

Act III.
My son, the Messiah.

[A street in Nazareth. A group of children play. Eli is nearby doing some work.]

MIRIAM: *[at the door, waving goodbye to Joshua]* Godspeed..! Be careful...*[turning around]*. What am I saying? He is thirty years old now, a rabbi, a teacher, and I still talk to him like to a child... My child! *[pause]* He wants to become a Messiah, a leader who guides people to power. But how is He to be accepted as the Messiah by other men? How can I help him?! I wish Joseph would be here. *[nostalgic]*. Joseph was so proud of Him ... Even that night, after which he never woke up, he sang his pride.

JOSEPH: *[sings in the style of Negro Spiritual]*

Jesus Man

Mary gave me a child,
I welcomed the Son of God
who was my honor to father.
He grew strong and wise,
knowing no fear to think,
knowing no fear to stand up,
gentle and proud and free,
loyal to the weaker,
seeking truth and justice,
not success and profit.
My son has grown to be a man.
Only a man can be a Christ!

CHORUS: Jesus-man! Jesus-Christ!

JOSEPH: *[recitative]*

He drinks goat's milk in the hills.
He wrests lives from the storms.
He plays like a merry brother.
He eats in the kitchen of his people.
He reads the ancient books.
He consoles with words and deeds.
He opens his heart,

and carries his forehead high.
He walks serene, face smiling*,
love as his shield and blazon,
his mind in the future,
armed with gentleness and example.
This is how my son is.
He is truly God's son.

MIRIAM: *[to herself]* Having raised Joshua, Joseph was satisfied with his life. On time, as he caressed an unusually beautiful table he had just finished carving, he said, with a little sadness, "Is there not a certain satisfaction in the fact that natural limits are set to the life of each person, so that at its conclusion it may appear as a work of art?" *

ELI: *[who approaches Mary, unobtrusively]* Joshua was very young when Joseph died.

MIRIAM: Yes, raising Him without a father was hard for me. He had to mature earlier, yet in other ways He remained a child. I guess I depended on Him too... and now He is going away... He has a great task ahead of Him. The entire world is greedy for gold and profit, and think nothing of making us slaves to grab their precious power. Joshua does not believe that the zealot revolution will ever succeed against the empire. I am afraid for Him, but He thinks only of the failures that victory may bring. Can a country of peasants and carpenters compete with the factories of Rome and their thousand slaves? If we succeed, He says, how can we remain who we are? How will the vanquished behave when they become victorious? Will we not then enslave the others? Will we turn from abused to abusers? No! We need to heal the crippled spirit. We need a new way of thinking. We cannot win by the sword only. "How would you become the Messiah?", I asked. "Will you organize a people's army like David's, as Barabbas is now forming?* Will you become a king?" "No..", He answered, "I want to be with my own, with the poor workers. The lilies of the field please me better than the towers of Jerusalem". How are you going to make people listen to you? I always believe in You, but **a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.**

"I will become a healer", He said. *[the lights of the upper stage go off, and those of the lower stage go on]* **Healer**

ANTONIO: His first public act was to heal. Joshua always thought that to be and think like a healer...*

ERNEST: ..is best. But dad, this is you favorite phrase. Is this part of your efforts to make me study medicine like you?

ANTONIO: No. You must follow your heart. Mary's son did what His heart told Him to do. He transformed Mary's dreams. He thought for Himself.

[The light that illuminates the family goes off, and in the higher stage, a group of women, men and children, surrounding Joshua moves across the stage, while Mary and Eli watch. We can feel Joshua's presence in their mist, but cannot see Him.]

MIRIAM: *[arm in arm with Eli, looking at a crowd]* A woman approaches Him. She is touching his cloak.

ELI: I know that woman, Her bleeding is constant.

MIRIAM: She is sure that touching Joshua' cloak will stop her bleeding. Her perpetual bleeding makes her unclean according to our old traditions. Joshua, even Joshua!, recoils for a moment, so strong is the old taboo... Ah!, He overcomes His response...I know now you will be a healer for our people, my son.

ELI: There, there, now it is a wealthy man, Jairus, I know him too. He comes to ask your son's help for his lovely daughter, the apple of his eye.

CHORUS: *[laughing]* What is He saying? Just go to believe that...

MIRIAM: Luke, can you hear what are they saying?

LUKE: Joshua just told Jairus not to weep, because his daughter is not dead but asleep. Nobody believes Him, but I, as a physician, I have seen a good number of hysteric women, and men, who become paralyzed, and people take them for dead, until one arouses them with a strong suggestion.

MALE CHORUS: Joshua said "Little girl, arise". And she did get up!

FEMALE CHORUS: He resurrected Jairus' daughter!

MALE CHORUS: With his words He resurrected her!

LUKE: What are they saying? I distinctly heard He said "She is not dead but asleep".

FEMALE: Also I heard Him saying that she was not dead.

MALE CHORUS: Silence! We have heard Him tell a paralytic man "Arise, take up your bed, and go away to your house". And the man walked!

