

# Mothers & Sons

CHARACTERS: 6 women, 1 girl

Hostess Mary - mother of John Mark, hosting the prayer session

Rhoda - a young inquisitive Gentile serving girl about 7 or 8 years old

Salome - One of the supporters of Jesus, mother of James and John

Joanna - Wife of Cuza, supporter of Jesus

Mary Magdela - somewhat disheveled appearance, striking hair

Mother Mary - the mother of Jesus, older, serene

Martha - sister of Lazarus

PROPS: Pots, jars, baskets, some loaves of baked bread, a kneading trough and dough, cheese, other kitchen implements, towels

SETTING: The kitchen of a first century Jewish home, during the night described in Acts 12. Two stools, a table and a bench

RUN TIME: 27 minutes

SCRIPTURE/BASED ON: Acts 12 with references to the Gospels and Acts 1-12.

HOSTESS MARY: *(Patiently trying to explain to a wiggly, impatient Rhoda)* Rhoda. I will need a lot of help tonight. There will be at least 50 people, maybe 100. I don't know. But there will be much to do. There will not be time for playing or jokes. Now, hand me the oil then bring me some water in the red clay jar. *(During this exchange HOSTESS MARY is making bread and other kitchen related tasks and Rhoda is assisting when she is not asking questions)*

RHODA: Why are so many people coming here? Is this another feast? You Jews have a lot of feasts.

HOSTESS MARY: Our dear brother Peter has been thrown in prison by Herod.

RHODA: You have a brother named Peter?

HOSTESS MARY: He's a Christian brother. We are going to pray for his release

RHODA: Why aren't you going to your temple to pray and sacrifice? In Egypt we would go to the temple of Isis and pray to her because she is the protector goddess of women. She might listen if we sacrificed enough.

HOSTESS MARY: Jesus taught us that true worship is about the Spirit and truth, not the place.

RHODA: Is it true that John Mark angered your High Priest? Will the priest make trouble for him? Why doesn't John Mark just take a sacrifice and say he's sorry?

HOSTESS MARY: Because he is not sorry. The priests and teachers of the law are wrong. They never should have stoned Stephen. John Mark seems to think it is his place to rebuke them. *(a but unsure of what she is saying)* I don't know if it was a wise thing to do or not. As a mother I think it was exceedingly foolish. *(Confidently)* But as a Christian I know it was the right thing to do. But that is not for me to decide right now. Right now we have bread to make and fish to grill and many other tasks to be hospitable. I hear our first guests

arriving.

SALOME: (*Enters while removing hood from her head.*) Shalom. I have come to join in the prayers for Peter. I thought you might need some help in the kitchen.

HOSTESS MARY: I would be glad for your help. I have 5 loaves of bread rising but I think we'll need more. The flour is in the jar. There is water in this jar (*indicating with a tilt of her head*).

SALOME: (*concerned, dropping her voice*) It is well we meet here and not at the temple courts.

RHODA: Why?

HOSTESS MARY: The Jewish leaders might make trouble. The Romans might make trouble. Or Herod might have more Christians arrested and killed. Rhoda, go make sure there is water enough for washing any arrival's feet and watering a donkeys.

RHODA: Wash, wash, wash. You Jews wash everything all the time. (*Exits*)

HOSTESS MARY: Salome, I am so sorry about your son, James.

SALOME: (*Who has jumped right in to the food preparation*) Thank God it was quick. (*Quieter*) I pray Peter does not die, but if he must die let it be quickly like James, a beheading not a crucifixion. I don't think I could ever bear to watch another one of those.

HOSTESS MARY: (*Strong, matter of fact*) We are all praying that Peter will be released. God did it before when Peter and your son John were arrested together. After they healed that crippled man.

RHODA: (*Entering loudly*) Eight more people have arrived. One of them brought a donkey.

HOSTESS MARY: (*pointing off stage*) Feet and donkey. (*RHODA exits*)

SALOME: (*Regaining her composure and wanting to change the subject*) She's a Gentile isn't she?

HOSTESS MARY: Yes, Egyptian. I think she had some idea of Jewish customs but The Way has been a shock to her. Living with us has been ... confusing to say the least.

SALOME: How long has she been here?

