

an
Impossible



A ONE-ACT PLAY
FOR CHRISTMAS

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PRODUCTION NOTES

This one-act, *An Impossible Life*, is the non-musical version of our musical resource, *Glorious Impossible*.

Scene divisions are included for rehearsal purposes, and do not represent pauses or black-outs in performance. Though divided into five scenes, this production should appear to the audience as a seamless one-act.

COSTUMES

Costumes for both John and Naomi should reflect their location and status. That is, they are living on a rough-and-tumble island. Naomi is without a husband, and survives only by renting rooms to people like John. Hers is a hard life. She should look she has just been interrupted while cleaning floors. The apostle John is not so much impoverished (although he might be), but is extremely old and cares nothing about how he looks. His appearance should be disheveled, his clothing old and well-worn.

PROPS AND SET

Except for the Necessary Props listed just below, the following items, descriptions and photographs are included as examples only for your production, showing how we did it for the inaugural production..

Necessary Props: a wooden writing stylus (can be made from a slender dowel) and small rolled parchment for John.

Suggested Props and Set Pieces

- a rag for Naomi to enter with and wipe her hands on
- small crude table
- small crude stool (next to table)
- various items on table: rolls of parchment, inkpot, jar of water, crude cups for drinking
- box and/or large basket for John to rummage through
- walking stick leaning against wall



Entire set. The church in which this musical was first produced does not have a "backstage" to the platform, so by erecting a partition screening the corner we created both a backstage and an interior "wall" for John's room. We entered and exited through the burgundy curtain.



Detail of parchment rolls and stylus. Begin with standard parchment paper, tear edges into an irregular pattern. then wipe on wood stain. It does not soak in, and takes several days before it is sufficiently dry to handle, but works well for an aged look. For the stylus we began with a quarter-inch dowel, then used black paint to simulate ink. (The parchment prop for John was a smaller version of these.)



Detail of table. The table was constructed from tree limbs and rough-sawed oak planks. Parchment scrolls were made from standard (baking) parchment paper stained to show age and wear.

1 **SET UP**
2

3 **Lights up on Narrator**
4

5 **Narrator**

6 The glory and joy of Christmas is with us once again. It is a time for
7 bright lights, cheerful decorations, fresh-cut evergreens, and warm
8 gatherings of families and friends. It is also, more than anything else,
9 time for the family of God to celebrate the moment, so long ago, when
10 the Son came down to be born in flesh. It is time to celebrate Jesus—
11 and what seems to many to be His impossible birth.
12

13 **Lights begin to slowly rise on drama set.**
14

15 **Narrator**

16 One person who has remained skeptical about the things of God is
17 Naomi, who runs the house where the aged apostle John rents a room.
18 The tiny island of Patmos—to which John has been exiled—is where
19 they live, and the absentminded apostle and his feisty landlady mix it
20 up on an almost daily basis.
21

22 One day, however, Naomi presents John with an opportunity to tell
23 her the story about an impossible birth that happened so long ago in
24 the town of Bethlehem—and the miraculous life that followed.
25

26 **Lights down on Narrator as he exits stage.**
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1 **SCENE ONE**

2
3 **The Time: c. AD 95**

4 **The Place: The island of Patmos**

5
6 **Enter John, the aged apostle. Though he has the appearance of**
7 **advanced years, he is energetic. His mind is quick, yet unreliable.**
8 **His memory is embarrassingly short, and he keeps forgetting**
9 **where he left things.**

10
11 **As he enters, he is frantically searching for something amid the**
12 **folds of his disheveled garments and his room. There is a wooden**
13 **stylus tucked behind his ear, and a small scroll stuffed into his belt.**

14
15 **John**

16 *(as he moves about his room looking for something)*

17 That woman will be the end of me yet! Where did she put it this
18 time? How am I to get anything done!

19 *(stopping; looking around; impatiently)*

20 A man has only so many years—and I've already overstayed my
21 welcome.

22 *(frustrated; with a growling crescendo)*

23 Na—o—mi!

24 *(waiting; now louder, sharper)*

25 Naomi!

26
27 **Enter Naomi, a woman of middle years. She is wiping her wet**
28 **hands on her apron.**

29
30 **Naomi**

31 *(irritably)*

32 What is it now, John?
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John

(darkly patient)

One would imagine that upon payment for one's room, one could have reasonable expectation of privacy—that one's landlady would respect one's possessions during her infrequent cleanings.

