

# The Well

CHARACTERS: 10 F, 4M, 3 either

COSTUMES: Biblical

SETTING: A well in a small town and a simply (stool or chair) furnished home

RUN TIME: 25 minutes

## Cast

Deborah, cousin of Mary

Salome, Mary's sister

Miriam, Mary's mother

Mary

Matthias, Mary's father

Joseph

Jacob, Joseph's father

Rabbi

Witness 1 (non speaking)

Witness 2 (non-speaking)

Gabriel

Elizabeth

Sarah, sister of Joseph

Peninnah, sharp tongued friend of Sarah  
aptly named after Hannah's rival wife

Judith, friend of Sarah

Basemath, friend of Sarah

Woman, from John 4

Samaritan man

Extras as angels, shepherds, Magi and  
servants

## Scene 1: The Well

*At rise: The town well and center of women's meetings. A group of young women are obviously in anticipation of some great event. Animated talking. One is watching for something (looking offstage)*

DEBORAH: The water isn't going to draw itself, you know.

SALOME: Shush. We're not here for water. We're watching.

DEBORAH: Watching what, cousin? Dirt blow?

SALOME: (*pointing stage right*) I see Joseph and his parents. His brother is with them.

DEBORAH: (realization dawning) Mary – you are about to become engaged!

SALOME: Betrothed!

MARY: I know! I know.

DEBORAH: Do you think you will like him? Love him?

MARY: I don't know. I suppose.

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SALOME: (*Pointing stage right*) Here comes the rabbi.

MIRIAM: (*entering stage left and startling them*) Salome! Stop pointing. What will the neighbors think? Quiet down. Do you want everyone to think we've raised a gaggle of honking geese? (*women giggle and sit*). Mary. (*Pulls her away from the others in front of the curtain which closes*)

MARY: Yes, mother.

MIRIAM: When you take the ring, you are married in the sight of the law, the people and Jehovah. It is no light thing.

MARY: I know mother. To break the betrothal would require a formal divorce, with grounds.

MIRIAM: It would be an embarrassment to us all were you to refuse him after the contracts have been drawn up, after the rabbi has been called, before all the witnesses.

MARY: I know.

MIRIAM: But better embarrassment now, than broken vows later. If you cannot marry Joseph the carpenter say so now. There will be no going back. You will be his wife for all purposes except living under the same roof.

MARY: I will marry him.

MATTHIAS: (*barely popping in stage right*) Wife, bring in our daughter. (*MIRIAM grasps MARY'S hand and they exit stage right. DEBORAH and SALOME enter stage left*)

DEBORAH: Let's go eavesdrop at the door. (*Moves toward stage left. SALOME grabs her arm to stop her*)

SALOME: No.

DEBORAH: (*hands on hips*) Who died and made you pharaoh?

SALOME: (*conspiratorially*) Let's go to the other side of the house. We can hear better there. (*They giggle quietly and exit stage right.*)

## Scene 2 - The Betrothal

*At rise: Simple Jewish home. Rabbi is center with JACOB, JOSEPH JOSEPH'S MOTHER and WITNESS 1 stage left, MATTHIAS, MIRIAM, WITNESS 2 and MARY (the furthest upstage and partially hidden) stage right*

RABBI: The marriage contracts are agreed upon by both parties?

MATTHIAS: Yes, Rabbi. As Mary's father, I agree to the terms.

JACOB: (*With confidence and presence*) And I, Jacob Barmathan, father of the bridegroom Joseph Barjacob, do agree to the terms.

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RABBI: Will the witnesses step forth. *(Two men step forth)* Joseph, do you have a token of value?

JOSEPH: I do Rabbi, a ring.

RABBI: Mary, daughter of Matthias, step forth and receive the ring, if you will. *(MARY does shyly)*

JOSEPH: *(Placing the ring on her finger)* You are consecrated to me, through this ring, according to the religion of Moses and Israel. *(The witnesses and fathers raise a prayer shawl above their head. MIRIAM brings wine and JOSEPH takes the pitcher and a glass and pours it. Hands it to MARY, who drinks it.)*

RABBI: This cup represents the blood of the covenant. As Eve was made from Adam's bone, so you are of one bone. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they shall be one flesh. *(MARY hands the cup to Joseph who drinks from it)*

JOSEPH: At my father's house are many rooms. I will go to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me and we will be together as husband and wife.

