

A Day in the Life

John 1:1-18

*Christmas 2 (Revised and
Catholic); Christmas 1
(Episcopal)*

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Freeman Ng

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	chorus - should be read by everybody together	●	●	▲	●
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲			
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲			
■	Jesus	▲	▲	■	▲
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲		
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		▲		
▲	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples			▲	
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past			▲	
●	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus				▲
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples				▲

Scene 1

Jesus , Peter , Phillip , chorus

chorus In the beginning was the Word,
 And the Word was with God,
 And the Word was God.
 He was in the beginning with God.

{Just before sunrise at the camp. Phillip wakes up with a start from a nightmare.}

Phillip Help! Save me!

Peter *[in an urgent whisper]* What is it?

Phillip What? Peter! *[whispering]* Sorry! I had a bad dream.

Peter *[whispering]* It's all right. Just keep it down. Everyone else is still asleep.

Phillip Sorry. What are you doing up?

Peter *[grimly]* It's my curse. From my past life. I'm used to getting up before dawn, and sometimes I still do. James, too.

Phillip The fishermen.

Peter Yeah, except for John. *[good naturedly complaining]* He sleeps like a baby until the moment the rabbi calls his name, the jerk.

Jesus Who's the jerk, him or me?

Peter Rabbi! What are you doing up?

Jesus I suppose I'm also unused to sleeping in. And I like to watch the sunrise.

Peter Um, I'm sorry about, you know...

Jesus Don't worry about it. If I had wanted polite disciples, I would never have called fishermen to follow me, though you're right that John is an exception.

Phillip Is John your favorite?

Jesus I don't know if it would be wise for me to answer that!

Peter It's all right. We can take it. And we already know it, anyway. Of course he's your favorite, and good for him! The rest of us will just try harder.

Jesus That's a very...rugged attitude.

Peter That's how my father treated me, and it's how I treated my kids.

Tell'em the truth, they can take it. If one of them was rotten at something, I'd tell him. If one of them was disappointing me, I'd say so.

Phillip Boy, I'm glad you're not my father!

Jesus *[to Peter]* So if you ever disappointed me, or were about to, you'd want to know it?

Peter Absolutely.

Jesus Very well. *[after a pause]* So Phillip -

Phillip No, not me! I don't want that deal!

Jesus Don't worry! I was just going to ask what your nightmare was about.

Phillip Oh, that. It's kind of embarrassing. I mean, I know that after death, we go to wait with Abraham for the resurrection, but sometimes I wonder what it would be like if we just stopped existing when we died. Just went out like a flame. I lie away thinking and thinking about it, and it's torture. And then, sometimes, I dream about it. I dream about not being. I can't even describe what that's like.

Peter *[after a pause]* Dude, you're messed up!

Phillip Don't you ever think about what it would be like if death was all there was? Or look at it another way: if you had never been born, if you never existed at all!

Peter *[simply]* If I had never been born, I wouldn't be around now to worry about it.

Phillip I know, I know! It's impossible to imagine. That makes it all the more excruciating to try.

Peter Rabbi, can you believe this?

Jesus *[to Phillip]* You could go even further. You could ask why there's anything at all, and not Nothing. Why there's light, and not eternal darkness. Why the world is, and not a cold Void. What it would be like if there were no thinking creatures at all, and not just if there were no You.

Phillip *[weakly]* Gee...thanks.

Jesus *[laughing]* I'm sorry! Here's something that might help.

Mighty Earth, hold us up.
Flowing Winds, never stop.
Stars of Night, fill us full.
Morning Sun, warm us through.

Phillip I like that. In a weird way, it does make me feel better. It reminds me of the grace my father used to say at the table.

Peter It reminds me of a fishing ditty *my* father used to sing to me at bedtime, and then I passed it on to my boys. Where'd you learn it?

Jesus From my father, just like you.

Phillip *[grabbing his water skin]* Here's to our fathers.

all Amen!

Scene 2

James , Jesus , Judas , chorus

chorus All things came into being through him,
And without him not one thing came into being.

What came into being through him was life,
And that life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,
And the darkness did not overcome it.