HOSTESS MARY: A few weeks. Rather unplanned too. John Mark was passing by a slave auction when he heard her screams. Her family had run up debts they could not pay. They were sold into slavery. Her father and two brothers had already been sold. The mother was being taken away by her new owners and Rhoda was objecting. Loudly. And violently

SALOME: I don't imagine that went over well

HOSTESS MARY: (*becoming more serious*) No. They started beating her. John Mark stepped in. He told them damaged property would bring them less money and offered 5 pieces of silver for her. They agreed almost too swiftly. (*With a soft chuckle*) He joked later that he probably could have been paid by them to take her

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away.

SALOME: She seems to have adjusted to her new life.

HOSTESS MARY: *(With a smile)* Yes and the scratches on John Mark have faded away.

MOTHER MARY: *(Entering and pulling the hood from her head)* Shalom.

HOSTESS MARY: *(Greeting her with a hug, followed by SALOME hugging her)* Shalom. I was hoping you would come.

SALOME: *(With concern)* But it's so late. It's dangerous after dark for a woman to walk alone in the streets.

MOTHER MARY: I wasn't alone. I came with Salome and John. He has become another son to me. He's seen Peter. Herod has him under heavy guard. Four squads of four soldiers each. John had no chance to speak to him. How can I help?

HOSTESS MARY: Sit and rest a while first. Then I suppose we'll need more bread. And these fish need to go out to the courtyard to be grilled.

SALOME: I can do that. I saw the fire in the courtyard on my way in. *(She takes the fish and a long fork and exits)*

HOSTESS MARY: I can't believe how hard this must be for her... James being beheaded. Her other son arrested.

MOTHER MARY: Yes. She grieves. She is having difficulty accepting the fact that God allowed her son James to die. She asks why he was not freed by an angel like John and Peter when the Sanhedrin had them jailed. Why not just a flogging?

HOSTESS MARY: Do you think she has accepted that this will not be an earthly kingdom? That John will not become a ruler? Being a mother is not easy in these times. *(glances at Mary and obviously stiffens as she realizes what she has said to whom)*

MOTHER MARY: It's alright. I knew and accepted my son Jesus' death long before it happened. It didn't make it any easier to watch. But I was somewhat prepared. Salome was not.

HOSTESS MARY: I can personally understand that. John Mark has been drawing attention to himself lately. I worry. As a Christian I know I must accept God's will. But it is hard to understand why he protects some and not the others. Isn't there another way? Besides, the Lord said whatever we asked for in prayer would be granted. We prayed for James. Do you think it was because we did not believe?

MOTHER MARY: His ways are higher than ours. He is beyond understanding. Remember Jesus said "blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Trials will come and some will fall away like seed scattered on rocks.

HOSTESS MARY: Perhaps. It is so hard to know. What is a trial? What is a test? What is God's will?

RHODA: (*entering*) Salome said to tell you the fish are on. Can I tend them?

HOSTESS MARY: Yes, but be careful. Don't burn yourself.

RHODA: I'll be careful. (*exits*)

MOTHER MARY: John Mark is becoming a fine young man. You must be proud of him.

HOSTESS MARY: (*Strained and worried*) I fear for him. He speaks out. (*Salome re-enters*) He has upset many of the Jewish leaders. Not just what he says, although teaching the resurrection is inflammatory enough. They think him disrespectful because of his age.

MOTHER MARY: If he's young and rash he will outgrow it. If he speaks by the power of God, then he must speak no matter how young he is. Jesus was only twelve when he began challenging the elders.

HOSTESS MARY: (*To Mary mother of Jesus*) Yes, but your son was the son of God.

MOTHER MARY: Every believer is a child of God.

RHODA: (*Bursting in*). I need more towels.

HOSTESS MARY: Did you leave the fish to burn?

RHODA: No. Some woman is tending them. She told me to get more towels for washing their feet. I must have washed ten thousand feet already and they just keep coming. I hate washing feet. They're dirty. They stink. (*SALOME enters*)

HOSTESS MARY: (*Reprimanding*) It's the job that falls to the youngest servant.

RHODA: But I hate it. Can't someone else at least help me?

MOTHER MARY: Yes. I'll go help you. (*Reaches a hand to Rhoda*)

HOSTESS MARY: No, Mary. Not you. You're an honored guest. The mother of our Lord.

