

THE TABLE INSIDE THE TREE

A CHRISTMAS SKETCH

by
David S. Lampel



AUTHOR'S NOTE

5 *The Table Inside the Tree* is a versatile sketch that can stand alone—as an illustration in support of a pastor’s message, choir anthem, or special music—or be integrated into a larger Christmas musical or play. If the latter, see as well our scripts *The Light* (magi), and *Three Men and a Baby* (shepherds).

Note that this sketch uses just a few props—the few belongings Mary and Joseph would have with them for their travels—and does not require an elaborate set. As with most His Company scripts, authentically attired, believable characters are more important—and more effective—than any accouterments.

10 **CHARACTERS**

Joseph
Mary

15 **SCENE**

The Time: c.6 BC, just before the birth of Christ; evening
The Place: on the road between Nazareth and Jerusalem, near Ramah, just north of Jerusalem

20 *House lights down.*
Stage lights up.

Enter Mary and Joseph.

25 *Joseph and Mary have been on the road for several days, traveling from Nazareth in the north, to the City of David (Bethlehem) in the south because of the census called by Caesar. They had been traveling with a caravan, but at Bethel the caravan turned east for Jericho. Since then they have been traveling alone, by foot. Joseph is supporting Mary as they walk—it is obvious that the young woman’s pregnancy is near term.*

30 **Mary**
(wearily, even painfully)
No further, Joseph. No more.

Joseph
(peering ahead)
35 There’s a place up ahead. Just a little more.

Mary
I don’t think I can—

Joseph

40 We're about there.

(reaching the resting spot)

Here. Sit on this rock.

Mary

We shouldn't have left them so soon.

45

Joseph

Who?

Mary

The caravan. At least then I could ride part of the way.

Joseph

50 But they were going east to Jericho. We had no choice.

(muttering to himself)

Does anyone have a choice these days.

Mary

What?

55

Joseph

I said we need to be pushing on.

Mary

No. I can't. I have to rest longer.

Joseph

60

(sarcastically)

The Romans wait for no man, Mary.

Mary

Well, I know one woman they'll have to wait for.

(more seriously)

65

Joseph, the baby. I have to rest.

Joseph

Yes. You're right of course.

(turning to go)

I'll find what I can for kindling.

70

Mary

No. Please. Stay with me.

Joseph

We'll need it tonight.

Mary

75

There's time for that. Sit with me a while.

80

Joseph is, and already has proven himself to be a good provider for his new wife. On their journey from Nazareth he has manfully kept Mary from harm, and, as much as possible, supplied her every need. But he is still uncomfortable with this new experience of having a wife—of having a female around all the time. Joseph is “a man’s man,” and ill-at-ease with the ways and needs of women—and especially a woman as young as his bride. He can build her a dwelling, or make her a bench or a cradle—anything with his hands. But he is yet uncomfortable with things of the heart.

Joseph moves toward Mary and awkwardly sits down next to her.

85

Mary

(after a pause; tenderly)

Why are you still uncomfortable around me?

Joseph

90

(protesting)

Me? No—no—

Mary

Joseph...

Joseph

95

(reluctantly; awkwardly)

You have to understand, Mary, my hands are callused. My skin is weathered and tough. I'm more used to the company of men. I don't know how to behave around you—especially,

(gesturing to her obvious pregnancy)

100

with, uh—

Mary

(simply; directly)

Do you love me, Joseph?

105

Joseph

(warmly)

You know I do.

Mary

Then just love me. Love me as I love you—my strong, rough man with the kind heart. Be who you are, because that is the man I fell in love with—

110

(embarrassed)

—the man who took me as I was.

Joseph

(quickly; firmly)

We won't speak of that. It is settled.

115

Mary

(referring to her being a virgin, and that the conception was supernatural)

Do you truly believe it?

