

THE DONKEY'S TALE

A Story of Christmas

By

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The Donkey's Tale

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Characters

Jessica, teen

Roman Soldier, 20's--30's

Joseph, late teen--20's

Mary, teen

Innkeeper's Wife, 30's—40's

Balthazar, 40's--60's

Gaspar, 40's--60's

Melchior, 40's--60's

Shepherd #1, 20's

Shepherd #2, 20's

Baby Jesus

Time

Days of Jesus' birth

Place

ACT I, Scene 1: Nazareth

ACT I, Scene 2: Nazareth

ACT I, Scene 3: On the road in Galilee

ACT I, Scene 4: On the road in the Judean hill country

ACT I, Scene 5: On the road near Jerusalem

ACT II, Scene 1: Outside Inn, Bethlehem

ACT II, Scene 2: Outside Inn, Bethlehem

ACT II, Scene 3: Outside Inn, Bethlehem

ACT II, Scene 4: In Stable, Bethlehem

ACT II, Scene 5: Outside Inn, Bethlehem

ACT II Scene 6: Outside Inn, Bethlehem

Scenery

ACT I, Scene 1: Facade of humble house with door way, left of center stage
ACT I, Scene 2: Facade of humble house with door way, left of center stage
ACT I, Scene 3: Bare stage
ACT I, Scene 4: Bare stage
ACT I, Scene 5: Bare stage
ACT II, Scene 1: Facade of Inn with door and bench
ACT II, Scene 2: Facade of Inn with door and bench
ACT II, Scene 3: Facade of Inn with door and bench
ACT II, Scene 4: Interior of Stable with bales of hay, manger
ACT II, Scene 5: Facade of Inn with door and bench
ACT II, Scene 6: Facade of Inn with door and bench

Costumes

Roman Soldier: Roman soldier outfit with shield and small sword
Mary, Joseph, Jessica, and Wife: Simple Bible-era robes, sashes, head-pieces, and sandals
Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior: Ornate robes and crowns
Shepherds (#1 and #2): Simple robes and sandals

Props

ACT I, Scene 1: rope for donkey, pregnancy enhancer for Mary, scroll for Roman Soldier
ACT I, Scene 2: Travel bags for Mary, Joseph, and Jessica
ACT I, Scene 3: Twigs for campfire, travel bags for Mary, Joseph, and Jessica, travel bag for Wife
ACT I, Scene 4: Camp fire and twigs
ACT II, Scene 1: Broom for Wife
ACT II, Scene 2: Crooks and purses for Shepherds
ACT II, Scene 3: Ornate boxes for Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior
ACT II, Scene 4: Ornate boxes for Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior, swaddling cloths for Baby Jesus
ACT II, Scene 5: Broom for Wife

THE DONKEY'S TALE

ACT I, Scene 1

{As the lights come up, Jessica is standing downstage right near the top of the stage right stairs. She is carrying rope for donkey. Roman Soldier enters stage from stage right stairs. He crosses to Jessica and speaks to her. She answers him. Roman Soldier opens up scroll he is carrying and looks at it. He motions to Jessica that she must go stage right. Roman Soldier crosses to house. As he crosses Jessica looks off stage right stairs. Roman Soldier stops in front of house and looks at scroll, knocks on door, and stands back awaiting response}

Roman Soldier: *{harshly}* Joseph, son of Jacob!

{There is no response. Roman Soldier knocks again}

Roman Soldier *{cont'd}*: *{harshly}* Joseph, son of Jacob!

{Joseph enters from door way and crosses to Roman Soldier}

Joseph: *{timidly}* Shalom, officer.

Roman Soldier: *{peering around Joseph}* Anyone in there with you?

Joseph: Yes, officer. My wife.

{Roman Soldier peers around Joseph and looks toward door}

Jessica: *{off stage right stairs}* I'll have to go, too. *{pointing to toward Roman Soldier}* You heard him.

Roman Soldier: *{motioning toward him}* Get her out here.

Joseph: She doesn't feel good.

{Roman Soldier laughs}

Roman Soldier: Doesn't feel...? *{stronger}* Get her out here!

Joseph: Yes, officer.

{Joseph enters into house. Roman Soldier stands and taps scroll}

Jessica: *{towards off stage right stairs}* To Bethlehem. For the census. The Roman soldier told me.

{Mary enters from door way. Joseph enters behind her. Mary crosses to Roman Soldier. Joseph crosses and puts right arm around Mary. Roman Soldier looks at her and is skeptical}

Joseph: This is Mary, my wife.

{Roman Soldier waves him off}

Roman Soldier: *{with skepticism}* Not feeling good?

{Mary turns to reveal her advanced state of pregnancy}

Mary: *{holding abdomen}* *{in distress}* I'm having a contraction.

{Roman Soldier laughs}

Joseph: She's nearing her time.

{Roman Soldier nods and sneers}

Roman Soldier: *{gruffly}* Are you Mary...*{looking at scroll}* daughter of Eli?

{Mary steps forward and nods. Jessica steps forward}

Jessica: He knew my family. They've all left. He knew I was Jessica.

