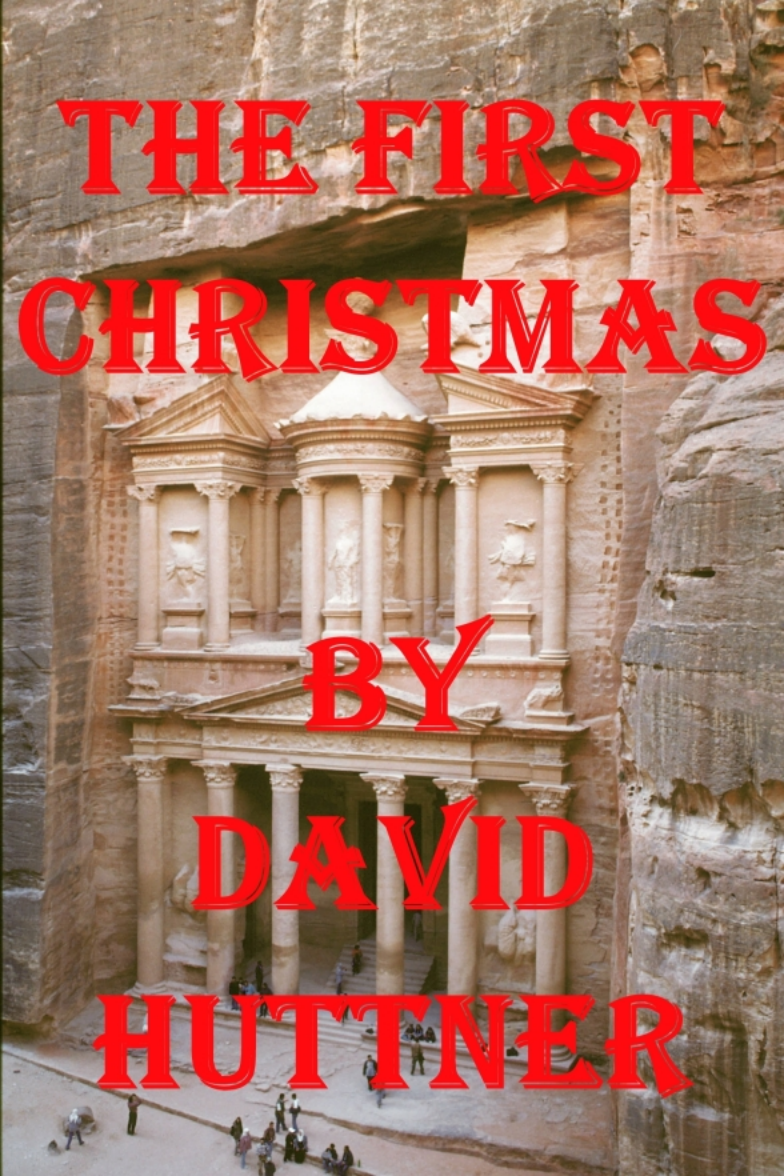


THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

BY
DAVID
HUTTNER



The First Christmas

A Short Play by David Huttner

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Cast of Characters

Paul of Tarsus: presumed author of the Christian myth

Ariston/Joseph: handsome, young man from a Corinthian trading family

Gavrilla/Mary: beautiful, young, Nabataean woman, Ariston's bride

Georgios: unethical, rival, Greek trader

Son #1: Georgios' elder son

Son #2: Georgios' younger son

Head Matron/Midwife: the elder, superior and spokesperson for the group

Assistant Matron/Midwife: one or two as resources permit

Thief #1: vicious cut-throat such as plagued desert trade routes

Thief #2: same as the above

Nabataean Girl: worker in the library

Act I: Awake in the Petra Library, December 25, 49 A.D. (Petra and Damascus were the capitals of the Nabataean Kingdom, which was conquered and absorbed into the Roman Empire in 106 A.D. Petra lies about 150 Km south and slightly east of Jerusalem.)

Scene I: Paul of Tarsus is seated at an oaken library table in front of the curtain, stage left. Between him and the curtain is a “bookcase” consisting of cubbyholes from which rolled parchments protrude. On the curtain to the right of him is a library window. He is bespectacled and has a full, white, untrimmed beard. He is dressed in a full body-length black robe and wears a black skullcap. He is absorbed in the reading of parchments and only slightly distracted when a handsome, patrician young man, Ariston, rushes in from stage left, sits down beside him, picks up one of the parchments and begins to read it. Paul resumes reading and is distracted two or three seconds later by a procession of women. The young, attractive Nabataean woman in the lead exchanges sidelong glances with the young man. The matronly attendants who follow her look disapprovingly at him. All stop for just a moment.

Head Matron: We’ll study in the other reading room today.

With this pronouncement, the young woman is visibly disappointed, but she proceeds with them offstage right.

Ariston: I'm at my wits end.

Paul: (Without looking up from his parchment) You're in love with the girl.

Ariston: Is it that obvious?

Paul: (Without looking up) Yes.

Ariston: But she's totally unapproachable.

Paul: (Without looking up) You're Greek.

Ariston: (Extending his hand) Ariston of Corinth. I was traveling through here with one of my father's caravans—we're traders. Then I saw her and became so smitten that I stayed here in Nabataea. I've been here two weeks, and I still haven't been able to say one word to her.