ZECHIAS: *[an old and short man, a wealthy tax collector, a collaborator of the Roman establishment, intelligent, ironic, cynic, skeptic, but also authentic. He keeps himself separated from the group, and speaks to the audience as if he would be talking to himself.]* There is a reason for everything, usually wrong.*

FEMALE CHORUS: His fame now extends all over Israel. Illness strikes a chord of wishful thinking in the hearts of the sick.

MALE CHORUS: All want His help. Belief breeds healing, and healing breeds belief. Legends build quickly. Illness knows no class, also the rich come to Him... The leader of a synagogue, a Roman centurion...

FEMALE CHORUS: ...a gentile woman came to ask Him to cast out evil spirits who have taken possession of her daughter.

ZECHIAS: Now the young rabbi will seek favors from the rich, like everybody else...

MIRIAM: Healing He reaches their hearts...

CHILDREN: *[walking in]* We also want to hear you..

MALE CHORUS: Let them pass. He asks us to let the children come to Him.

CHILDREN'S CHORUS: *[Sings traditional sunday school song]*

"Jesus loves the little children,
"all the children of the world,
"red and yellow, black and white,
"they are precious in his sight."

MALE CHORUS: Children! Sometimes this man Joshua behaves like a woman. He is always surrounded by women, **Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources.** *[turning to Mary]* He has learned from a woman!

MIRIAM: Yes, I taught him... *the chorus leaves, except for Mary Magdalene]*

MAGDALENE: *[Mary Magdalene, approaching Mary humbly]* Good day, my lady, God be with you. You are blessed among all women, to have a son like Joshua.

MIRIAM: Good day to you. Thank you for your words. Who are you?

MAGDALENE: Me? I am ... a nobody.. *[she says these words automatically, obeying a sense of inferiority learned in childhood, but then she corrects herself, and adds with pride:]* a nobody I was. Now I am His witness.

MIRIAM: *[silently]* ?

MAGDALENE: I am still young, yet I have already died and resurrected. My mother, who was beaten up by her husband almost daily, went with another man.* When I was born, her husband realized that he was not my father. My face, my hair, the color of my skin, all told him. He beat me up, once and again. I did not understand. I thought I was bad, a bad girl. My weak and guilty mother never protected me. Worst, she taught me to respect the man I called father. The day I became woman, he made fun of me; I wanted to kill him. Others killed him, in a brawl. Then mother told me he was not my father. I never forgave her. Few days later, Herod's guards came to take my only friend, a boy my age, to serve in the army. We had only one afternoon to say goodbye, and I gave my love to him. I'm glad I did not deny myself to him, because my good friend never came back.. When I found myself with child, I did not know what to do.

FEMALE CHORUS: Man does not know **the way of the eagle in the air, the way of the serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the mist of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.**

MALE CHORUS: Men will know. Moses did not prohibit sex before marriage, but we have made an obligation for brides to prove their virginity, under the pain of death by stoning.

MAGDALENE: I could not marry, so I .. lowered myself, and became ... what I am.. *[correcting herself]* what I

was... a harlot.. When my child died, I went crazy. I thought that seven demons possessed me, just as those repugnant men, dirty and brutal, had possessed me. They called me the Madwoman of Magdala --that is my village. The decent men, and the decent women, turned away from me, except at the time of their sickening pleasure. Then they did not mind that I was crazy.

FEMALE CHORUS: *[from a poem by Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz*]*

Foolish, arrogant men
who accuse me without reason,
without realizing you're the cause
of my misery and my shame.
Who is guiltier,
although neither does well,
me, who sins for pay,
or you, who pay to sin?

MIRIAM: My poor child...

MAGDALENE: You treat me like your son did. Like a person. He did not reject me for having made love to my good friend; or for having being a prostitute; or for having become depressed and crazy.

FEMALE CHORUS: This is the story Joshua told: There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii and the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he pardoned them both. Which of them will love him more?

MAGDALENE: So I love Him more than anybody else.

MALE CHORUS: Joshua said: It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick.

MAGDALENE: Like making peace: you cannot make peace with a friend, but only with an enemy. He helped me to make friends in my mind with my mother, with men, even with the one who I thought of as my father. That is how he cast out my seven demons...

MIRIAM: What is your name?

MAGDALENE: Mary

MIRIAM: Like me.

FEMALE CHORUS: We are all Mary. Nobody is better than anybody.

MAGDALENE: As I come from Magdala, men call me Magdalene.

MIRIAM: What do you do now?

MAGDALENE: I work with Him.

MIRIAM: *[delighted]* Oh!, please tell me his news. I have no word from Him for a while.

MAGDALENE: He teaches, He teaches all the time.

MIRIAM: Yes, I know, but how does He teach?

MAGDALENE: Always with stories.

MIRIAM: *[delighted]* Ah! As I taught Him...

Wedding

[stage: a field in front of a house]

FEMALE CHORUS: On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Joshua was there. Now both Joshua and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

[Enter group of men and women, surrounding an invisible Joshua]

MARY MAGDALENE: *[stepping out from the group, apart]*
Oh Joshua!