{Later that morning in the camp.}

Jesus *[cheerfully]* Damn!

James What's wrong? What happened?

Judas *[humorously]* The same thing that happens every day: the rabbi is having trouble starting the fire.

Jesus *[ruefully]* This shouldn't be so hard!

James The trick is to hit the metal with the flint just right. Hard, but controlled.

Jesus So you've told me.

James Do you want me to show you again?

Jesus Hold on, I want to try a little longer.

{Jesus continues trying a while.}

James No. You have to hold it closer to the tinder. Even if you get a spark, it's not going to do anything from where you've got it.

Jesus Okay, how's this?

James Better, but your angle's all wrong. Don't forget, it's not the flint that chips off and starts the fire, it's the metal.

Judas It's the metal? Really? Then what's the purpose of the flint? Why not two pieces of metal? Or metal and some different kind of rock? If it's all about the metal, why does it work with different kinds of metal, but you always have to have the flint?

James I have no idea. I just know that's how it works.

Jesus What an amazing, surprising universe!

Judas *[dryly]* I'll be amazed and surprised if you manage to start the fire.

Jesus I feel like I ought to be able to do this. People have been mastering this skill since Adam.

Judas Not me! And I don't even want to try. I leave it to the outdoor types. Give me the city every time, where the nearest live fire is never more than three or four houses away.

Jesus It must be tough for you to be camping out with us all the time.

Judas Anything for the Kingdom! It's fitting that we start out here and not in any of the big cities. That way, when the Day arrives, we'll seem to appear from nowhere.

Jesus *Ex nihilo.*

James What's that?

Jesus Roman for, "from Nothing."

Judas Exactly. Though I'm not thrilled that you're using their language.

James Rabbi, how about if I take over now?

Jesus I'm not beat yet. I have the patience of ten men!

James Um, the problem is that I have the *hunger* of ten men, and they're waiting to start lunch.

Jesus Ah. All right. Show us how it's done.

James *[speaking as he strikes the flint]* You have to hit it - just - right - and lo - and - behold - you will - get - a spark...I said - you - will...get a spark!

{The tinder begins smoking.}

Jesus *[wonderstruck]* Marvelous!

James Now we just have to nurse this little smolder into a flame.

Judas *[dramatically but humorously]* For behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is like tinder struck by a spark!

Jesus I hope not! Or I might not manage *it*, either.

{The tinder bursts into flame.}

James And there it is!

Judas *Ex nihilo!*

Jesus Amazing! *[suddenly solemn]* We thank you, Father, for the gift of fire: that burns in the deepest heavens, that warms through and through the mighty Earth and sets her winds in motion, that dances here before us.

all Amen!

Scene 3

Jesus , Mary , Matthew , chorus

chorus He was in the world, and the world came into being through him;
Yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own,
And his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
He gave power to become children of God,

Who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man,
But of God.

{After lunch in the camp.}

Matthew The time! Oh my God, the time!

Mary What's the matter?

Matthew We're late! We were going to make another attempt at the synagogue noon reading!

Jesus Can we still get there in time?

Matthew Maybe if we run all the way. Or if you do. I'm afraid I'd just slow you down.

Mary I want to go, too!

Matthew If I couldn't keep up with him, there's no way you will.

Mary Oh, I wish we hadn't overslept! What came over us this morning?

Jesus It's my fault. If I hadn't spent so much time trying to start the fire, lunch would have been on time.

Matthew No time for blame. Why don't you take Peter and James? They're the fastest runners - and the toughest bodyguards, just in case there's trouble again.

Jesus You know? *[suddenly pauses]* Let's not go.

Matthew *[shocked]* Rabbi!

Jesus We're all tired. We've been pushing ourselves hard lately. It's why everybody overslept. We could do with a day off.

Mary *[shocked]* A day off?

Jesus Sure. People do that.

Matthew But...but we're not just people. We have a Mission. We're workers in the field. If we don't get out there every day, we won't get the harvest in.

Jesus Yes, I said that. But another way the harvest doesn't get completed is if the harvesters work too hard one day and are unable to go out the next. Even during the harvest season, there is the Sabbath.