Paul: She may only speak Aramaic. You don't speak Aramaic, do you? Once more, the Nabataeans are a fiercely nationalistic people. Even if she were to want you, her countrymen would not permit her to marry someone whom they dislike and distrust.

Ariston: Look, I'm young, but I've already traveled enough to know that people are basically the same everywhere. We all want to be loved. At some time or another, we'd all like to have a child or two. We all want a better life for our children, and we all want to contribute and be appreciated for our contributions. The rest is camel dung. If we are both good persons and we love each other, that's all that matters.

Paul: (Smiling warmly and putting an arm on his shoulder) Are you willing to marry her and take her to a more cosmopolitan country, like your own?

Ariston: Of course!

Paul: Are you willing to buy her from her father—with gold?

Ariston: If I can. I have almost run through the little bit of money that I had with me. (Pondering) I suppose I could borrow some money from the house of Georgios.

Paul: You know Georgios?

Ariston: Sure. We're rival traders. He and his two sons are in town now with a caravan. But how do you know them?

Paul: I came here with that caravan, on the outward-bound leg of its journey. They're not friends of yours, are they?

Ariston: Georgios and the whole family are filthy swine. They'll charge me a king's ransom in interest, but they won't hesitate to lend me money.

Paul: Their unsavory character was obvious to me. I was glad to get away from them.

Ariston: So what about my beloved, Gavrilla. Can you speak her language? Can *you* speak Aramaic? Can you help me?

Paul: My boy, in addition to your native Greek, I speak fluent Aramaic and Hebrew. But I would be too conspicuous for this job. I will send my servant boy to intercede for you.

Ariston: I don't know how to thank you Sir. (Offering his hand to shake)

Paul: Just call me Paul, Paul of Tarsus.

Ariston: Forgive me for asking Paul, but you're obviously a highly educated and worldly man. How is it possible for a Jew, who is so much despised within the Roman Empire and the world at large, to be so well traveled?

Paul: My Jewish mother married a Roman citizen, a Pharisee priest from Tarsus. That makes me a hereditary Roman citizen--and inclines me to sympathize with you in your pursuit of an Aramaic woman. As for the discrimination against Jews, my ancestors did kill the last of the gods, you know.

Ariston: No, I don't know. What are you talking about?

Paul: I'm talking about the so-called "Black-headed people," the odd looking slaves whom Hammurabi settled in Judea and who lived there peacefully for several hundred years before my desperate Habiru ancestors poured into the area and slaughtered them off.

Ariston: But haven't all people been guilty of genocide at one time or another. Why should some remote case of it be the source of all the anti-Semitism?

Paul: Because these were very special victims. They were an earlier form of man from whom we modern men branched. All of our religions tell us, albeit symbolically, about a protracted war that was waged all over the world, a war between us and this earlier form of man, our parent species.

Ariston: When did this happen?

Paul: It happened during the 15th or 14th Century, long before men could write. Our religions contain what remains of the oral history of that war. The genocide committed in Judea was just the last and most ignoble chapter of it. After the last of the “Black-headed” people were defeated in battle in the Cassiterties, the Tin Islands, the survivors and the ones that hid out in the high mountains of Central Asia were rounded up and employed as slaves and the victims in religious passion plays, in the Lower Tigris and Euphrates River Valley for about 10,000 years. But my people were unfairly blamed for the whole of it and for causing the extinction of our parent species.

Ariston: So these early men became the gods and the war with them became the subject of our religions?

Paul: Ah...you learn fast. The underlying subject of the entire world’s flood myths and many other sacred myths, yes; but this is not the only subject within our religions. Our religions deal, metaphorically, with all of our universal obsessions, with our unconscious mixed emotions for this group plus three other groups and one individual.

Ariston: Which are ...

Paul: Some much earlier, prehistoric group of primal fathers that I still don't know much about, our ongoing competitors and the parent of the same sex, the competing parent.

Ariston: By ongoing competitors, you mean ...

Paul: For you and me, all other fertile men; for your Gavrilla, all other fertile women. When a young person represses the negative side of his emotions toward the ongoing objects of extreme mixed emotions, his mind is unable to locate the struggle between his conflicting emotions; and he assumes that the struggle is with something outside of himself—a spirit. He “finds religion” when he falsely identifies these spirits with the two groups who were once an obsessional source of similar mixed emotions for his ancestors, with the prehistoric gods of a socially prepared religion, a grossly distorted oral history of a whole people. I think of these four groups as “the four original elements of the godhead.” A fifth group, the Species War victors, gradually contracted the ambivalence of their victims and ascended to pantheons everywhere. This happened because the executioner is hated to the extent that his victim is loved and loved to the extent that his victim is hated. All five groups are becoming amalgamated; and in our modern era, wherein we must suppress our negativity toward our ongoing genetic competitors in the interest of trade, the negative aspect, which we have to “put behind us,” became the hateful “Devil,” and the positive aspect became the loving “God.”

Ariston: Wow! You've given a bit of thought to this!

Paul: Quite so.

Ariston: So ...what are you doing here?

Paul: I'm working to synthesize and improve upon all the best elements of previous and existing cults to create a religion that will unite the whole of the Empire, a religion with which all men can identify, a religion that will enable us to overcome our petty tribal, ethnic and national prejudices, a religion that will civilize the world.