Joseph

(after a long, thoughtful pause; struggling for the words)

When I am cutting down a tree, I “believe” that inside it is a table, or a stool, or the framework and sides of an ox cart. No one else can see those things in the tree, but I can see them. Even so, there's still a small part of me that doesn't believe completely until I am shaping and smoothing the boards.

120

125

(pause)

There are things a man believes—truly believes. Yet a small part of him—

(embarrassed)

—the weaker part—doesn't believe fully until he sees it in his own hands.

130

Mary

(after a beat; simply)

Do you believe that day will come?

Joseph

(firmly)

135 Yes.

Mary

(with a sigh)

Then that is enough for me.

(beat)

140 Everyone knows you are an honorable man, Joseph. And there is no dishonor in obeying the Lord.

Joseph

(as he rises to look for kindling; angry)

Yes, but only we know we are obeying Him.

145

Joseph exits.

After Joseph exits, Mary covers her head with her shawl and, lifting her gaze upward, prays.

150

Mary

(quietly earnest)

O Lord God, forgive my husband. Forgive me. Forgive us both our fears and doubting. He is a good man, and I love him so. But he is a man. His faith is not perfect—like him, it is still rough around the edges.

155

(pause; marveling)

Growing in me is the mark of our trust in you—

(in awe)

—the sign of Your trust in us. Do with us as You will.

160

Joseph returns, carrying a few sticks for a fire.

Joseph

(referring to his paltry load of wood)

This won't keep us warm tonight.

165

(considering)

We could press on. Be there by morning.

Mary

(protesting)

Not another step. Caesar can wait one more day to count our heads.

170

(pause; a new thought; motioning with her head to her belly)

I wonder what they'll do with the little one. Will they count him?

Joseph

(bitterly, but with a shrug)

Just another Jew to Rome. Just another lowly subject. What do they care.

175

Mary

(realizing for the first time; with alarm)

Will anyone care?

Joseph

What do you—

180

Mary

(continuing with a measure of increasing alarm)

Will anyone know about this? Will it matter? After all, who are we to do this? We're nothing, just two lost people in the midst of many—and all of us in a lost nation.

185

Joseph

Mary—

Mary

No. What if it's all been for nothing? "Just another Jew" you said. You're right: Just another Jew. What will they care?

190

Joseph

But isn't that part of our obedience? Don't we trust that God knows what He is doing?

Mary

(struggling between both sides of the argument; haltingly)

195

I— I believe. But, it's so hard to see it all.

Joseph

(after a thoughtful pause)

200

There will be a day when I will hold the child in my arms. Though I am not his father, I will be his father as best I can. The little one will put his trust in me—to feed him, clothe him, protect him.

(pause)

205

We are God's little ones. We must trust Him, just as our little one will trust us. He will be too small to do anything else, and we are too small to do anything but believe that God knows what He is doing.

Mary

(having calmed down; with respect for her wise husband; warmly)

Does my husband already see the table inside the tree?

Joseph

210

(smiling)

I can already feel it in my hands.

Suddenly the child moves inside Mary.

215

Mary

Oh, Joseph! That was a strong one!

(taking Joseph's hand and placing it on her belly)

Here, there will be another.

220

They wait, and after a few seconds the child moves again, and both Mary and Joseph grin broadly.

Joseph

(in awe)

225

How that must hurt you.

Mary

(glowing)

No, it is a wonderful feeling. It is life! It is my child.

(beat)

230 It is hope.

(pause; seriously)

We must press on, Joseph.

Joseph

(confused)

235 But, you said—

Mary

(struggling to get up)

The little one will be here soon, and we must get to Bethlehem before he is born.

240

Joseph

(as he collects their few belongings, and helps Mary to her feet; ruefully)

Well, Mary, if the Lord will get us there safely, perhaps he will some day instruct me in the curious ways of women.

Mary

(good-naturedly)

245

Oh, my, even the Lord won't help you there.

Joseph

(as they exit; affectionately)

Your ways are too marvelous to behold.

250

Mary

(laughing)

Well, we have that in common, too.

They exit.

255

Stage lights down.

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