MOTHER MARY: I insist. My son washed feet, even the feet of the one who betrayed him. Furthermore we are taught that the greatest shall be the least and the servant of all. (*takes Rhoda's hand and they exit*)

SALOME: She is an amazing woman. I can see why God chose her to mother his son.

HOSTESS MARY: Yes, it would take a remarkable woman.

(MARY MAGDELA enters carrying a covered basket)

MARY MAGDELA: (*With a touch of drama*) Greetings. A blessing upon this house. (*Removes her head covering which has hidden her face*)

SALOME: Mary! (*They hug, turning to HOSTESS MARY*) This is Mary Magdela.

HOSTESS MARY: *(Taken aback, a bit fearful)* Yes. Of course. *(Not going to greet her)* The one .... I have heard of you but we have never met. *(finally stepping forward gingerly to take the basket MAGDELA proffers)* Greetings in the name of our Lord. *(Steps back quickly)*

MARY MAGDELA: Can I help? *(Picks up a knife, thumps it into some cheese, staring at HOSTESS MARY who draws back obviously frightened. SALOME stifles a giggle)*

SALOME: Mary, it's alright. She won't hurt you or anything. *(To MARY MAGDELA)* I think Mary has heard about the seven demons *(HOSTESS MARY recovers)*

HOSTESS MARY: *(Chagrined)* I am sorry. Please forgive me. I know Jesus cast them out. I just...

MARY MAGDELA: *(Laughing)* There is nothing to forgive. I have suffered far worse from others. And sometimes it suits me to be given wide berth. Especially with the Romans and Herod's soldiers and even our own priests ready to persecute those of us who follow the Way. *(JOANNA enters)*

HOSTESS MARY: Welcome. This is Joanna. Her husband Cuza manages Herod's household. *(Women greet each other)*

MARY MAGDELA: *(Adamantly with obvious disgust)* Herod. That fox.

JOANNA: He is exactly that. *(nodding, turning to MARY MAGDELA)* I recognize you, now. You were at the crucifixion and at the tomb.

MARY MAGDELA: I was the one who stayed behind and thought Jesus a gardener. I begged him to tell me where the body was. *(shaking her head at her own stupidity)* After all the times I listened to Jesus speak, all the times I watched him heal and cast out demons, I still had no clue. Then suddenly Jesus himself was there.

SALOME: But when you returned to us the men said you were talking nonsense. Peter and John finally decided to see for themselves but the rest wrote you off as a hysterical female. *(MOTHER MARY re-enters)*

MARY MAGDELA: *(chuckling)* Maybe they thought the demons had come back. *(getting serious for once and turning to MOTHER MARY)* Mary, You didn't go to the tomb that morning. I always wanted to ask you about that. Why did you stay behind?

MOTHER MARY: Because I knew Jesus wouldn't be there.

HOSTESS MARY: How could you know that? You watched him die with your own eyes....

MOTHER MARY: Yes I watched, not just on Calvary, but all 33 years of his life. I knew before he performed his first miracle that he could and would.

MARY MAGDELA: *(quietly amazed)* That's right. You coaxed him into turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

MOTHER MARY: I knew he would rise again. That was the only thing that kept me from a total breakdown. But even knowing he would rise, it was terrible. (*MOTHER MARY falls silent, SALOME embraces her, MARY MAGDELA places a hand on her shoulder*)

HOSTESS MARY: Sons are a joy to a mother. But they are also the needle that pierces our hearts.

MOTHER MARY: Sometimes it is a sword - Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce my heart and he was right.

RHODA: (*bursting in*) Someone else is here. A man and his sisters. They came all the way from Bethany! They brought all kinds of food too. A donkey load! They must be rich!

HOSTESS MARY: That would be Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

RHODA: Another Mary! I don't think I can keep a 4<sup>th</sup> Mary straight.

MARY MAGDELA: You won't have to. Mary won't be in to help. She'll be praying with the others. But we can count on Martha's help. (*Chuckling*) She truly has a servant's heart but I suggest we all get busy or she'll assign us things to do. (*To HOSTESS MARY*) She tends to take charge.

HOSTESS MARY: (*Not understanding*) But this is my house. Would she take charge in someone else's house?

ALL: Yes.

