

Jesus Life: Mary's Story

Written by Joanna Richards ©

First Performed December 2012 at Elk Lake Baptist Church, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Director Notes: This play is based on scripture and imagines the life of Jesus through the eyes and experiences of Mary as an old woman. Old Mary carries this play and can hold a book on her lap with her lines if substantial memorization is not possible. The play is divided into three scenes but flows as one seamless narration. It could also be done as an Easter play.

Read through the script and assign parts based on the capability of the kids to memorize lines and portray the character effectively. The age recommendations are suggestions. Actions and lighting are indicated in brackets and italics.

Friendly Disclaimer: This is a creative work from the imagination of a mother. The intent is to give fresh perspective on what it may have been like to watch Jesus grow up. It is not intended to detract from or add to scripture in any way.

Actors:

Old Mary: Role for an older teen or adult

Young Mary: Role for a tween or teen girl

Young Jesus: Role for 7 to 12 year old boy (could use a very young child for his first scene)

James: Very brief non-speaking role for 5 to 7 year old boy

Jesus sister: Very brief non-speaking role for a 4 to 7 year old girl

Jeremiah: Non-speaking role for a 7 to 10 year old boy

Three Teenage boys: Very brief non-speaking role for three tweens or teens

Three Men: Very brief non-speaking role for three men (two men would also work well)

Total Actors Required: Minimum 11

Set-up and Instructions:

The **stage** is split into two parts, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the stage is Old Mary, sitting in a comfortable chair with blankets and a book on her lap; the lights stay up on her portion of the stage for almost the entire play. The remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ of the stage is where the action happens and lights go up and down as the action plays out, referred to in the script as "Action Stage". If your church only has the option to have lights on or off for the whole stage, use a dimmer switch for the transitions.

The **backdrop** can be very simple (e.g., black curtain) or set up to look like ancient times.

Costumes really help the kids get into character and help the audience to suspend their disbelief.

Scene 1: Birth and Early Years Jesus

(Lights slowly come up on Old Mary as she starts to speak. Her first line is in total darkness.)

Old Mary: I remember the day we brought little Jesus into the world like it was yesterday. They say you never forget the details of the birth of your firstborn and they're right. There were some very special things about the conception of our Jesus but everything else was as normal as could be. His delivery was 8 hours. My cousin Elizabeth tells me I'm lucky. Her little John was 16. Ugh. It was a little awkward for Joseph and me as we'd never been together, you know in the normal husband and wife way, but after my first scream he shed his shyness, and queasiness, and was really an excellent midwife. I had met with the midwives in town before we left for Bethlehem so I knew what to expect, in a very general way. Birth, afterbirth, make sure the bleeding stops.

Jesus wasn't a good sleeper until about three months. He seemed to get a bit of gas most nights which would keep him up until he got it out of his system. I didn't mind though. I would sit and rock him and sing lullabies. Joseph would too, if he didn't have to work early the next day.

Oh we doted on our little Jesus. With your first, every little thing they do is so amazing. First smiles. First giggles. Rolling then crawling then walking and oh my goodness the running.

(Lights come up on Action Stage. Jesus runs around on stage followed by Young Mary. He climbs onto props on stage (suggest different sized boxes or anything sturdy), jumps off them and eventually falls. Young Mary watches and comes to him when he falls, dusts off his knee, helps pick him up and walks him off stage. The action can take longer than Old Mary's speaking below. Old Mary can watch as these are her memories. Lights go down on Action Stage)

Jesus loved to run. Run and climb. You'd turn your back for a minute and he'd be getting out and up. His balance was not too good so he had more than his fair share of skinned knees.

I wasn't sure what to expect of our little man growing up. When you're 14 and an angel shows up to tell you you're going to give birth to a baby boy that will be called the Son of the Most High who will reign over the house of Jacob, that his kingdom will never end, you think to yourself, it's going to be very difficult to keep this little man's ego in check. But that was never the way with Jesus. He had a heart as good as gold from the start. It seemed like for every lesson Joseph and I would teach him, he would teach us three.

