

# **Three Religious Plays**

**(For Performance, Discussion, and Study)**

- 1) That Woman Mary (Or Christ and Barabbas)**
- 2) The Worship In Myself**
- 3) To Know Love**

By

**Frederick L. Saur**

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**THAT WOMAN MARY  
Or CHRIST AND BARABBAS**

**For Easter or Mother's Day**

**By Frederick L. Saur**

3 women, no set, Biblical costumes. Running time: 15 minutes

THAT WOMAN MARY has been performed with the titles CHRIST AND BARABBAS, HEART TO HEART, and JAEL, A MOTHER. Another suggested title is A MOTHER'S LOVE. It has been successfully used for a Mother's Day worship service.

**SUMMARY**

Shortly after the crucifixion of Christ, Ruth, a woman of Nazareth, meets Jael, the mother of Barabbas, at the town well. They discuss Jesus and his strange ways and talk about his mother, Mary. Another neighbor, Rachel, joins them with questions about Jael's son, Barabbas, who has just returned home after his release from prison. Jael admits that Barabbas now seems different, gentler. When she learns that Barabbas is talking with Mary, Jael hurries off. Rachel and Ruth remain, discussing Jael and the problems that result from the Roman occupation. Jael soon returns with the story of the resurrection and tells how Barabbas has changed. The three women see Mary approaching and hurry off to meet her.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**J A E L**

The mother of Barabbas, a matter-of-fact woman of hard speech.

**R U T H**

A serene woman of quiet strength.

**R A C H E L**

A neighbor with a slightly flippant manner.

**PRODUCTION NOTES**

The play takes place early in the morning either near the town well in Nazareth or at a spring where the women wash their clothes. If near the town well, the only properties needed are a low bench, upon which the women may sit, and three large but not cumbersome pitchers or jugs. If near the

spring, the woman may carry on stage cloths in baskets which they pretend to be washing in the stream center stage. The costumes should be simple draped robes such as those worn in Bible times.

This play may be staged in the chancel, a fellowship hall, or a classroom. It also may be effectively presented without costumes or scenery as a dramatic reading, with the actors casually referring to their scripts while concentrating on a forceful interpretation. The play may be followed by a short commentary by the pastor or a layperson.

### **THAT WOMAN MARY**

(JAEL enters left, carrying a heavy pitcher for water OR a basket of cloth to be washed. She sighs, pauses, and sits. Obviously disturbed, she rests her head in her hands. RUTH enters right, also carrying a pitcher or basket of clothing.)

RUTH: Good morning, Jael.

JAEL: Someone has been here earlier and slopped water all over the ground. It's muddy.

RUTH: It's a cheerful morning, isn't it? The song of a bird awakened me at dawn.

JAEL: I was awakened at dawn by my husband, grumbling for his breakfast. A cheerful morning indeed!

RUTH: Have you heard? Mary, the mother of Jesus, has returned.

JAEL: When?

RUTH: Sometime during the night. I'm not certain.

JAEL: Have you talked with her?

RUTH: No. I heard that young man John – the friend of Jesus – singing in the garden, and I inquired. The other Mary – the one they call Magdalene – returned with them.

JAEL: The red-haired hussy who was Herod's friend.

RUTH: Yes, but don't think of her as such. They say she has changed much since...

JAEL: Loose women never change. You did not speak to Joseph's widow?

RUTH: No.

(RUTH may kneel, remove a garment from her basket, and pretend to be washing it in the stream downstage center. JAEL may join her, but her anger is evident in the manner in which she whips the clothing through the water.)

JAEL: I want to see her, now that her son is dead. I want to hear if her tongue still speaks of kindness to the Roman guards since her son was crucified.

RUTH: (Horrified) You do not plan to speak of it to her!

RAEL: I want to know just why he died. It has been a month now; I want to hear the facts.

RUTH: You will know in time.

JAEL: I told her he would come to this – he with his strange beliefs. Remember when he was a child and they took him to Jerusalem for his first Passover? It was five days before they again caught up with our caravan because they had to return for their darling son. And what was the dreamer doing when they found Him? Talking with the teacher! I'd have thrashed him.

RUTH: His reason for delaying *was* most strange.

JAEL: And that Sabbath in the synagogue! Most pompous was he as he defied the laws of the Sabbath and spoke against the Pharisees.

