

A script from



“Papa, Please Understand”

by
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- What** Mary and her father are writing letters to each other, revealing how he doubts the truth behind her pregnancy and the identity of her young son. This script is a blend of reader’s theater and an acted scene.
Themes: Christmas, Jesus’ Birth, Faith, Belief, Messiah, God With Us
- Who** Papa- Age 35 and up. The father of Mary.
Mary- Age 15-25. Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- When** Biblical times with a bit of modern flair.
- Wear (Props)** Modern clothes are fine. Papa and Daughter are both seated at a table. When we staged it, they were seated on opposing sides of a round table, slightly upstage so that they were “cheated” out to the audience. This enabled the two performers to look eye-to-eye when the script calls for it. Alternate possibilities include two writing desks both facing the audience, and only slightly angled toward each other. In any case, both actors should have paper and a pen. They are in their own separate homes, in separate towns.
- Why** Matthew 1:23
- How** For the first section of this piece, the lines are designed such that the final words of one performer are identical to the first words of the next. This is indicated in the script by underlining. Rehearsing this “overlap” is vital, so that the overlapped words are delivered in nearly perfect sync, so as to be clear to the audience. Throughout the remainder of the piece, the “together” lines should be rehearsed carefully as well. Each actor should give their own *inflection* on the line, but the cadence and pacing should be identical.
- Time** Approximately 7 minutes

As lights rise, Papa and Mary are seated at tables, writing letters to each other. It is important that they do not acknowledge each other's presence until they look at each other the first time.

Papa: Daughter, I know I haven't written in a while. But the neighbor's little girl brought us a loaf of bread this morning and it reminded me of something. Do you remember that day you decided to help your mother make dinner? You couldn't have been more than five. Your mother was next door visiting the neighbors when you decided it was dinner time. It's a wonder you didn't burn down the house cooking that bread! I got home just in time to see you covered in flour, pulling a perfectly cooked loaf of bread out of the oven. That wouldn't be the last time you astounded your dear Papa!

Mary: Dear Papa, your grandson is taking a nap and my better half is at the shop. He always seems to be at the shop, since his skills are in such high demand. But I thought I would take a moment to write. I think of you every day about this time...it's when you always came home for lunch. I remember running at you full-tilt when you came through the door calling out, "Where's my little girl?"

Papa: "My little girl is quite a good cook," I would tell people. I was always so eager to talk about you, to brag on how smart and hard-working you were. We used to be so close. You were daddy's little girl for so long. *(Pause)* That's why I don't understand how you could let this happen. When I looked toward your future...I had such high hopes.

Mary: I had such high hopes when the messenger came with the letter from home. But no...still just Mama's name at the end. I've kept every letter you two have ever written me. I wish you would write more and not make Mama do it all, but I guess that's part of what happens when your father is convinced that you've disgraced our family name.

Papa: Our family name has taken quite a hit by what I now think of as "your situation". I can barely show my face at the synagogue. I think it would be better if you at least ADMITTED you'd done something wrong. And that husband of yours—I refuse to call him my son-in-law—he had us fooled! Seemed like a man with potential, a future! But now he's fallen in line with your ridiculous story. I can't imagine why.

Mary: I can't imagine why you think I would have lied about this. Don't you think I KNOW how ridiculous it sounds? Of course I do! I don't blame you for having doubts. But to flat out accuse me of lying? I thought you respected me more than that. Of all the childish things I may have done, I never once lied to either you or mother. I know Mama has her doubts as well, but at least she's doing as I asked and waiting it out. Why can't you?

Papa: Why can't you see things through my eyes? I've told your mother that this is the time for tough love. We can't let you get away with these outrageous stories, playing us for fools. If you want to live as an adult, we must hold you to adult standards, and not accept this kind of foolishness.

Mary: FOOLISHNESS! That's what you called it. You looked right in my eyes and called it foolishness. That's what bothers me most, I think.

Papa: What bothers me most, I think, is that I think you're fooling yourself. When I looked into your eyes, I didn't see deception. Fear, some confusion, something that resembled excitement, but no deception. Have you really convinced yourself that this is true?

Mary: This is true!!! I know it is, no matter who doubts me.

Together: (You/I) gave birth to the Messiah (?/!)

Papa: My daughter?

Mary: Me!!

Papa: No...the Messiah...would not have come in this way.

Mary: It was unexpected, but...

These two lines are delivered simultaneously, converging on "terrifying".

Papa: It's nonsensical and blasphemous and ridiculous and unbelievable and

Mary: It's thrilling and exciting and amazing and astounding and

Together: Terrifying.

On "terrifying", they look at each other, and hold each other's gaze for a long time.

Papa: *(returning to his letter)* I'm frightened for you, my daughter...my Mary.

Mary: *(Returning to her letter)* Papa, come visit, and look in my eyes again. You have to know that I would not invent a story like this.

Papa: *(softening)* If it is true...

Mary: It IS true, Papa...

Papa: If it is true...then nothing is as we have expected. Nothing is as we planned.

Mary: I can't explain it, Papa. I can't tell you how it will all work out. But...

Together: This changes everything.

Mary: It *does*, Papa. The God you have served so faithfully all your life is doing a *new* thing...and you get a front row seat! I don't want you to miss it.

Papa: But if the Messiah is not a conqueror...if that is different...then I have this suspicion that this road will not be an easy one for you...or your child.

Mary: I know that it won't be easy, Papa. But Joseph is beside me and God is leading us.

Papa: Joseph...he really does believe you, doesn't he?

Mary: He does, Papa. *(Chuckles)* He has an advantage, though. God sent an angel to Him too.

Papa: *(to the heavens with a touch of humor)* Is it too much to ask that you might have done the same for me?

Mary: Papa...

Papa: Daughter...

Mary: Don't miss out. You've prayed all your life for a Messiah. You've taught me to expect the unexpected from the God of our Fathers. You've instructed me in the FAITH of our fathers. All I'm asking is that you look to the heavens and ask for God to give you faith in this plan you weren't expecting. Trust me...

Papa: My daughter, the mother of the Messiah? Can it really be true?

Mary: *(looks toward papa)* Yes, Papa.

Papa: *(looks at Mary, then long pause as they hold each other's gaze again)* Yes, Mary.

Mary: *(returning to her letter)* We've had plenty of guests since the baby came—shepherds and some very wise men from far away, even. I've had lots to ponder, and Joseph has been so wonderful. But Papa, I want YOU to see Him—our little baby, Jesus.

Papa: *(with wonder and approval)* Jesus? You named the baby "God saves."

Mary: *(smiling)* Yes, Papa. It's the name the angels gave us.

Papa: Jesus. My daughter's baby.

Mary: Yes, Papa.

Papa: Jesus, the Messiah?

Mary: *(fervently)* Yes, Papa.

Papa: So, I suppose I must accept that after all the prayers, and all these years...

Mary: Papa, we should be celebrating because...

Together: God is with us.

Long silence as they look at each other and subtly smile one last time.

Together: *(returning to their letters)* With all my love...

Papa: And with newly opened eyes, your Papa.

Mary: Your devoted daughter.

Papa: *(standing and heading toward offstage)* Anna, gather your things. We're going to go visit our grandson!!

Mary: *(standing and heading offstage)* Joseph, you're home just in time! Mama and Papa are coming to visit!

Lights fade.