

EASTER...
DOUBTS AND PROMISES

By

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SUMMARY

Two settings and two times, the first Easter morning and an Easter Sunday today, are combined in this play to study two sets of characters and how they react to death and the promise of Eternal life.

In Palestine, Joseph of Arimathea and his wife, Rebecca, await the Easter dawn, very conscious of the grief of their guests, followers of Christ. They learn from Mary Magdalene that even in grief, one may have hope and faith.

In the contemporary setting, Joe and his wife Becky react to the death of Joe's father. They learn from Joe's mother that one may miss the presence of a loved one, but the resurrection eases such a loss and, with faith, promises hope.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Should the director and cast wish, only three actors may play the six roles: Joseph of Arimathea also appearing as Joe, Rebecca also appearing as Becky, Mary Magdalene also appearing as Mom.

CHARACTERS

All characters, except Joe's mother (and Mary Magdalene, if an actress plays both roles) are in their late twenties or early thirties; Joe's mother is in her late fifties or early sixties.

JOE is troubled but sincere. He wishes to be a good husband and father, but his grief is now dominating his emotions.

BECKY is supportive of her husband's grief, but determined to move forward with actions that will best serve her family as Christians.

MOM is a warm, loving mother, who realizes this is a difficult time for Joe.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA is experiencing the same emotions as Joe, except that he has a stronger faith in the Christ just crucified.

REBECCA OF ARIMATHEA is sincere, supportive of her husband, but confused by the events.

MARY MAGDALENE is a grieving but strong woman, determined to do what she believes is right.

COSTUMES

In the contemporary scenes, Joe and Becky may wear jeans and sport shirts or jogging sweat suits. Joe's mom dresses attractively but conservatively for church. The actors in the biblical scenes wear traditional costumes. If only three actors play all six characters, the biblical costumes should be long enough to conceal the contemporary footwear, since the actors will need to change costumes quickly.

SETTING

The stage is divided in two areas. Stage right is the contemporary home of Joe and Becky, with entrance stage right; stage left is the first-century home of Joseph of Arimathea, with entrance stage left. Table center; shelf rear.

EASTER...

doubts and promises

SCENE I

The home of Joseph of Arimathea, a storeroom with a shelf of supplies rear center, a table center, and entrance left rear. Several bowls and bottles stand on the table. Lights come up slowly left as Rebecca, carrying a lamp, and Mary Magdalene enter from left. As they talk, Rebecca clears the table of the bowls and bottles.

MARY: You are most kind to help me at such an early hour.

REBECCA: You are our guest. I would rather come with you than send a servant. Here are the spices. I will clear the table. *(Mary takes the lamp from her)* Besides, the servants need not know what we do.

MARY: It is wise to be cautious, even at this hour.

REBECCA: I trust our servants. Some are followers of your friend. I spent a restless night and rose to watch the dawn.

MARY: I too rose to watch the dawn. I am almost ashamed to have slept so well after...*(Pause)*

REBECCA: *(Completing the statement for her, with sympathy)* After your friend's death. How is his mother?

MARY: Much rested. She spent the Sabbath walking in your garden. It is so beautiful and peaceful there. You have a lovely garden.

REBECCA: Thank you. I prefer to work there alone, especially when I am troubled. I found his mother there. I expected to find her grief-stricken. Instead, she looked so peaceful, as if relieved that it was over. Of course, that was such a terrible way to die. These Romans! Crucifixion! I have never seen one, but I have heard of them. And to be forced to watch!

MARY: We were not forced. We wished to be present.

REBECCA: To be present at the death of a loved one! I would lack the courage to watch such a death.

MARY: It was not an act of courage. It was an act of love.

REBECCA: (*Pausing in her movements*) I was with my father when he died. I was afraid, but I loved my father....

MARY: So did we love our teacher, Jesus.