RUTH: I remember well.

Jael: And did you hear about the way he whipped the moneychangers in the temple? Ha! I never thought him that bold! But they deserved it. Why, they charged twice too much for a single dove.

RUTH: He had strange thoughts.

JAEL: And then he came to this. For all his honey talk, he died a common criminal.

RUTH: (Suddenly flaring in defense) And what is your son?

JAEL: Barabbas?

RUTH: Who else?

JAEL: What do you mean?

RUTH: You call Jesus a criminal. Is not Barabbas?

JAEL: Only in the eyes of Rome. Does he not fight against her tyranny? My son Barabbas fights to make all Jewry free. But what did Jesus do? He went about the country treating all alike, Roman and Jew.

RUTH: He spoke much good.

JAEEL: But when did he act? Only in the temple – only once – did he use his strength!

RUTH: Would you have him kill, as your son kills?

JAEEL: I rejoice at every drop of Roman blood Barabbas spills. He is my son, and is my name not Jael? I am the namesake of our ancestor who welcomed Sisera our enemy within her tent and, while he slept, took a hammer in her hand and smote his temples with a tent pin till he died!

RUTH: Oh, Jael! That was long ago.

JAEEL: What is different now? Look how Jesus died! Crucified upon a Roman cross.

RUTH: I wonder why?

JAEEL: He asked for it. You say the times have changed. I'd see Barabbas kill *all* Romans, if the time were ripe.

RUTH: But meanwhile you spend dark nights lying awake, wondering where your son is, or if he still lives.

JAEEL: That is the price I pay for breeding hate within his bones.

RUTH: Many's the time they've pounded on your door – the Roman soldiers – and searched your house, and warned you that if they caught your son, they'd kill him.

JAEEL: They never found him.

RUTH: I hear they have him now, imprisoned in Jerusalem.

JAEEL: That is what you hear.

RUTH: Oh, Jael! You may hide your thoughts from others but I know the longings in your heart.

JAEEL: He is my son, and if Rome takes his life....

RUTH: Jesus is crucified, yet I am certain Mary seeks no vengeance.

JAEEL: She is sweet-lipped Mary. I am Jael, enemy of Rome.

RUTH: Oh, Jael, Jael! All this leads only to death. There is a better way of life.

JAEEL: Like Jesus taught? That way, too, led to a Roman cross and death! Death is at every turn, and when I go to Sheol, I will go with Roman blood upon my hands if my son dies.

RACHEL: (Enters right, also carrying an empty pitcher or a basket of clothing) What is this talk of blood?

RUTH: Oh, Rachel.

RACHEL: Peace be unto you, and no more talk of blood. The morning is too pure, too beautiful.

JAEL: It's like all other mornings. The sun is in the sky and I have work to do. (Rises.)

RACHEL: I see Barabbas has returned.

JAEL: What do you mean?

RACHEL: Your tongue is bitter, and your eyes are sharp.

JAEL: I spent a restless night.

RACHEL: Fearing as you slept, your son would slit your throat?

RUTH: Barabbas has returned?

JAEL: You said yourself he was a prisoner, and in Jerusalem.

RACHEL: He spoke to me this morning, here in Nazareth.

JAEL: Where did you see him?

RACHEL: Standing in the doorway of your house.

JAEL: The fool! Some Roman citizen will see him and report his whereabouts!

RACHEL: He seemed quite unconcerned.

RUTH: When was he released?

JAEL: I don't know. When he returned last night, he was most tired and soon dropped off to sleep.

RACHEL: He said the Romans had released him.

RUTH: The Romans freed a Hebrew, a murderer!

RACHEL: He seemed most strange. He never cared to talk with the rest of us before. And he had a crowd of children at his feet, telling them stories.

RUTH: That doesn't sound like Jael's son.

JAEL: He does seem changed. He kissed me when we met last night.

RUTH: He showed you tenderness?

JAEL: He needed food and shelter. I'm not the fool he takes me for.

RACHEL: You are his mother.

JAEL: I'm not a mother like that woman Mary.

RACHEL: What hate have you for Mary?

JAEL: I must go to him.

RACHEL: You find him at the home of Mary.

JAEL: Mary!

RACHEL: He seemed very eager to converse with her.

JAEL: Why?