Tell me, my true love,*
where you mind your flocks...
My beloved is fair and ruddy,
his head is gold, finest gold:
his locks are like palm-fronds, black as
the raven.
His eyes are like doves beside brooks of
water,
his legs are pillars of marble in sockets of
finest gold.
Such is my beloved,
daughters of Jerusalem.

FEMALE CHORUS: The bride is coming! The bride is coming!

MAGDALENE: I wish I could be His bride...

MIRIAM: The bride came from a strange land, and to gain

our hearts she sang one of our oldest songs:

AFRICAN WOMAN: *[beautifully dressed in multicolored outfit, head shaven, with the shape of Nefertiti's]*

I am black and beautiful,
daughters of Jerusalem,
like Solomon's pavilions,
like the tents of Kedar,
dark outside, and rich inside.
Take no notice of my swarthy skin
because I am scorched by the sun...

FEMALE CHORUS: O that you would kiss me with the
kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine.

ZECHIAS: *[in a critical mood]* At least kisses are easier to
get. Wine, there is none left. Our hosts remembered to invite
everybody, but forgot to get enough to drink.

MIRIAM: I asked Joshua to help them.

ELI: What did He do?

MIRIAM: He instructed the servants to fill the wine jugs with
water, and then He looked intensely at the guests, and told
them that they will be served the finest wine. And the finest
wine, each of them said, I have drunk.

ZECHIAS: Israeli wine is notoriously bad.

*[As this conversation takes place, a group of women
approach Mary, and ask questions in rapid succession. The
men leave, except for Zechias who remains on the outside
of the group.]*

FEMALE CHORUS:

-How did he do that? Was it a miracle?

-We hear your son is a prophet, but he does not behave like
a prophet. Prophets live in the wilderness, and come out to
ask all to repent.

ZECHIAS: A much over-rated profession, if you understand
what I mean. Each prophet says what he wants.

FEMALE CHORUS:

-Your son Joshua is asking others to join him. Is he
organizing a movement?

-He tells them to be wise as serpents, and to appear
harmless as doves.

-He tells them that they will be persecuted by outsiders, so
they all come together, in unity.

-He does not promise them learning, like a teacher, but power.

-Does He organize the poor to strike for power?

-Or does He strive for power to help the poor?

-How can He speak with such authority, when He is just a carpenter, the son of a carpenter?

MIRIAM: He is not speaking of the law that men make, by force or by consensus. He is speaking of justice, which is what we call the laws of God. By so defining the law, a single man can speak with as much authority as the entire establishment, and he can demand change by pointing out how the men in power have deviated from the true laws.

WOMAN: What do you mean?

MIRIAM: They brought to him a married woman who had laid with another man.

FEMALE CHORUS: Did they bring the man too?

ZECHIAS: *[dismissing the idea as ridiculous]* Noooh. What do you think?

MIRIAM: They asked Him:

PHARISEE: "Shall we stone her to death?"

FEMALE CHORUS: Oh, how horrible!

MIRIAM: Could He let her go unpunished?

FEMALE CHORUS: That would be against the law!

MIRIAM: So He said: **Let he who is free of guilt throw the first stone.**

FEMALE CHORUS: *[reassured]* We have heard that He is on the side of women.

ZECHIAS: *[To the audience.]* He is a tricky fellow, I say. With the modesty that characterizes me, I will explain it all to you: He cannot say the same things as the rabbis,* because people are already bored with all the speeches at the synagogue.. But He cannot say something too different, because He would be against the Scriptures.. So He calls for conformity with the law, to disarm the opposition, and then He expands the law, creating change while insisting He is not.. Tricky...

MIRIAM: Many times I made him aware how unjust it was for wives that men can send them away just by giving them a divorce paper. Women can rarely get a divorce, even when they are beaten. Joshua wanted to protect the women without creating opposition, so He began by reaffirming the law, and then enlarging it by prohibiting men to divorce their wives without reason.

WOMAN: I think that men should fight for their freedom, not just talk of rewards and punishment in the after-world. That only helps the powerful to quiet down the opposition.

MIRIAM: Oh He never uses the promise of heaven as a way of persuading the poor and the abused to accept their misery, but as an incentive for all to follow Him in creating a better world. Those who act can achieve heaven, while those who submit will remain in hell.

WOMAN: What does He say about Hell?

MIRIAM: He threatens the powerful with a hell of eternal fire in an attempt to control their abuses, but I can assure you that Joshua does not think that God is cruel. He learned our Scriptures, where hell is the Sheol, a gray place of infinite nothingness, where the punishment consists in the absence of God, the death of the spirit. Life without meaning, that is hell. Our life is now meaningful. Let's return to our feast. This is the time to feast.

ZECHIAS: *[as the women join a group of men, who will be the disciples in the next scene]* In my old age, I have learned that those who find life meaningful, and those who find life meaningless, are both right. It depends.

The lilies of the valley

MIRIAM: Our conventional religious men think it is enough to refrain from throwing wild parties and getting drunk. Joshua wants to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind to our

feasts. There is so much pain and failure in life, that one needs also feasting, to keep on struggling.