Roman Soldier: *{folding scroll}* Why haven't you left for the census?

{Mary is uncomfortable and rocks back and forward}

Jessica: You know why I couldn't leave.

Mary: *{holding abdomen}* Joseph, I can't stand anymore.

{Joseph puts arm around Mary}

Joseph: *{looking around}* On the bench. *{finding no bench}* *{frustrated}* Where's the...?

Mary: *{insistently}* I must...

{Mary starts to slump to the ground. Joseph puts arm around Mary so she falls gently to her knees. Joseph drops to his knees and keeps arm around her}

Roman Soldier: *{harshly}* Are you telling me...?

Jessica: *{holding up rope}* I had to take care of you.

{Mary rocks back and forth}

Mary: *{holding abdomen}* The pain, Joseph. The pain.

Joseph: *{anxiously}* If we could wait a week, officer. Please. Until she delivers. We didn't plan...

Roman Soldier: Should've thought 'bout that before. *{with a sneer}*
Married three months and giving birth. *{wagging finger}* Everybody in town
knows. What do the rabbis think? *{with a sneer}* What 'bout the...ladies ?
{Mary rocks back and forward}

Joseph: It's not safe for her to travel. We'd be alone. I'd have no help on
the way if Mary...

Jessica: *{amazed}* It's safe. I'm not going alone!

Roman Soldier: *{pointing to Jessica}* *{harshly}* Talk to her. She's going
today.

Joseph: But officer...

Roman Soldier: *{emphatically}* You must leave today. It's the last day.
Everybody's gotta be out of their homes.

{Jessica is listening to off stage right}

Jessica: *{excitedly}* I'm taking you with me! I won't be alone.

Joseph: Can't my wife stay?

{Roman Soldier looks carefully at scroll}

Roman Soldier: You're both of the house of David. You both must
go...*{looking at scroll again}* to Bethlehem.

Joseph: *{pleadingly}* She can't!

Mary: *{calmly}* I'll try, Joseph. I'll try. I'll go if I have to.

{Joseph pats her hand. Joseph stands up and crosses to Roman Soldier}

Jessica: I won't have to walk either. *{pointing off stage right stairs}* I'll ride
you!

Joseph: *{whispering}* We won't make it, walking all the way. She'll die.
The baby'll die.

Roman Soldier: *{sternly}* Get her up!

Jessica: It'll be easy. And fun!

Joseph: But officer...

Mary: *{holding abdomen}* *{in discomfort}* I must sit.

{Roman Soldier looks at Mary then at Joseph}

Roman Soldier: *{motioning toward house} {harshly}* Get her up and get your things!

{Joseph crosses back to Mary}

Jessica: I'll get my things and we'll leave.

{Jessica exits off stage right stairs. Joseph stoops down and puts arm as if to pick her up}

Roman Soldier: *{waving off}* Not in there again! I'll never get her out.

{Roman Soldier crosses hastily to Joseph and Mary. He grabs head pieces off Joseph and Mary and tosses them to the ground in a pile}

Roman Soldier *{cont'd}* : *{motioning to ground} {to Mary}* Sit there. *{motioning toward house and Joseph}* You get the bags and come right out!

{Joseph nods and lets Mary down to the ground gently. She sits on pile of head pieces. Mary looks up at Joseph kindly and pats his arm}

Mary: What ever'll happen, will happen. God's in this.

{Roman Soldier shakes head, spits with contempt, and crosses to stage left stairs. Roman Soldier watches as Joseph exits into house. Roman Soldier exits off stage left stairs. Mary sitting on ground crosses arms in front of chest, closes eyes, hums quietly, and rocks slowly back and forth}

{black out}

ACT I, Scene 2

{As the lights come up, Joseph enters from house carrying two travel bags. He crosses to Mary and helps Mary up. Jessica enters from stage right stairs with travel bag and sits on the top of the stairs. She stuffs clothing into travel bag. Joseph looks at Mary knowing her feelings. Mary nods at Joseph. Mary holds her abdomen as they slowly cross to Jessica}

Mary: Jessica, you're going, too?

{Jessica stops stuffing clothes in the bag and turns toward Mary and Joseph}

Jessica: *{looking at them}{nodding}* To Bethlehem. For the census. My family's of the house of David.

Mary: *{with a smile}* You're too young.

{Jessica stands up}

Jessica: *{hands on hips} {a little sassy}* The Roman officer said I had to go. I'm over fourteen.

Mary: *{looking around}* Not by yourself!

{Jessica points off stage right stairs. Mary looks off stage right stairs, sees no one, and then looks back at Jessica}

Jessica: I'll be fine.

Mary: It's too dangerous for a young girl to walk a hundred miles alone!

{Jessica puts hand on hip and cocks head in annoyance}

Jessica: Don't worry. I'm grown-up, almost.

{Mary and Joseph look around and do not see anyone else.}

Jessica *{cont'd}*: I'm sixteen...next month. And I'm alone, most of the time.

{Mary slumps down. Jessica crosses closer to Mary}

Jessica *{cont'd}*: What's the matter?