RACHEL: Did he not tell you how his life was saved?

JAEL: No.

RACHEL: The custom of the Passover. Pilate allowed the crowd to choose a prisoner to be released. Their choice was between Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas was freed and Jesus was crucified.

JAEL: I don't believe you.

RACHEL: Go to him and hear it from his lips.

JAEL: I will. I will. (Hurries off right.)

RUTH: You forgot your water, (or wash), Jael.

RACHEL: I've seen a miracle today. Barabbas is a different man.

RUTH: How do you mean?

RACHEL: The murder has left his eyes. His mind is full of peace.

RUTH: A Miracle indeed!

RACHEL: I never thought I'd see a miracle. (Lightly) And now I have.

RUTH: You forget one miracle you saw.

RACHEL: And what was that?

RUTH: My wedding feast at Cana, when Jesus blessed the water and we tasted wine.

RACHEL: Some have reasoned out an answer for that one.

RUTH: I don't need to reason Jesus' ways. Since that day, both my marriage and my life have been blessed.

RACHEL: And now he's dead.

RUTH: And Barabbas is alive.

RACHEL: What were you speaking of when I arrived?

RUTH: Nothing of consequence.

RACHEL: Jael's bitter voice was sharp as a sword's bite.

RUTH: She hates Romans.

RACHEL: As we all do.

RUTH: I pity them – nothing more.

RACHEL: You re wrong. You u change your mind.

RUTH: I don't think so. I don't ask for much, and what I have, the Romans cannot take from me.

RACHEL: And what is that?

RUTH: My home, my husband's love, and the joy we have in our firstborn.

RACHEL: With one quick stroke, all that could disappear before Roman's bloody spear.

RUTH: I will not think of such a thing.

RACHEL: I've seen it happen.

RUTH: They cannot take from me the promise of a better life.

RACHEL: A promise made by Jesus, who was killed a month ago.

RUTH: We only heard he was. Jerusalem is far from here, and we hear many rumors.

RACHEL: I know all that. But this morning I talked with a man who saw him die.

RUTH: Barabbas?

RACHEL: Yes. He told me... (Pauses)

RUTH: Yes?

RACHEL: It seemed as though he would tell me more – how Jesus died – and something else. But then he stopped and turned away and hurried off to Mary.

RUTH: I wonder why?

RACHEL: He said he'd see me later and tell me much, much more. But knowing Jael's son, I valued not his words.

RUTH: Poor Jael. She is so full of hate and bitterness.

RACHEL: Why not? To live as she has lived – knowing no love, and having all she gave thrust back at her with a clenched fist.

RUTH: She does love Barabbas.

RACHEL: A mother's love. All fierce and heartbreaking, knowing your son thinks of you only when he hungers and needs rest, and as soon as he's refreshed he will go, without a backward glance or grateful word.

RUTH: She is a mother, Rachel. We would do the same.

RACHEL: If only she would guard her tongue when she sees Mary.

RUTH: Why must she hate her so?"

RACHEL: Because poor Mary's son had all the qualities Barabbas lacked – the gentleness and quiet dignity.

RUTH: Mary loved him so.

RACHEL: And he loved her, and Jael mocked that love because she had none from her own son.

RUTH: She found much ridicule for Jesus.

RACHEL: I ridiculed him, too. It was some time before I found much sense in Jesus' words.

RUTH: Jael *never* understood.

RACHEL: All that is past. Jesus is dead; Barabbas is alive. Mary lost her son, and Jael... (Pauses)

RUTH: Go on.

RACHEL: You should have seen him. Remember how Jesus talked with all the children at his feet? Barabbas did the same this morning. He used to frighten children with his fierce looks, but when I came upon them, they were sitting all around him, searching his face with smiles upon their lips. It was most strange.

RUTH: Indeed.

RACHEL: We'd best finish and go now.

RUTH: Yes, I've tarried long enough. (JAEL slowly enters right as RUTH and RACHEL gather their belongings.) Why, Jael!

RACHEL: You forgot....

JAEL: I came to ask you to forgive me.

RUTH: For what?

JAEL: For all the things I've said... all the harsh words. I spoke that way because I was so unhappy. I didn't have the home you have, the love you felt. But now it's different. In one short morning, all has changed! Barabbas met me on the way. He took my hand and called me Mother. And he told me... such strange things. It's true that he is free.