THE DISCIPLES, WOMEN AND MEN CHORUS: Our kingdom is of this world. We love life. John made a beautiful song we all love to sing:

**God so loved the world
that He gave His begotten Son.
For God did not send His son
into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world, through Him might be
saved.**

ZECHIAS: As prophets go, He is not too bad. At least He never puts on a somber spiritual face, and fasts and prays. He puts on His best clothes and makes a feast with His friends. *[With irony]* Although fasting once in a while would be useful for the Sadducees, who are becoming so fat.. *[with displeasure]* Oh, here come these aristocrats.. And also the pure ones.* This will be a good one! *[Two groups of men enter, hotly debating with each other]*

PHARISEES: Yes, your city manners make you subjects of Rome, the new Babylon.

SADDUCEES: We are fond of knowledge, of modern science and contemporary thought. We study Greek science.

PHARISEES: Yes, you Sadducees have been so enamored of Greek science that you forgot to help our heroes in their fight for independence.

SADDUCEES: Those Maccabees were just uncivilized guerrillas,* defeated by the greater civilization of Rome.

PHARISEES:

-Defeat is no shame.

-To collaborate with the enemy is despicable.

[All in unison.]

-Collaborators!

SADDUCEES:

-We collaborate in the creation of the new world, the Roman Peace.

-You Pharisees are ignorant like country bumpkins, and

hypocritical too.

-You call yourselves the separate ones, as if God who is one wanted to separate us from other men.

-You claim to follow the old religion, and adhere to its fundamentals, but you add to our scriptures all kind of superstitions!

ZECHIAS: *[always addressing the audience]* Yeah, yeah, they both talk good God, but sooner or later they all seek the favor of the powerful.

DISCIPLE: Joshua gets really impatient with these debates between Sadducees and Pharisees. **Why do you see a splinter in your brother's eye, and never notice a plank in your own?**, He asks.

SADDUCEES: *[realizing that the disciples are there]* Oh, there is Joshua and His crowd... We really do not want them. They are zealots. Look at the swords they don. *[they leave]*

PHARISEES: *[to the disciples]*

-What kind of behavior is this?

-No wonder the Romans think poorly of you. You wear swords, like rebels, and feast instead of working.

DISCIPLES:

-We do have swords.* The Romans must know that we shall defend our lives. But we are not aggressors.

-Even if we are slapped in the face, we shall turn the other cheek.

ZECHIAS: Yeah, turn the other cheek, and carry a sword.

DISCIPLES: **When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throws you into prison. This is what Joshua taught us.**

ZECHIAS: Very practical: try to make peace, because you cannot expect justice. Not from judges, anyhow.

DISCIPLES: In the short run, we are too weak to defeat the Romans in battle, so armed revolution is not a good strategy. In the long run, means and ends must be the same. To create peace we need to become peaceful. The only way to overcome

the Romans is to change their hearts.

PHARISEES: *[more conciliatory]* We know you are not a band of revolutionary zealots, nor are you true mystics who punish the flesh to enhance the spirit. In fact you just talk and feast.

DISCIPLES: We feast because Joshua brings us the good news. The kingdom of God is at hand.

ZECHIAS: The good news is that the kingdom of God is coming. The bad news is that only the Romans have come so far.

PHARISEES: You feast too much, that is why you are poor.

DISCIPLES: We work and we are poor. The way to be rich is not to work, but to have others working for you. Taking from others gives wealth.

ZECHIAS: They speak like that because they are poor. Gathering taxes has made me wise: all men want money.

PHARISEES: You are poor because you are lazy. Read the Bible: you reap what you sow. Learn the work ethic.

MIRIAM: Joshua worked hard enough, as a carpenter, and was proud of His work, but never thought that life should be work. One time He said: **Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil, nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**

DISCIPLES:

-We are free only when we play, and the whole world becomes a work of art. To work is not an end in itself; it is not a goal of life.

-I do not need to be rich. There are so many things in the market I need not buy...* Neither work nor money provide a purpose to life. Doing something for others, we do find a purpose.

A MAN FROM THE PHARISEE GROUP: Our rabbi Hillel said: "If I am not for myself, who will be? And if I not for others, who am I? And if not now, when?"

MIRIAM: Yes, there are many good men among you, who

teach love, just like Joshua. He does not think too much of rituals, as you do...

ZECHIAS: Yeah, these men are always tempted to pray. It is so much less costly than doing something practical...

PHARISEES: Ritual and faith gives salvation!

DISCIPLES: No! Giving to others, working for others, gives salvation. Joshua says that you are like white coffins, shiny on the outside, but putrid and decayed inside.

ZECHIAS: I always thought that piety is such a tiresome virtue. Now that I come to think about, most virtues are overrated. Principally those practiced by the Pharisees --like eating some kind of food, and being so strict with the Sabbath...

DISCIPLES:

-Faith without work is hypocrisy.

-We need commitment, commitment and solidarity with the oppressed.