RABBI: May Jehovah grant you long lives and many children together.

*(Sobriety of the moment is broken as everyone congratulates everyone. Lights out)*

### Scene 3 - The Birth of Jesus Foretold *(Before the curtain)*

*At rise: Mary is sweeping. The angel, who has been unseen in darkness, has spotlight suddenly illuminating him. Mary startled, looks up, drops broom and bows to him.*

GABRIEL: Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. *(Mary looks up)*

GABRIEL: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

MARY: How will this be, since I am a virgin?

GABRIEL: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.

MARY: I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. *(lights out, curtain opens)*

### Scene 4 – A Trip to Judea

*At rise: Matthias is working on leather for a sandal. Mary enters*

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MARY: Mother said you needed me.

MATTHIAS: Yes. Mary, Adonijah and his wife and children are going to Judea for a few months. She needs someone to help her on the trip with those children. I think it would be good for you to go along and help her. You'll be having children of your own soon.

MARY: (*dreamily*) Yes, I will. A special child. (*MATTHIAS gives her a look*)

MATTHIAS: I know most people won't associate with his family since he became a tax collector for the Romans. But they can afford to pay a little for your help and you will need things for your new home.

MARY: Yes, father, and for the baby.

MATTHIAS: (*Slightly scowling*) While you are there you will stay with Zachariah and Elizabeth until Adonijah returns. (*Mary stands there smiling*) That's all. Don't you have chores?

MARY: Yes, father. (*Lights out, curtain*)

## Scene 5 - Elizabeth

*Before the curtain: At rise: Elizabeth is sitting, sewing. Mary enters*

MARY: Elizabeth!

*Elizabeth stands awkwardly because of her pregnancy to meet her. She stops and acknowledges something wonderful has happened within her womb.*

ELIZABETH: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. (*They embrace*)

Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!

MARY: (*Looking upward*)

My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
(*reaching out to hold Elizabeth's hand*) but has lifted up the humble.

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He has filled the hungry with good things  
 but has sent the rich away empty.  
 He has helped his servant Israel,  
 remembering to be merciful  
 to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
 even as he said to our fathers.

## SCENE 6 – The Well and gossip

*At rise: Three young women are gathered at the well.*

BASEMATH: They say your sister-in-law Mary has returned.

SARAH: (*Scornfully*) After associating with the tax collector's family for months and months.

PENINNAH: Don't you think it strange that she was gone all those months?

SARAH: And not with my brother's leave.

BASEMATH: When do you think he will bring her to live with him?

SARAH: Any time now. He's almost finished their house.

BASEMATH: Being a carpenter made that easier. I don't think Josiah will ever finish the room he is making for us.

PENINNAH: You're so fortunate to be spoken for. I wish I was.

BASEMATH: I still think it's rather strange Joseph decided to make a separate dwelling.

SARAH: Joseph has a mind of his own.

JUDITH: (*rushing in*) I have seen her.

PENINNAH: Who?

JUDITH: Mary. She's on her way here now. Walking slowly.

BASEMATH: So?

JUDITH: You'll see. Just look for yourselves. (*MARY enters, after a few steps she has to fix her sandal. She is in an early but obvious stage of pregnancy. The girls stare, speechless at first, then with knowing glances at each other. SARAH is stunned.*)

BASEMATH: So you're back.

MARY: Yes.

PENINNAH: Anything interesting happen in Judea?

MARY: *(Glowing, talking while she draws water)* Elizabeth had a baby. It was amazing because she was so old. No one thought she would have children and then God blessed her with a son. She named him John. Isn't it amazing what God can do? *(She smiles and exits)*

JUDITH: She is isn't she?

PENINNAH: I believe so. Sarah?

SARAH: *(in shock)* I have nothing to say. I have to go home. *(She runs off stage. Basemath picks up her left behind jar and is about to call after her when PENINNAH stops her)*

PENINNAH: She's too upset to care. I'll take it to her later. *(lights out)*

### Scene 7 - Jacob and Joseph

*Before curtain, stage right. At Rise: Spotlight on JACOB talking to a troubled JOSEPH*

JACOB: *(Concerned)* There is no doubt she is with child, my son. Before God as your witness, tell the truth. *(Forcefully)* Is the child yours?