He had been in prison many days. The place was foul with filth and black as night, and when they dragged him forth, his eyes at first could not see things quite right. He was certain he would be killed. But when he heard the people cry, "Crucify, crucify!" even my son, stouthearted as he is, cringed at the thought. And then he understood. Pilate wanted the people to choose between him and another man. Which one should be freed? They

cnose Barabbas, and only then, in relief and joy, did he see who the other was: Jesus. He looked at him across the howling mob, and Jesus smiled one of those godlike smiles – and Barabbas smiled back – but in contempt.

My son was freed. He told me how he traveled with the mob, watching his fellow townsman struggle with the cross. He planned to glory in Jesus' death, watch him writhe in agony upon the cross, and mock him for the last time.

As he told me this, he cried. My son, Barabbas, wept against my breast as he has not done since he was – oh, so small. I held him close, and tears from eyes I thought were long since dry fell upon his hair.

He told me that as he watched the agony, he realized how wrong he'd been, and he knew he stood before – Messiah! But he was late – too late, and he saw the Son of God die on a Roman cross.

All this had to happen, to bring my son back to me.

RUTH: It was too great a price.

RACHEL: Your joy should taste quite bitter in your mouth.

JAEL: I have not told you all. When it was finished... when Jesus was dead... Barabbas started homeward. On the way he heard strange news, news he could not comprehend. Jesus had risen from the dead! Yes, stare at me, as I stared at him. Barabbas told me this, and as he spoke, I knew he told the truth. Jesus, who had been dead, is now alive!

But Barabbas needed proof, and he searched for it. He found Jesus, and he talked with him! I don't know what they said, but I know my son. All the evil – the evil I tried to hide from my sad heart – is gone. He is the son I have longed for all these years, gentle and strong – a loving strength – strength like Jesus had.

RACHEL: This is Barabbas?

JAEL: Yes.

RACHEL: When I talked with him, I knew he was not the same.

RUTH: Then Jesus lives?

JAEL: Yes.

RUTH: I would see Mary. Has she heard the news?

RACHEL: Let us go to her. (Turns) Look! Coming up the path!

RUTH: It's Mary!

RACHEL: How radiant she looks!

RUTH: Let s go to meet ner.

(The WOMEN exit right with their belongings, intent upon the figure they see approaching.)

THE END of the play, to be followed by commentary, discussion, and prayer.

## THE WORSHIP IN MYSELF

By Frederick L. Saur

### SETTING:

A table with two chairs facing each other. Several papers on table with writing materials.

Off stage right: 2 coffee cups.

### CHARACTERS:

GRANDMOTHER: at least sixty years of age, gracious, shrewd, challenging.

GRANDDAUGHTER: teens or twenties, loving, considerate; covers rebellion with courtesy.

As you read: GRANDMOTHER = GMTHR and GRANDDAUGHTER = DTR

## THE WORSHIP IN MYSELF

CURTAIN: *GRANDDAUGHTER is seated, stage right of table, writing. Laughter offstage, high, shrill, hysterical. GRANDMOTHER enters, laughing, and collapses on chair left. She places a notebook on the table.*

GRANDDAUGHTER: What is so very funny?

GRANDMOTHER: *(Immediately stops laughing and is now serious)* I'm doing my homework.

DTR: Doing your homework?

GMTR: Practicing remembering emotions.

DTR: *(Not questioning; just echoing.)* Practicing remembering emotions.

GMTR: Yes. My assignment is to remember how I laughed when Deacon Brown sneezed as he took up the collection and his upper plate fell into the aisle and he scrambled after it.

DTR: *(Laughs.)* Deacon Brown! I wish I had seen that. You are remembering this for...?

GMTR: (*Laughing for a few seconds, then:*) For drama class.

DTR: I should have guessed. Your drama class for seniors at church.. (*teasing*) I'd come if you'd invite me – but I'm too young.

GMTR: The class is for the older generation who want to show off. The religious, theatrical hams!

DTR: Religious hams! (*Shrugs.*) As long as you enjoy yourselves. But haven't you by now – at your ages – learned to control your emotions? Very well. Never too old to learn – and show off!

GMTR: (*Posing and speaking dramatically*) We are studying “The Method.”

