

ELEVEN WOMEN TOWARD THE CROSS

by Bartie Jones



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**ELEVEN WOMEN
TOWARD THE CROSS**

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PRODUCTION NOTES

STAGE SETTING

One large cross at the back Center Stage. Five levels of platform, boxes, steps or adaptations depending on the sanctuary.

LIGHTING

Two spotlights to alternate and one floodlight. (Again flexible depending on availability.)

MUSIC

The organ prelude, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth," is from Handel's *Messiah*. "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" may be found in most Protestant hymnals — Presbyterian, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, etc. In the Methodist hymnal *The Book of Hymns*, it may be found on page 417. The solo "Whither Thou Goest," words and music by Guy Singer, may be found in books of wedding music. The sheet music is published by Kavelin Music Corporation, Hill and Range Songs, Inc., 1619 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

CHARACTERS

Worship Leader, Reader, 11 women, a 4-year-old girl and a 6-year-old boy (or close).

COSTUMES

Women should be chosen carefully to represent the characters in the script. Imagination and careful choice of colors can create a lovely scene when the full floodlights are on the final picture. With a little practice, cloths or sheets may be draped gracefully and authentically to suggest the clothing of the times. The following specific suggestions may help:

EVE: Barefoot, vine-belted short tunic of suede or leather — hold an apple.

REBEKAH: Bracelets, clay pitcher on shoulder.

MIRIAM: Try a long braided hairpiece, wine cloth, belted around waist and over shoulder.

DEBORAH: Can be strong-looking, with old jewelry — perhaps a medallion in bold colors.

RUTH: Subtle beige colors, long flowing hair, perhaps a few strands of wheat.

ELIZABETH: A mature woman who might use three shades or pastel colors, a cloth in hand.

MARY: (Mother of Jesus) Choose a soft blue, only drape the head as well. No jewelry or belts.

MARY OF BETHANY: Soft pink or rose. She might have a small bottle for oil.

MARTHA: Perhaps two tones of green and holding a wooden bowl of fruit.

MARY MAGDALENE: Her hair or hairpiece should be very long and full, and let her hands be holding her hair like a towel. No jewelry.

THE ELECT LADY: Suggest a rose drape. She has her arms around the two children — the boy in soft blue, looking down, the girl in pale yellow, looking into the face of her mother.

FORMAT

Prelude: "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth," from Handel's *Messiah*.

Call to Worship and Lord's Prayer.

Hymn: "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," verses 1 & 2.

Scripture: Proverbs 31:10-31.

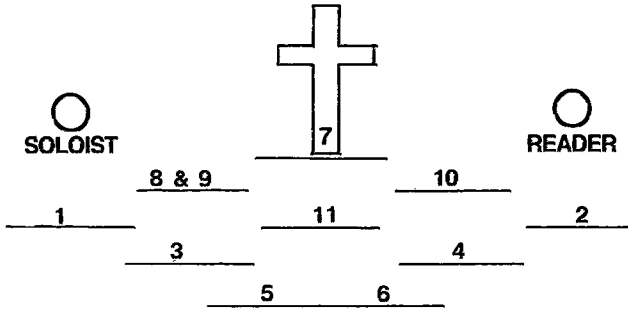
Drama: Eleven Women Toward the Cross. Solo, within the drama, "Whither Thou Goest."

Hymn: Last verse.

Closing Prayer.

NOTE: Dialog indicated by quotation marks may be spoken by either Reader or character.

POSITIONS ON STAGE



(House lights dim out — spotlight comes up on
Woman #1, Eve.)

READER: Let us trace the genealogy of women, from Eve through the Lady Elect — women toward the cross. The first woman, Eve was created, but from God. God created her and brought her womanly nature into being. God did not give dominion until he had woman and man standing side-by-side. Woman does not hold an exalted place in creation. Her name, Eve, means life. She is described as beautiful of form and figure. Poet and artist have pictured her with face of celestial loveliness and a form strong and immortal.