-We need to learn the truth, and we cannot learn it just by reading the Scriptures.*

ZECHIAS: Yeah, yeah, that I like. Reading the Scriptures is a highly over-rated virtue.

PHARISEE: Shut up, old man. Respect the Truth!

ZECHIAS: *[always to the audience and to himself]* The virtue of truth is also highly over-rated, if you understand my point. Truth is what the ignorant are sure they know.*

DISCIPLES: Salvation comes to those who love their neighbor.

A PHARISEE: We wonder how your rabbi conceives of his love. We see many women among you...

ANOTHER PHARISEE: Some of them have both history and geography.. like that woman from Magdala..

MAGDALENE: *[emerging from among the disciples]* How would that be a matter of yours?! Do you think His message would be less because He would love like any other man? *[apart]* Oh, I wish He would! His spirit inflames His profound black eyes, and inflames me, body and soul.. I never dared think of wanting

Him as a man, but I dream with Him, every night... although I know it will not come to pass... To fall in love is such a happiness... Being loved hardly compares... *[to the Pharisees]* Our rabbi Joshua does not make love to any of us. Not because He wants to mortify the flesh, like the prophets of the desert and the Dead Sea, but because He has a mission that absorbs His life. Woman stories would be in His way to become the leader we need. Do not even dream of spreading stories, because we shall prove them false.

The Good neighbor

[The chorus surrounds the invisible figure of Joshua.]

PHARISEE: *[to Joshua]* The Scriptures command us to love our neighbor. Who is our neighbor?

MIRIAM: I can't hear from here. Old man Zechias, What did He say?

ZECHIAS: I cannot hear either. Let me climb the tree and look.

CHILDREN'S CHORUS:

Zechias was a wee little man,
and a wee little man was he.
He climbed up the sycamore tree
for Joshua he wanted to see.

CHILD: Joshua told the story of a man who was robbed by bandits. They beat him up, and left him as dead on the side of the road. A rabbi went by, without stopping, and an orthodox Jew did not stop either. But a Samaritan carry him to the inn, where they took care of him.

ZECHIAS: Your Son has dramatic flair, to choose those who are most hated by we Jews as a symbol of the good neighbor.

MIRIAM: I am proud Joshua remembered our good neighbor Eli, the Palestinian from Samaria.

FEMALE AND MALE CHORUS: *[still looking to its midst, where Joshua is, all at the same time]* Let the peace of Christ bless this Holy Land, where Palestinian and Jew live together, and die together, since the time of Moses. *[one voice at a time:]*

-To make peace is not easy. We will have to change many things.

-People can change, they can change much, almost completely, but only within continuity.

-To ask us to change at once, abandoning who we are, is like saying "kill yourself". *

-We must then accept our enemies as they are, because we want them to change. Only in this fashion we shall bring peace.

-I do not think peace is ever possible. Evil is part of human nature.

ZECHIAS: *[apart]* In my old age, I have come to understand that people who think that human nature is good, and people who think that human nature is bad, are both right. They speak about themselves.

MIRIAM: We can always make things better.

ZECHIAS: Again you have it. Those who think they can do it, and those who think they can't, often are both right.

WOMAN: What did He say now?

MALE CHORUS: **He that makes haste to be rich shall not be innocent.**

FEMALE CHORUS: He speaks for all of us! For the poor, for the abused, for the oppressed, for the women..

MAGDALENE: When I first met Joshua, I hoped He was a knight in shining armor, who would rescue me. Then I discovered He is not an errant knight saving damsels in distress, but a leader of the weak. He teaches us to be strong and proud. The poor with spirit, not the poor in spirit shall inherit the earth.

ZECHIAS: Those who think themselves inferior are often right.

MALE: He is hard with the wealthy. He told them that: **for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven is as difficult as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.**

FEMALE: Yes, but He added that, with God's help, the camel will go through the eye of the needle, and, if they help God, the wealthy will enter the kingdom of heaven. Joshua did not condemn the rich, making them our enemies, but

tried to attract them to God's side.

Zechias' conversion

CHILDREN CHORUS: Joshua saw Zechias in the tree, and invited Himself to have dinner at his house. People were surprised, because Zechias had made himself rich as a tax collector, and was despised by all, as a collaborator of the Romans.

FEMALE: Joshua saw the hunger that made this man, old and vulnerable, to climb a tree.

ZECHIAS: Yes, hunger for seeing and for being seen. I am not one of His. Wealthy, greedy, without a sense of guilt, measuring it all by its monetary value, too educated to believe in the miracles that the credulous attribute to Him, I am perhaps the least likely of Christ's converts. Yet I climb a tree, such was my thirst to see Him, my hunger to listen to Him. He saw my thirst and my hunger, and invited Himself to have dinner with me. He is tricky. Nobody that would pass judgement on me could help me change. So He comes and says: **Judge not, that you be not judged.** So here I am, a changed man. I always was greedy, but my hunger has changed. **From this day, I shall give half of my possessions to the poor.** [*changing tone, from sublime to knavish*] I am sufficiently rich to afford it.