(Jesus, James and his sister come on Action Stage in the dark. Lights come up on Action Stage. The scene below is acted out by Jesus, Jeremiah and Jesus sister)

I remember watching him play with his little brother and sister. His brother idolized him and his sister was annoyed by him. He would never play with her for long enough. Too much sitting, not

enough action. After a few minutes of playing nicely with her and her dolls, he and James would turn the dolls into Roman soldiers or Egyptians and Hebrews and start playing war games. But this was the thing. Every time James would cut down a Roman soldier doll, Jesus would have one of the other dolls say a little prayer and bring the soldier back to life. It was the most curious thing for a 6 year old.

(Lights go down on Action Stage. Children leave, three men come on and sit at a table as lights come up, miming drinking and talking. Mary continues to speak during this transition.)

All of the male adults in Jesus' life *hated* the Roman soldiers. His uncles would come over, drink too much, and talk about the way things should be. They'd kibitz about the good old days when *Jews were in charge of Jews* and how one day God would bring a king like David to destroy the Roman Empire and restore our rightful place as rulers. Of course, my heart wanted to think a better time was coming. I had some girlfriends that had been treated very roughly by the Romans but it didn't seem like there was any point in fighting back from where I sat. Better to pray.

(Lights go down on Action Stage. Men leave. Jesus comes back on stage. Lights come up on Jesus as he sits and reads quietly while mouthing the words.)

Scene 2: Tween Jesus

We never told his siblings about the unique way Jesus came into the world. We didn't want them to feel any less special. But I always felt they somehow knew. The warmth and tenderness Jesus conveyed was remarkable, even as a little boy. By 12 his command of our Jewish teachings was beyond Joseph's. He had an intensity about learning the word of God that seemed almost manic. He literally craved it and would consume it day and night.

(Young Mary joins Jesus on stage and they begin walking.)

His intensity for learning was only matched by his intensity against injustice.

(This miming happens as Mary speaks the section below. Two boys follow another boy on stage and start to push him around, and eventually push him off stage. Jesus runs after them. Young Mary follows. Lights go down on Action Stage.)

I have a piercing memory of our little Jesus at 10 years old. We were walking home from the market when we could see a short distance away, two teenage boys that were beating up a boy half their size. Jesus was no giant but his intensity as he ran at those boys, screaming that "God sees what you're doing, God hears cries for help and God is to be feared." I think those teenagers thought he was possessed because they ran away so fast.

(Lights come up on Action Stage with Young Mary tucking Jesus into bed.)

I recognized one of the teenagers. I know his daddy was rough with him. I tried to explain that to Jesus as I was putting him to bed that night.

Young Mary: Oh Jesus, sometimes people have bad behaviour because that's how they've been treated.

Jesus: Does that make it right mommy? I don't think that makes it right. Our God in heaven answers prayers for mercy, doesn't he? You and me and daddy, we are his answer sometimes.

(Lights out on Action Stage.)

Old Mary: It was that night I talked to Joseph about speaking to the teen's father about his treatment of his son. Joseph was small but he was strong and he had a good reputation as an honest and hard worker. The boy's father respected Joseph enough to say he would stop hitting his son. My 10 year old was teaching me that we can be the answer to human cries for mercy. It seems so obvious now. It wasn't then. *(She sighs.)*

Jesus was a good son. He never talked back and he never forgot my birthday. We didn't have much money but there was always a little something special in the kitchen for me the morning of my birthday.

(Lights up on Action Stage. Young Mary enters as though she's just gotten up in the morning and comes into the kitchen to prepare for the day. A flower is sitting on her workspace, waiting for her. She picks it up as Jesus comes in. She smells the flower and kisses him on the cheek.)

Maybe a wildflower, or a fresh loaf of bread from the bakery, or something he'd made. He was a good son.