Joseph: Mary's near term. *{anxiously}* How can she get to Bethlehem? She can't walk... for a week...in the wilderness.

Mary: *{holding abdomen and moaning}* Joseph, I'm having a contraction. Another one.

Joseph: We have to get started, Mary. *{to Jessica}* The Roman soldier said we had to leave today...

Jessica: Me, too...

Joseph: *{to Mary}* God knows where our baby'll be born. Where he...

Jessica: He? You know the baby's a boy? My cousins have used... *{dramatically}* everything to find out what their babies would be. *{shaking head}* Nothing worked.

{Mary moans}

Joseph: Mary was told by an angel she'd give birth to a son.

Jessica: An angel?

Joseph: An angel called Gabriel. He told me, too. Later. *{looking at Mary penitently} {sighing}* I didn't believe Mary at first.

Jessica: Why angels? Why to...*{pointing to Mary}* Mary and...*{pointing to Joseph}* to you?

Joseph: He's a special child. He's Messiah.

{Jessica is shocked}

Jessica: My aunt told me long ago every Jewish girl since Eve's dreamed she'd be the mother of Messiah. She hoped it'd be me. Me too. *{shrugging shoulders}* I'm not married...yet. *{with a sigh}* Now you've saying...

{Joseph helps Mary up. Jessica helps Mary on stage right side}

Joseph: We'll make it, Mary. God'll make a way for us to get to Bethlehem.

{Jessica holds onto Mary's arm}

Joseph: The Roman soldier told us to talk with you. If you come with us, it'd really help me...us.

Mary: You wouldn't have to travel alone. It'd be safer.

Jessica: *{with annoyance}* I told you I'm almost...

{Mary slumps down because of pain. Joseph and Jessica help Mary up}

Mary: Sorry.

{Jessica looks at Mary and thinks}

Jessica: I'll go with you. I can help.

{Jessica makes a deep sigh}

Jessica *{cont'd}*: *{with sadness}* Mary can ride.

Joseph: Ride?

Jessica: On my donkey. *{pointing off stage right stairs}* Over there. Tied to the tall tree.

{Mary and Joseph look off stage right stairs}

Jessica *{cont'd}* : Aunt and uncle thought it'd be safe to me to go alone since I'd be riding my donkey. I'm leaving her with my uncle in Jerusalem on the way back.

{Mary and Joseph look back at Jessica and nod. Roman Soldier enters from stage left stairs and crosses toward Mary, Joseph, and Jessica}

Joseph: Then you'll have to walk.

{Mary holds abdomen and leans forward and back. Jessica looks at Mary}

{Jessica sighs deeply}

Jessica: I don't mind. *{trying to smile}* It'd be safer. You're right. *{waving off}* I shouldn't go alone.

Joseph: It'll be a big help, too.

{Jessica smiles and Mary pats Jessica's arm. Roman Soldier reaches Mary, Joseph, and Jessica}

Roman Soldier: *{gruffly}* Not gone yet?

{Joseph and Jessica turn Mary toward stage right stairs. Jessica takes travel bags from Joseph and carries all three}

Joseph: We going, officer. *{happily}* Mary's going to ride on a donkey...*{pointing to Jessica}* Jessica's donkey.

{Roman Soldier smiles at Jessica then at Joseph}

Roman Soldier: *{kindly}* Good. *{harshly}* I don't care how she gets there. You must all leave...now! *{Joseph and Jessica help Mary. They start to cross toward stage right stairs}*

Joseph: This way, Mary. To Jessica's donkey. She's just over there.

Roman Soldier: *{harshly}* *{pointing toward stage right}* Go!

{Joseph, Mary, and Jessica exit off stage right stairs carrying travel bags. Roman Soldier remains on stage watching Joseph, Mary, and Jessica exit. Roman Soldier shakes head and taps scroll, crosses to stage left stairs and exits off stage left stairs}

{black out}

ACT I, Scene 3

{Mary, Joseph, and Jessica enter from stage right stairs, carrying travel bags. There are twigs scattered about the stage. Joseph has arm around Mary and helps her up the stairs}

{Mary stops}

Mary: I need to stop for a minute, please.

Joseph: *{to Jessica}* Will your donkey be safe there?

Jessica: She's tied to a stump.

Mary: I can't go very far without a break. Sorry.

{Jessica nods}

Joseph: You've done very well, Mary.

Mary: I slow everybody down.

Joseph: *{holding Mary's arm with his hand}* We've done fine...really.

Joseph *{cont'd}* : *{to Jessica}* We couldn't have made it this far, if Mary had to walk.

{Joseph smiles at Jessica and Jessica nods and smiles back. Mary turns and puts hand on abdomen. Jessica watches Mary and puts hands to mouth}

Mary: What's the matter?

Jessica: You're bigger than this morning!

{Mary looks at her abdomen. Mary and Jessica laugh}

Jessica *{cont'd}* : Sit here. I'll get twigs for the fire.

{Wife enters with travel bag from stage left stairs and crosses slowly toward center stage}

Mary: I can help.

Jessica: *{motioning to ground}* Sit. Sit.

