

I WAIT...I WONDER

by L.M. Brown-Goens



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PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPS: An old table or some other period piece to use as writing table, and bench. An oil lamp or candle. Sheets of parchment paper for MARY's diary. The edges may be burned to give them an older appearance. Non-fusible interfacing available at fabric stores, or any heavy paper may be stained with tea and used in place of parchment. A thick writing utensil that looks like a stylus or reed pen and a clay-like well. For Christmas Eve — a manger, straw, and a baby Jesus.

DESCRIPTION: This program is designed so that each Advent and Christmas Eve entry can be read as if from a letter or journal. However, some short segments could be more effective if memorized and recited appropriately. Possible memorized portions are so marked with an asterisk (*).

MARY's journal can be included almost anywhere in a worship service, though we often had the reading between hymns, sometimes after scripture readings.

Each Advent carries a theme which is indicated.

The following is an outline of how we produced *I Wait . . . I Wonder* at Church of the Saviour.

For the **first and second Sunday of Advent**, the desk, bench, etc. remained in the same place in the sanctuary. We had no other scenery, but there could be, of course. MARY entered during a hymn on each of these Sundays and sat at her table, pretending to finish the last sentence or two of her journal entry before reading it aloud. She carried a candle in and out with her.

For the **third Sunday of Advent**, the writing table and other props were located in a different area to signify MARY's different location (at her cousin's).

The **fourth Sunday of Advent** finds MARY in a stable-like setting: We made this with straw strewn about a platform and a couple of bales intact for MARY, and later JOSEPH, to sit on. Our area was very small, decorated with old blankets and clay pottery. Because of her condition, MARY's robe is not tied with cord this Sunday, and she enters a darkened sanctuary so that she is seated when the lights come up and she reads. After the evening reading on this Sunday (part two of the fourth Sunday in Advent), JOSEPH entered and escorted her out.

Christmas Eve can be done however the director wishes. Our church handled it like this: The sanctuary was darkened when

MARY and JOSEPH entered with the baby and took their places at the stable to which the manger had been added. Throughout the service, MARY and JOSEPH minister to the baby and exchange looks and touches — all done in small, rather insignificant movements at appropriate times. Lights came up on the INNKEEPER who read (half-memorized) from the list of things his wife had given him to do (the list also contained his lines). This was followed by a hymn, "Away in a Manger." The SHEPHERD BOY then read his letter. The congregation sang "Oh, Come All Ye Faithful" after the SHEPHERD's words. JOSEPH, who had been playing with the baby, looking at MARY, and jotting things down in his journal throughout, then read his journal entry, after which a soloist sang "What Child is This." This was followed by a lullaby sung by a young girl in dim light during which MARY rocked and cuddled her baby. (If MARY has a good voice, she may sing the lullaby.) MARY then speaks to her baby. Our MARY kept her lines written on an index card tucked into the baby's blanket. It worked beautifully, as she was able to use the card as a guide while caressing the child.

Obviously, anything might follow the above readings. In our case, MARY's speech was followed by a song entitled "Christmas Lullaby." With each successive verse, the INNKEEPER and then the SHEPHERD joined the manger scene. During the choruses, liturgical dancers functioning as angels danced, freezing during the verses. Following the song, the angels lit candles from the pastor's candle and passed the lights on to the congregation, who had been given candles prior to the service. The angels then joined the manger scene as the congregation sings "Silent Night."

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ADVENT ONE

Watching and Waiting

SCENE: MARY enters as the choir sings the last verse of a song or as the organist plays. She carries a lit candle and a journal. She sits at a small table and jots down a few final words before reading.