DTR: Ah, yes, the Method. Who was the Russian...?

GMTR: Constantin Stanislavski. The Actor's Studio....

DTR: In New York.<sup>1</sup> And your assignment – your homework?

GMTR: We are to remember some hilariously funny situation and recreate it from memory so we can apply it to – use it in - any dramatic situation.

(*Nothing is said for at least ten seconds. DTR returns to her writing; GMTR sits, concentrating, then gasps a few sobs, stops, rises, and turns upstage, her back to DTR.*)

DTR: Grandmother! (*A pause as DTR realizes she is “acting.”*) Now what? What situation are you recreating now?

GMTHR: (*Raises her head, sighs, turns back to the table and wipes her eyes.*) Something from the past. I don't care much for practicing – reliving - the emotion of grief. (*Sits stage left of table*)

DTR: You were thinking of...?

GMTR: (*Reluctant to identify the individual, so the response is:*) Somebody's death.

DTR: (*Reaches across the table to take GMTR'S hand.*) Gran, isn't this going a bit too far for a church class in drama? We have encouraged you to be involved and try new things, especially with our church. But.... (*They exchange a long look before DAUGHTER returns to her writing*)

GMTR: (*Shuffles some pages; then:*) I'll stick with Stanislavski, but I need help.

DTR: On!

GMTR: I have to paraphrase his famous quotation. Put it in my own words. (*When DTR does not respond.*) If you're busy I'll come back later.

DTR: (*Puts down her pen and stacks pages in a neat pile.*) I'm finished. The worship service is ready to go to the printers.

GMTR: Isn't the Pastor going to approve it?

DTR: He has. I, the choir director, am to select the hymns and special music and supply the numbers and titles. (*Pushes a page across the table to GRANDMOTHER who studies the page, looks up at GRANDDAUGHTER, sighs, and shakes her head.*)

GMTR: No. Not I. I don't sing solos any more. I crack on the high notes and no longer can sustain a note. (*Pats her middle region.*) Weak diaphragm.

DTR: (*Persuasively:*) You will sing beautifully. And with sincere emotion. Consider it a test of – what do you call it? – “recreating a memory to use in a dramatic situation.” You can certainly do that with “Walking Where Jesus Walked.” The lyrics are lovely and very dramatic. You wring the emotion out of it. People weep. As a child, I was so excited to have my Grandmother sing during worship. I have always been so proud.

GMTR: Ah, yes. Proud. (*After a long thought, she changes form of word, applying it to herself:*) Pride.

DTR: People who don't belong to our church come when they know you are performing in a Christmas or Easter play for special worship. You always have had very appreciative audiences. (*She is certain this will persuade GRANDMOTHER.*)

GMTR: (*Emphasizing the three words in the following sentence*) Audiences for worship! Yes, I know. And I have enjoyed performing for years as I have relished my appreciative audiences. I have loved the applause until... I read both Stanislavsky and Kierkegaard. (*Raising her head and one eyebrow; challenging:*) And now, after all these years of – performing – Kierkegaard and Stanislavsky have made me rethink my – (with emphasis on each word) - worship performances.

DTR: Another Russian? Grandmother! (*Shakes her head in negation.*) This class is not for you. (*When GMTR just sits and smiles.*) You are taking

this too seriously. (*with indignation.*) Really! You can't apply these Russians' dictums to your singing!

GRNDMOTHER: Kierkegaard is a Dane – from Denmark - not a Russian.

DTR: (*Rises, frustrated. She is not to give up; she will persuade GRANDMOTHER to sing. She needs time to think.*) I need a cup of coffee. Will you join me? It's already made.

GMTR: No caffeine. I'll get it. We both take it black; right?

(GRANDDAUGHTER is not listening; instead, she sits right of table, reading, as her GRANDMOTHER, smiling indulgently, exits right.)

DTR: (*Reaches across the table to another sheet of paper.*) What's this? Kierkegaard. (*Calling to offstage right.*) Who is Kierke - what's his name - gaard? Another actor?

GMTR: (*Enters from right with two cups of coffee. Puts cups on table and sits left at table.*) No. A philosopher and theologian. I had heard of him but never studied him. He offers an interesting postulate.

DTR: "Pos-tu-late." Really, Gran! This class must be some.... (*Shrugs at a loss for words.*)

GRANDMOTHER: (*Completing her sentence for her:*) Challenge. Yes. I need a challenge.