Ariston: Do you think that's possible in a world where there are so many people like Georgios and the Romans, people whose foremost desire is to rob others?

Paul: Maybe not, but it's got to help, and it sure can't hurt.

A resonating female *voice is heard from outside*. "Behold, the virgin, Chaabou, is in labor and will soon deliver onto us the son of God, Dusares, the Lord of lords. Chaabou shall then become the Great Mother Goddess, Allat." Both men walk to the window from where they can gaze upon the street below.

Ariston: You've come to the right place and in time for the solstice birth of the god.

Paul: Yes, but I missed the conception. What can you tell me about it?

Ariston: Well, as you probably know, on the 15th of December, the stone representing the gods—now God--is dug up and carried around the inner

chamber of the Virgin's temple seven times. This magically or symbolically leads to her insemination.

Paul: Yes, by the prehistoric gods, by God. Thus Dusares has both an earthly parent and spirit world parent. He becomes associated with all five of the universal elements of the godhead that I defined for you a moment ago. The supernatural birth of Dusares, Mithra and countless other gods, begs the question of their divinity and power. This was the major flaw of Gilgamesh; his priests didn't have this in their bag of tricks. Carrying the stone seven times around the temple, the number seven, is symbolic of our ambivalence toward our ongoing genetic competitors with whom we must cooperate but with whom we trade countless little injuries and insults seven days a week. But was there any less violence this year?

Ariston: You know about that too! The King is trying to quell the violence, and the priests and priestesses are cooperating with him. They now use only cow's blood on the stone representing the gods. This they pour on it after it is dug up and before it is reburied. They've been urging their followers not to sacrifice or mutilate themselves for the gods. But again this year there were at least two fanatics who severed their penises and slashed their wrists in attempts to sacrifice themselves and douse the stone with their own blood. Royal guards tried to stop them, but they were too late.

Paul: These poor, yokels, within months they'll be eating my dust—even here in their hometown.

Ariston: I don't understand. What do you mean?

Paul: I've already confided more to you than I ever do to strangers. If I tell you more, it's got to be strictly confidential.

Ariston: I'm in your debt, and my lips are sealed.

Paul: OK. Look, we mythmakers –author/priests --are in a race to develop a god that can serve the whole of the empire. The new god has got to seem powerful enough to satisfy all of the people's infantile desires. He's got to be able to grant instant escape from death and all forms of suffering. He's also got to be able to relieve the people's guilt, fear and paranoia without requiring blood sacrifice from them. Blood sacrifice is incompatible with trade. It terrifies strangers who know that they themselves are the likely victims; and in the modern world, this group includes you merchants who have to be able to travel and approach foreigners with goods in hand instead of weapons. In order to relieve the peoples' guilt, fear and paranoia, in order to totally quench the gods' thirst for revenge and eliminate the need for further sacrifices, the new god must be the ideal, sacrificial lamb. He must be the amalgamated Son, the killer and would-be killer of the four amalgamated, non-derivative and universal elements of the godhead—all of them fathers of one sort or another. Moreover, like Marduk—of the Babylonian Creation Epic—this Son must give himself up for sacrifice by the gods, and the people must believe in him as the Son of God and participate in his sacrifice by symbolically and magically drinking his blood and eating his body.

Ariston: But why do we have to satisfy the dead gods' thirst for revenge? Why does somebody have to buy us a pardon? Can't we just forget about them?

Paul: The gods are unconsciously understood to be angry due to the negative side of our ambivalence toward these four groups. The primal fathers were killed by their sons. We killed our parent species. There's a part of every one of us that would like to kill our same sex parent and our ongoing genetic competitors. Forgetting all this negativity is the tact taken by the Buddhists. They preach that separate things are mere illusions, that there is a unity to all matter and energy in the universe. Of course, that's true, but only with respect to chemistry and physics. It's not true with respect to our biology. Like it or not, we are all equipped with a nervous system that ends in our fingers and toes and makes us respond appropriately to pleasure and pain. Moreover, the Buddhists hypocritically vacillate in this message in order to fleece the people. This message is followed by symbols that unconsciously remind people of the Species War victims, the dead gods, and pique their guilt with respect to the gods. These symbols, for example the long ears and the stocky body type of our parent species, are then followed by the pronouncement that the road to heaven, "nirvana," begins with the abandonment of all earthly desires. The last two messages predictably motivate people to pitch coins into every pot and pool that the Buddhists associate with the gods. This hypocrisy and exploitation notwithstanding, the message that all is illusion can only be effective in the East where the Species War was less violent due to there having been fewer cul-de-sacs there, fewer peninsular areas where our parent species was forced to fight.

Easterners also have a female dominated (relatively nonviolent) society. Eastern women appear to have moderated the violence in their prehistory.

Yet another strategy for dealing with guilt, fear and paranoia about the gods is the convoluted Hebrew strategy. Even though we Jews killed the last of the gods, we borrowed the practice of monotheism from the Egyptians and became the first people to steadfastly practice it. Citing our monotheism, we Jews claim to be God's chosen people, people who are off the hook for the crimes of the past—provided that we worship Him, follow the Golden Rule, etc. But if only Jews are the chosen people, what are the rest of the Empire's citizens to do to avoid the wrath of the angry gods? They need another solution, and that's what my competitors and I are working to develop.