JOSEPH: *(in earnest)* No father. I swear it is not.

JACOB: Then the law is clear. She has broken the covenant. She has violated the marriage vows. You have the right to bring this matter to the elders. If she is an adulteress, she can be divorced, stoned even.

JOSEPH: No, father. I do not wish to expose her to public disgrace. I will put her away quietly.

JACOB: She did not spare your reputation. What she has done is a blemish on our family name, and us of the royal household of David.

JOSEPH: I'm going to bed, father. *(Moves stage left and lies down to sleep. The angel enters and stands over him)*

ANGEL: Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. *(Lights dim, angel exits; lights up half, JACOB enter and shakes JOSEPH awake.)*

JACOB: Son, arise.

JOSEPH: Father. I have changed my mind. *(stands)* I had a dream. It was from the Lord. I am going to take Mary as my wife.

JACOB: You what!

JOSEPH: The angel said that what is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and we are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

JACOB: That is absurd! Whoever heard of the Holy Spirit being poured into a woman?!

JOSEPH: Joel prophesied it. He said

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.

Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

JACOB: You must be out of your mind to think you have had a vision from the Lord.

JOSEPH: Mary is God's servant and He has poured out his spirit on both her and me.

JACOB: Nonsense! You will not disgrace our house by bringing that – woman- here.

JOSEPH: Father, I believe this is taking place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, God with us.

JACOB: *(With finality)* You can divorce her or be disowned.

JOSEPH: Disowned?

JACOB: Disowned. I'll not have another man's child brought up as my grandson. *(Lights out)*

### Scene 8 – Mary's parents react

*At rise: MATTHIAS is agitated and pacing. Miriam is distraught.*

MIRIAM: Matthias, there is no doubt. Mary is with child.

MATTHIAS: *(angry but trying not to show it)* How could she? How could he? How could they both? We brought her up better than that. Bring her in here.

MIRIAM: Wait. Suppose it wasn't Joseph.

MATTHIAS: What do you mean it's not Joseph?

MIRIAM: Mary is a good girl. But suppose something happened on the trip to Elizabeth and Zachariah's? Suppose she was taken by force and is too ashamed to tell us.



MATTHIAS: (*stops pacing and thinks before replying*). According to the law if a man takes a virgin pledged to be married they shall both be taken to the gate of the town and stoned to death—the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife.

MIRIAM: But what if it were on the road? What does the law say then?

MATTHIAS: But if out in the country a man happens to meet a girl pledged to be married and forces her, only the man who has done this shall die. Nothing is done to the girl; she has committed no sin deserving death.

MIRIAM: It is like someone who attacks and murders his neighbor, for the man found the girl out in the country, and though the betrothed girl screamed, there was no one to rescue her.

MATTHIAS: (*seeing some possible hope in the situation*) Is this what happened? Did she tell you this?

MIRIAM: (*more distraught*) No.

MATTHIAS: (*frustrated*) Have you talked to her about this?

MIRIAM: Yes.

MATTHIAS: And what does she say?

MIRIAM: She claims an angel spoke to her. But I think that it is because she is frightened. (*full of self incrimination*) We never should have let her go with that (*spitting the words out*) tax collector's family!

MATTHIAS: (*trying to convince himself as much as MIRIAM but failing*) Adonijah's father was a friend of our family. His wife needed a companion to help with the children. We needed our taxes reduced. I thought no harm would come of it, especially since we have relatives in Judea – priestly relatives.

MIRIAM: I'll bring Mary. Talk to her.

MATTHIAS: Alright. (*MIRIAM exits and brings back MARY. MATTHIAS paces and talks aloud*) How could this happen? Why, oh Lord. Aren't the Romans grief enough? Why? (*Sees Mary. Miriam is huddled into a corner, watching in a horror only a mother can feel. Every emotion is reflected on her agonized face.*

MATTHIAS: Mary. You are with child?

MARY: Yes, father.

MATTHIAS: (*trying to stay calm*) How did this come to be?