REBECCA: There, the table is cleared. Now I will get you the spices Nicodemus and Joseph brought back after the burial. (*She sorts through the bottles on another shelf.*) Joseph said they moved with great haste to care for the body before the Sabbath. He regretted the haste and planned to have the body better cared for. (*Placing some bottles on the table*)

MARY: He has been most kind, as have you.

REBECCA: And you will go to the tomb? Don't you fear the Jews and the Romans will be watching?

MARY: We mean no harm to Jew or Roman. We will go to honor Jesus' body as he honored us.

REBECCA: But to admit you knew Jesus! My husband was most careful when he visited him, and he told no one of their conversations.

MARY: I know. He was careful, as was Nicodemus.

REBECCA: You approved of their caution? They are members of the Sanhedrin. They feared what might happen if others knew. Here, you will need a basket to carry the spices. (*As they talk, she places the spices in the basket.*)

MARY: It is not for me to judge your husband or Nicodemus.

REBECCA: your teacher did not seem to be an evil man, a criminal, to be punished so cruelly. I saw your friend, Jesus, once. I was in the market the day he cured the blind man.

MARY: He cured many.

REBECCA: I believe he performed a miracle, for I knew the blind man. Oh, I did not know his name, but every time I went to market and passed by him I gave him a coin. And he came to know me, not by name, but one day I purchased some jasmine, and he associated my walk with the scent of the flower, and ever after when he heard my footsteps, he called after me when I gave him a coin. “Thank you, lady with the jasmine, and may our Lord bless you.” That day, when I witnessed how your friend gave him his sight, I rejoiced with him. At first, when he regained his sight, he stood still, staring about him. He thanked your friend, Jesus, and then walked slowly about, staring at all the people and the marketplace. As he walked by me, he looked in my eyes with such a glorious, happy look. He did not recognize me, of course, and I did not move. But I felt blessed also, just because I had witnessed his healing. And then, later, I heard how the Sanhedrin examined the man, questioning how he had regained his sight, attempting to find some fault with your friend who could perform miracles. I truly believe it was a miracle. My husband, Joseph, told me of some of the things this Jesus said. I could find no fault in what he said. With Joseph a member of the Sanhedrin, I know what some of the members are truly like. It is difficult to respect some – even if they are priests. I should not talk this way. You will not repeat my words?

MARY: I am a guest in your home. You have given us shelter. I will not speak of this.

REBECCA: *(taking a bottle from the shelf)* Ah, myrrh. It is such a wonderful fragrance. *(She lifts the stopper, sniffs, shares the scent with Mary, and then replaces the stopper.)* The Scriptures often mention it as a very special spice.

MARY: Yes.

REBECCA: The spice for kings and for our God.

MARY: Yes. His mother, Mary, told me she received such a gift at her son's birth.

REBECCA: Her name is Mary. Your name also.

MARY: Yes. (*Checking the contents of the basket*) This then is all the spices?

REBECCA: Yes. And you will want some fresh linens. (*Places the basket on the shelf*) Come. (*Crosses and listens at the doorway*) The house is still asleep. We will get some linens and then return.

(*Rebecca exits, left followed by Mary. Lights go down on stage left for several seconds, leaving the stage dark.*)

SCENE II

Lights go up stage right. Becky enters stage right, carrying a cooking pan and a dozen eggs in a carton, which she places on the table. From the center rear shelf she takes a bag of onions to the table and begins removing the loose, dry skins from the onions and layering the skins and eggs in the pan.

JOE: (*Looks in at the doorway, then enters from right*) Oh, here you are.

BECKY: (*Placing her finger to her lips*) Are the children awake?

JOE: Sound asleep. I looked all over the house for you. Why up so early? Is something the matter?

BECKY: Couldn't sleep, and I remembered I hadn't boiled the eggs. (*She talks as she continues to work.*)

JOE: But we colored some eggs with the children last night.

BECKY: These are special for you – and for the children.