Now, as I said before, the new god also has to seem powerful enough to grant instant escape from death and all forms of suffering. I'll have my Jesus perform all the same miracles performed by the Hebrew prophets...

Ariston: Wait a minute, Sir. Let me get this straight. You said that four or five groups of ancestors and relatives condensed into God and Devil: the primal fathers--some very early group of murdered ancestors? The other groups were the parent of the same sex, our parent species, our ongoing genetic competitors and--the derivative group--the killers of our parent species. Why these four groups and this one individual?

Paul: I told you, but it went over your head. Listen again. Men have always been obsessed with two prehistoric, ancestral groups *toward whom they have universally felt extreme mixed emotions, **ambivalence***. These prehistoric groups are the primal fathers and the victims of the Species War. The victors of the Species War gradually contracted the mixed emotions, the ambivalence, felt toward their victims. The identities of these groups have been gradually and symbolically banished to our unconscious minds due to guilt about the parental status of them. Are you with me?

Ariston: Ok ...

Paul: Now, when you have extreme mixed emotions, love and hate, ambivalence toward someone, especially toward someone who is a parent of some sort; you have a big hang-up. If you merely hate someone, you can avoid and forget about him, her or them. Not so when you have extreme mixed emotions toward someone you need, toward a parent of some sort. You become obsessed with this person or group. This person or group becomes associated with every difficult problem, every tough decision and every momentous event. Consequently, men have always hoped that and children have always assumed that the persons with godlike—subjective--status within their own minds enjoy the same status—objectively--within the outside world. Now, pay attention, when we myth-makers succeed in condensing all of these ancestral objects of extreme ambivalence, all of these universal gods, into one mythological character, into one symbol for them or their killers, we are justified in equipping the new god with all the wished-for powers, the power to control the vagaries of nature, the power to perform miracles and the power to

overcome death. Indeed, such a mythological symbol **MUST** have all of these powers because, in combination, the countless people whom he represents have them. In combination, the four original elements of the godhead are timeless, universal and potentially unlimited in power. But these local yokels, these Dusares priests have only got a few pieces of the puzzle. They obviously don't even know who the universal elements of the godhead are. My god will bury theirs.

Ariston: Wow, it sounds like you've got it all figured out.

Paul: Not quite, I'm still working on his solstice birth—which is why I've come here.

A female voice from outside announces: Behold, the head is appearing. The Son of God is coming out of the Virgin.

Ariston: I think I'll be getting home before all hell breaks loose out there. (Shaking Paul's hand) It was a pleasure to meet you Sir. Please do try to communicate my love and honorable intentions to Gavrilla. Hers is the pink granite house, on this street, three blocks to the east. I'm staying at the Traders' Inn.

Paul: You can count on me to do what I can, young man. But I can't promise how they'll respond.

Ariston shrugs resignedly and exits stage right. Paul, who has been standing by the window, walks to the table and sits down. Traditional,

festive Middle Eastern music begins. Paul listens intently for a few seconds before slowly falling asleep. As his head sinks to the table, the lights fade out. Paul exits before lights go on again, but the “the library” remains in place, in front of the curtain, stage left.

Act II, The Dream Act: The curtain rises and Paul is standing downstage, left and observing the action downstage center. A CD at http://putumayo.com/catalog/item.php?item_number=220&referrer=googleAD sells for \$15.98. The following songs on that CD are appropriate as background music between the scenes of Act II: Sharif's "Shiraz," Nabiha Yazbeck's "Astahel," Bahia El Idrissi's "Arhil," Nickodemus' "Cleopatra in New York" and Yasser Habeeb's "Elama." However, before using any of these recordings in a commercial, theatrical production, you should obtain permission from the copyright holder.

Scene I: Ariston and Gavrilla are center stage. She is seated sidesaddle, facing the audience on an ass that he is leading across the stage, left to right. Where resources permit, a background mural should scroll to the left and a people mover should move to the left whenever Ariston and the donkey walk, so they can appear to be traveling but never leave center stage. The landscape is dry, rocky and barren.

Paul: (Calling out to Ariston) So, I see you won the hand of the fair Gavrilla. (Gavrilla laughs her characteristic laugh, which is a combination of gaiety and mockery.)

Ariston: (Sighing in a resigned fashion that belies the explicit meaning of his words) Yes, I don't know how I can ever thank you, Paul.

Paul: I'll tell you how. You two are going to help me work out the details of my god's virgin birth... (Gavrilla smiles and swivels to look back at Paul,

revealing to the audience that she is due to give birth.) ...And I see that the lady is typecast for her role!

Ariston: I don't understand. How can we help you write a myth?

Paul: As actors, Son. I need actors to help me visualize the birth of baby Jesus.

Gavrilla: "Jesus," who's "Jesus?"

Paul: "Jesus" is my new god. He was a radical rabbi who was crucified by the Romans about 17 years ago.

Ariston: If he died seventeen years ago, how can she be giving birth to him now?

Paul: (Pondering and self-absorbed as he replies) Because now is 50 years ago.

Ariston: How come we never heard of this rabbi? Are you sure you're all right?