{Joseph helps Mary down. Joseph and Jessica put down travel bags to make a pile to sit on. Mary sits on ground on top of travel bags at top of stage right stairs. Jessica looks for twigs and picks up twigs. She crosses toward center stage, and bends down}

Wife: Shalom.

{Jessica looks up and stands up}

Jessica: Shalom.

Wife: *{concerned}* Why are you on this road? It's dangerous. It's getting dark.

Jessica: For the census. I'm going to Bethlehem.

Wife: *{looking around}* Not alone!

{Jessica shakes head}

Jessica: *{motioning toward Joseph and Mary}* With my neighbors...and my donkey. Mary's riding my donkey. I'm walking. She's expecting...very soon.

{Wife looks over at Mary and nods}

Wife: I'm returning to Bethlehem. I went to Galilee near Nazareth for the census...

Jessica: We're from Nazareth...

{Wife nods}

Wife: My husband has an inn in Bethlehem.

Jessica: We'll need a place to stay in Bethlehem for Mary to deliver her baby.

{Wife looks over at Mary}

Wife: *{shaking head}* She'll never make it. She looks like she'll deliver...here...*{looking over at Mary again}* tonight!

{Jessica picks up twigs}

Jessica: Hope not. I've helped with animals...but not people.

Joseph: *{calling over to Jessica}* Jessica, who's there with you? Are you talking to a stranger? You shouldn't...

Jessica: *{calling over to Joseph}* A lady traveling to Bethlehem. I'll bring her over. *{to Wife}* It'll happen wherever God wants it to happen.

Wife: God? God's in this?

Jessica: This baby's special. He's Messiah.

Wife: *{with disbelief}* How can you be sure?

Jessica: An angel appeared to Mary and told her. Then to Joseph 'cause he didn't believe Mary when she told him.

Wife: *{laughing}* Can understand why. An angel?

Jessica: Gabriel.

Wife: *{looking askance}* You're serious.

Joseph: *{calling over to Jessica}* All right, Jessica?

Wife: The messenger angel.

Jessica: *{calling over to Joseph}* Fine. I'll be right there. *{to Wife}* Before they were married. Before they had relations. A special conception. They told me. On the way.

Wife: *{taken aback}* I hope there's more proof. Anyone... *{pointing to Mary and Joseph}* anybody can say an angel appeared to them especially... A conception without intimacy? I've never heard of such a thing.

Jessica: *{shrugging shoulders}* I believe what she said.

Wife: People will say...anything if they get pregnant before they're married. It'd have to be a miracle!

Jessica: It is a miracle!

Joseph: *{calling over to Jessica}* Jessica!

{Wife shakes head vigorously}

Jessica: Shouldn't I believe her? *{calling over to Joseph}* Coming.

Wife: Conception without intimacy? Angels appearing...? Nobody'll will believe them...or you. *{motioning toward Mary and Joseph}* Your neighbors are calling you. *{whispering}* They'll say anything—they're not family.

{Jessica and Wife start to cross}

Jessica: They live 'cross the street. They're close like family—I don't have much family. *{thinking}* Never heard them lie before.

{Jessica and Wife cross to Mary and Joseph. Joseph stands up as Jessica and Wife approach}

Wife: *{as crossing}* *{pointing toward stage right stairs}* Nice donkey.

Jessica: *{with a slight edge}* I have to walk all the way.

Wife: You're doing a good deed. *{in a whisper}* Remember what I said.

Jessica: *{as they reach Mary and Joseph}* This is lady I met...*{pointing back to center stage}* She's traveling like we are.

Joseph: Shalom.

Mary: Shalom.

Jessica: *{pointing to Mary and Joseph}* Mary and Joseph.

Wife: Shalom. *{patting Jessica's arm}* You have a gracious neighbor in Jessica.

Mary: I couldn't have made it without her donkey. *{holding her right abdomen}* Ouch!

Joseph: *{leaning over Mary} {very concerned}* What's the matter, Mary?

Wife: What is it?

Mary: *{feeling her abdomen}* A foot.

{Wife, Mary, and Jessica laugh}

Joseph: *{anxiously}* I was worried.

{Wife, Mary, and Jessica smile. Joseph stands up}

Joseph: Are you also going to Bethlehem for the census?

Wife: *{shaking head}* Returning there. I registered in Galilee.

Jessica: I told her we were from Nazareth going to Bethlehem.

Wife: Such a vast movement of our people. For no purpose. *{hands up}*
Such trouble for...Rome.

Mary: God has a purpose in this movement. He must.

Wife: God? Must?

Mary: He must want someone or some people to be somewhere very badly.

Wife: *{pointing to Mary}* This is a terrible hardship for you. *{surveying the stage}* God wouldn't want this. He'd want you home. *{hands up}* You could give birth out here!

Mary: *{shaking head}* No. Not here. It won't happen here.

Joseph: Mary!

Jessica: I told her an angel...

Mary: *{earnestly}* He's a special child. He's Messiah. God's working very hard to get him to Bethlehem. We're of the family of David. David was born in Bethlehem. *{nodding}* That's where Jesus is to born. I'm sure of it.

