S MOTHER:** Older supportive woman with a long robe and flowing headdress.
- GABRIEL (ANGEL):** Clothed in long white gown with a gold belt. Use a bright spotlight (light from transparency projector works well) to silhouette him from behind. He speaks with a deep calming voice.
- ELIZABETH:** Older pregnant woman who is enthusiastic. Long gown (use same pillow/support that Mary will need later in Scene 5) showing her enlarged belly, with a flowing headdress covering her gray hair.
- BARTIMAEUS:** Impetuous young friend of Joseph who is dressed similarly, but with a fuller dark beard.
- JACOB:** Joseph's father portrayed as a kind, older man with a gray beard and costume similar to Eli.
- PAGE:** Official-sounding male tenor voice. Not actually seen.

Properties

Stage: The physical stage is best if at least 25 feet across. Certainly an altar area which is cleared will do.

Scene 5 requires a layout of two sets, like a split screen, with simultaneous action (but not dialogue). A divider is not necessary. Joseph will need to exit stage-right and reenter the scene stage-left later in this scene.

Lighting that can be dimmed or lowered is important. Elaborate lighting and staging can make for a more polished presentation, but improvising can be a lot of fun! Many stages will not have curtains requiring dimming the lights to transition between scenes.

Scene 1: Simple wooden table and two stools. Mary has an earthen water pitcher, and her mother a wicker basket or pottery bowl with a wooden mixing spoon. A leather wine flask (alternatively a pottery pitcher) is used to "pour" wine into a goblet. Joseph will need a small sack of coins and a rope for a heifer.

Scene 2: Mary is stitching a garment as this scene begins. A large cloth bag or purse is needed on opposite stage with folded clothes by it. She will hastily pack it during this scene.

And on That Day by Phil Keaggy (True Believer, Sparrow) is played at the end of this scene and at the conclusion of the play. Available on tape or CD.

Scene 3: No props required.

Scene 4: Joseph is hammering some boards (actually finishing a gate). A small fence-like gate can be constructed so that it is able to stand upright.

Audio tape: This will be played during the dialogue and can be made ahead of time and used for sound effect. It is a group of about five to six men and women casting insults at Joseph because of Mary (i.e., "Look, Joseph the fool", "let me cast the first stone", "Raca!", "Is Joseph's betrothed named Gomer?!" "Joseph, you are shamed!") Use derisive laughter and an attitude of contempt.

A rolled oriental carpet will be set in area of the stage where Joseph will pray and lie down to sleep.

Scene 5: Mary and her mother use same table and one stool from Scene 1. An oil (or candle) lamp is lit on the table.

Scripture: All Bible verses are from the New American Standard Bible.

Scene 1: The Covenant

Set: *ELI and MARY'S MOTHER sit at the table. (SHE is mixing contents of a bowl.) MARY is standing and holds a water pitcher. A leather wine flask and goblet are hidden nearby where MARY and HER MOTHER will retreat.*

MARY: Father, Mother, I have met a young man, a carpenter named Joseph. His home and wood shop are near the gate, where I go to draw water.

ELI: Yes, of course! I know his father, Jacob. We used to go together to Jerusalem for Passover many years ago. They are a God-fearing family, and believe me I know something of this young man.

MOTHER: Mary . . . Does this young man interest you?

MARY: Only that the Lord our God would lead me to one as kind, gentle and handsome as Joseph.

MOTHER: Look, who is approaching? (*SHE glances and points to where HE will enter.*)

MARY: It is Joseph! (*MARY and MOTHER move to opposite stage and listen attentively.*)

ELI: Shalom! Welcome to my home, Joseph. (*THEY hug side-to-side.*) Here, sit...and tell me what is on your mind.

JOSEPH: Eli . . . If it be agreeable to you and your daughter, Mary . . . I wish to . . . well . . . to ask your consideration to give Mary to be my wife.

ELI: Joseph, your reputation and character are remarkable as the elders speak so highly of you. Mary, I believe, is open to this. But with what can I (*emphasis*) gauge your earnestness and worthiness to receive such a request?

JOSEPH: I have worked diligently for this very day. I offer these seven gold coins, a heifer (*HE hands ELI the sack of coins and rope*) and my promise to build a new shelter and fold for your sheep. (*HE places hand on the mallet.*)

ELI: (*In subtle voice*) Ahhh, you have noticed the plight of my flock. A generous offer indeed! I am well-pleased, Joseph, well-pleased.

JOSEPH: It is nothing compared to my pledge to love her with all my heart, and, if need be, to die for her.

ELI: Now I know of God's provision for Mary and your worthiness. Mary! Come quickly. Bring the wine and let us make a covenant for your betrothal to Joseph. (**MARY** and **HER MOTHER**, who is carrying the flask and goblet, come forward. **ELI** stands and **MARY** sits in **HIS** place facing **JOSEPH**.)