Naomi

So now it's my cleaning.

John

(sharply)

Don't change the subject.

Naomi

(she's been here before)

Whatever it is you can't find—I didn't touch it.

John

A-ha! So you admit it.

Naomi

No wonder they threw you out of your last place.

John

(after a beat; stiffly)

That charge was never proven.

Naomi

And to think I took pity on you...

John

(simply)

I just want to know where you put it.

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Naomi

(beginning simply, then with greater intensity the next two lines)

What?

John

I can't get any work done without it.

Naomi

What?

John

I won't hold it against you. Just tell me where.

Naomi

What?!

John

(suddenly forgetting what he was talking about; flatly)

What.

Naomi

(after a long sigh; as if speaking to a child; rhythmically)

Tell me what you were doing when you couldn't find it.

John

(thinking)

Writing. I need to finish my letter.

(pause; irritably)

Stylus. Can't find my stylus.

Naomi, with a sigh, removes the stylus from John's ear and hands it to him.

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John

(staring at the stylus in his hand)

Who put that there?

(moving toward his table)

Now all I need is my parchment. Where is it?

(looking around; angrily)

What have you done with my parchment?!

Naomi, with an even heavier sigh, removes the scroll from John's belt and hands it to him.

Naomi

You're impossible.

Naomi turns to leave, but the word "impossible" catches John by surprise. He stops her with his question.

John

(intrigued)

What did you say?

Naomi

(returning; expecting that John is picking a fight; suspiciously)

I said you're impossible.

Slowly a smile spreads across the apostle's face.

John

Now, I may be troublesome, but—

(a thought occurs)

I know of something truly impossible.

Naomi

(rolling her eyes)

Here we go again.

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John

(inviting/ordering)

Sit down.

Naomi

(shaking her head "no")

I've got floors to sweep, dinner to fix—

John

(firm)

I promise not to complain about your dirty floors.

Naomi slowly sits, eyeing John warily.

John

I'd like to tell you a story about a most remarkable life—in fact, some might call it an impossible life.

(pause; choosing his words carefully)

Once upon a time, long ago, a baby came into the world. This baby should not have been. His birth was an impossibility. For the husband was not the father, and the mother had never known a man.

Naomi

Ah, another one of your fables.

John

My dear I have never told you fables—only... remarkables.

Naomi

(skeptically)

Uh-huh.

John

Now this baby had a most extraordinary birth. He was born the lowest of the low, in a filthy cave. Those sharing His nursery were not other

1 children, but the beasts of the field, and his tiny nostrils were first
2 filled with their earthy aroma.

3 (beat)

4 But, this lowly birth was heralded by the heavens! No less than angels
5 from God announced it.

6
7 **Naomi**

8 (rising; dismissively)

9 I don't have time for this.

10
11 **John**

12 (warmly sincere)

13 But you must make time, Naomi.

14
15 **Naomi**

16 Your tales are fine for amusing children, or for after-meal
17 entertainment. But they have nothing to say to me.

18 (beat)

19 I live in the real world, John.

20
21 **John**

22 How odd that you should say that. For, my dear, this story is especially
23 for those in the real world.

24 (beat)

25 It is at once rooted in the muck and mire of this world—and
26 illumined by the very word of God.

27
28 **Naomi**

29 (sneering)

30 What does your God know of the muck of this world?

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32 **John**

33 Why, everything. He made it—and He came to live in it.

SCENE TWO

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Naomi

(irritated)

I have respected your beliefs, John—no matter how ridiculous they seem. But you are now playing me for a fool.

John

(protesting his innocence)

I would not—

Naomi

(interrupting)

You expect me to believe that this God of yours—the one you claim created everything of this earth—actually came here—and as a baby.

(beat; sharply)

What do you take me for?

John

I told you it was impossible. But I also tell you it is true.

(pause)

It was in Bethlehem—a town just south of Jerusalem—about, oh, one hundred years ago, I'd say. King Herod had ordered a census, and since both the mother and Joseph were of the house of David, they traveled to this city to be registered. There the child was born in a stable just outside of town, when the innkeeper was unable to put them up.

Naomi

(sarcastically)

Couldn't God have arranged better accommodations?

John

(darkly)

I thought you respected my beliefs.

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Naomi

You're pushing it this time.

John

No one knew of the birth. So God—all according to plan—sent His messengers to get the word out to a few special people.