Wife: Jesus?

Mary: His name.

Joseph: Mary, you've not told me these...

Mary: *{to Joseph} {genuinely}* I've been treasuring much in my heart since the angel Gabriel spoke to me. (tapping chest) This is something I feel deeply...very deeply. Something I know very deeply

Wife: *{shaking head}* I don't know much about such things...about angels. Neither does my husband. I'm sure of that.

{Mary holds abdomen with both hands because of pain. Wife forces a smile}

Wife *{cont'd}* : Many claim to be Messiah. In Jerusalem I've heard them speak. Standing on the street corners. In the squares. Some get a big crowd—especially if they say something outrageous.

Joseph: It's happened many times in our history, yes. Especially in dark days. Like today...but...

Wife: Our people need a deliverer. We all know it. We've been in bondage under Rome for generations. We've been promised by God. But angels...? Your son...?.

{Mary rocks back and forth with pain}

Wife *{cont'd}* : *{waving off}* You'll never make it to Bethlehem. Who can help you out here?

Mary: God.

Wife: Yes, yes.

Mary: *{motioning to Joseph and then Jessica}* My husband.

Wife: Of course. Of course.

Mary: And my neighbor whom God has...

Jessica: *{holding chest}* Me? What could I do?

{Wife smiles}

Wife: I'd help if I could; but I must make several more miles before it gets dark. *{looking up}* Really dark.

Mary: I understand...

Wife: The inn's very busy. My husband needs me home as soon as possible.

Mary: I have help here. But I will deliver in Bethlehem.

{Wife turns toward stage right exit, crossing closer to Jessica}

Wife: *{to Jessica}* If...

Mary: *{with determination}* In Bethlehem!

Wife: *{calling back to Mary and Joseph}* When you get to Bethlehem, we're the first inn as you enter town. Near Shepherds' Field. Ask anyone if you don't see it. Shalom.

Joseph: Shalom.

Jessica: *{to Wife}* What should I think? What should I do?

Wife: *{starting to cross}* *{quietly to Jessica}* More proof than angels. Anyone can... Find out more.

Jessica: *{quietly to Wife}* Where? How?

Wife: *{more loudly so Mary and Joseph can hear}* *{merrily}* Your donkey's carrying Messiah.

Jessica: *{to Wife}* Shalom. Thanks for caring what I think.

{Wife nods to Jessica}

Wife: *{to Jessica}* We have a stable next to the inn. The only one with a stable. For your donkey. You'll recognize it. *{calling to Mary}* *{smiling}* I'll want to see your son.

Mary and Joseph: Shalom. Shalom.

{Wife crosses toward stage right exit}

Wife: *{to herself as she crosses}* Nice people. Too bad...

{Wife reaches stage right exit and exits}

Joseph: *{looking upward}* Let's gather more twigs for a fire. *{looking up}* It's getting dark. This is as far as we can go today.

{Jessica looks around and gathers twigs}

{black out}

ACT I, Scene 4

{As the lights come up, Roman Soldier is standing at center stage. He has scroll and is looking around anxiously then off stage right stairs. He watches as Jessica enters. Jessica enters from stage right stairs and crosses toward Roman Soldier. Jessica carries travel bag. Joseph carries two travel

bags. Mary helped by Joseph slowly enters from stage right stairs and stands at top of stairs}

Roman Soldier: Where are you going?

Jessica: Bethlehem.

Roman Soldier: *{pointing stage right}* That way.

{Jessica turns toward Mary and Joseph and motions toward Mary and Joseph to advance to her}

Roman Soldier: *{gruffly}* *{pointing off stage right stairs}* Did you tie your donkey up to that tree?

Jessica: *{pointing off stage right stairs}* Yes, officer.

Roman Soldier: We've had too many stray animals on these roads during the census. *{pointing again}* If he...

Jessica: My donkey's a "she"...

{Roman Soldier looks threateningly at Jessica. Mary with Joseph's arm around her crosses with Joseph to Jessica}

Jessica *{cont'd}* : *{holding hands up}* Sorry, officer.

Joseph: She meant no harm, officer.

{Roman Soldier ignores Joseph}

Roman Soldier: If...she...

{Jessica nods several times agreeably}

Roman Soldier *{cont'd}* : Gets away, *{putting hand on sword}* she'll be...

Jessica: *{scared}* No! No! She won't get loose. I promise.

{Roman Soldier takes hand away from sword}

Roman Soldier: Why'd you tie your donkey up? It's noon.

{Joseph lets Mary down to the ground. Mary holds her abdomen. Joseph puts travel bags around Mary}

Roman Soldier: *{harshly}* What are you doing? You can't stop here. Not next to the road! Not this time of day!

Joseph: Just for a... Officer, please. My wife's very tired. *{motioning toward her abdomen}* She's...

{Roman Soldier looks at Mary holding her abdomen}

Roman Soldier: I know you...you're from Nazareth. *{amazed}* You've got this far? Just for a moment. *{pointing toward stage left}* Stay away from others. We want no crowds gathering 'cause of security. *{unfolding scroll}* What family...? *{looking at Jessica, Mary, and Joseph}* Are you together?