MARY MAGDELA: I'll check the fish. I wouldn't want Martha to find me sitting around. (*The women all smile as she exits and they get back to work*)

SALOME: I'll help (*she exits as well*)

RHODA: (*Amazed at all the activity*) How many more people are coming? The house is about to overflow with people.

MOTHER MARY: There were 120 of us gathered in that upper room right after Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives.

RHODA: (*Incredulous*) 120! In one room! We'll never fit 120!

JOANNA: I am concerned about too large a group. Cuza, that's my husband, says Herod is targeting the Christians. People will notice a large gathering. They'll talk. It's just not safe anywhere. After what happened to James....



HOSTESS MARY: When the Sanhedrin put John and Peter in prison, God sent an angel to release them. Do you think he will do the same again?

MOTHER MARY: I do not know. Peter's fate is in God's hands. We aren't called to understand or agree. We are called to submit.

HOSTESS MARY: It is hard being a woman. We have no status. We have no power. All we can do is wait and watch.

MOTHER MARY: We women can serve. We can pray.

HOSTESS MARY: Yes. Prayer is a powerful force.

MOTHER MARY: And we have many gathered here to pray: (SALOME and MARY MAGDELA enter)

MARY MAGDELA: John Mark has taken over the grilling. Funny how men wouldn't be caught dead in the kitchen but they'll grill outside.

HOSTESS MARY: I know this is part of God's plan but why Peter? The Lord left him to lead us. He said Peter would be the Rock. He's healed, taught, and even raised the dead. (*Emphatically*) We need him.

SALOME: He did deny the Messiah.

MARY MAGDELA: We all slip at one time or another. Some of us so far that only God's tender love and grace could possibly reach us.

MOTHER MARY: Peter hasn't let fear control him since then. That's changed. He's been forgiven and was told to strengthen the brothers. Not once since then has he failed to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. He stood up to the Sanhedrin. He defies the chief priests and elders.

MARY MAGDELA: We can only hope that's from God, not Peter's impulsiveness, his rash plunging into the hornet's nest. He's stirred up the believers as well, baptizing gentiles.

SALOME: Everyone is amazed that he and John were just ordinary, unschooled fishermen. They are truly a living testament to God's power - how he can change, how he can empower. You know this for yourself, Mary, how your transformation affected everyone. How it gives hope that anyone, even a demon possessed woman, can be changed.

HOSTESS MARY: Look at how that Saul of Tarsus changed.

MARY MAGDELA: Yes. But we have to rely on the power of the creator, not the created.

SALOME: I see. Perhaps we are relying on Peter, rather than God.

MARY MAGDELA: Maybe. I believe God wants every believer to be his messenger. Everything is changed Salome, everything. It's not just being released from the law. Everyone one of us is called to share the good news. It's not just the priests or the rabbis or even the apostles. Its ordinary people. Even women.

MOTHER MARY: Even mothers

RHODA: (*Entering, exaggeratedly weary sounding*) John Mark said to for me to bring some bread and cheese. (*With more interest*) He and some old man were talking about an angel letting Peter and John out of prison. Did that really happen? (*her voice starts to speed up as she gets more curious*) What does an angel look like? Do you think the angel will let Peter out too?

MOTHER MARY: (*pulls Rhoda to her and holds her*) Only God knows. May his will not ours be done.

MARTHA: (*entering with basket and jar*) Blessings upon this home. (*All the women greet her, Hostess Mary takes the basket*)

MARTHA: (*Businesslike*) I brought bread (*indicating the basket with a nod of her head*). We also brought oil, raisins and wine. Lazarus thought there might be a crowd.

HOSTESS MARY: I appreciate it, Martha.

MARTHA: God has blessed my family richly. And the master taught us to share. (*Looking around assessing the situation and taking charge*) What shall I do? Have we set anything out yet? I thought I smelled fish being cooked. Is someone watching them? Do we have enough bread - there were at least 50 people praying when we arrived and I didn't see Thomas or Matthias yet. How many are you prepared for?

MOTHER MARY: (*With a knowing smile*) This Mary has everything well in hand. But we wouldn't want you to be idle. (*To the others*) Martha makes the most marvelous raisin bread and since you brought raisins...

MARTHA: Yes. I'll get started (*Starts assembling what she'll need*). This could take a while. My sister and I waited four days for an answer to our prayer for Lazarus.

JOANNA: Martha, how did you manage in that four days?