Paul: (Gruffly) I had to invent him. Have patience and work with me. As I once tried to explain to you back in the library, my new supreme God, who will surpass and supersede all previous gods, must be, like Mithra and Dusares, both of the world and of the spirit world because he is the killer or would-be killer of all four original and universal elements of the godhead, four of the five groups of ancestors and relatives with whom we are obsessed owing to having extreme mixed emotions toward these groups. Of

the four killers or would-be killers, the Species War victors are the most important group and Jesus' principal aspect because they are themselves one of the universal elements, albeit a derived element, of the godhead. Two of the four original groups, the primal fathers and our father species, were exterminated long ago and are of the spirit world. The other two, the competing parent, the parent of the same sex, and the believer's ongoing genetic competitors, are still in this, real, material world. So my supreme God, the symbolic killer of all four original groups of gods, the supreme sacrificial goat whose sacrifice buys a pardon for the rest of us, must be a historical figure with supernatural powers that include the abilities to pass between the two worlds. He must be able to survive the death of the body (like Marduk, Mithra, Nintur, Odysseus and every fertility god that ever slaked the gods' thirst for revenge).

But that is precisely the problem! No real historical person has such powers. The Gilgamesh priests took Gilgamesh, the most powerful king of whom they knew for their god. But everybody knew that the most he had done was build a wall around Uruk and its holy temple, Eanna.

(turning toward the audience and talking more to himself and them than to Ariston and Gavrilla) My Jesus is fictional, but I'll make him look historical. Most people in the River Jordan area are illiterate. Few records are kept. Moreover, Jesus has no close, surviving friends or relatives, so that explains why nothing has been inscribed about him anywhere. I've combed the libraries in search of Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew information. Jesus is a popular name in the region, but there is no record of a 33 year old, radical

rabbi, like him, with a brother named James. When Jesus was about 33 years old, he was crucified by the Romans, by likely instruments of the wrathful gods. That's it. Other than that, there's zilch on the guy. (Turning slightly, toward Ariston and Gavrilla) So, do you see what that means?

Ariston: It means he was no bright and shining star.

Paul: Wrong! It means that I'm free to write the rest of his story. My cohorts (real or invented) and myself can say that he performed all of the miracles attributed to the Hebrew prophets. We can equip "Jesus" with whatever powers the new supreme and universal God requires.

Ariston: (To Gavrilla) Honey, remind me never to play poker with this man.

Gavrilla: (Laughing) Oh, don't be so critical. I like Paul. But, Paul, you really are a con artist.

Ariston: Paul, are you getting a kickback from Georgios, from the loan that enabled me to buy Gavrilla?

Paul: (Indignantly) Wouldn't think of it. (Sympathetically) How much did he demand in interest?

Ariston: Twenty-two percent.

Paul: The *ganef*! Don't worry Ariston. I'll get him to reduce the rate tremendously.

Ariston: How are you going to do that?

Paul: Don't you worry about it. He'll reduce it when he meets you in Bethlehem, a little town five Km southwest of Jerusalem.

Gavrilla: Bethlehem? We're going to the hospital in Jerusalem.

Ariston: We couldn't have the baby in Petra. Everybody there knows we've only been married for seven months, but why Bethlehem?

Paul: Because King David was from Bethlehem. Quiet now, I'm thinking. (With his fingers on his temples, eyes closed, meditatively) The virgin birth scene has got to be primitive and...for some reason...around other animals...Yes! In a barn!

Gavrilla: (Discreetly to Ariston) Maybe you're right. Maybe he's not all right. (Commandingly) Get me a drink.

Ariston: Surely you don't expect us to tell people that she's been knocked up by the prehistoric gods of the spirit world?

Paul: By the Holy Spirit.

Ariston: If that were the case, I never would have bought her. She is definitely NOT the sweet, quiet and obedient girl I thought I was marrying.

Paul: (As Gavrilla laughs gaily and mockingly) They never are.

Ariston: If we try to tell anyone that she's been knocked up by the Holy Spirit, I'll be the laughing stock of the known world.

Paul: No, no. After I get the details all worked out, we're going to say that this is what happened 50 years ago, to...uh...Joseph and...uh...Mary and our Savior, the baby Jesus. All three are Jews because, as I already explained to you and as everyone still knows—at least unconsciously, my Jewish ancestors killed the last members of our parent species, the principal gods. Jesus, the Savior who dies for our sins, is the killer or would-be killer of all four original and universal elements of the godhead, so he has to be a Jew. Moreover, you're going to Bethlehem--and they went to Bethlehem--because they were fleeing the wrathful King Herod. A prophet had told Herod that a son born in the same year as Jesus would overthrow him. So Herod decreed that every male child born in that year be murdered. (Gavrilla gasps in horror.)

Ariston: Even Harod the Great wasn't that crazy!

Paul: Of course, it's just a device. All the supreme gods have been prophesied to overthrow their royal grandfathers and have been accordingly hunted down at birth by their grandfathers. This little drama symbolically foretells of our species overthrowing our parent species, and the murderous wrath of the latter gives the former a needed excuse. The myths of Acrisios, Gilgamesh, the Hebrew Moses, Irish Lugh, Celtic Tuathal Tecmar, Cyrus the Great, Aslaug (daughter of Sigurd and Brunhild) and Zeus all deployed the same devise.

Gavrilla: (Commandingly to Ariston) Pickles, that's what I need. Why didn't you bring some pickles?

Ariston: I don't know. Darling, remind me never to play poker or buy a horse from this guy. (Turning to Paul) But Mr. Slick, you've got a serious problem here. You say your Jesus was born 50 years ago, right?

Paul: Right.