The Sermon on the Mount

[Stage: a hill over the Sea of Galilee. The chorus occupies all the stage]

FEMALE CHORUS: He stood on the top of the mountain, facing the Sea of Galilee.

MALE CHORUS: Blessed be the poor with spirit. Blessed be you who are peaceful, because yours will be God's home. Happy are you who are oppressed, poor and hungry now, because you will be satisfied. Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh. But you who are rich, are having your consolation now. You who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

MIRIAM: This is what He said: Love your neighbor like your self. Organize your life, your work, your community,

at the service of persons. Kingdoms are organized to increase their riches, and enterprises to maximize their profits. Churches claim to work for the glory of God, but this is so difficult to define, that more often than not it ends up to be the glory of the priests. Revolutionary zealots want us to place ourselves at the service of the community, to give up our individuality, our possessions and our mind, and the final outcome is that all is lost, and someone else commands us. One must love oneself to love the other, and those who renounce to their own self also hurt the others. The means must be the same as the ends, so we must be peaceful to create peace, just to create justice, respectful to create respect. We should be peaceful, not meek. Life should not be at service of king, emperor, not even God. Life should be for persons, you and me, and in this manner we serve God.

Anoint The Christ

MAGDALENE:.... I will help Him... I want to co-create with Him a better world. Helping the Christ is the highest thing I can ever do. I want to help Him!

MIRIAM: Me too. *[explaining]* When I was a young girl, and dreamed, like many others, that my son could be a Messiah, I did not just hope and wait. I asked myself, "How do I teach a Messiah?". When He was a grown man, a man who could become our Messiah, I asked myself "How can a poor man be recognized as a Messiah? How can I help Him?" It is difficult to be a prophet in your own land. In Galilee nobody listened to Him, who they all know as a carpenter, the son of a carpenter.

MAGDALENE: Now I understand. He acts humble, and yet, one time, a woman anointed His feet with oil, Joshua said that her anointing was more important than all the work her sister did.

MIRIAM: Yes, it was. The anointment was the recognition that He was the Christ, that means the anointed one. Nobody can become the Christ, unless others recognize Him. That was my first task as a

mother: to recognize Him. That is the most important role of every mother, I guess, to mirror her child.

ZECHIAS: I also recognized Him. No miracles convinced me. I am Christian, but not simple. And I saw clearly the maneuvers through which Joshua sought power, but I also saw his authenticity.

MAGDALENE: You too are authentic. Come with us. Sunday we march on Jerusalem.

March on Jerusalem

[stage: road to Jerusalem]

MIRIAM: It seems yesterday that He stepped into public life, alone, poor, unknown. It was yesterday when He failed to have His message heard in Galilee. But defeat never discourages Him. Today my Joshua is going to Jerusalem to proclaim He is the Christ. To Jerusalem, where all expect the Messiah to establish his kingdom. He is thinking carefully every step He takes, to satisfy each prophecy. He will go through the Mount of Olives...

FEMALE CHORUS: .. as prophesied..

MIRIAM: ... and will enter Jerusalem mounted on an ass..

FEMALE CHORUS: ..in the traditional manner of the kings.

MALE CHORUS: We shall spread our garments on His way, and cut branches from the trees, and strew them in the way.

FEMALE CHORUS: And we shall sing Hosanna, and call Him the Son of David, so all know of His mission.

MIRIAM: I am going to Jerusalem too. I too want to help.

WOMAN: *[approaching Mary, and grabbing her by her sleeve]* Mary, talk to your son. His followers will get Him in trouble. The worst of all is that Simon, who they call Peter because he is stubborn like a rock. He is a zealot, a revolutionary who wants to share the wealth among all the people.

FEMALE CHORUS: Joshua was never violent...

MIRIAM: Except once, with the merchants of the temple.

Joshua confronts the bankers of the Temple

[Stage: The courtyard facing the Temple. Two Roman soldiers on guard.]

MIRIAM: Monday Joshua confronts the bankers of the temple.

CHORUS: Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Joshua went to up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of chords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overturned the banks where they sat.

MIRIAM: Afterwards, I asked him why. He was full of passion, but His words were sweet and patient: "These are not simple merchants, selling goods or souvenirs", He explained, "they are money-traders, usurers, bankers.* The Temple is the treasury and the banking facility that contribute to the wealth and power of the priestly aristocracy that collaborates with the Romans."

LYDIA: Were they bad bankers, like those people who stole all the money in the Savings and Loan Associations?*

ANTONIO: *[grunts in discomfort, perhaps agreeing and perhaps denying what Lydia said]* Some other time I will tell you that story..

ERNEST: What about the debt of the Latin American countries? Should they pay it? In school they taught me that the Church banned money lending for centuries. Should we go back to that Christianity, or it is no longer possible?

ANTONIO: Well... perhaps Joshua did not want to outlaw all bankers, perhaps He just wanted to get rid of the greedy ones... But it cannot be chance that Joshua's only act of violence was against money traders.. When His disciples rebelled against the Romans years later, they also burned the money-lenders bonds.

CHORUS: *[in business suits, speaking through microphones, with mechanical voices]*

-This is the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, the

BCCI.