MARTHA: I knew Jesus was the Messiah. Even death, kneels to the Christ, the son of the living God.

JOANNA: When Peter spoke at Pentecost - when Cuza and I were baptized along with thousands of others, Peter didn't seem like a fisherman at all.



HOSTESS MARY: It's public knowledge that he raised Dorcas from the dead. People line the streets just in case his shadow falls on a loved one and heals them.

MARTHA: That's not necessarily a good thing. Remember what happened when it became public Lazarus was raised from the dead? Remember how the leaders decided it was best for one man to die, or even two?

JOANNA: (*Puzzled*) Two?

MARY MAGDELA: Yes, two. They talked about killing Lazarus as well. Stop the talk about resurrection. (*Mulling things over*) Things aren't like at first. At first we were in the favor of the Jews. (*Certain*) Now that's changed. They send men around to round us up like sheep to be slaughtered. (*Rhoda obviously has stopped working and is listening intently to the conversation*)

JOANNA: Like Stephen. They accused him of blasphemy and stoned him. (*Rhoda's face shows some distress at this. Hostess Mary notices and gives a nod to the others to be quiet*)

HOSTESS MARY: Rhoda - we have many guests and need much more water. Fill all the jars by the olive tree in the courtyard with water.

RHODA: All 7 of them?

HOSTESS MARY: Yes, all 7.

RHODA: (*Protesting*) But they're huge. It takes 20 trips to the well to fill each one!!

HOSTESS MARY: Then you best get started. (*Rhoda starts to leave, stops for a hug from MOTHER MARY and lingers*)

JOANNA: Is it safe for her to be out this late?

HOSTESS MARY: The courtyard wall is high. My John Mark has also posted a few of the lads about to keep watch. We'll be warned if there is a problem.

JOANNA: It grows dark. Herod's spies are everywhere not to mention those of the chief priests and the Roman invaders. Maybe you should lock the doors.

HOSTESS MARY: Yes. Rhoda - ask John Mark to lock the doors now that it is dark. Tell him what Joanna just said. We should not let anyone in that we do not know. Now Go (*RHODA exits*) (*Worried*) John is so young to have all this responsibility but since his father died he has to take care of things. I don't know what I would do without him

RHODA: (*Bursting in*) Peter's here, He's at the door!

HOSTESS MARY: (*Sharply*) Rhoda! Now is not a time to play.

MARY MAGDELA: (*Mildly reproving*) Hold on. Sometimes the most unbelievable news is the truest?

RHODA: But it is true. I saw Peter. He's at the door!

SALOME: She could be seeing his angel. *(To Joanna)* Do you think Herod would have executed him tonight - before the trial?

JOANNA: That's not likely. Herod likes show. He'd want to make a spectacle of the execution. He's wound up in public opinion, playing to the masses. I think he'd do anything for attention.

RHODA: *(emphatic)* No, really! It's Peter. Really. *(Pleadingly to MOTHER MARY)* Really. I'm not making it up. Why are you all praying if you don't think he'll be freed?

HOSTESS MARY: Rhoda, you've only seen Peter once. It's dark outside. I believe you think it's Peter.

RHODA: *(Louder)* But it is Peter!

MOTHER MARY: Rhoda *(holding out her hand)* Let's go see. *(They exit)*

JOANNA: Mary! It could be Herod's soldiers. They might be looking for more Christians to put to death! Or someone from the chief priests or even Roman soldiers. . *(Turning to the others)* Maybe we should disperse. *(Those remaining look at each other in silence for a beat)*

HOSTESS MARY: My John! My John Mark! Where is he? *(Short pause of confusion and concern then MOTHER MARY and RHODA enter. Women ad lib)* Was it him? Really him? Is he alright? How did he escape? Where is he now? )

RHODA: *(Shouting above the questions)* He left! *(noise stops)*

MOTHER MARY: *(Taking charge and motioning them to be quiet)* I'll tell you, keep your voices down. We may be in more danger than we realized. They may have already discovered him missing. *(The women prepare to listen)*

RHODA : *( Loud stage whisper)* He said an angel came for him!

HOSTESS MARY: Shhhhhhhh Let Mary talk.

RHODA: But he did! He said an angel made the chains fall off and the city gate opened by itself! *(HOSTESS MARY cuddling Rhoda to quiet her down, turning toward MOTHER MARY)* What did Peter say?