Ariston: Herod the Great died 54 years ago, four years before your Jesus was born.

Paul: OK, so we'll include that devise in only one version of the myth. People are going to believe whatever they want to believe. I'm just going to tell them what they want to hear.

Ariston: Can you promise to get Georgios to reduce my interest rate to some reasonable figure?

Paul: Sure.

Ariston: Then you've got a deal. We'll see you at the public stables in Bethlehem.

Lights fade out signaling the end of Scene I.

Scene II: As lights come up, Paul is where he was, downstage left. Georgios, his two sons and two thieves have replaced Ariston and Gavrilla at center stage. The two surly-looking thieves are in tattered and mismatched but expensive clothing such as what they might have stolen from their victims.

Georgios and sons have four, heavily laden pack animals. The thieves have a fifth animal, also heavily laden. The thieves exchange their animal for one of Georgios'.

Thief #1: It's always a pleasure to do business with you, Georgios.

Georgios: The pleasure is all ours, my friend. We'll be returning in about a month. Should we bring anything out of the ordinary?

Thief #2: The usual supplies will be fine.

Georgios: (As they bow farewell to one another) All the best. (Thieves exit upstage left or right.)

Paul: (Facing the audience and calling out loudly) Georgios ...

Georgios: (Startled and unable to locate the person behind the voice) Paul, is that you?

Paul: Yes. I see that you're trading with the thieves, fencing their stolen goods.

Georgios: Thieves? Why, those two good lads are local farmers.

Paul: Not in this region they're not. This is the most remote, barren and arid stretch of the King's Highway. We both know that there are only thieves in these parts. Once more, if they were farmers, then there would be foodstuffs on that animal that they exchanged for one of yours. Do you

care to show me what's on it? (Georgio's two sons converge defensively around the animal and ready the daggers at their belts.)

Georgio: Well, I could have been mistaken, but I thought they were farmers.

Paul: Then you always make the same mistake at the same part of the highway because I remember seeing you make the same sort of transaction when I accompanied you on the outward-bound trip.

Georgios: Look Paul, the Nabataeans are all thieves. They always have been. The King himself is a thief.

Paul: At one time, yes. But they are improving themselves, and even if the King's taxes amount to more than what you thieves steal, people would rather pay the taxes because they are rationally and not arbitrarily levied. Moreover, the King knows that if he doesn't put an end to thievery in Nabataea, the people will welcome in the Romans to replace him. The most recent royal proclamation extended the death penalty to anyone found guilty of aiding and abetting thieves. It would really be a pity to see your heads on stakes outside the gates of Petra.

Georgios: Ok, Paul. What do you want?

Paul: For starters, I want you to go to the public stables in Bethlehem.

Georgios: Where the hell is Bethlehem?

Paul: It's a little town south of Jerusalem. It will be only a short detour for you. Oh...and don some of the silk clothes and golden jewelry you're carrying. I want you to look like three oriental kings.

Son #1: (To his father) Has he completely lost it?

Georgios: (Furtively) He never had a full deck to play with.

Paul: Keep your heads. Humor me.

Georgios: OK. We'll be there.

Lights fade out.

Scene III: As lights rise, we see that the stage has become a stable, the aisle of the stable running up and down stage. Gavrilla is lying in the center on top of a haystack. We see only her lower legs and her occasionally extended right arm, which holds a large dill pickle, but we hear her intermittent cries from labor pains. One or two midwives are attending to her. We also hear occasional sounds of the horses and asses in the stalls and the chickens, goats, ducks and piglets that roam freely in the aisle. In front of the haystack is a hay-filled manger, waiting to accommodate the child. Ariston is seated on a milking stool to the left of the manger, wringing his hands nervously. Paul is looking on like a film director from downstage, left.

Georgios and his sons: (From offstage right) Can we come in yet?

Paul: Not yet. Wait until the child is born.

Georgios: It's getting awfully cold out here. (Groans issue from Gavrilla.)

Paul: It won't be long.

Midwife: That's it honey. Push. I see it coming.

Gavrilla: (Moaning) Oh, yes, yes.

Midwife: That's it. More. Harder. (We hear a slap and the "Waaa" cry of the baby. All eyes are focused on the haystack for a few seconds. Then the midwife comes forward with a baby doll in hands.) It's a beautiful baby girl!

Paul: For the record, it was a boy.

Midwife: (Confused and looking at the father) What? (Ariston makes the cuckoo sign to tell her that Paul is off his rocker.)

Paul: When all of this happened, fifty years ago, it was a boy, the Christ child. (Raising his voice) Wise men, you can enter now. (The three crooked merchants trudge in from stage right, wearing ill-fitting silk, jewelry and crowns.) Let all rejoice, for the Virgin Mary, conceived of the Holy Spirit, has given birth today, on Solstice Day.

Son #1: (An exasperated Ariston looks heavenward) It's August! Virgin? Conceived by the Holy Spirit? Her?

Georgios: What will people think when word gets around that Ariston bought a bride just days before it became apparent that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit? (The merchant/thieves laugh uproariously.)

Son #2: (Interrupting their laughter) No! Don't tell anybody. If word of this gets out, everyone will want to trade with him, and the rest of us will be ruined! (They laugh even more uproariously.)

Paul: For the record, his name is not Ariston. It's Joseph. Now, behold, one and all that these three kings of the Far East, the Magi, have come bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to our Savior, the Newborn King of kings.