When Eve listened to the serpent, she acted independently of God and later blamed the serpent. Though Eve fell far short of the ideal of womanhood, she rose to her destiny as a wife and mother. True, paradise had been lost, but something wonderful happened — maternal care had been born. In Eve, motherhood became a great sacrifice and a sublime service. In the birth of her first child, Cain, she said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." God now ruled over her life. We know she suffered the heartaches and torments suffered by mothers of wicked sons. At the age of 130, she gave birth to a son, Seth, and spoke, "God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." And a great seed this was to be,

for the ancestry of Jesus Christ was to be traced back to the line of Seth. What great beauty and yet great sorrow were mingled together in this first of all women. How she must have wondered in her own heart if there truly was any hope for this creation of God's. Despite her transgressions, Eve still stands as a revelation of the Father, and as one who can rise above transgression.

(Spotlight fades — second spotlight comes up on Woman #2, Rebekah.)

At the first sight of Rebekah, we seem to sense a kindness of heart, music and grace in her motions. Artists have portrayed her with a patrician profile, broadly arched eyebrows, gentle and expressive eyes and a firm yet innocent mouth. We see her first at the well, being observed by a meditative old man who had come looking for a suitable wife for his master's son, Isaac. How little Rebekah knew of the high destiny that awaited her, simply because she volunteered a service that would be only natural to her, to offer to water the man's camels. It was a sign. When Abraham's steward asked Rebekah's family for her hand in marriage to Isaac, the son of Abraham, God established his covenant, and Rebekah would be a part of that covenant. She answered willingly, "I will go." Though Isaac was 40 and Rebekah only 20, they lived many happy years together. Late in years, she bore twins, and through her love and desire for one son, she plotted deception. In order to provide Jacob, the younger, with Esau's birthright (in her belief that this one was more worthy) she, out of her own free will instead of God's, accomplished the deception. In so doing, she was made to live out her life without the presence of her favorite son, Jacob. How often we, too, believe our own will to be better than the will of God.

(Spotlight fades and other spotlight comes up on Woman #3, Miriam.)

Miriam is the first woman in the Bible whose interest was national and whose mission was patriotic. The sister of Moses, she stood by him from his birth, and assisted him throughout her long and dedicated life. She stayed by his basket hidden in the bullrushes, watching until the babe was taken by the pharaoh's daughter and then hastened to acquire a nursemaid to serve the princess, the nursemaid being Moses' own mother. Truly an act of bravery and courage for such a young girl. As they grew up together, she served their people as a prophetess. The Hebrew word prophetess means "a woman who is inspired to teach the will of God." Hers was the first song in Hebrew literature, the song of Miriam and Moses. It was sung just following the delivery of their people through the Red Sea. She had helped lead their people to freedom and the that came from her lips was the first of the Bible.

Later in life, she fell spiritually and spoke against her brother in jealousy and bitterness. Miriam became one of the most perfect examples of woman's mixed nature, good and evil. Then she was struck with leprosy and in her misery, Moses prayed for her. We can be sure that Miriam was touched by her brother's love. Though she was shut out of the camp for a time, she was not shut out of the hearts of the people. Neither Miriam nor Moses ever saw the promised land, but as long as her song was sung, Miriam continued to live in the hearts of all and Israel could not die. Again, the lineage of Jesus was kept alive. *(Spotlight fades and other spotlight comes up on Woman #4, Deborah.)*

Deborah was a woman of keen mind, great courage and splendid faith. She was given supreme authority in Israel, an honor gained by no other woman in the Bible. In all her roles, first that of counselor to her people, next as judge in their disputes and finally as deliverer in time of war, Deborah exhibited womanly excellence. She was a

judge of wise counsel and prudent decisions. She led her people into a war that ended wars. The Israelites, trusting God, annihilated their enemies and a 40-year peace followed. She was indeed a “mother of Israel.” She must have had fire in her eyes, determination in her step and a positive ring to her voice. A handsome woman, yet feminine; a homemaker, yet a leader of her country. Upon the day of battle she spoke to Barak, her general, saying, “Up! For this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand.” Such fire as Deborah possessed never died out of Israel.

(Spotlight fades and other spotlight comes up on Woman #5, Ruth.)