MARY: Tonight, oh Diary, I share with you such a vague restlessness. I find it difficult to define. I fear for our world which seems to darken every day with still more gloom and despair. King Herod, our so-called governor, has just executed another one of his own children. He has built pagan temples and spent our tax money on gymnasiums and theaters when people starve in the streets. I am told Roman citizens watch human beings slaughter each other for entertainment, and Roman soldiers march through our village, defying God with their graven emblems. Evil surrounds us. Father reminds me of Isaiah's promise: "Be strong, fear not. Behold, God will come and save you." But when? And how? Father has just come from the synagogue where they have discussed the Messiah our God will send. What will he be like? Father admits no one agrees about this. The Zealots claim the Messiah will be a great warrior like David who will force the hated Romans from our midst and set up a godly kingdom. Some people argue that the Messiah will be a great prophet like Elijah — maybe even Elijah himself. And those quiet, funny little men who live in the wilderness and eat locusts don't argue at all. They just pray for a heavenly deliverer, whatever that means. Most everybody thinks it will be as Isaiah said: A young woman will bear a son and call him Emmanuel. I wonder if we'll know when this happens. Will the mother of the Messiah know? And will the knowledge be shared with

1 the world right away, or later? Maybe the Messiah is
2 among us right now, this very minute, waiting for the
3 the right time to make himself known. Maybe he, too,
4 awaits God's signal. (*MARY closes journal and bows head.*)
5 * Oh Lord God, hurry, please. For we wander in darkness
6 with evil all around us. Give us light. I wait upon you,
7 my Father. We all wait. Amen. (*MARY blows out candle and*
8 *exits.*)
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ADVENT TWO

Worthy and Unworthy

SCENE: MARY sits at table, finishing last of her diary entry.

MARY: I am to have a child. A king. Me, Mary! A simple girl from Nazareth. I believe, for the Lord God does not lie, but I don't understand. The angel said I had found favor with God. But why? I love him, but so do dozens of other girls far more worthy than I. The mother of a king who will rule from David's throne — me! Surely the mother of a great king should be from a royal family. Or a priestly one. Why didn't God choose Rachel? She's known throughout Galilee for her beauty, and she is righteous and pure, the daughter of Rabbi Saul. I am a peasant girl, daughter of a poor man. Maybe there's been a mistake. No, God doesn't make mistakes. Maybe the angel Gabriel, maybe he . . . no, silly girl, what's wrong with you? I'm scared, that's what's wrong with me. I'm scared of what Joseph will say, for one thing. Will he believe that I remain a virgin though I am with child? My own mother won't believe it. Especially my mother. Oh, what am I to do? Joseph loves me, but he has his reputation to think about. I have humiliated him. He can have me stoned to death if he wishes. No, he loves me, but he will ask — "Why you, Mary? Why did our Lord pick you?" And I won't have an answer. Oh, Angel Gabriel, come talk to me again. I have so many questions I should have asked while I had the chance, but I was so stunned, so shocked I couldn't think. Gabriel? *(Awaits response)* Oh, why do I tremble so? My God, how could you favor such a frightened little mouse? Maybe I am dreaming. No, I know I'm not. Yet this is so unreal — angels, a baby who will be king — Who could believe it? My heart believes but my head does not. *(MARY bows her head and either prays the*

1 *next lines or continues to read in journal.)* * **I will do thy will,**
 2 **oh Lord, because you are my Lord. My faith assures me:**
 3 **Joseph will not reject me nor have me punished, for these**
 4 **things cannot be your will. All will come to pass as the**
 5 **Angel said: I will carry a baby for the Lord, and this baby**
 6 **will be named Jesus, and he will be king. This is the will**
 7 **of my Saviour God, and I will abide by His will. But I**
 8 **cannot pretend to understand.** (*MARY may arise and start*
 9 *her exit, then stop as if she just remembered something before*
 10 *reciting her lines or these lines may be read as part of her diary*
 11 *entry.)* * **Elizabeth! The angel said she, too, has been**
 12 **blessed by our Lord with the miracle of a baby. My cousin**
 13 **will understand, for she is old and wise. I shall go to her.**
 14 **Yes! I shall go to my cousin Elizabeth.**

ADVENT THREE

The Magnificat

SCENE: If possible, MARY's position or the backdrop might be altered from the first two journal readings because she is not at home but with her cousin.)