(Lights down on Action Stage.)

We got through the teen years and into his twenties. He apprenticed his father and became a fine carpenter. His younger brothers also followed in his footsteps, save Jeremiah whose body seemed to reject him right from the day he came out of the womb.

(Lights up on Action Stage. Jeremiah enters and hobbles around the stage then hobbles off.)

His back seemed crooked and his arms would jerk here and there without his telling them to. Jesus loved to carry Jeremiah up hills to watch the sun set or take him down to the lake to go for a swim. He never tired of making Jeremiah smile.

(Young Mary comes on stage and mimes washing dishes. Jesus and Jeremiah enter and act out the scene.)

One day after Jesus brought Jeremiah back from the beach, we noticed something very different. Jeremiah's twitching was gone and his back was poker straight. Now we had all noticed the peace-giving effect Jesus had on Jeremiah, on all of us actually, but this was different. Jeremiah's body physically looked different. I called Joseph.

Young Mary: Joseph, get down here right now. You need to come see Jer!

Jesus: God didn't want our brother Jeremiah to be hurting anymore. I prayed and he is healed.

(Mary bursts into tears and embraces both boys. Lights on Action Stage go down. Jesus and Jeremiah exit. Young Mary lies down for the next scene.)

Old Mary: Tears streamed down Joseph's face. My own robe was soaked with joy. You know, you hurt for your children when life is hard for them. You just want to take away all their pain and suffering. I had prayed my heart out for Jer since he was days old and here, Jesus says it so simply and calmly. As though he knew the very heart of God. It rang in my head all night, "God didn't want our brother to be hurting anymore." Did he say our brother? Jesus was my son, I taught him to clean himself, I taught him to speak and to walk, and yet he had become my peer and my teacher.

Scene 3: Adult Jesus

Around 30, everything started to change and it's taken me years and years of pondering and questioning to understand what happened. I suppose I had been lulled in those 30 years to just think we would have a regular life with our beautiful son who made us laugh, sang out of tune, recited scripture, healed our family members and kept our home full of wine. I would have recurring dreams about the night the angel came when I was just a young girl.

(Young Mary is lying asleep on Action Stage. A beam of light slowly fills the room representing the angel; Young Mary mimes the interaction by initially looking afraid, questioning then moving to acceptance.)

Old Mary: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." I would always wake up in a sweat because part of me didn't want him to be the Son of the Most High. It was as though God was reminding me. I just wanted life to continue as it always had.

The stories are a little ragged for me as my mind is deteriorating and I received many stories second hand anyway, but I'm told he was baptized by his cousin John, the clouds parted, a dove came down and God spoke saying this was *His* son. It was about that time Jesus started hanging

out with a group of young men. He was partial to 12 of them. I had wondered if he perhaps wasn't interested in girls, but there were many other men and women who were often in his company and he didn't seem to have any romantic inclination towards any of them. If anything, they seemed like his siblings.

(Director's Note: depending on your actors' stamina, you can cut this section below and finish at **on page 7)

He started teaching in the synagogues and offending the leaders there. I asked him so many times to just come home, to stop causing us problems, to become a carpenter again. His father had passed away and it was his duty to take care of us. But he would hug me and smile and tell me Jeremiah would make sure the bills were paid.

I couldn't go to the market anymore without the women looking at me with disdain, disgust or pity. "Oh there's Mary, her oldest son is roaming the countryside pretending to be some great teacher!" I would have spat at them but it would only make things worse.

Every now and then a young man or woman would fall at my feet and praise God for the woman who gave birth to such a great teacher. Typically they would be people I wouldn't have associated with before, like tax collectors and prostitutes. But they would say remarkable things like "The Kingdom, it's real, it's here!" "God's word is among us. My sins are forgiven." "My legs are healed." "My broken heart is full again."

Jesus had a way with the down and outs. They listened to him. Their heads weren't so full of themselves that there was no room for his words.