Matthew But now those ignoramuses in the town will think they've won! They practically chased us out with pitchforks yesterday! We can't let them think they scared us off, can we?

Jesus Why not? We come not as conquerors, but as servants. Let them know that we respect their wishes, and maybe they'll let us speak to them next time.

Matthew All right. I'll go tell the others.

{Matthew exits.}

Mary Rabbi, tell me the truth. I'm the real reason you're not going into the town, aren't I?

Jesus You? How?

Mary Because I wanted to go with you but wasn't going to be able to run fast enough.

Jesus Ah.

Mary I'm so sorry! And now the people of that town will never hear the Good News.

Jesus *[tenderly]* Mary!

{Matthew returns.}

Matthew Okay, I told them, but now they're blaming me for planting the idea in your mind! "You must have pushed him into it. He wouldn't just quit on his own!"

Jesus I'm sorry, Matthew. I'll make sure they understand what really happened. *[after a pause]* But first, I want to tell the two of you what *really* happened.

Matthew Huh?

Jesus *[tenderly]* Matthew, Mary, it's true we're all tired, and maybe that alone would have been enough to prevent us from returning to that town, but the truth is that I'm tired in mind and spirit, too. I just can't face the hatred of that town again so soon! Maybe if my body were less tired, it could carry me back into the fray despite my heartbreak. Or if I were less heartbroken, I could will my body on. But as it is, there's no strength in any part of me to meet today's challenge. *[after a pause]* I'm sorry for letting you down.

{A long pause while the other two mull it over.}

Matthew I understand. There were days when I was a tax collector I could barely drag myself out of bed, knowing the hate that would hit me full in the face the moment I walked out my door.

Mary I understand, too.

Jesus Thank you. We'll take a little break today, then. A Sabbath out of order. Maybe I'll use the time to practice some more and finally learn how to start a fire! But tomorrow, we go back into the fields.

Mary and Matthew Amen!

Scene 4

Jesus , Joanna , John , chorus

chorus And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
 And we have seen his glory,
 Glory as of a father's only son,
 Full of grace and truth.

{Still at the camp, late in the afternoon.}

Jesus *[crying out in pain]* Ahhhhhhh!

Joanna What happened? What's wrong?

John The rabbi hurt himself!

Jesus Ahhhhh!!!!

Joanna Oh my God! Rabbi, are you all right?

Jesus *[almost laughing]* No!

John Here, let me see it.

Joanna *[gasping when she sees the injury]* We have to get help!

John *[examining the injury]* No, I think it's all right. It looks worse than it is.

Jesus It *feels* worse than it *looks*!

Joanna How did it happen?

Jesus Incompetence and stubbornness.

Joanna What?

John He was trying to start a fire and sliced a finger with the flint.

Joanna But the fire is still going.

Jesus I'm trying to learn how to do it. For weeks, I've been trying to learn. Ow!

John Sorry! I have to make sure the cut didn't go too deep. Joanna, could you bring water and a little oil? And some clean cloth.

Joanna Right away.

{She exits.}

Jesus Pain. I'll never get used to it. It's only one small finger, but it's paralyzing my whole body!

John I got my foot caught under a fallen mast once. It was the most painful thing I ever experienced. I even passed out for a moment.

Nothing was broken, thank God, but it was months before I could walk on it again.

{Joanna returns with the medical supplies.}

Joanna Here you go. What are you talking about?

John I was telling the rabbi about the time I hurt my foot on the fishing boat.

Joanna "The most painful thing that ever happened to you."

John *[laughing]* Yeah, I guess I tell that one a lot! It's my one macho fisherman story.

Jesus *[to Joanna]* What about you? What's the most painful thing you ever experienced?

Joanna You need to ask that question of a woman who has had two children?

Jesus *[embarrassed]* Oh! I wasn't thinking. Of course.

John But I've heard that at least you forget the pain afterward.

Joanna Ha! I think that's a lie we tell ourselves so we'll go through with it again each time. Otherwise, the human race would come to an end!

Jesus Life! Nothing can stop it. Neither pain nor sorrow, nor all the darkness of the uncreated Void.

John and Mary Amen.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- **Haiku Diem** - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

www.AuthorFreeman.com