MARY: Elizabeth, my cousin, is six months along in her confinement. She simply radiates gratitude and joy! The story she told me last night fills me with awe and wonder. She said an angel, Gabriel — the same who came to me, I think — spoke to Zechariah in the temple. Gabriel told Zechariah that Elizabeth and he would have a son named John who would grow up to be a spiritual leader, preparing men for the Lord. Since Elizabeth is old and past child-bearing age, Zechariah didn't believe what he heard. Actually, I think he did believe, since one tends to believe an angel, but Zechariah can be a little sarcastic sometimes, especially if he doesn't know what to say. After all, this had to be pretty startling news. They wanted a baby all these years, but finally accepted their childless life. Now this. Anyway, whatever Zechariah did or said, it was the wrong thing, for the angel struck him dumb out of anger. Zechariah cannot speak a word, and we don't know if he ever will again. Elizabeth says he will. She has such faith. She says Zechariah probably needed a lesson, but God won't make him suffer forever. She seems to know these things instinctively. I was right to come here. She knew all about the baby I carry. The moment after I said hello, before I could even speak another word, she was joyfully exclaiming: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." I had told her nothing, yet she knew! She called me the mother of my Lord. (*Beat*) Mother of the Lord. It is true! At last I know with my head as well as my heart.

Oh, how my soul magnifies the Lord, and I rejoice in God
my Saviour. The Lord is mighty and holy. He uses his
strength to bring down the proud, and his mercy to exalt
the lowly. He fills the hungry and sends the rich away
empty. Because he has found favor with me, a lowly
handmaiden, all generations will call me blessed forever.
Oh, holy God, you have blessed me. And through me, in
your mercy, you will help all mankind as you promised.
How I praise you. How I rejoice! With gratitude, I will
remain your humble servant forever.

ADVENT FOUR
Journeys Ended and Begun
Part One

SCENE: MARY sits in stable-like surroundings. She is pregnant and exhausted.

MARY: Bethlehem at last. Joseph intended to get here yesterday afternoon, but I just couldn't go on. After five days, my back hurt so badly, I couldn't keep walking. We didn't arrive until almost noon today. I never saw such a crowd of people, not even on holy days in Jerusalem. The marketplace was jammed with all kinds of travelers — rich people from Egypt and Greece, officials and soldiers from Rome, and thousands of people just like us from Judea and Galilee. We learned immediately that the hostel was full to overflowing, and so there was nothing to do but walk from house to house, hoping a family had space for us. No one did. By the time we reached the other side of town, my feet were so swollen that Joseph had to remove part of the load from the donkey so I could ride. It was bumpy, but it was easier than walking. Finally, an innkeeper suggested we use his cave stable and even gave us some hay for bedding and a little food. I think he was about to send us away just like everyone else had, but then he stared at me, much to Joseph's dismay — it was very rude. I was so tired and felt so sick to my stomach, I didn't even care. But I think he felt sorry for me because of my condition and that's why he let us use his stable. (*"O Little Town of Bethlehem" can be sung here, or other hymns or Scripture read or MARY can continue to read her journal entry.*)

Part Two

(May be performed with Part One or separately in the evening service)

SCENE: Later that day.

MARY: It is evening, and I'm feeling worse than ever. Joseph has gone to find a midwife, for both of us think I will be going into labor soon. Perhaps I've started already. I don't know what labor feels like, but my back still hurts, and I have this odd, pulling sensation in my stomach. I'm still troubled by what is happening to me. From the moment the angel delivered the Lord's message that I would bear his child, I have pondered these events and circumstances, never fully understanding. Certainly this present situation perplexes me most of all. Here I sit on a bundle of hay in a stable 90 miles from home. A small lamb nuzzles my arm, looking for his mother, I suppose. Somewhere outside, cattle are lowing. Our donkey chomps hay noisily, shifting from side to side as if his feet hurt as much as mine do. The glow from the candle flickering off the cave walls lights the straw in the manger like gold. Shall I give birth to God's son *here*? Surely this holy infant deserves better. Yet, I am soon to deliver: that I know. And there is no place else. I wish my mother were here. And Hannah, the midwife who tends all the girls back home. I wish Joseph would hurry back. Still, I am safe and warm. God is here with me. With us. I feel His presence and I am not afraid. This is the last thing I expected, though. To give birth in a city far from home in a stable among strangers must be part of God's plan, or it wouldn't be happening. One thing I'm learning fast: our God does not do things the way we think he will. He appears fond of the unexpected — even the ludicrous. It makes me wonder what will happen after my baby is



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P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

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