Everyone loves and knows well the story of Ruth. She lived 13 centuries before Jesus, and was the great-grandmother of King David, and therefore an ancestor of the Savior. She is the most lovable woman in the Bible. Her abiding love embraces the one person you would least expect her to, her mother-in-law, Naomi. A Moabite, a foreigner, a stranger, Ruth won her way into hearts as an ideal daughter-in-law, wife and mother. Her story, which culminates in her marriage to Boaz, a man of influence, is one of the most beautiful romances in the Bible. Modest, courteous, loyal, gentle, yet decisive, Ruth always seemed to do the right thing at the right time. She is pictured as beautiful, with high cheekbones and warm eyes. Who can forget her decision when she loses her husband to follow her mother-in-law? She does not pity herself, but speaks the beautiful words of loyalty.

Solo: “Whither Thou Goest”

From the marriage of Ruth and Boaz sprang the suspicious lineage of the House of David. Love had worked the miracle in Ruth’s life. She had proved that love can penetrate the barriers of race. Hers was the first mixed marriage, and thus did divine wisdom intimate that the

Messiah would be the inspiration of no limited nationality,
but the Lord of all humanity.

(Spotlight changes to Woman #6, Elizabeth.)

Here is a woman who holds two distinctions that
lend immortality to her name. She was the mother of
John, the Baptist, forerunner of the Messiah, and she was
the first to greet her cousin Mary as mother of the Messiah.
She was Elizabeth. She was a godly person, and though
well beyond the natural age of childbearing, her great faith
and prayers won from God the birth of a son. Not just an
ordinary son, but a son of whom Jesus said, "Among them
that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater one
than John, the Baptist." Elizabeth believed strongly in
miracles. Though old, she still walked vigorously and with
a vibrant step. When she recognized her young cousin
Mary with her words, "Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb," she fulfilled the
meaning of her own name, which in its Hebrew form
signifies that God is an oath. To her, God's word was
all powerful. Though with child herself, and filled with
great dreams for him, Elizabeth, humble and unselfish,
could accede that Mary would bear a child greater than
her own. They spent three months together in happiness
and sharing, for then they could not look across the years
to the end of their sons' lives — John beheaded and Jesus
crucified. The words of John spoken of Jesus, "He must
increase and I must decrease," are a reminder of the spirit
of his noble mother, Elizabeth.

(Spotlights change to Woman #7, Mary, mother of Jesus.)

And what have we to say of Mary, the mother of
Jesus, the most exalted and honored woman of all time,
a young, unknown girl, chosen by God, a privilege desired
and prayed for by every young Jewish girl for centuries?
Though she never wore fine clothes, the Madonnas through
the ages have been draped in the most costly of garments;

1 though she never exalted herself, literature has raised her
 2 to the highest pinnacle of any woman in history; though
 3 she never travelled any farther than from Palestine to Egypt, and
 4 then by donkey, her story still travels to the farthest
 5 corners of this earth; and though she suffered as much as
 6 any woman in the world's history, her suffering changed
 7 to joy at her son's resurrection. As a young girl, she was
 8 serious and believed in the wonders of God, yet really too
 9 humble to think of herself as such. Mary's first recorded
 10 words, "How can this be, seeing I know not a man?"
 11 bespeak her purity and her humility; and her answer,
 12 "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," shows her surrender
 13 to divine love and to God alone. Mary, with tender love
 14 and abiding faith, ministered to her son from his birth until
 15 his burial. Her entire life was dedicated to the love and
 16 service of Jesus. Her suffering and grief reached its climax
 17 as she watched her Son die on the cross. The last mention
 18 of Mary is when she met with the infant church after the
 19 Ascension, praying with the Apostles in the Upper Room
 20 in Jerusalem. Mary, the selfless mother of Jesus, lives on
 21 as the world's most beautiful example of motherhood.
 22 *(Spotlight changes to Women #8 & #9, Mary and Martha.)*

23 But the story is not finished. Two women, close
 24 to Jesus, are mentioned together because they are sisters —
 25 Mary of Bethany and Martha. Mary, one of the most
 26 spiritually sensitive women, showed evidence of knowing
 27 more of His secret power and wisdom than his disciples.
 28 They lived together in Bethany beside the Jericho road
 29 and many were the visits of Jesus to their home. Martha,
 30 the homemaker, practical and unemotional, busied herself
 31 with the household duties. Mary, the more pensive,
 32 impassioned and imaginative, sat listening at His feet.
 33 When Martha complained to Jesus that Mary should help
 34 her serve the meal, Jesus answered, "Martha is a good
 35 woman pursuing worthy tasks and necessary tasks;



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