JOE: Oh. (*Watches her for three seconds, then responds.*) Thank you. I ... (*Another pause of three seconds, then quietly:*) You needn't have. Not this Easter.

BECKY: (*Looks directly into his eyes*) Yes. Especially this Easter.

JOE: The children wouldn't miss them.

BECKY: I would. (*With emphasis:*) You would. And your mother....

JOE: Mom wouldn't say anything. (*Moves toward the exit*) Don't bother. It's getting too late to prepare them anyway.

BECKY: (*Looks up and out center and stops him with her tone*) Joe! I want to. I want this because it's an Easter tradition. (*He reluctantly returns to stand beside her, looking down at the materials before them. She continues layering the eggs. He helps her separate the dry onion skins.*) I went grocery shopping with your dad and I couldn't understand why he shopped for onion skins. No one sold onion skins. He found some – free. The store manager wouldn't charge him for onion skins. I felt kind of foolish standing there in the store, peeling dry skins off onions. He told me how his thrifty farm mother saved onion skins for months and used them to color eggs for her children.

JOE: I guess my grandparents were pretty hard up when Dad was a kid.

BECKY: I need some vinegar. On the shelf.

JOE: (*Moves to get the vinegar, stops, leans his head on his arm against the shelf, his back to Becky and to the audience*) I miss him.

BECKY: We all do.

JOE: It doesn't seem right with him gone. (*With his free hand he makes a fist and hits the shelf once, slowly, softly*) I can't think about Easter with him gone.

BECKY: We will have his special colored eggs. Not commercially dyed,

but dyed with onion skins, the way he did every year for you. And our children – his grandchildren will remember him for this and –

JOE: *(Now in control, turns to face her, unscrews the bottle cap, hands bottle to her, and says dryly)* They are too young to remember.

BECKY: We will keep alive *our* memories of him and tell our children of him, and continue to do all the thoughtful, everyday things he did for us and for them.

JOE: Right now all I remember is how he suffered – his pain – and how he looked in that hospital bed.

BECKY: That is past. He is at rest now. Today we will remember how he loved coming over and helping you hide the Easter baskets. *(Finishes preparing the onion skins and eggs, pours in some vinegar, and hands the pan to Joe)* Now, fill this with water, put it on to boil, and go the attic for the Easter baskets. Don't wake the children. I'll get the candy.

JOE: You remembered to buy some candy?

BECKY: It's been hidden in the cupboard for two weeks.

JOE: *(After a long look)* Thanks.

BECKY: And there are plenty of licorice jellybeans for you. Move, before the children are up.

(Joe exits right. Becky turns to follow, then places the vinegar bottle on the shelf, turns and walks to the table and gathers up any stray bits of onion skin. She sighs.)

BECKY: It's Easter. Oh, Dad, I miss you too.

(Becky exits right. Lights go down slowly and out.)

SCENE III

Lights go up slowly stage left. Joseph of Arimathea enters stage left and calls softly.

JOSEPH: Rebecca! *(He checks the shelf, sees that the spices have been placed in the basket and moves the basket from the shelf to the table and examines the contents of the basket.)*

REBECCA: *(Entering stage left) Joseph.*

JOSEPH: I couldn't sleep. You were gone from the room when I awakened. I waited and then rose. Who else is about? It is too early for the servants.

REBECCA: Mary of Magdala and I have been collecting the spices. She will take them to the tomb.

JOSEPH: You plan to go with her?

REBECCA: I hadn't thought – I don't know. I am surprised that you gave the tomb to this Jesus.

JOSEPH: Surprised. You know how I feel *(corrects his verb tense)* how I have felt about him.

REBECCA: Yes. And now?

JOSEPH: Now?

REBECCA: Everyone will know.

JOSEPH: I want them to know.

REBECCA: Why now? It is dangerous for you.

JOSEPH: I am beyond caring for my position with the Sanhedrin. I want all the people to know – both Jews and Romans – that I believed in him.

REBECCA: But you were wise....

