

JESUS WAS, JESUS IS

by Charlotte Fleeg



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CAST OF CHARACTERS

SPEAKER

JOHN THE BAPTIST

MARTHA

MARY

PAUL

TIMOTHY

MARY MAGDALENE

PETER

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

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(The scene takes place in the altar area of your church. The SPEAKER enters the pulpit, carrying a thick sheaf of papers. Obviously nervous over the prospect of delivering the sermon, he or she coughs uncomfortably and begins to speak, with painful evidence of Speech 101.)

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13

SPEAKER: Who was Jesus Christ? This is a difficult question to answer. Many people over the years have attempted to answer just this question. As Christians, we all have . . . er. . . ideas about the sort of man Jesus was. We have read in the —

14

15

JOHN: *(Somewhere out of sight, howling)* Repent!

16

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JOHN: *(Entering down middle aisle)* I am the voice of someone shouting in the desert. Make a straight path for the Lord to travel. *(To the congregation)* You snakes. . . who told you that you could escape the punishment God is about to send? Do those things which show that you have turned from your sins! The ax is ready to cut down the tree at the roots; every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire! He will gather his wheat into his barn, but he will burn the chaff in the fire that never goes out!

27

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29

SPEAKER: *(Outraged)* I beg your pardon!

JOHN: It is not my pardon you should beg, but God's.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

30

31

32

SPEAKER: Look here, you can't come howling into this church like that. This is a respectable congregation. Just who do you think you are?

33

34

JOHN: I am called the Baptist. . . John, the Baptist. See my garb?

35

SPEAKER: Nice loincloth.

- 1 JOHN: Genuine camel's hair.
- 2 SPEAKER: Well, OK, what do you want? What's the
3 meaning of bursting in here like this?
- 4 JOHN: I heard the start of your sermon. I didn't like
5 it.
- 6 SPEAKER: What's the matter with it?
- 7 JOHN: (*Scornfully, and building*) What kind of a man
8 was Jesus? He was the Son of man, come to bring
9 the fire and destruction of the last days. For it
10 was written in the scriptures that the Son of man
11 should appear, coming in the clouds with great
12 power and glory, and in the days after that time of
13 trouble, the sun will grow dark, the moon will no
14 longer shine, the stars will fall from heaven, and the
15 powers in space will be driven from their courses!
- 16 SPEAKER: Would you stop that? Please!
- 17 JOHN: It was given to me to prophesy his coming. I
18 said to them, the man who will come after me is
19 much greater than I am. I baptize you with water,
20 but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit! And
21 he came to me to be baptized — me, who was not
22 good enough to bend down and untie his sandals! —
23 and I baptized him, and heaven was opened, and
24 the Spirit of God came down upon him like a dove,
25 and lighted upon him. Then a voice from heaven
26 said, "This is my own dear son, with whom I am
27 well pleased." And I knew he was the one whose
28 coming was foretold. You bet. (*Opens up his*
29 *leather pouch and extracts something small and*
30 *crunchy, which he begins to eat.*)
- 31 SPEAKER: What's that?
- 32 JOHN: Locusts. Want some?
- 33 SPEAKER: (*Recoiling*) No, thanks.
- 34 JOHN: Gives me a quick pick-up.
- 35 SPEAKER: Well, ah. . .I suppose you must be right.

1 About Jesus, I mean. After all, you met him.

2 JOHN: That's right.

3 SPEAKER: Son of man? Destruction of the temple,
4 and all that?

5 JOHN: Yup.

6 SPEAKER: Is that why — (*SPEAKER is interrupted*
7 *by MARTHA, coming from the back of the church.*
8 *She is talking to her sister, MARY, who is reading*
9 *a book and ignoring her.*)

10 MARTHA: (*To her sister, also any nearby members of*
11 *the audience.*) So I said to him, this, to you, is a
12 chicken? Now, your father, I said to him, a prince
13 among men, would he have offered me a chicken
14 like this? A chicken so scrawny as this, I would
15 not dishonor my Passover dishes with!

16 SPEAKER: (*Surprised again*) Who are you?

17 MARTHA: (*Smiling*) I am Martha, and this is my sister
18 Mary, with her nose in a book as usual. (*MARY sits*
19 *down by the pulpit.*) That girl! (*MARTHA catches*
20 *sight of JOHN.*) Young man! Such a garment!
21 You'll catch your death. What is your wife thinking
22 of?