{Joseph looks at Mary and Jessica}

Joseph: Yes, officer. David's family.

Roman Soldier: All three?

{Jessica, Mary, and Joseph nod to Roman Soldier. Roman Soldier crosses to Joseph}

Roman Soldier: *{looking at scroll}* Bethlehem. *{rolling up scroll}* I remember. *{pointing stage right}* Forty miles to go.

{Mary tugs on Joseph's arm}

Mary: *{earnestly}* We'll make it, Joseph.

Roman Soldier: *{to Joseph}* In her condition?

{Roman Soldier shakes head}

Roman Soldier *{cont'd}* : *{to Jessica}* Never.

{Joseph pats Mary}

Joseph: *{with reassurance}* You will, Mary. I know you will.

Roman Soldier: *{slight smile}* You're amazing. Just a few minutes. You must make more miles this afternoon. Before nightfall.

Joseph: We will, officer. Thank you.

Roman Soldier: You gotta get to Bethlehem before the census ends.

Joseph: Yes, officer. We will, officer.

{Roman Soldier turns and crosses to stage left stairs and exits off stage left stairs. Jessica and Joseph sit with Mary. Joseph offers water to Mary to drink. Mary drinks and hands water to Joseph. Joseph hands water to Jessica who drinks as Mary speaks}

Mary: This is near Elizabeth's home. My cousin. I visited her after the angel spoke to me.

Jessica: *{as she hands water back to Joseph}* How do you know it's true? Angels speaking to you.

Mary: Elizabeth's husband was also visited by an angel, the same angel. As I approached Elizabeth I called out to her. As she heard my greeting, she said she was filled with the Holy Spirit and the child inside her leaped for joy.

{Jessica looks away not sure}

Mary *{cont'd}* : *{concerned}* Once in her house, she could tell I was pregnant. She asked why should “the mother of my Lord” visit her?

{Jessica does not look back. Mary looks at Jessica}

Mary *{cont'd}* : *{concerned}* I thought you believed me.

{Jessica looks back toward Mary}

Jessica: *{shrugging shoulders}* How could it be true? Angels.

Joseph: You think we're making this up?

Jessica: I'm...not sure. The innkeepers' wife said anyone could say they've seen an angel.

Joseph: Other people saw the angel too...

Mary: *{pointing to Joseph}* You and Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband...

{Joseph nods}

Joseph: How could three people make up the same story?

Jessica: *{shrugging shoulders}* *{tentatively}* They might. Depending... They could've...*{pause}* *{genuinely}* I want to believe you.

{Joseph looks away and thinks, then turns to Jessica}

Joseph: *{reassuringly}* There's more than an angel appearing to Mary...or me or Zechariah. Or Elizabeth's reaction when seeing Mary.

{Jessica nods expectantly}

Jessica: More? Something that would...?

Joseph: What's happened has fulfilled Scripture. Prophecies made centuries ago 'bout Messiah such as “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son.”

Mary: He will be “of the house of David”.

Joseph: “He will be called a Nazarene”.

*{Roman Soldier enters from stage left stairs and crosses to center stage.
Jessica nods with understanding}*

Mary: We've trusted the angel because...*{patting abdomen}* Jesus...

Jessica: Jesus?

Mary: The name we were told to give our son...

Joseph: Meaning “Savior”--another prophecy...

{Roman Soldier listens and shakes head with disapproval}

Mary: Is fulfilling God's word in the Scriptures. Each day more prophecies are coming true as we live out what He wants us to do.

{Roman Soldier reaches Jessica, Mary, and Joseph}

Roman Soldier: I said a few moments.

Joseph: Yes, officer. Thank you. We're on our way.

{Joseph helps Mary up. Jessica stands up. Joseph and Jessica pick up travel bags}

Jessica: I'll get my donkey.

*{Jessica hurriedly crosses to stage right and stands near stage right stairs.
Jessica turns and looks back at Mary and Joseph as Joseph is helping Mary up}*

Jessica *{cont'd}* : I want to be sure. (as she turns) My aunt's said: Live out what God wants you to do. Am I?

{Jessica exits stage right}

Roman Soldier: *{pointing with scroll}* Move! No loitering. No talking about... Messiah. I heard you. I don't want any trouble. No trouble. You don't want any trouble. Go! Catch up with the girl. . *{motioning for them to leave}* Now!

{Joseph puts arm around Mary. Mary and Joseph slowly cross to stage right exit and exit stage right. Roman Soldier watches them as they cross. Roman Soldier taps scroll on his hand. Roman Soldier holds up scroll and points toward them with scroll}

Roman Soldier *{cont'd}* : *{harshly}* You must make five miles before night fall. *{to himself}* They'll never make five miles. *{calling out to Mary and*

Joseph No talk 'bout Messiah! Not from you or anyone else! *{to himself}*
{shaking head} What's going on ?

{Roman Soldier crosses to stage left stairs and exits off stage left stairs}
{black out}

ACT I, Scene 5

{As the lights come up, Jessica enters from the stage left stairs. She slowly crosses across stage. She is weary, dragging herself along. She sighs with tiredness. Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior enter from stage right stairs and stop at the top of the stairs. They look around, confused where they should be going. They spot Jessica and cross to her as she reaches center stage}

Balthazar: Shalom, young lady.

