

Christmas Pageant Year C (2003, 2006)
From the Book of Luke
By Kelly Balistreri

Scene 1

At the far end of the room we see a wizened elderly man, the physician and disciple, LUKE, preparing to write. After a moment he sits and begins. He speaks as he writes.

LUKE

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theodophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

The light on Luke dims. In a central area, we see a Hebrew priest, ZECHARIAH, lighting incense at an altar. Just beyond him, on the other side of a partition, is a MULTITUDE of people kneeling in prayer. Zechariah becomes startled when he sees, sitting beside the altar a man wearing a trenchcoat over his clothing. He is angel GABRIEL.

GABRIEL

(jovially)

Don't be afraid Zechariah!

Zechariah trembles and looks even more afraid.

GABRIEL

Leaning close, as if he has a secret to share, he whispers loudly.

Your prayers have been heard!

Zechariah falls to the ground. Gabriel falls to the ground to meet him.

GABRIEL

Still whispering loudly in Zechariah's face

You wife Elizabeth will bear you a son!

Now Zechariah gets up and tries to get away from Gabriel. Gabriel, recognizing he is unwanted, turns his back on Zechariah as well.

GABRIEL

(calling over his shoulder)

You will call his name John.

Zechariah still will not turn his face to Gabriel. Gabriel keeps his back turned as well. Gabriel calling over his shoulder again, almost irritated.

And you will have joy and gladness!

Zechariah takes a quick peek over his shoulder and turns back.

GABRIEL

And many will rejoice at his birth!

At the far end of the room, the light goes on where Luke sits still writing.

LUKE

For he will be great before the Lord, and he will not drink wine or strong drink, but will be filled with the Holy Spirit. *[He looks up momentarily as he says]* Even from his mother's womb.

During this time, the characters of Zechariah and Gabriel, at the other end of the room, have turned to each other and come together in muted conversation.

LUKE

And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of their fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people to be prepared.

The light dims on Luke and at the other end of the room Zechariah speaks to Gabriel.

ZECHARIAH

How can I believe this? I'm an old man. My wife is...advanced.

Suddenly Gabriel's trench-coat falls open to reveal his internally illuminated white robe.

GABRIEL

I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of the God. [*Zechariah jumps back.*] I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Now you will be silent until these things come to pass. You will not be able to speak because you did not believe.

The multitude praying outside the partition begin to rouse each other.

Hill Person 1

What on earth is keeping Zechariah?

Hill Person 2

What *in heaven* is keeping Zechariah?

Hill Person 3

Maybe he's fallen asleep. He's no spring chicken.

Hill Person 4

He's all alone in there.

Hill Person 3

Maybe he's just an old chicken.

Hill Person 1

Maybe he saw a ghost and he's too mortified to tell us.

Hill Person 5

Maybe saw the Holy Ghost!

Hill Person 1

You shouldn't talk like that.

Suddenly, ZECHARIAH comes running out of the temple, breathless and gesticulating wildly. People's mouths drop as they stare.

Hill Person 5

Crossing arms emphatically

Maybe I should.

The scene is over and the players quickly exit. (Luke remains at his desk writing, though not always illuminated, throughout the pageant).

Scene 2

The congregation stands and sings "Ya Viene el Alba." As they sing, the scene is set. MARY enters dancing with a full basket on her head. As the

music stops, she sets the basket down and begins her work. She notices GABRIEL wearing his closed trench-coat has been watching her.

GABRIEL

Hello favored one! The Lord is with you!

Mary steps away and looks out toward the audience worriedly.

MARY

What sort of greeting is this?

GABRIEL

Walks over to Mary and taps her on the shoulder. She turns to face him.

Don't be afraid Mary. You have found favor with God.

MARY smiles brightly, bows, then she looks at GABRIEL expectantly.

GABRIEL

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son. And you will call his name Joshua.

The light goes up on LUKE still writing.

LUKE

He pauses in his writing.

Which in Greek is YAY-ZUS, the name Jesus. *[he begins to write again.]* He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; *[he stands]* and of his kingdom there will be no end.

LUKE stands gazing off toward MARY and GABRIEL, as if seeing the past.

MARY

Very seriously

How will it happen? *[after a long pause]* I don't have a husband.

GABRIEL

The Holy Spirit will come to you. You shall know the power of the Most High. And for this, the child shall be called holy.

LUKE and GABRIEL

[in unison] He will be called the Son of God.

GABRIEL

Also, your cousin Elizabeth, in her old age, will have a son.

LUKE

They've called her barren. But with God, nothing will be impossible.

MARY

Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let everything happen to me just as you have said.

Gabriel, overjoyed, goes down on one knee and makes a deep bow to her, then leaves quickly. MARY watches after him with her head cocked, wondering at his great deference to her. The scene has ended. Mary exits.

SONG

Congregation stands and sings together, "All of creation rejoices in you," # 60 in Music for Liturgy.

SCENE 3

The light goes back on Luke, seated at his desk.

LUKE

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a city of Judah. Entering the house of ZECHARIAH, she greeted Elizabeth.