23 JOHN: I have never married, woman.

24 MARTHA: A nice, big, strong man like you? (*She looks*
25 *at her sister.*) Mary! Smile!

26 SPEAKER: I suppose you knew Jesus, too?

27 MARTHA: Certainly! And all his disciples. Such nice
28 boys, but messy. In and out, in and out, with
29 their sandals all dusty, and eating me out of house
30 and home. But, who's complaining?

31 MARY: (*Turning a page*) You are, Martha.

32 MARTHA: This is complaining? Nice boys they were!
33 And did they like my honey cakes? James, once
34 he ate six. And Jesus liked a nice bowl of chicken
35 soup as much as anyone.

1 **SPEAKER:** I seem to remember he thought other
2 things were more important.

3 **MARTHA:** Yes, I know what you're talking about,
4 young man! Once they were all in our house,
5 and Jesus was teaching them. And there was Mary,
6 right at his feet. Well, I was trying to get supper
7 for them — one woman getting supper for all
8 those men? I said to him, "Jesus, don't you care
9 that my sister has left me to do all the work?
10 Tell her to come and help me!" and he said,
11 "Martha, Martha! You are troubled and worried
12 over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary
13 has chosen the right thing, and it shall not be
14 taken from her."

15 **MARY:** See, Martha?

16 **MARTHA:** (*Airily*) So, wisdom is nice. So, soup is
17 nice, too. Who can read the scriptures on an
18 empty stomach?

19 **SPEAKER:** Is that all you thought of Jesus, someone
20 who liked your cooking?

21 **MARTHA:** Bite your tongue! Jesus loved my sister and
22 me, and he loved our brother. Our brother's name is
23 Lazarus. One day he grew ill of a fever, and I sent
24 for Jesus. He did not come right away, and Lazarus
25 died. We wrapped him in his grave clothes, put him
26 in the tomb, and mourned for him. Then, four days
27 later, Jesus came. I said to him, "If you had been
28 here, Lord, my brother would not have died!"
29 Then Jesus asked where we had laid him, and we
30 took him there; and Jesus looked at the tomb, and
31 he wept for our brother. He told us to move the
32 stone at the entrance to the tomb away, and we
33 did. And Jesus prayed; and then he cried out with
34 a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And our
35 brother came forth, his hands and feet wrapped in

1 grave clothes! "Untie him," Jesus said to us, "and
 2 let him go." (*Looks at JOHN.*) Judgment? Destruction?
 3 He loved Lazarus, and wept for him, and raised him
 4 from the dead. Where was the judgment, the
 5 destruction in that? It was a miracle! (*To the*
 6 *SPEAKER*) That's what Jesus was, a man who
 7 wrought miracles. Remember the time he fed the
 8 five thousand? Now that was a miracle!

9 *SPEAKER:* (*To MARY*) Is that the way you thought
 10 of Jesus, Mary?

11 *MARY:* Jesus was a man of wisdom.

12 *MARTHA:* (*Exasperated*) Pfui! (*Starts bustling around the*
 13 *area, dusting and tidying.*)

14 *MARY:* (*Rising*) From the time he was but a young boy,
 15 only twelve years, did not the elders marvel at his
 16 wisdom? Did he not, in the days of his teaching,
 17 confound the scribes and the Pharisees? Once, some
 18 members of Herod's party were sent to trap him.
 19 Oh, they were sly. They flattered him and said they
 20 knew he spoke the truth. They said to him, "Is it
 21 against Jewish law to pay taxes to the Roman
 22 emperor?" But he saw through their trick — they
 23 wanted him to speak against the emperor, so that
 24 he would be jailed — and he asked them to bring
 25 him a coin. They brought him one, and he asked,
 26 "Whose face and name is on this coin?" They
 27 replied, "The emperor's." So Jesus said, "Well,
 28 then, pay to the emperor what belongs to the
 29 emperor, and pay to God what belongs to God."

30 *SPEAKER:* That was pretty sharp.

31 *MARY:* So you see that Jesus was primarily a man of
 32 wisdom. Thus it follows that wisdom is the fountain
 33 of life. Only the wisdom of the righteous can save
 34 us. It is written: "It is better to listen to the quiet
 35 words of a wise man, than the shouts of fools."