Jessica: *{wearily}* Shalom.

Balthazar: You shouldn't be traveling alone on such a desolate road. It's dangerous.

Jessica: I'm not alone. *{pointing toward stage right exit}* I'm with the lady riding on the donkey.

{Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior look at stage right exit}

Jessica *(cont'd)* : *(whiny)* My donkey. *{patting chest}* I have to walk.

{Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior look back at Jessica and are taken aback by her attitude}

Jessica *{cont'd}* : I can't keep up with them. *{shrugging shoulders}* I'm tired. I let the pregnant lady have my donkey. I thought I'd ride all the way for census...

Gaspar: The Roman census?

Jessica: *{whiny}* Even some of the way. *{with a sigh}* It's time to stop for the night.

Gaspar: *{looking stage right then at Jessica}* You're doing a good deed.

Jessica: Everyone says that.

{Gaspar smiles as Melchior taps his arm}

Melchior: *{tapping Gaspar's arm}* The reason so many people are on the roads. The census. *{tapping scroll}* Does it mean anything more?

{Gaspar shrugs shoulders}

Jessica: *{to Gaspar}* I don't always feel good 'bout it, like now, when I'm tired.

Gaspar: *{to Jessica}* Nobody does, especially when it's inconvenient or difficult. *{with encouragement}* It's a good deed nonetheless.

Jessica: Is it what God wants?

Gaspar: *{genuinely}* If it's a good deed, God wants it.

{Balthazar nods at Melchior and Gaspar. They nod back at him. Jessica give a curt smile}

Jessica: My aunt talks like that. Have you come to register for the census?

{Jessica looks off stage right stairs and is impressed at what she sees}

Jessica (cont'd): *{pointing off stage right stairs}* What big camels! And beautiful! And the blankets. What colors! *{touching her forehead}* Such pretty beads on their heads... *{pointing off stage right stairs}* and tails!

{Jessica looks back at Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior}

Jessica (cont'd): *{with discouragement}* My donkey's scrawny. Her blanket's simple... brown. *{musing}* I should get some beads. They'd be pretty...

Gaspar: My dear, we're not here for the census. We're from Persia. *{motioning toward Gaspar and Melchior}* Scholars... teachers. *{tapping his chest}* Priests.

{Gaspar, Balthazar, and Melchior bow with respect to Jessica. Jessica is impressed}

Jessica: *{hands to face}* Why are you here...so far from home?

Gaspar: We've come to worship the newborn king. A child born not long ago or soon to be born.

Jessica: Out here?

Gaspar: *{taken aback}* In the king's palace. Not out here! No. *{looking stage right}* Not of peasants.

Jessica: You've come all this way to see a child?

Gaspar: Not just a child. A king!

Jessica: How'd you know a new king was...or is to be born? I haven't heard of any new king in the palace. Nobody in my town or anyone along the way we've talked to—*{nodding}* we've talked to a lot of people—has mentioned a new king in the palace.

Balthazar: *{pointing upward}* From the star that appeared months ago.

{All look up at star}

Gaspar: We've been traveling at night to follow it.

{Jessica looks down}

Jessica: I haven't noticed..fore now. *{yawning}* I've been tired from walking all day. I fall asleep after supper. Before it's very dark. *{pondering what Balthazar and Gaspar have said}* How do you know 'bout a new king? Stars don't talk.

Melchior: *{amused}* From your Scriptures.

Jessica: Where did you get it? *{looking at scroll}* It's so old.

Melchior: Your people were exiled in our land five hundred years ago. When they returned...*{motioning around}* here, they left copies of your Scriptures. Others even before us have been studying your Scriptures for generations...

Jessica: Why?

Balthazar: To discover truths from your culture. From all cultures.

Gaspar: *{pointing upward}* When this star appeared in the west months ago, we looked in all the great books of different cultures for an explanation. In your Scripture we found the answer.

Melchior: *{reading from scroll}* “A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel.” This was written by a prophet who lived fifteen hundred years ago as recorded in your Scriptures.

Jessica: Why would you care about a Jewish king?

Melchior: *{reading from scroll}* “I will make you a light for the Gentiles”—*{looking at Jessica}* non Jews--*{reading}* “that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Gaspar: Written by the prophet Isaiah seven hundred years ago...

Melchior: We have come because this king's for all mankind.

Jessica: Here?

Melchior: *{reading from scroll}* “He will reign on David's throne”...
{looking at Jessica} in Jerusalem.

Gaspar: Where the king is.

Jessica: King Herod?

Balthazar: The king of the Jews.

Jessica: *{with disdain}* He's not one of our people. He was put on the throne by the Romans.

Balthazar: But he is the king.

Jessica: No one's heard of any of his wives giving birth. We've talked to many people. He's actually killed several wives...

{Melchior turns and takes two steps toward stage right. He stops and puts hand to side of face and taps it}

Balthazar: There must be much you do not know. Much many do not know outside the palace.