JOSEPH: Wise to protect myself? Even when I came to believe in him, ready to acknowledge who he truly was? Remember the day you saw him heal the blind man in the marketplace. You came running to tell me of it – to tell me you believed Jesus performed a miracle. What did I tell you? How did I instruct you?

REBECCA: You told me to be silent. Professing belief in him could be dangerous. You were right. He was crucified.

JOSEPH: Months ago I came to listen, to follow, to believe.

REBECCA: I, too, could believe in him.

JOSEPH: And it was not until he was brought to trial that I dared speak in his defense.

REBECCA: You defended him before the Sanhedrin!

JOSEPH: Yes. They may cast me out, but I tried to save him and I failed. I tried too late. I failed this great man – this teacher who performed miracles, who spoke such wisdom, who was called the Son of God. All I could do for him, all I can do for him now is give him a tomb for his burial.

REBECCA: And give his friends lodging for the Sabbath. They are most grateful.

JOSEPH: Yes. His mother and brother and the other women.

REBECCA: They should be rising now. The servants will be preparing our morning meal. I must go. *(She returns the basket to the shelf.)*

JOSEPH: I will go with you. Though with a heavy heart.

REBECCA: Joseph, take heart. Good may yet come of this.

(They exit stage left. Left lights slowly dim and go out.)

SCENE IV

Stage right lights slowly come up. Becky enters stage right, carrying bags of candy that she separates into piles on the table. In five seconds Joe follows, carrying packages containing Ester baskets of assorted sizes. He unwraps the baskets.

BECKY: Ah, you found them. And the children?

JOE: Still dreaming of the Easter Bunny. (*Cynically*) How do we resolve our pagan rituals of Ester bunnies with our Christian beliefs?

BECKY: How did you?

JOE: “When I became a man, I put away childish things.”

BECKY: And our children will resolve such rituals and beliefs in time. What *we* will do is concentrate on the *reason* for this celebration as we talk about Easter. (*She places the candy into the baskets. Joe watches her. She stops and looks at him*) Joe?

JOE: Good selection of candy. Not too much.

BECKY: (*knowing he is not communicating his true thoughts*) Joe?

JOE: Do we need five baskets?

BECKY: Two for the children, one for you, one for me, one for your mother. The children will count them.

JOE: (*Places a sixth basket on the stage shelf right rear*) I’ll put Dad’s here.

BECKY: (*Continues as if he had not spoken*) Five and your licorice jellybeans go in your basket.

JOE: (*Fondly and with humor*) My basket!

BECKY: Every year. Isn't it as old as you are? Your favorite basket?

JOE: (*Holds up a chocolate cross and examines it*) You remembered.

BECKY: Your mother reminded me that you always asked for a chocolate cross for Easter.

JOE: (*Places the chocolate cross in another basket*) You take it this year.

BECKY: Why me?

JOE: This year... (*Slowly*) your... faith... is stronger than mine.

BECKY: Perhaps today, as you watch our children, your faith will grow stronger.

JOE: (*cynically*) "Lo, ye must have faith as little children." (*Looks away; he cannot face her.*) I guess I'm quoting incorrectly – or out of context – not the right time.

BECKY: Joe, stop punishing yourself.

JOE: (*Stronger, his voice rising*) I failed my father.

BECKY: Shhh! The children!

JOE: I tried to help Dad (*quieter*), but I could do nothing. I couldn't pray that his pain would stop. I just sat there in that hospital room and held his hand and watched him. And sometimes I ran from him.

BECKY: You gave him love.

JOE: That wasn't enough.

BECKY: It was. It is. (*Silence of five seconds, then with a softer, compelling voice:*) Today is *Easter*.

JOE: Not... for... me! (*Seeking an escape*) I think I hear the children.

(Joe quickly exits stage right, leaving the baskets on the table. Becky follows. Stage right lights slowly go down and out.)

To Read The Rest, Please Purchase The Script