MARY

Steps into the house and calls

Hail, Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH, startled, holds her belly at the child's leaping within her. Steadying herself, she turns, greets MARY by name,

ELIZABETH

Mary! *[Steadying herself, Elizabeth rushes to greet Mary as she very excitedly she exclaims]*

Blessed are you among women! Blessed is the fruit of your womb!

She pats Mary's belly, then throws her arms around her, then steps back to look at her.

ELIZABETH (continuing)

Why is this granted to me?! That the mother of my Lord should come to me?! *[She kneels, takes MARY's hands and kisses them.]* When you called your greeting the baby in my womb leaped for joy! *[She hugs her again, then steps back to look at her again, holding MARY's face in her two hands.]* Blessed is she who believed that here would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

MARY

[takes Elizabeth's hands, and speaks very directly to her face.]

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Mary and Elizabeth become still in time, as is Luke the writer, and we hear a solo voice sing the Magnificat (by Hinshaw) with the congregation singing refrains. When the solo is finished the scene has ended and Mary and Elizabeth exit.

SCENE 4

The light is on as Luke speaks.

LUKE

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. When the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and relations heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

Enter ELIZABETH holding a baby followed by a group of NEIGHBORS.

HILL PERSON 1

He's just so adorable. I wonder if he'll grow up to be a priest.

HILL PERSON 6

Look at that, he's got his father's smile.

HILL PERSON 3

He hasn't got any teeth.

Zechariah enters with another PRIEST pantomiming something, as he is used to doing.

Hill Person 6

As I was saying. . .

Priest

[interrupting] May I have your attention everyone? Today, on the eighth day of his life, we are here to celebrate the circumcision of little Zechariah.

Elizabeth

No, no! That's not going to be his name. His name will be called John.

We HEAR murmuring among the neighbors.

Hill Person 1

But my dear, that's absolutely scandalous. You haven't a single relative with that name!

Hill Person 6

[to ZECHARIAH] Well old man! What do you have to say about this? I mean. . .oh, sorry.

Hill Person 3

But yes, Zechariah, tell us what the child's father has to say about this!

[There is a time of gesturing between ZECHARIAH – 'asking' for a writing tablet – and the neighbors. The priest fetches a tablet and hands it to ZECHARIAH at last. Everyone is suddenly quiet while ZECHARIAH writes. He hands the tablet back to the priest who read it with solemnity.]

Priest

His name is John.

[ZECHARIAH is nodding frantically and suddenly begins to speak.]

ZECHARIAH

Yes! Yes! His name IS John! It was Gabriel himself who told it to me!
Praise God! I doubted, but now I believe! His name is John!

[Everyone is stunned. The tableau is frozen in time. The light is on Luke as he writes and speaks.]

LUKE

And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through the hill country of Judea. And all who heard wondered in their hearts, ‘what will this child be? For the hand of the Lord is with him.’ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. . .

[Everyone in the tableau stays frozen except for ZECHARIAH.]

ZECHARIAH

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people. . .

[ZECHARIAH freezes again with the others and we hear A SOLO of ‘Blessed are you, Oh Lord’ (Fabian) from the Song of ZECHARIAH (after Handl). When the song finishes the scene is finished and the players exit.]

SCENE 5A

[square is filled with TOWNSPEOPLE going about their various businesses; when a Roman PROCLAIMER and his two body GUARDS enter.]

PROCLAIMER

Oye! Oye! Let it be known this day, that the great Caesar, known as Augustus, has ordered a census to be taken of the entire world. Let every man and his family return to his ancestral city to be registered immediately. Anyone failing to register will be severely punished, severely taxed and severely. . .ruined.

[The proclaimer and his guards leave. The Townspeople begin murmuring loudly. JOSEPH who has been listening with the crowd turns to search for MARY, whom he finds shortly.]

JOSEPH

Mary! Mary! Did you hear that? You know that my ancestry goes all the way back to King David. I'm so sorry, but we'll have to go all the way to Bethlehem.

MARY

Well then, we'd better leave soon. I'd rather have this baby IN Bethlehem than on the road to Bethlehem.

TOWNSPERSON

You're gonna walk all the way to that dusty old shepherds' town? In her condition?

JOSEPH

It is the City of David

MARY

The birthplace of a king.

JOSEPH

[he takes her hands together] Mary, you are so good to me.

SCENE 5B: ROAD TO BETHLEHEM
SONG

[The townspeople slowly exit as the congregation stands and sings the Navajo Chant "In Beauty Happily I walk." Sanford will line out, so congregation can sing without books. As the song is sung, Mary and Joseph circle the whole sanctuary.]

SCENE 6: DOOR OF THE INN

[Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem and locate the inn. Joseph knocks and the KEEPOER answers, broom in hand.]

KEEPER

Well hello here traveler. Where ya hail from?

JOSEPH

We've come all the way from Judea, Nazareth actually.

KEEPER

Well, that IS a long way. Tired?

JOSEPH

Please, we need a room.

KEEPER

I see that! Can you pay?

JOSEPH

Certainly.

[Joseph hands the Keeper some money. Just then, Mary moans, doubles over from a birth pain and collapses at the innkeeper's feet, just inside the door. The Keeper notices and is irritated.]