- 1 (MARY looks pointedly at JOHN.)
- 2 PAUL: (*Entering*) It is also written: "I will destroy the
3 wisdom of the wise, and set aside the wisdom of
4 the scholars!" (*While PAUL is speaking, TIMOTHY*
5 *also enters with two heavy suitcases [the suitcases*
6 *have travel stickers on them that read "Macedonia,"*
7 *"Corinth," "Antioch," etc.], an easel, and a huge*
8 *poster. He quietly and unobtrusively sets down the*
9 *suitcases, sets up the easel and poster. The poster*
10 *reads: "St. Paul's Traveling Salvation Show."*
11 *TIMOTHY takes out a pad and pencil and begins*
12 *taking down what PAUL is saying.)*
- 13 PAUL: (*Continuing*) So, where does that leave the
14 wise? Or the scholars? Or the skillful debaters of
15 this world? God has shown that this world's wisdom
16 is folly. Some want miracles for proof, and others
17 look for wisdom. But what seems to be God's
18 foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what
19 seems to be God's weakness is stronger than human
20 strength. (*He finishes with a flourish, and TIMOTHY*
21 *applauds dutifully.)*
- 22 PAUL: (*To TIMOTHY*) Send that off to Corinth at
23 the first opportunity. (*Hailing the SPEAKER*) Say,
24 is this Macedonia?
- 25 SPEAKER: No.
- 26 PAUL: But it's Sunday! If it's Sunday, this must be
27 Macedonia!
- 28 SPEAKER: Sorry, this is (*Name of your town.*)
- 29 PAUL: (*Looking puzzled, speaks the name of your town.*)
30 Timothy, write that down. (*To the audience*) Maybe
31 I'll send you a letter sometime.
- 32 SPEAKER: I suppose, Paul, you've come to tell us
33 what sort of person Jesus was?
- 34 JOHN: Ah, he didn't even know Jesus!
- 35 PAUL: Not in person. I knew him by revelation. And

- 1 from him I learned that by the free gift of God's
 2 grace, all are put right with him — God made all
 3 people prisoners of disobedience so that he might
 4 show mercy to them all.
- 5 JOHN: What blasphemy! Does not the prophet Isaiah
 6 say, "The Lord is coming from his heavenly dwelling
 7 place to punish the people of the earth for their
 8 sins"? How could he punish them for sins he made
 9 them commit? Did not Jesus himself say, "I come
 10 not to bring peace, but a sword"? I say to you,
 11 that sword is the flaming sword of judgment!
- 12 PAUL: (*Sanctimoniously*) Salvation.
- 13 JOHN: Judgment!
- 14 PAUL: Salvation. . .
- 15 JOHN: Judgment!
- 16 PAUL: Salvation!
- 17 JOHN: Judgment!
- 18 PAUL: (*Losing his temper*) Essene! (*Pronounced: Es-SEEN*)
- 19 JOHN: Hellenist! (*Pronounced: HELL-en-ist*)
- 20 PAUL: Bug-eater!
- 21 JOHN: Suitcase freak!
- 22 SPEAKER: Hold it! Wait a minute! Calm down, you
 23 two! (*MARTHA comes over and soothes JOHN.*
 24 *He retires bad-temperedly over to one side.*
 25 *SPEAKER attempting to placate PAUL*) Mr., ah —
 26 Paul — what you say is very interesting and — ah
 27 — has in fact formed the cornerstone of our faith
 28 as Christians —
- 29 PAUL: (*Settling his robes huffily*) I doubt that. If
 30 your views were at all as one with mine, then you
 31 would not allow these women to chatter on in
 32 your church. As in all churches of God's people,
 33 the women should keep quiet in the meetings.
 34 They are not — (*MARY MAGDALENE appears*
 35 *down the aisle, suddenly, a tough and formidable*

1 *opponent.*)

2 MARY M: Hold it right there!

3 SPEAKER: Oh, great. Who is this?

4 MARTHA: This is Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus
5 cast out seven devils. *(Pause)* We're not sure he
6 got all of them.

7 MARY M: What's this about women not being allowed
8 to speak in the church?

9 PAUL: Women are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish
10 law says, they must not be put in charge.

11 MARY M: Huh! *(She crosses to the altar and flips*
12 *through the Bible. Reads:)* "For we conclude that
13 a person is put right with God only by faith, and
14 not by doing what the Law commands."