DTR: So what is this "postulate"? And how does it apply to your singing and acting for church worship? (*Sips coffee.*)

GMTR: Well... (*Sips coffee*) You say I have been complemented for my performances in worship. Kierkegaard would have you identify who is who in church worship – or if you wish to think of our sanctuary as a theatre – identify for me the director, the actors, and the audience in church – in worship.<sup>2</sup>

(*Following speeches to the end are spoken very deliberately and thoughtfully: DTR is slowly comprehending what GMTR has discovered.*)

DTR: Easy. The director is the pastor, the actors are the choir, the organist, and any other speakers, and the congregation – all are the audience.

GMTR: Think again. Doesn't the congregation participate? (*Pause.*) And doesn't their participation make them actors? (*DTR drains her coffee cup*)

DTR: Hmmm. Tricky. Clever. The audience is.... God! God is the audience. We are all performing for God! Ouch! I have never thought of God as the audience.

GMTR: Yes. Ouch! And Stanislavsky has also given me much to think about – a great, big ouch! For whom have I performed? Myself, the congregation, or...?

DTR: (Defensively:) Your performances have always been sincere, dedicated....

GMTR: Yes, so I thought. But I never thought far enough. I have sung to the congregation to whom I thought of as my audience. Our drama teacher has been very shrewd in introducing both Kierkegaard and Stanislavsky in our study for a religious theatre.

DTR: (*As she throws up her hands in dismay, she turns over her empty coffee cup. She jumps up, laughs nervously, rights the coffee cup, turns her back on the table and paces stage far right and back to sit again table stage right. Speaks in consternation:*) This is... this is....

GMTR: (*Opening her notebook and pushing it across the table:*) Here's the quotation I'm assigned to paraphrase. Stanislavsky told his students to....

DTR: (*Reading:*) "Love the art in yourself, not yourself in art."<sup>3</sup> And this applies to your singing performances in church? How?

GMTR: First help me paraphrase.

DTR: "Love the art in yourself and not yourself in art. (*Repeats:*) Love the art in yourself and not yourself in art." Humph! How do you define art in yourself and yourself in art?

GMTR: My paraphrase is: Don't be conceited when you perform; don't love yourself as an actor performing on stage. Don't live – don't perform – for applause. Use what talent you have wisely, skillfully, to communicate truth and love.

DTR: The message is not for you. You are not a conceited woman. You are not a vain woman.

GMTR: (*Shrugs and smiles ruefully.*) I must admit I have enjoyed being praised and applauded.... (*Looks toward balcony, as if into the distance:*) ... for forty years....

DTR: You have never sought praise. Directors have always come to you and pleaded with you to perform in the plays and to sing for worship. Your performances have been a gift to God.

GMTR: Yes. In part. But my ego has also always been there. After thinking about Stanislavski and Kierkegaard I have examined the pleasure I have experienced all these years, especially the pleasure.... (*She clasps her hands.*)

DTR: So you take Stanislavski's quote and transfer it to: "Love the music in yourself and not yourself in music." (*GMTR unclasps her hands and holds them out, palms up.*)

GMTR: Take it further. He is saying to me – to all of us: "All of you in worship who lead and perform and direct and play and sing: Love the worship in yourself... (*Touches her chest with both hands.*) ...and not yourself in worship." (*A long pause.*)

DTR: Oh, Gran! (*She reaches across the table and grasps GMTR'S hands. She comprehends and accepts.*) "Love the worship in yourself and not yourself in worship."

GMTR: Because we are performing for.... Because the audience is ....? (*A long pause for the GRANDDAUGHTER and the audience to complete the statement:*)

DTR: And because worship is...? (*A longer pause.*)

IN UNISON: "Love the worship in yourself and not yourself in worship."