I didn't see him much after he turned 30. I went to a few of his sermons to the masses and at the time, honestly, it didn't make much sense to me. I would ask his disciples but they seemed like a fairly dull lot. Nice boys but slow. They would try to explain his parables but it often came out more confused than the original version.

I contented myself to stay at home and tend to my other children.

Then the day came when I heard from my friend Myrna (Myrna hears all the gossip in town because her husband is a mucky muck at the synagogue), that the Pharisees believed their authority was threatened by Jesus' teaching. You see Jesus was preaching that God wanted us all to talk to God directly, that we could call him daddy and pour out our hearts to him. That we didn't need to strictly observe the Sabbath if it meant neglecting good works or taking care of our spiritual lives. He was making God real to the people and not just a scary deity in the sky. But the thing Myrna said was becoming the noose around Jesus' neck was that, at times, it sounded like Jesus was claiming to *be* God. Lord, have mercy.

I have to say, I got angry with God a fair few times. If God was giving me His own Son, why in God's name didn't he go and tell the religious rulers that's what he was doing? It would have been so simple! Joseph would tell me that God told the people who would listen, and that was me, him, the shepherds and the magi. We got in at the first chapter. Everyone else gets in when they're ready to hear. No forcing, only inviting.

Those kinds of answers don't squelch the flame of an angry mother's heart.

(Director's Note: option to have simple images on screen with the crowds, palm branches, then a cross. Simple images can be very effective – nothing too graphic.)

Now through all these years the Roman rule wasn't getting any easier. The anticipation for a ruler from among us to throw off foreign oppressors was growing. With the crowds and crowds that were following Jesus, getting healed for everything from demon possession to broken toes to leprosy, it didn't take long for the king-making discussion to turn to Jesus. The Pharisees weren't on board obviously as Jesus had made them look foolish and they hated him for it.

****One week** before the Passover in Jesus' 33rd year, I heard people were laying down branches in front of him and calling him the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

And from that week through the next year, my heart goes cold.

(All lights out, both on Old Mary and Action Stage. Old Mary speaks in the dark and begins to cry at "My little boy.")

A mother isn't supposed to outlive her son. A mother isn't supposed to watch her son suffer and die on a cross for a criminal. He was a good boy. My little boy. My little Jesus whose skinned knees I kissed a thousand times. My little Jesus who wouldn't hurt another child even when provoked. My little Jesus, hanging on a cross, forgiving his murderers.

A mother's heart cannot bear such pain. *(She sniffs and pulls herself together as the lights start to come back up.)*

He told his friend John that I was his mother now and he was my son. Jesus, sweet Jesus. Taking care of his mama even when he's bleeding to death.

I'm glad John became my son or I wouldn't have ever had joy in my heart again. You see, I never saw Jesus again, at least not *my* son Jesus. I met a man who looked a lot like my Jesus but he was different. He didn't seem as much like a man as a god. I hope you don't think me foolish or irreverent but my heart still longs to hold my Jesus, my son. John opened up the scriptures to me and explained why my Jesus had to die. The Lamb of God, the justice of God executed on

himself, the tearing of the curtain, the slaying of death, the victory of life and the beginning of the reign of the Kingdom of God.

I am able to speak to him now. It heals me every day to wake up and speak to Jesus, to delight in my memories of his birth, the star, the shepherds and the angels, the visitors from the east with their extravagant gifts, and dream of the day I will go to him in death.

There are many things to puzzle over as you likely know. But in all my puzzling the one thing I've clung to is that my Jesus knew you were worth his birth, life and death. I ask you, as a mother, make my Jesus proud of his choice.

(Lights fade. Project image of the star shining over Bethlehem and play (or have children sing) O Little Town of Bethlehem.)

The End.

A Word from the Author

If your congregation has used this script, please consider [donating to my writing endeavours](#). I would *love* to write full time and produce more Christ-honouring content.

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