- "In BCCI we have removed the duality of subject and object and we seek to live the oneness of life". *

- "The process of BCCI is the process of becoming souls".

- "This is the final agenda item: God, providence, divinity, faith, BCCI".

- "Living in the BCCI human energy system will make you experience a totally new ecology, the ecology of God's divinity". - This is the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, the BCCI, as we took your money and went bankrupt.

Say no to the lesser evil

[Stage: The interior of a house in Jerusalem.]

MIRIAM: Tuesday, the priests met in council.

MALE CHORUS:

- Yesterdays's attack on the Temple was a call for revolution.

- The insurrection led by Barabbas has failed... but Jerusalem is full of Passover pilgrims.. A spark may inflame revolution at any time.

- The people are awaiting the imminent arrival of a Messiah who will come down from heaven, to liberate us from the Romans.

- We who are less blind to earthly realities, and less confident of divine support, cannot discount the disparities of number and power.

- We are in terror of a suicidal uprising that incites the Romans to destroy our entire nation.

ANTONIO: Forty years later, it turned out as they had feared.

PRIEST: **It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. This is the lesser evil.**

The land of God

[Stage: A street in Jerusalem.]

MIRIAM: That very Tuesday His enemies set up their trap. There was a great multitude surrounding Joshua.

MALE AND FEMALE CHORUS:

- Rabbi Joshua is teaching again.

- He should be careful, the Roman soldiers are on guard in

the square.

- What is he going to say about land taxes?
- Shall we pay land-taxes that the Roman Caesar has imposed on our land?
- All the land of Israel belongs to God, because we hold it in common property.*
- A good Jew cannot pay taxes to Caesar for a land that belongs to God.

ZECHIAS: They may talk of God, but in the last instance nobody wants to pay taxes.

AGENT PROVOCATEUR: *[to another]* Now that there are so many people around, and also Roman soldiers, now is our opportunity to entrap Him. *[loud]* Rabbi, rabbi, you who call yourself the Son of Man, should we pay land taxes to Caesar?

MALE CHORUS:

- Will He dare to say no? The soldiers will arrest Him.
- Will He advise us to pay? That would make Him a traitor, to whom I shall never listen again. I will go with Barabbas' people, who are organizing an insurrection.
- What did He say? Silence, I cannot hear. What did He say? *[the man pulls Zechias sleeve]*

ZECHIAS: *[laughing]* He is smart! He duped them! He asked for a coin, which of course had Caesar's face, and told them: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God". The soldiers thought He was advising us to pay, to leave the worldly wealth to Caesar, and to restrict God to only the spiritual kingdom. But we Jews all understood: we cannot pay Caesar taxes on the land that belongs to God.

MALE CHORUS:

- All the Romans think about is taxes. No matter their names, the Gods of the Pagans have all come to be the God of money...
- ..that means slavery.
- You cannot serve both God and capital. One of the two has to be the servant.

MIRIAM: The Kingdom of God is already coming into being.

This does not mean we can sit back and wait for its glorious course to develop. Quite the contrary, He is convinced that it cannot develop of its own account, that it is us who will make it. The Kingdom of God is a new way of thinking.

FEMALE CHORUS: Do you mean to repent from your past sins?

MIRIAM: Much more than that! We must work to create the kingdom of God.

The Messiah must die

MIRIAM: Thursday, the street boiled with discussion.

CHORUS (MALE AND FEMALE):

-Beware Mary, your Son is in danger.

-He accuses us.

-He loves us but He does not like us.

-He disrupts order. He attacks the temple. He doubts the High Priest. He challenges the King.

-He puts us in danger. He challenges the Roman army.

-We follow the commandments, letter by letter.

-We are the people. Does He think himself better than us?

-We are the chosen people. The Law does not tell us to love the others. When there is war, only our dead we count.

-He ought to approve of our ways if we are going to approve of His.

MIRIAM: *[shouting and covering her ears]* Stop!! Stop!! I don't want to hear you! You would let the Romans kill Him!

CHORUS:

-The Messiah must die.

-Only Moses was the leader of a victorious people.

-One day a Prophet of God will lead his people to victory.*

-The Messiah of the vanquished people...

-The Messiah of a vanquished people must die.

-Every man who claims to be the Messiah must die.

-Every woman who wants to be the Redeemer..

-God's Messiah must die.

-God's Messiah must die for our sake.

-God's Messiah must die to redeem us from Rome.

-God's Messiah must die for our cowardice.

-God's Messiah must die for our sins.

The Last Supper

MIRIAM: That same Thursday, Joshua met with His

disciples one last time. He laid out His plans. He instructed them not to fear defeat. He warned them not to expect miracles, but to be prepared to die. He was prepared to die. He knew. The Messiah must die, because the people do not as yet have enough force, but His death will call His message to the world. He knew that the people would not save Him, because they were not sufficiently strong.

LYDIA: The daughter of the minister told me that the Jews killed Christ. Is this what she meant?