KEEPER

Just a minute there. You got any gold pieces on you?

JOSEPH

[bewildered] Gold? No, of course not. I haven't any gold.

KEEPER

Well then, you can't stay here. *[Innkeeper pushes at Mary with the broom. Joseph attempts to intervene.]* There'll be no babies born in this fine establishment. The noise! The mess! The trouble! You'll be bothering everybody. I have to think of my customers. You poor folk are all alike. Never thinking of anybody but yourselves. You can't have your baby here. Not unless you've got a king's ransom to pay!

[The Keeper slams the door. While the keeper has been talking, Mary has stepped out of the way and fallen to her hands and knees. Joseph turns and finds her down on the ground. He is panic-stricken.]

JOSEPH

Oh Mary! What have I done, bringing you to this place? This is terrible. Mary try to hold on. I'll find help. There's got to be a midwife. . . someone. . . anyone. . .

[Joseph runs off into the street. Mary crawls behind the stable where she cannot be seen.]

SONG

*[The congregation stands to sing, "O Womb More Spacious than a City." Music for Liturgy, # 76. When the singing is finished Mary emerges holding **her baby** close.]*

SCENE 6a: STABLE

LUKE

And Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger.

*During the following mimed scene, choir leader and the choir begin humming 'away in a manger' quietly. **THE ANIMALS** (oxen and asses) who have been milling around, notice Mary's presence and all prostrate themselves, revealing a humble bed for baby Jesus. Mary, seeming to understand their offering, slowly walks to the manger and places her baby on the hay. Then she sits herself on the ground beside the manger. Just then, Joseph comes running back with a MIDWIFE< but stops short to behold the scene.]*

The congregation stands to sing "Away in a Manger" (During this time all the other players exit) When the singing stops, Luke, who is writing speaks.

SCENE 7

LUKE

Now in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and they were filled with fear.

[In the center area the SHEPHERDS and SHEEP have gathered around a fire (camp light – the room is very dark), a stranger, Gabriel in his trench coat, comes up to them and startles them.]

SHEPHERD 1

Oh - - - my - - - Gosh! Who are you? Where did you come from? And how did you get HERE?

[Suddenly several other people wearing trench coats appear to be surrounding the shepherds, who are obviously terrified. At Gabriel's signal they all their coats fall open to reveal illumination from within (battery-powered lights under thin white robes.)]

SHEPHERD 2

Look, it's the glory of the Lord!

[The shepherds are astonished and murmuring.]

GABRIEL

Be not afraid! I bring you good news! I bring you good news of a great joy! Good news of a great joy which shall come to all people!

[through the congregation a number of people will echo the phrase 'all people' for a moment, and then it over in a variety of languages.]

ANGELS

[repeating over and over, layered on top of 'all people'] A great joy! A great Joy!

[The light goes on Luke again, who is feverishly writing.]

LUKE

For to you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in manger.

[a soloist, then full choir sings from Handel's messiah, 'And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host, singing (choir): Glory to God, Glory to god in the highest,' Angels join shepherds around Mary and the baby at the manger. When choir finishes angels exit simply. The shepherds are still on.]

SHEPHERD 1

Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has happened which the Lord made known to us!

SHEPHERD 2

Yeah, come on. Let's go!

SHEPHERD 3

But who will stay with the sheep?

SHEPHERD 2

Not me! No way. I want to go to Bethlehem. I want to see the miracle!

SHEPHERD 3

We all do. Can't we bring the wooly ones then?

SHEPHERD 2

He said to look for a manger. Maybe it would be all right to bring our little flock.

SHEPHERD 1

Our little flock! This little flock descends from the very sheep King David himself once tended.

SHEPHERD 2

You're right. Maybe that's why the angels came to us.

SHEPHERD 3

Were they really angels?

SHEPHERD 1

Of course they were, you doubter. Didn't you see them and hear them with your own eyes and ears? They brought us good news...

SHEPHERD 2

[excitedly interjecting] . . .of great joy!

SHEPHERD 1

[continuing...] for all people!

[From around the room is HEARD the phrase 'all people,' as before.]

SHEPHERD 3

And sheep?

SHEPHERD 1

Listen if the heart of God has room enough for you and me on this. . . this night of nights, then certainly there must be room for sheep.

SHEPHERD 2

That settles it! To Bethlehem we go!

SONG:

The congregation sings 'Alegres del Corazon' (O come all ye faithful). During the song, the shepherds process to Bethlehem. The whole cast assembles behind and around Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus. After it is quiet, the light comes up on =Luke, who now stands closer to the scene, observing it, as if beholding his completed canvas. (if desired, the scene can include 'all people' i.e. the proclaimer, the keeper, etc.)

SCENE 8

LUKE

They went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child.

[Mary rises from her seat; and holding the baby, walks over to Luke while he continues.]

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

[Mary holds baby Jesus out for Luke to see. Luke smiles contentedly at the child, then at Mary. Luke continues -]

But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

[Luke watches after Mary as she returns to the tableau. Luke then kneels, still facing the scene.]

SONG:

The congregation rises to sing 'Joy to the World.'

THE END