Naomi

(attempting to complete his thoughts; knowingly)

The city leaders. Perhaps soldiers.

John

(anticipating her sharp reply; wincingly)

Uh, shepherds.

Naomi

(exploding)

Now there you go again. Why in the world would God have wasted the news on shepherds?

John

(defensively)

And why would God have "wasted" His good news on fishermen, and farmers, and a tax collector?

(pause; calming down)

If I have learned anything in my many years, it is that God plays by His own rules. He has repeatedly channeled His grace through the lowly, through those who move invisibly through society. So His Son was given birth in the close stench of a stable, and He announced the arrival of our salvation first to poor shepherds.

SCENE THREE

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Naomi

(suspiciously)

What do you mean, "salvation"?

John

Why do you think God sent His Son?

Naomi

How would I know. None of it makes sense. Even if your God is real, why would He bother? What's the point of it all?

John

(after some thought)

Mercy. Love.

Naomi

(snorting derisively)

Love. Don't speak to me of love. A worthless commodity.

(reciting a well-worn, painful memory)

I thought I loved my husband. Worse, I thought he loved me. And to what end. Now he is gone, and I must take in boarders to stay alive.

(darkly)

Don't speak to me of love. Love brings only sorrow—and pain.

John

(somberly)

I can't argue with that, Naomi. God's love for man certainly brought unthinkable pain—to Himself.

Naomi

So why would He love us?

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John

(quickly)

Ah, that is a question for the ages.

(after some thought)

For His own reasons, God chose to love His creation. But it was an unrequited love. We did not love Him back. Even when we tried, it came out dark, insubstantial, even perverse. As we were, we were incapable of responding to His love.

(pause)

So God supplied it Himself.

Naomi

(confused)

Supplied what?

John

(emphatically)

That is why He sent His Son. That impossible birth, so long ago, was God's answer to the impossibly wide gulf that separated us from Him.

Naomi

(mildly incredulous)

That baby.

John

And the man He became.

1 **SCENE FOUR**

2
3 **John**

4 *(conversationally)*

5 The family didn't stay in Bethlehem, but settled in Nazareth, where the
6 boy learned Joseph's trade: carpentry. But from His earliest days, He
7 revealed that He was more than mere flesh. Why even when they—

8
9 **Naomi**

10 *(interrupting; exploding)*

11 That's enough! How stupid do you think I am?

12 *(beat)*

13 Make up your mind: was he man or was he god? Pick one!

14 *(disgusted, and impatient with John's silence)*

15 Oh, I've had enough of your tall tales.

16
17 **John**

18 *(urgently; firmly)*

19 Naomi, I have never told you fables—and I am not now!

20 *(regrouping)*

21 Wrapped inside that tiny child was the fullness of God! And His
22 impossible birth was just the beginning of a life like no other.

23
24 **Naomi**

25 You can say that again.

26 *(rapidly)*

27 I don't even think it was a life like his. I don't think it was a life at all.

28 *(beat)*

29 I think old age is clouding your mind, making you believe your own
30 lies.

31
32 **John**

33 *(thoughtfully)*

34 No, Naomi. You are forgetting that if I am an old man, it means I was
35 there. It means I heard it all from His own lips, saw it all with my own

1 eyes. I am not telling you a story handed down to me—something I
2 read somewhere. I am telling you what I have already lived!

3 (pause)

4 He called me out of a fishing boat. I left the work of my earthly
5 father to serve the Son of my heavenly Father. I was there from the
6 beginning.

7 (pause)

8 I was with Him when He taught us to live happily with the burdens of
9 this life—to love those who hate us, to build our lives on Him, rather
10 than on the quicksand of this world.

11 (pause)

12 I was with Him when He washed out leprosy and demons and
13 blindness. I was there when He raised the dead, when He walked on
14 water, and fed thousands by blessing a handful of bread and fish.

15 (with awe)

16 I was with Him on that mountain when He was changed before our
17 eyes—when His face shone like the sun, and we had to shield our eyes
18 from His holiness.

19 (heavily; darkly)

20 And I was at the foot of the cross with His mother that black day
21 when He was nailed to the tree. I watched His face as the weight of
22 mankind's sin was heaped on Him, and His heavenly Father had to
23 turn His face away from His only Son.

24 (pause; brightening)

25 But I was also at His tomb—

26 (turning to Naomi)

27 —and found it empty. For Jesus had risen from the dead. No grave
28 could hold the Son of God. Yes, Naomi, the man who was born in
29 Bethlehem was fully man. And the baby born in that stable was also
30 all of God.