ANTONIO: It is true that people did not fight then. Forty years later they fought, all Christians and non-Christians Jews together, against the Roman empire. They were defeated; the country was destroyed, and the Jews were sent into exile.*

MIRIAM: Joshua had no false illusions. He did not expect the imminent arrival of divine assistance to defeat the empire. He thought for Himself. He realized that an uprising would be suicidal, because it would incite the Romans to destroy Jerusalem. He predicted the Romans would destroy the Temple.

MALE CHORUS: *Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

ANTONIO: This came to pass, because the Roman peace was as cruel as a modern bombing. When the Jews were defeated, the Christians of Rome, to avoid persecution, separated themselves by blaming the Jews for Joshua's death. Fear corrupts as much as power. They blamed the victims, and invented legends that forgave Pilate, the Roman governor who ordered Joshua torture and death. This was the beginning of Christian anti-semitism. Israel was never independent again until 1948. Only after Israel was reborn, and strong, did the Christians stop condemning Joshua's own people.

CHORUS: The Roman army tortured and killed the zealots, to the last man, to the last child, as later tortured and killed the early Christians.

ANTONIO: Armies still do... Our times have been tragic

times for Latin Americans.. Archbishop Romero...

ERNEST: ...Martin Luther King, Malcolm X...*

DISCIPLES: [*male chorus*] We take the bread, and share it among all women and men, saying: This is the body of our Christ. We take the cup of wine, and share it among all women and men, saying: This is the blood of our Christ. We are all sisters and brothers. We shall not wage war.

Friday: The arrest

MIRIAM: [*with great sadness*] Then it was Friday, Holy Friday...

CHORUS: Is He the Son of God?

ELI: That is nonsense. Joshua is the son of my friend Mary and her late husband Joseph. I know her since we were three.

JEW 1: I asked Matthew, and Luke. They both say that he is the son of Joseph.

JEW 2: I would not take their word for it. I asked them too, and I pressed them. Is He really of the family of David? Matthew said yes, and so did Luke, but each gave me a different story. They did not even agree who was Joseph's father!. Matthew said Jacob and Luke said Heli...*

JEW 3: No, Heli was the father of Mary...

JEW 4: Can the Messiah be the son of a woman and a man?

JEW 1: We all are the sons of God...

JEW 2: Yes, yes, but the Messiah must be a chosen son...

JEW 3: Every wonder-worker calls himself the son of God by a virgin mother. The legends of the Gentiles are full of them... Romulus and Remus, the twin founders of Rome..

MAGDALENE: Men of little faith! Stop arguing! The soldiers took Him prisoner...

JEW 3: He must have done something wrong.

MIRIAM: They did not dare to arrest Him in the temple, where the people would have protected Him. They waited for the night, when He was in the garden of Gethsemane. They came with clubs and swords, men of the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, many of them, and behind were the Roman soldiers, who should have protected the

peace, but were here to guarantee the kidnaping. Simon Peter was courageous. He drew

his sword and cut off the ear one of the attackers. Joshua realized that the struggle was unequal, and asked Peter to put his sword back in its place. Looking at the soldiers He told them with a voice at once gentle and menacing: **Those who live by the sword, will die by the sword.**

CHORUS:

JEW 1: Joshua told them before He was taken prisoner to get themselves swords even if they had to sell their clothes to get the money.*

JEW 2: His disciples always carry swords.

JEW 1: Yes, but this time He had asked them to carry swords...

JEW 3: He said to take the sword?! I thought that He tried to prevail by non-violence. There is a story about turning the other cheek..

JEW 1: Luke had heard Him saying that now he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a sack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

JEW 3: Then they said, Lord, look, here are two swords. And He said to them: It is enough.

JEW 1: It was not enough. Is it ever enough?

MAGDALENE: Aren't they going to do something to save Him? Now they speak of peace, and turning the other cheek. Turning the other cheek was never meant as submission, but only as passive resistance.

FEMALE NEIGHBOR: *[to Mary]* Do you believe what He says? Others may see him as a rabbi and a leader, but you know Him as a child. As a mother...

MIRIAM: *[interrupting]* As a mother I believe in Him. If I do not believe in Him, who will?

JEW 1: His brother James has stood by Him.*

JEW 3: But His own disciple Judas kissed Him on the cheek to give Him away to His enemies..

JEW 2: Peter was so afraid that he denied to have been his disciple!

JEW 1: The Romans want to execute Him, as a rebel attempting to become King of the Jews. They send Him to King Herod Antipas, who has most to loose, as a Messiah

would be the rightful king of Judea. But Antipas, for once, stood his ground, and refused to pass judgement.*

MAGDALENE: *[while the rest of the company enters the stage]:* We shall not be Judas. We shall do better than Antipas. We shall be more courageous than Peter. We shall confront that monster, Pontius Pilate, who already has on his hands the blood of so many Jews.* We shall overcome.

JOHN: God is an eternal creator, still creating and self-creating. We can co-create with God. We shall overcome.

[The entire company turns to the audience inviting them to join in singing "We shall overcome". The music fills the theater (use recording and loudspeakers). Some actors stand in the very front of the stage, others mix with the audience.]*

End of act III.