15 PAUL: *(Contemptuously)* Who said that?

16 MARY M: You did.

17 PAUL: Oh. . .Well, if a woman wants to find out about
18 something, she should ask her husband at home. It
19 is a disgrace for a woman to speak in a church!
20 *(MARY MAGDALENE flips a few more pages in*
21 *the Bible.)*

22 MARY M: *(Reading)* "There is no difference between
23 Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men,
24 between men and women. You are all one in
25 Christ Jesus."

26 PAUL: Who said that?

27 MARY M: You did.

28 PAUL: *(To TIMOTHY)* Did I say that?

29 TIMOTHY: Yes, Sir, to the Galatians.

30 PAUL: Oh. Well, if I said it to the Galatians, it must
31 be right. That was one of my better letters, if I
32 recall.

33 MARY M: *(To SPEAKER)* That's what Jesus was, a
34 person to make us all one in him! He spoke to the
35 rich and the poor, the innocent and the guilty, the

1 Jew and Gentile alike. To him there were no kings
2 or slaves, no wise or foolish, no clean or unclean.
3 To him we were all but children. . .his own
4 children, his chicks, whom he would gather under his
5 wings.

6 SPEAKER: Liberty and equality, huh?

7 MARY M: That's right! *(To PAUL)* You! You remind
8 me of those disciples. They talked about love and
9 equality and unity — oh, yes, they talked about it!
10 But you know, Mary and Salome and I were the
11 first ones at the tomb that Sunday. The angel
12 appeared to us, and then Jesus himself appeared
13 to us. But when we ran and told the disciples,
14 they didn't believe us! They told us we were
15 speaking nonsense. If Jesus was going to appear
16 to anyone, he'd appear to us, they said. Just a
17 bunch of hysterical women, they said. Run along
18 and lie down with a cold cloth on your forehead
19 and you'll feel better, they said. *(To MARTHA)*
20 Such nice boys!

21 PETER: *(Entering)* Mary, aren't you ever going to let
22 us live that down?

23 MARTHA: You poor boy, you're so thin! Tch, tch,
24 skin and bones! *(To the SPEAKER)* This is Simon,
25 whom Jesus called the Rock. Why, I'll never know.
26 Does this boy look like a rock to you? *(She*
27 *pinches his cheek, playfully.)* Such a face, a
28 regular cherub!

29 SPEAKER: *(Awed)* St. Peter?

30 PETER: *(Feeling his face resignedly)* If you like.

31 SPEAKER: Well, this is more like it! I'm so glad
32 you're here! Of all these people, you probably
33 knew Jesus best. You were practically his best
34 friend, right? You can tell us what he was really
35 all about.

1 PETER: Oh, I don't know if I can.

2 SPEAKER: Come on. What was Jesus like?

3 PETER: Well . . . the thing I always remember about
4 Jesus was how forgiving he was. Everyone always
5 thinks of the twelve of us disciples as a group of —
6 of —

7 SPEAKER: Saints?

8 PETER: Yeah. But we weren't saints. We were the
9 biggest bunch of incompetents you ever saw. And
10 me — I was the worst. I tried — I really tried —
11 but I was always doing or saying the wrong thing.
12 He was always telling those little stories about lamps
13 and vineyards and kings and all that, and many
14 times I didn't understand what he was talking about.
15 I often thought — why doesn't he just say God's
16 word and not confuse us with all of his stories and
17 parables?

18 SPEAKER: I've thought that myself on occasion.

19 PETER: But he never gave up. He kept on explaining
20 and explaining to us. . . . Then there was a time I
21 tried to chase those little kids away. But he became
22 upset with me. He said, "Forbid them not, for the
23 Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these!" But
24 he forgave me. He always forgave me. There was
25 the time I tried to walk on water — and wound
26 up swimming — and the time I wanted to build
27 the booths up on the mountain and stay there —
28 and there was the time I tried to get him to stop
29 talking morbidly about going to his death in
30 Jerusalem. He was angry with me for that, too.
31 He said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" — to me!
32 I had one big chance to make it up to him — to
33 be the big hero. When they arrested him, everyone
34 else ran out on him, but I should have stuck by him.
35 I should have, but I didn't. I said I didn't know him



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