THE END

<sup>1</sup> Foster Hirsch, A Method To Their Madness, The History of the Actor's Studio, W.W.Norton & Co. , 1964, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, "Purity of the Heart is to Will One Thing," p. 124f. "God is the critical theatergoer, who looks on to see how the lines are spoken and how they are listened to: hence here the customary audience is wanting. The speaker is then the prompter, and the listener stands openly before God."

the listener... is the actor, who in all truth acts  
before God." From D. Storm, [dstorm@infostations.com](mailto:dstorm@infostations.com)

<sup>3</sup> "Quotes from Konstantine Stanislavski,"  
<http://members.tripod.com/jim-68/stan.htm>

**TO KNOW LOVE**  
**By Frederick L. Saur**

**SYNOPSIS:** James, the stepbrother of Jesus, comes to Mary from the carpenter's shop with a splinter to be removed. He tells Mary of his concern for Jesus, who grieves for his stepsister. James questions why God permits tragic events, and he and Mary reflect on the scriptures before joining Jesus in the shop.

**CHARACTERS:**

**MOTHER** - of middle age

**JAMES** – in his thirties (or may be played by a youth – see note below.)

**COSTUMES:** simple work clothes for both, may be contemporary or historical.

**SETTING:** This short play may be presented in a sanctuary or hall with a table center with chairs to right and left of table. Exits right and left. Properties - ointment and cloth for a bandage and any dishes or items performers desire to have available.

**PROGRAM COMMENTARY:** This play would have the audience consider how Jesus might have had a similar experience to the sorrows some of us encounter and His reaction to grief.

"The first mention of the family is in the *Gospel of Mark*.... The presumption of Joseph's death when Jesus was yet young is very strong, and this, while not proof, adds substance to the *tradition* that he was an elderly man when he became espoused to Mary, and to the further tradition that he was a widower and that the 'brothers and sisters' of Jesus were in nominal fact stepbrothers and step-sisters by the carpenter's earlier marriage." (Guy Schofield, *It Began on the Cross, The Historical Sequel to the New Testament, A.D. 39-155*. p. 25. Hawthorn Books, Inc. New York, 1959.)

**Author's note:** Should the director prefer, the role of James may be played by a very young man. This would mean that the brothers of Jesus were the sons of Mary and Joseph. Some of the dialogue of James would sound better spoken by a young man. If a young man appears as James, then the dialogue referring to a *stepbrother* and a previous marriage must be omitted.

(MOTHER STANDS UPS TAGE OF THE TABLE PERFORMING A TASK. MAY BE KNEADING BREAD OR SEWING. JAMES ENTERS LEFT AND STANDS WATCHING MOTHER FOR A FEW SECONDS UNTIL SHE BECOMES AWARE OF HIS PRESENCE AND LOOKS UP)

MOTHER James, have you been standing there long?

JAMES Not long, Mother.

MOTHER And what were you thinking as you watched me at my work?

JAMES That my brothers and I were fortunate our father found you for his wife after my mother died.

MOTHER I was fortunate to have had your father Joseph as a husband as I am fortunate to have such fine step-sons. You have left your work.

JAMES My brother asked me to come to you.

MOTHER To come to me. Why?

JAMES To see how his mother is, and.... (PAUSES)

MOTHER His mother is well. And what else?

JAMES I have a splinter in my hand.

MOTHER The son of Joseph the carpenter has a splinter! This is the first time you have come to me with a splinter. Always before your sister.... (SHE STOPS, CATCHING HERSELF WITH A STATEMENT SHE DOES NOT WANT TO COMPLETE)

JAMES My brother remembered that and then sent me to you.

MOTHER But he also sent you because both of you are concerned for me. Right?

JAMES It hurts us to see you sad.

MOTHER It hurts to see you both sad. We are all sad, but life has both happy and sad times. Sit down here in the light and I will remove your splinter. (HE SITS RIGHT AND SHE SITS LEFT. HE LEANS HIS ARM ACROSS THE TABLE SO SHE CAN HOLD HIS HAND. DURING THE CONVERSATION SHE REMOVES THE SPLINTER,

BATHES II WITH A LOTION, AND WRAPS II WITH FABRIC) Is your brother alone?

JAMES He is now. Aaron the fisherman just left. Aaron wanted to argue about the price to repair the rudder of his boat.

MOTHER But my son would not haggle.

JAMES That made Aaron angry. It is strange that some people in town like my brother very much and others....

MOTHER (A short pause before she completes his statement) ... Others find him too honest a man.

JAMES And the best carpenter - after my father.

MOTHER After your father you are both excellent carpenters - (a pause, then with humor:) - except for splinters.

JAMES Now that father is gone.... (A pause, then:) Your (or my brother) son speaks well in the synagogue. Especially for one so young.