MARY: An angel told me I was highly favored! He said I should not be afraid. I would be with child and give birth to a son named Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

MATTHIAS: (*Trying to be reasonable*) Joseph is of the house of David. Is this his child?



MARY: No. The angel said the Holy Spirit will come upon me, and the power of the Most High will overshadow me so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. For nothing is impossible with God.

MATTHIAS: *(unable to contain his emotions completely, they start to show and build)* Mary, this is serious. Do not lie to me. If someone has forced you, tell me now. I will do what I can to clear this up. But do not lie to me.

MARY: It is as I have said.

MATTHIAS: *(angry, distraught, anguished)* The penalty for unfaithfulness is death. They will come in here and drag you to the city gate and tie you to a stake. The people will throw rocks at you until you are dead. Dead!

MARY: No father. That is not what the angel said would happen.

MATTHIAS: *(becoming enraged)* Did the angel tell you that you and your family will be shunned by all decent Jews? That you will have a baby and no husband to take care of you or provide for you? Did the angel tell you how unlikely it is for a bastard child to even make it to adulthood?

MIRIAM: *(timidly taking a step from the wall, fearfully pleading)* We can send her away. Back to Elizabeth's. She could ... *(A knock on the door interrupts.)*

MATTHIAS: Enter.

RABBI: Your presence is needed at the city gate. The elders have gathered to hear the matter of your daughter's marriage contract with Joseph the carpenter. *(Lights out)*

## Scene 9 – The Well

*At rise: Women are around the well. They are dressed against colder weather and it is obvious some time has passed. SARAH has hardened into a bitter woman.*

JUDITH: Have you heard? There is to be a census of the entire Roman world.

PENINNAH: Everyone must go to his own town to register.

JUDITH: My father and brothers are going to Jerusalem.

SARAH: My father has to travel to Judea also, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because we belong to the house and line of David.

BASEMATH: Will Joseph travel with him?

SARAH: No. He is no longer considered a son in our family after taking *(distain)* that woman home.

JUDITH: Mary looks like she'll give birth at any time.

SARAH: Don't say that name in my presence. She has brought dishonor on my family – a family of royal lineage.

JUDITH: What shall we call her?

BASEMATH: I don't use that kind of language (*giggles*)

SARAH: (*Curtly*) It's not a laughing matter.

PENINNAH: Then let's call her Gomer. It's a fitting name, don't you think?

SARAH: Yes. (*BASEMATH and JUDITH shush them and point. DEBORAH and SALOME enter. During the next part of the scene SARAH and her friends act superior while SALOME's embarrassment turns into mounting anger. Deborah is tense, wanting to keep the situation from exploding. Distain drips from the words spoken by PENINNAH and SARAH.*)

PENINNAH: Salome, I hear your sister is about to give birth. Has she picked out any names yet?

DEBORAH: Just ignore her, Salome. Let's get the water and go.

PENINNAH: I heard Ma ... that woman... is considering Lo-Ruhamah, or Lo-Ammi.

SARAH: Very fitting names. Not loved and not my people. (*SARAH'S group laughs loudly*)

PENINNAH: We thought maybe your sister might be changing her name too, like Sarai became Sarah – the Princess.

SARAH: We thought Gomer would fit.

DEBORAH: Just ignore them.

SALOME: Since you're so versed in the scriptures perhaps you know this one from Proverbs - A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul.

PENINNAH: Speaking of proverbs, I believe a great deal is devoted to the Adulteress! (*SALOME drops her jug and gets in SARAH's face. Deborah picks up the jug, grabs SALOME's arm and hauls her off while SARAH and friends laugh.*)

## Scene 10 – Another trip

*Before the curtain.*

JOSEPH: Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census to be taken. I will need to go to Bethlehem to register.

MARY: I understand.

JOSEPH: I can't leave you here. If you give birth while I am gone, none of the midwives or women will attend you.

MARY: My mother would. Salome might.

JOSEPH: Your father has forbidden them to have any contact with us. So, I will take you with me.

MARY: It will not be easy. I'll slow you down.

JOSEPH: Mary, I told you once I would come back for you. I will not leave you nor will I leave the baby you carry. We go together. As you have reminded me many times, nothing is impossible with God. (*MARY laughs*) I just hope taking you on such a journey is not putting him to the test.