31 **Naomi**

32 (sobered)

33 Even if that is true... Why?
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John

(thoughtfully)

From man's perspective it was an impossible life. But for God, anything is possible—even the salvation of those who rejected His Son.

(pointedly)

And those who still do.

SCENE FIVE

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Naomi

(subdued; soberly)

You're very persuasive, John. You make a convincing argument.

John

(quickly; innocently)

Don't misunderstand, Naomi. I am not trying to win an argument.

(firmly)

I am telling you what I know to be true. The rest is up to you.

Naomi

(after some thought)

I have always believed in the gods. But I have not always believed them.

(ruminatively)

"Salvation." What is that? What does that really mean? Life is hard, and the idea that some mysterious all-powerful being from high overhead would be of any help to me, well—it has just never worked out that way. They must have other, more important things on their minds.

(pause)

After my husband left there was no one to look out for me. Certainly none of the many gods I grew up with. I had to look out for myself.

(proudly)

And I haven't done a bad job of it.

(challenging John)

You say this Jesus is better than my old gods. All right, what does He have to offer if I believe in Him? What's in it for me?

John

(disappointed; shaking his head sadly)

I'm sorry, Naomi. If you can say that, then I've done a poor job explaining Him to you.

(pause)

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2 Let me try once more—

3
4 **Naomi**

5 (groaning)

6 No more! Please. Please. No more stories.

7
8 **John**

9 I'll be brief.

10 (after some thought)

11 One day we were crossing the Sea of Galilee in Peter's boat. All of us
12 were there—including Jesus. Then a storm came up, quickly. It happens
13 some times on that old lake. Out of nowhere. It was a terrible squall.
14 The boat was being tossed about like a toy. We called for the Master,
15 thinking He might pray for us—pray for our safety. At first we couldn't
16 find Him, but then Andrew found him in the stern—sound asleep!

17 (pause)

18 When we woke Him, He scolded us—not for waking Him, but for our
19 fear—our lack of faith.

20 (with awe)

21 Then, with just a simple, quiet word, He calmed the storm. He actually
22 scolded the storm, as if it were an unruly child. And it stopped. It just
23 stopped. Perfectly calm.

24
25 **Naomi**

26 (wearily)

27 Your point?

28
29 **John**

30 (emphatically)

31 Don't you understand yet who it is I have been telling you about? Who
32 else but God—the true God, the one God—can do such a thing! He
33 holds in His hand power over nature, this world, people—everything!
34 He is Lord over all.

(more subdued)

1
2 Naomi, we all have storms in our life. You do. I do. Life tosses us about,
3 leaving us shaken and bruised. But with faith in Jesus comes a peace
4 that brings us through those storms.

5 (beat)

6 A peace that we find only in the God who holds such power.

7 (pause)

8 My people have an ancient prayer that includes this: "Even though I
9 walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You
10 are with me, Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me."

11
12 **Naomi**

13 (flatly)

14 I already have friends.

15
16 **John**

17 (gently)

18 Oh, Naomi. He is so much more than that.

19 (shrugging)

20 I can tell you that faith in Jesus means eternal life with Him in heaven.
21 I can tell you that it means His Spirit comes to dwell within you. I
22 can tell you that He will radically change your life—make you a new
23 person, inside and out.

24 (beat)

25 But when the angel came to Joseph, to tell him that Mary, his
26 betrothed, was already pregnant with the Child, the angel told him,
27 "She shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel."

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29 **Naomi**

30 (mildly interested)

31 What does that mean—"Immanuel"?
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John

(smiling warmly)

It means “God with us.” It means Jesus is always with you. He is all of God, and He is with you. You don’t have to wait for heaven. He is with you every day, every hour.

(beat)

He is with me.

(mischievously)

He is the one who gets me through the daily storm—of living under your roof.

Naomi

(scowling)

You’re impossible.

John

(smiling)

We’d better not start that again.

(more seriously, but not too heavy)

My friend, I have faith that there will come a day when the name of Jesus will mean something to you. There will come a day when the Spirit will speak, and you will listen—and respond.

(beat)

For that day I will keep praying.

Naomi

(after some thought)

Fair enough.

(laughing? or still scowling good-naturedly?)

Now c’mon you crazy old man. Supper will be ready soon.

They exit.

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