MOTHER Yes. He speaks well.

JAMES Some people do not agree with what he says.

MOTHER He speaks the truth.

JAMES I wish ... I am concerned that he intends to go about the country talking to people. He is not a rabbi.

MOTHER He believes our God desires it of him.

JAMES When he leaves, I will miss him, but I will be content to stay here with you.

MOTHER Do not stay out of duty.

JAMES To be a master carpenter is all I desire, and you are a good woman and a good mother.

MOTHER I am proud of Joseph's sons. My sons are all kind and considerate of me.

JAMES Thank you for removing my splinter. (HE STARTS OUT AND PAUSES. A SOB ESCAPES HIM) I miss my sister. Father was old and tired. His time had come. But....

MOTHER We all miss your sister.

JAMES Why did she have to die?

MOTHER      We do not know, James.

JAMES        Why did God permit her to die?

MOTHER      We do not know.

JAMES        My brother is close to God.

MOTHER      Yes, we believe he has a special relationship with our  
                God.

JAMES        I got the splinter on purpose.

MOTHER      James?

JAMES        I wanted to leave Jesus alone. He was weeping again  
                and I do not know how to console him.

MOTHER      Jesus has been weeping?

JAMES        Several times. When he didn't know I saw him.

MOTHER      We all miss your sister.

JAMES        I think he misses her the most. She always brought  
                him fruit midmornings. When that time comes he                  looks at  
                the empty doorway and sighs and tears fall                  on the wood and  
                on his tools. She sang all day long. I miss her singing! I hear Jesus  
                humming her favorite songs and then he stops and sighs and wipes his  
                tears with the sleeve of his tunic. Then he returns to his  
                work and in a short time he hums her songs again.

MOTHER      We all must grieve in our own way.

JAMES        When I wept, he comforted me.

MOTHER      So he would. You have both comforted me. Your  
                sister would not want you to grieve too much.

JAMES        I said to Jesus, "Our sister was good; why must she  
                leave us? You and Mother are good; how could God                  permit  
                this grief to come to us?"

MOTHER      (A LONG SILENCE AS MARY LOOKS INTO THE  
                DISTANT PAST, REMEMBERING

OTHER EVENTS. FINALLY SHE SPEAKS,                  ALMOST  
A WHISPER) What was his reply?

JAMES        "To know love I must mourn." I said I did not  
                understand. (HE REPEATS SLOWLY;) "To know                  love I

must mourn. He said that God meant for him to know all emotions, all the problems that humanity must experience.

MOTHER The ways of our God are mysterious.

JAMES I know he is different from other men. Even in his youth, he is very wise and kind and gentle and I cannot want a better brother. I love him and am proud of him, but....

MOTHER But...?

JAMES If God means for Jesus to suffer, must we also suffer with him? Must my sister die?

MOTHER I quote the Psalmist: (QUOTING) "The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

JAMES I will quote *Job*: "If a man die, shall he live again?"

MOTHER Remember Isaiah: "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces...." We know that we must all die some time. Perhaps it is only when we lose someone that we truly know what it is to love.

JAMES Is that to be: that we cannot truly love unless we suffer loss, unless we know true grief? (MARY DOES NOT ANSWER, THIS TIME ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE) Jesus tells me that the God of Love will permit him to suffer so that he may truly know what it is to be a man and to love. I am not like him. I do not want to grieve. What man or woman wants to lose a loved one?

MOTHER My son speaks what he believes God wants him to learn of life. What have you learned as you mourn for your sister?

JAMES Love is the most important thing in life.

MOTHER More than having all the riches of the world?

JAMES Oh, yes.

MOTHER More than being a powerful king or emperor and being known throughout the world and having men bow down

to you before your wealth and power :

JAMES            Yes.

MOTHER        (SHE GENTLY TOUCHES HIS FACE IN A  
GESTURE OF LOVE) Let us go and talk with            Jesus as  
he works. We will share our love as we now            share our grief,  
and we will pray that we will be            better and stronger for  
our sharing.

(THEY EXIT. THE END)

Without Erick  
*To Know Love*  
would not have been written  
as a memorial to our son

***FREDRICK LAWRENCE SAUR, JR.***  
(September 8, 1960 - February 17, 1995)