### Scene 11 – The Well

*At rise: The women are at the well*

JUDITH: Did you hear? Joseph is taking Mary with him to Bethlehem.

SARAH: Yes, I heard. We can only hope she miscarries along the way. Or dies giving birth.

PENINNAH: That would serve her right. She has destroyed your brother's life.

SARAH: He deserved better.

BASEMATH: She may have it on the road.

SARAH: (*Bitterly*) She can have it in a pig's trough for all I care.

PENINNAH: Here comes your brother with a water jar.

BASEMATH: He isn't drawing the water is he? That's women's work.

PENINNAH: He's already lowered himself as far as he could when he took her home. Why not draw the water as well.

SARAH: You three go on. I would speak to him alone.

JUDITH: (*shocked*) Your parents have forbidden it!

SARAH: So see to it that they don't find out. I'll have my say. (*The three move off. JOSEPH arrives and begins drawing water*)

JOSEPH: (*Cordial but not warm, feeling her out*) Sarah. I hope you are well.

SARAH: As well as can be expected for one whose family has become the laughing-stock of Nazareth.

JOSEPH: Sarah, ... (*SARAH cuts him off*)

SARAH: Joseph, it's not too late. Take her to Bethlehem and leave her there. You go somewhere else and start over. Somewhere where no one will know. In time, you will be free of all this.

JOSEPH: I can't do that!

SARAH: (*exasperated*) Then sell her as a slave. There'll be plenty of Romans around.

JOSEPH: (*Incredulous*) Sarah, she is my wife. She carries a child from God.

SARAH: You are a fool, Joseph. A fool. (*Lights, Curtain*)

## Scene 12 -The Birth

*Before the curtain extreme stage left. Medium intensity spotlight on MARY, in labor. She can barely hold herself up against a wall. JOSEPH hurries on stage and helps support her.*

JOSEPH: There is no room in the inn.

MARY: It is time. I can't...

JOSEPH: There is cave close by with the owner's cattle inside. It's the best we can do.

MARY: All things are possible with God. (*Light off, they get in place for shepherds visiting. Dim spot on stage right where shepherds are sleeping or sitting up watching the flocks. Curtain opens to reveal Gabriel and heavenly host. Shepherds wake and react to the strange sight.* )

GABRIEL: Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (*Lights brighten during Gabriel's lines so when the angel chorus speaks the light is at maximum intensity*) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

ANGELS: (*As many as can say the lines in unison*) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

SHEPHERD: Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. (*They move to MARY, JOSEPH and BABY while angel choir sings. Curtain closes. Shepherds appear amazed and move into the audience to tell the news and glorify God. Servants of the Kings enter with two ornate chairs or simple thrones and escort MARY and JOSEPH to them. Kings come in and present their gifts Lights out.* )

## Scene 13 – Another well, another time

*At rise: A well. Jesus, tired from his journey, sitting down by the well. Samaritan woman enters to draw water.*

JESUS: Will you give me a drink?

WOMAN: (*talking as she draws water*) You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

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JESUS: If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. *(She gives him a drink and he sips some)*

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. *(takes another, longer drink)*

WOMAN: Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.

JESUS: *(standing, handing her the dipper)* Go, call your husband and come back.

WOMAN: I have no husband.

JESUS: You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.

WOMAN: Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Aren't you concerned about what people will think – you keeping company with a woman of my questionable character?

JESUS: No. God does not look on the outward appearance as does man, but at the heart. *(WOMAN dismisses his answer with a small hand gesture)* As the scriptures say in Proverbs - Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

WOMAN: *(trying to possibly pick a fight)* Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

JESUS: True worshipers worship the Father in spirit and truth. *(Disciples enter and look surprised to see him talking to a woman but say nothing)*

WOMAN: I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.

JESUS: I who speak to you am he. *(WOMAN leaves her jar and exits bringing back others. They come in and kneel and bow at Jesus feet as he completes his lines except WOMAN and SAMARITAN MAN who remains standing until his line)* My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages; even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

SAMARITAN MAN: *(to woman)* We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world. *(They bow)*

*Song – Joy to the World*