Son #2: (All three looking at each other confusedly) Who said anything about gifts?

Paul: What, you didn't bring the gold, frankincense and myrrh that befit this newborn king of kings? Then your gift shall be that you shall reduce the interest rate on his father's loan from 22 to 2 percent. (The merchants are too flabbergasted to react, but Ariston, until now the image of gloom and doom, becomes exhilarated.)

Ariston: Whatever you say, Paul buddy. Can we arrange any more tributes to the...uh-Newborn King of kings?

Paul: That will do. You see, someone other than the mythmaker has to announce to the world the unfolding of the major events in the life of the god—his virgin birth, his sacrificial death at the hands of the gods or their

surrogates and his resurrection. For example, that's why men have to run through the streets of Babylon heralding that Marduk is missing when he is about to be punished and ascended to heaven by the gods. Here, these three kings from the Far East and the star they followed to get here play that role. They put the people on notice that their savior has arrived.

Ariston: Paul, can't we move Mary and the Newborn King to better accommodations? It stinks in here. You know, there are all these animals!

Paul: Sure. Get your things together. (Facing the audience, pondering, eyes closed and fingers on temples) The animals are necessary to symbolize our evolution from the lower animals. In his capacity as the Victors of the Species War, Jesus represents our species *per se*, the pinnacle of evolution, the supreme animal to date. In their myths, in our grossly distorted oral history, our post deluge ancestors obscured the parental identity of the deluge—that is Species War—victims. Killing a parent species made them feel supremely guilty, but hiding the parental status of the victims had the effect of severing our link with the animal kingdom. The “wise men” are symbolic of our parent species, the deluge (Species War) victims. They are “wise” because they too were supreme on Earth before we displaced them. They are on the scene not only to pay tribute to their successor, but also to symbolically restore our link with the rest of the animal kingdom. (The midwife pushes a cart forward, a cart in which the mother lies with babe in arms. She is once more chomping on a large, dill pickle.)

Georgios: This is all very clever, Paul; but do you really think anyone is going to buy this road apple pie that you're cooking up?

Paul: Maybe not here in the Mid East where there have been so many thousands of cults and people are familiar with all of these mythological devices. But those hayseeds in the West are sure to buy it.

Ariston: A related question but one more to the point is “Should they buy it?”

Paul: Huh?

Ariston: As you yourself admit, you’re creating a fiction and passing it off as historical truth.

Paul: A fiction that metaphorically simulates the historical truth, which is why sacred myths are so powerful – besides, what is truth?

With this, all jaws drop; but we hear only stuttering and aborted answers as everyone ponders the question.

Paul: The truth is all the knowledge that advances human evolution, especially our ability to lead happier and longer lives. Since we don’t live in a vacuum but in one, material universe and, for the time being, planet Earth; the Truth includes only correct historical information about what has happened because only that information can help us learn the laws of this natural world that we must try to ever-better adapt to. But advancing human evolution requires not only more natural science but also becoming more civilized and cooperating better with one another. As a Greek, as a born philosopher, you ought to know, Ariston, the ethos of the modern era.

Ariston: Ethical reciprocity, the Golden Rule, don't do unto others what you wouldn't want done to you.

Paul: (Aside to the audience) He's a little slow but one of our better boys. (For all) Exactly! Do we have a hierarchical, world government with a hierarchy of family planning committees that authorized you and Gavrilla to have this baby?

Gavrilla: Nobody's gonna tell me ...

Ariston: (Emphatically) Hush! (Sheepishly) No.

Paul: And is your rich family (that a few generations ago was as unscrupulous as Georgios is now) limited in all the privileges and advantages that they bestow upon you, class privileges and advantages that prevent the rest of us from enjoying equal opportunity?

Ariston: (Sheepishly) No, so what's your point?

Paul: My point is that all of our problems – at bottom – are due to us not extending the Golden Rule to the most important sphere of social life – to our reproductive competition.

Ariston: And how must we do that?

Paul: By recognizing that life and death decisions are not the responsibility of “the gods” but of us as individuals and by forbidding all of the unjust behavior that occurs within this sphere, behavior that violates the Golden Rule – in other words – by inaugurating population control and equal

opportunity throughout the world. But people cannot yet take the truth. In order to learn something basic about yourself, you have to be able to make the changes that that knowledge implies. People are still much too traumatized to dispense with their “gods.” They are especially traumatized by the Great Flood that occurred due to a global frenzy of slashing and burning to claim possession of the land after the discovery of horticulture, a Great Flood that took about half the world’s population and was universally believed to have been brought by our parent-species gods as punishment for exterminating them, punishment that turned these gods and the Species War into taboo subjects that had to be wiped from our memories. Moreover, we lack the technical means of birth control, population control. So a metaphorical truth is the most that people can cope with at the present time. The more precise, historical truth will have to await a more advanced age.

Midwife (the eldest if there are more than one): Judging by the Dusares priests, if I were you, I’d be more concerned about the kind of man who is going to preach this stuff to others.

Paul: What?

Midwife: What kind of man can believe in the virgin birth nonsense so strongly that he is willing to preach it to others?

Paul: What? Who?

Midwife: Only a man who never really knew his father or a man who lacked an effective father (a father that loved him and was loved and

desired by the mother)—this is the only type of man who can believe in that nonsense.