(**ELI** now pours wine into the goblet. The **COUPLE** grasp the goblet with both hands.)

"Drink and imbibe deeply, O' lovers!" (Song of Solomon 5:1).
(**JOSEPH** drinks first, then hands the cup to **MARY**, **WHO** drinks.)

(**ELI** raises **HIS** hands and offers a benedictory prayer):
Jehovah God, the Holy One of Israel! In your presence, by Your power, we ask Your sacred seal upon the covenant that Joseph and Mary have entered into.

(**ELI** turns to **JOSEPH** to bless **HIM**.)

"We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem." (Ruth 4:11)

JOSEPH: (Placing **HIS** hand on **MARY'S** cheek)
Mary, I pledge to be faithful to the promise I spoke to your father and to prepare a place for you in my father's house to receive you as my bride.
(**MARY** places **HER** hand over **JOSEPH'S** outstretched hand.)

MARY: Joseph, I consecrate myself to God and to you, and I will be waiting faithfully for you. (**JOSEPH** gets up to exit as **THEY** slowly release hands with loving, longing looks.)

ELI/JOSEPH: Shalom. (**THEY** hug side-to-side)

ELI: (Turning now to **MARY** and **HER MOTHER** as **THEY** stand together arm-in-arm) Let us celebrate the goodness of the Lord! HA! HA! (**THEY** then exit)

Scene 2: The Annunciation

Set: *MARY is alone sitting on the ground stitching a garment. A cloth tote bag with folded clothes by it is on the other side of stage.*

NARRATOR: "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."
(*Luke 1:26-27*)

GABRIEL: (*The bright light silhouettes HIS frame*)
"Hail favored one! The Lord is with you." (*Luke 1:28*)

MARY: (*Astonished, saying under HER breath*) What can this mean?

GABRIEL: "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom will have no end." (*Luke 1:30-33*)

MARY: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (*Luke 1:34*)

GABRIEL: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative, Elizabeth, has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God." (*Luke 1:35-37*)

MARY: (*Now kneels, lifting HER hands to God*)
"Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord: be it done to me according to your word." (*Luke 1:38*) (*The angel light goes off and stage lights dim to "off" for 15-20 seconds of silence, then come back on. MARY then gets up directly and begins to pack HER bag during the narration.*)

NARRATOR: "Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah." (*Luke 1:30*)

MOTHER: (*Enters stage*) Mary! Where are you preparing to go in such a hurry?
(*MARY stands.*)

MARY: To see our cousin, Elizabeth, and Zacharias. God has told me she is with child. It is a sign from God.

MOTHER: O, make me laugh with the laughter of Sara. (***SHE** chuckles.*) Can it be another old and barren woman conceives in Israel? I suppose you shall find out soon enough. Mary...you look pale...are you well, my child? (***SHE** holds **MARY'S** arms.*)

MARY: Yes, Mother, never more so!

MOTHER: Then I will ask your father to send your brother, Josias, with you. Go with God's blessing, my Mary. (***SHE** kisses **MARY** on the forehead and exits.*)

*(**MARY** continues packing **HER** bag, walks slowly off-stage towards the audience, then out. Meanwhile, And on That Day by Phil Keaggy is playing. It continues until the refrain "Holy, Holy, Holy.")*

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Scene 3: The Arrival

Set: *No props needed. ELIZABETH is looking intently to where MARY will enter.*

MARY: Elizabeth! . . . Elizabeth! It is I, Mary!

ELIZABETH: Ohhh!! (*SHE shows a startle at the baby's kick.*)

"Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." (*Luke 1:42-45*)

MARY: "My soul exalts in the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regard for the humble state of His bondservant. For behold, from this time on, all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. (*Verses 51-53 can be omitted to shorten this praise.*) He has given help to Israel, His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever." (*Luke 1:46-55*)

ELIZABETH: These five months I have kept myself in seclusion for "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men." (*Luke 1:25*)

MARY: For truly I have much to share of what God has revealed by the mouth of His angel, Gabriel, and how the Holy Spirit overshadowed me so that I conceived a holy offspring.

ELIZABETH: I, too, have much upon my heart. God has revealed to Zacharias that our son "will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (*Luke 1:17-18*)

And now, behold the mother of my Lord has come to me!

MARY: But, oh, Elizabeth, what shall I do? I am now betrothed to my beloved Joseph. How can I tell him this? He will surely come to know it! (*distressed, nearly sobbing, with ELIZABETH comforting HER*)

ELIZABETH: My offspring is a forerunner to confirm what God is about to do through you and Joseph. If Joseph seeks God, He will reveal to him what He is about to do. (*THEY exit as ELIZABETH continues . . .*)

I am overjoyed and bless the Lord for sending you to help me at this time.

NARRATOR: "And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home." (*Luke 1:56*)

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