{Jessica holds robe out forward feigning pregnancy}

Jessica: *{giggling}* You can't miss...

{Gaspar notices that Melchior has crossed to stage right. Gaspar crosses to Melchior}

Gaspar: *{to Melchior}* What is it, Melchior?

Melchior: This census has caused a great migration of the Jewish people. To places they don't want to go. *{pointing to Jessica}* The girl says no one's heard any of Herod's wives has given birth.

{Balthazar and Jessica cross to Melchior}

Jessica: Herod's not Jewish.

Melchior: The new king has to be a Jew according to...*{pointing to Jessica}* the Scriptures.

Jessica: Herod's not...

Melchior: *{sweeping hand over stage}* Could the purpose of this vast movement of people be to bring the new king--*{pointing to Gaspar}* a Jew—to be born here? Where the star's heading?

Balthazar: *{hands up}* Here?

Gaspar: *{pointing upward}* It's still moving.

Balthazar: *{pointing up}* Jerusalem. Jerusalem.

{Balthazar looks at Gaspar and nods}

Gaspar: Where we're going.

{Gaspar is reassured and nods}

Melchior: *{looking stage right}* Could a woman... here...? *{pointing stage right}* That one?

{Gaspar, Balthazar, and Jessica look stage right. Gaspar and Balthazar shake heads vigorously}

Gaspar: *{with disdain}* She's a peasant. Not a queen. Not the mother of a king. Besides the star's moving.

{Melchior looks stage right}

Melchior: They're stopping. The woman's getting off the donkey...*{to Jessica}* your donkey.

Jessica: They're stopping for the night. We'll camp there. We're tired. We'll all tired. We've traveled all day.

Gaspar: We've just started. We travel at night...*{pointing upward}* following the star.

Balthazar: To Jerusalem. To the palace.

Gaspar: *{with disdain}* Not to worship a peasant king.

{Gaspar and Balthazar start to cross to stage right stairs}

Jessica: Mary—*{pointing stage right}* the woman I'm traveling with—says her baby's Messiah, another name for a king—the king of kings.

Gaspar: *{amazed}* It can't be!

Melchior: *{tapping scroll}* I'm familiar with that name in your Scriptures. *{Gaspar and Balthazar stop and turn toward Jessica}*

Gaspar: How does she know...*{with contempt}* this peasant woman?

Jessica: An angel appeared to her.

Gaspar: Anyone could say...

{Gaspar looks at Balthazar and waves off with disdain and shakes his head}

Gaspar: Do you believe stories about...angels?

Jessica : Not just angels. Prophecies in the Scriptures...*{pointing to scroll}* other prophecies are coming true like the ones you've read.

{Melchior nods deeply, thinking about what Jessica has said. Gaspar and Balthazar turn away}

Melchior: *{kindly}* Where are you going, young lady?

Jessica: Bethlehem.

{Gaspar and Balthazar turn back toward Melchior and Jessica}

Gaspar: *{insistently}* We're going to Jerusalem. To the city. To the palace. To the new king. The prophecies say He'll be a king. Kings are in palaces, in cities. New kings are in palaces, in cities. *{pointing upward to star}* The star...

{Star moves stage right. All look up then back at each other}

Gaspar *{cont'd}* : Where the star's going!

Jessica: The star's heading toward Jerusalem. But beyond Jerusalem is Bethlehem.

{Gaspar motions to Balthazar. They start to cross to stage right stairs}

Gaspar: *{to Melchior}* Are you coming?

Melchior: There may be more of... *{holding up scroll}* these Scripture we should study.

{Gaspar waves his arm in disdain. Gaspar motions to Balthazar. Gaspar and Balthazar exit off stage right stairs}

Melchior *{cont'd}* : *{kindly}* Take care of your friend. Get her to Bethlehem.

Jessica: It's where she's to deliver. *{pointing toward star}* Where the star's...

Melchior: We'll know soon. Let her ride on your donkey. It's the only way she can get there. *{nodding to Jessica}* We may be seeing you again.

Jessica: *{pointing toward star}* Don't you think...?

{Melchior smiles}

Melchior: Shalom.

Jessica: In Bethlehem.

Melchior: *{with a slight smile}* Perhaps.

{Jessica smiles}

Jessica: You will. The star'll stop in Bethlehem.

{Melchior looks up at star then at Jessica}

Jessica *{cont'd}* : Shalom.

{Melchior nods and bows. Jessica turns and starts to cross toward stage right exit}

Melchior: *{with a smile}* Young lady.

{Jessica stops and turns around}

Melchior *{cont'd}* : I have read about angels in your Scriptures. They appear for a purpose. For something extraordinary!

{Jessica smiles broadly}

Jessica: Like now.

{Melchior smiles back}

Melchior: Shalom.

{Jessica turns and crosses to stage right exit and exits stage right. Melchior watches Jessica until she exits. Then he looks up at the star and opens the scroll. He reads the scroll. Melchior looks again at stage right exit. Melchior thinks, smiles, and nods, and exits off stage right stairs}

{black out}

End of ACT I

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