Paul: So?

Midwife: So? Don't you know who and what these men are?

Paul: No.

Midwife: Well, let me give you some hints. When a woman has a child but no husband or no husband whom she loves and desires, she becomes overly affectionate with the child. She attempts to get some of the physical love she needs from the child. Now, the normal male child learns to identify with his father because the child must become like his father in order to win the love of his mother or someone like her. But that doesn't happen in the case of the male child who lacks an effective father, a father who is loved by the mother. This child learns to identify only with his mother. When he matures sexually and seeks a love object outside of the family, he seeks someone with whom he can renew the powerful and erotic relationship that he once enjoyed with his mother. Only now, he is the mother, and he seeks a young boy to play the role that he once played in that relationship.

Georgios: Uh, I don't get it.

Midwife: The virgin birth priests are all PEDOFILES, idiot!

Paul: Well, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. For the time being, we need to improve distant neighbor relations in the interest of trade. We

need to create a religion that can create some semblance of unity and foster cooperation within the empire.

Ariston: (Picking up a packed bag and reaching for the handles of the cart) OK. Whatever you say, but can we leave now, Paul? It stinks in here.

Paul: In a minute. (Pondering, downstage, facing the audience) There's one more element that's missing here...Joseph's occupation...Let's see, who were the fathers of the Species War Victors? (Imploring the audience) Can any of you help me? (Brushing them off) Oh, of course not ...I got it! The inventors of the bow and arrow! The invention of the bow and arrow is what made it possible for our ancestors to defeat our parent species. The members of our parent species had evolved with and been selected for their ability to use the spear. Carpenters, wood workers, symbolize the inventors of the bow and arrow. That's why carpenters were sacred for so long in so many parts of the world. My Joseph, Jesus' father, must be a carpenter. Of course, the inventors of the bow and arrow bore no guilt for the Species War because technology is morally neutral. It can be used for good or bad purposes. That's why, in the Babylonian Creation Epic, Tagtug, the symbolic inventor of the bow and arrow, only accompanied Marduk to his trial by the gods. The inventor was, in a sense, the father of the user and had to accompany the son as a father accompanies a son to juvenile court. But Tagtug or his latter day stand-in, Tammuz, was never put on trial.

After my supreme Jesus is sacrificed in the spring to magically revive the vegetation and slake the gods' thirst for revenge, he shall be resurrected and ascend into heaven to sit upon the right hand of the amalgamated

Father and the Holy Ghost. The parent species fathers are also the “Holy Ghost or Spirit,” the angriest aspect of “God,” the aspect that punishes and takes our lives, because we all benefited from their extermination by inheriting the earth.

During his persecution, death and resurrection, Jesus must wear a crown of thorns. The crown of thorns symbolizes more than just his suffering for our sakes, the suffering that won us a pardon. As a wooden crown, it also symbolizes the Stone Age, the Old Stone Age, the Paleolithic, the era before the Species War was fought, when there was no metal for crowns or anything else and the only stone tools were the big clumsy ones needed to chop trees and make spears.

Ariston: I foresee another problem for your god, Paul. Most people are so ignorant, they might not have the faintest awareness, even a subconscious awareness, of Jesus’ crime.

Paul: If average people weren’t still subconsciously aware of the Species War, the Romans wouldn’t be using crucifixion as the preferred form of execution. Being nailed to a wooden cross is symbolic of our parent species victims being bound to a large tree and shot full of arrows until they bled to death. But you have a point, I could add a Tagtug-like device to augment their subconscious awareness. Ah, yes! He was sentenced to death with a murderer and a thief, criminals of the worst sort; but the other two were pardoned just prior to crucifixion. So Jesus’ crimes of murder and theft are of a much higher order, crimes committed directly against the gods.

Georgios: I don't get it.

Ariston: Me neither.

Paul: Don't you see, they are only common criminals. Jesus, as the Species War victors, as the killer of the parent species gods, is the supreme murderer and thief.

Georgios: Thief too? How so?

Ariston: I see – because we took the whole world, Earth, from our parent species.

Paul: Precisely!

The three merchant/thieves: (Pathetic and imploring) Paul, it stinks in here. Let's get out of here guy.

Paul: Yes, go forth and tell the world that the Savior was born on Christmas Day!

Lights fade out.

Act III: Awake once more in the Petra Library, which has remained in front of the curtain, stage left, throughout the play.

Scene I: A Nabataen girl, a worker in the library, awakens the sleeping Paul.

Girl: Sir, the library is closing. It's time to leave.

Paul: (smiling) Oh, yes, I was dreaming!

Girl: Was it a good dream Sir?

Paul: It was a very good dream, not wholly original, but the most perfect of its kind. In fact, it was an immaculate conception that will fascinate and influence men for two thousand years.

As lights slowly dim, we hear Hayden's "Halleluiahs Chorus": "King of kings, halleluiahs, halleluiahs, and Lord of lords, halleluiahs, halleluiahs, and He shall reign forever and ever..."

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I, David Huttner, was born in Chicago in 1949. I am the author of numerous, self-published social science works and unpublished screenplays. I graduated from CUNY Law School and passed the NY State Bar Exam in 1998. I've worked as a realtor and stockbroker. For most of my working life, I drove a NYC taxi. I moved to China in 2004 where I now live in retirement.

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