MOTHER MARY: He was sleeping when a light and the angel poking him on the side awoke him. The angel told him to get dressed and follow him. Peter said he thought he was dreaming.

JOANNA: He had a vision before when he was sent to speak to Cornelius.

MARTHA: Peter would have realized it was something from God. Go on.

MOTHER MARY: He was chained between two of the sixteen guards assigned to...

RHODA: 16 guards!! 16 - that's a lot.... (*HOSTESS MARY shushes her*)

MOTHER MARY: All 16 of them were sleeping. (*pauses knowingly for effect*) He said the gates swung open on their own. He got to the end of the street and the angel vanished. He guessed there would be a group of believers here so he came to let us know he was leaving for a while. I imagine there will be quite a commotion when the guards discover their prisoner is missing.

JOANNA: (*In a chilled voice*) Herod will have them all executed. That's the Roman penalty for losing a prisoner condemned to die. You take the condemned man's place. (*A beat of silence as they think about that*)

MARTHA: It won't be long until someone suggests they look here. (*HOSTESS MARY looked frightened by the prospect*)

JOANNA: And with no victim for public trial Herod will be looking for someone else to arrest.

MARTHA: Joanna's right. (*To HOSTESS MARY*) We are in danger and we are putting you and your family in danger, Mary.

HOSTESS MARY: (*stricken and fearful*) My John. What if they come for John? (*MOTHER MARY comes over to her and holds her in an embrace*)

MARTHA: (*Putting her cloak on, taking charge*) Let us take John Mark back to Bethany with us tonight. Lazarus may be able to do something. (*Other woman start gathering their cloaks, items preparing to leave*) (*HOSTESS MARY (starts to weep, MOTHER MARY comforts her)*)

JOANNA: Good idea, Martha. If soldiers find a group of Christians here they just might seize the owner's son.

MARTHA: If it seems best we'll send him even further away.

MOTHER MARY: Isn't his cousin Barnabas returning to Antioch soon?

HOSTESS MARY: Yes.

MARTHA: Then it would be good for John Mark to go with him. At least for a time.

HOSTESS MARY: (*teary, overwhelmed*) But he's my son, my firstborn and my only son. I'm not ready for him to go anywhere. How will we manage without him?

MARTHA: Leave that to me. We'll see you are taken care of as long as needed. My brother Lazarus will be able to help.

MOTHER MARY: Sons cause great joy, but even the best of sons can be a great heartache. Sometimes we have to let them go. *(Takes HOSTESS MARY'S face in her hands and looks directly at her, speaking gently but reassuringly)* He'll be in God's hands, Mary.

HOSTESS MARY: *(still fighting the logic of it)* But he has no provisions. *(her thoughts are scattered)* What should I pack?

MARTHA: *(comforting her with a hug)* I'll see to it that he has everything he needs. We'll send word. God be with you all *(exits)*

JOANNA: Mary, I must go too. Cuza will find out from Herod what's going on and I'll send word when we do hear. We wish to cast no suspicion upon your house so it is best we meet elsewhere for a time. Thank you for opening your home. May God's peace dwell upon it? *(She hugs and leaves)*

RHODA: Do you want me to walk you home, Mary.

MOTHER MARY: *(Kneeling down to be on eye level with her)* No. But thank you. John will take care of me. He'll see I'm safe.

MARY MAGDELA :*( to HOSTESS MARY)* We are all under the protection of the Most High and His son. Even if we must leave this body we know we will be with him in a mansion he has built for us. Do not lose heart. Do not be afraid. Peace to you and this house. *(Hugs HOSTESS MARY then she and MOTHER MARY exit)*

RHODA: Why is John Mark leaving? Where is he going to go?

HOSTESS MARY: I don't know. *(Making up her mind to trust God)* But I do know he will be in the hands of God. That's really all I have to know. *(Taking a deep breath and getting her composure)* I have to gather up his things. He'll need his cloak and a change of clothes, sturdy sandals - Rhoda, get the basket we take to market and bring it here. *(Rhoda starts to leave, turns)*

RHODA: It's hard to be a mother, isn't it?

HOSTESS MARY: Yes, I think it's the hardest thing in the world. But I am so thankful we all have a heavenly father who loves us and cares for us.