

Out of Egypt

Matthew 2:13-23

Year A Christmas 1
(Catholic); Year A
Christmas 1 (Revised)

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3
▲	Woman - a kind, slightly gushy woman at the inn	▲		
▲	Mary - the mother of Jesus, more open to the unknown and apt to trust her instincts than Joseph, and willing to quietly disobey him when necessary	●	▲	▲
▲	Joseph - Mary's husband, a cautious, careful, conscientious man who doesn't actually enjoy being visited by prophetic dreams from God	●	▲	▲
●	Jesus - an ordinary two year old child named Joshua	●	●	●
▲	Man - a gruff and patriotic man with strong opinions on everything	■		
▲	Blind Woman - a mysterious Egyptian woman they meet at the inn who might be a witch - or a prophetess		■	
▲	Priest - a friendly and helpful priest they meet on the road			▲
●	Levite - an expert on the Law they meet on the road			▲

Scene 1

Jesus , Joseph , Man , Mary , Woman

{Joseph and Mary, with their 2 year old child, sit at a table in an inn on their journey back to Israel from Egypt.}

Woman What a darling little boy!

{A pause while Mary and Joseph struggle with how to answer that.}

Mary Yes. Yes he is.

Joseph It's kind of you to say.

Woman No kindness needed. He is a cutie! *[to Jesus]* Aren't you a cutie? You're going to be a little heartbreaker! *[to Mary and then Joseph]* I do believe he has your eyes, and your nose.

Jesus *[touching his eyes and nose and ears in a child's game]* Eyes! Nose! Hears!

Woman *[to Jesus]* That's right! *[to Mary and Joseph]* Bright, too! *[to Jesus]* What's your name, young man?

Jesus Josha!

Joseph His name is Joshua.

Man That's a good name. A strong name. A traditional name. You don't hear them that often these days.

Woman No, you don't. It seems like Greek names are all the rage these days. Or Roman.

Man *[in disgust]* Roman names. It's a disgrace! Might as well teach'em to worship all those Roman gods, and grow up to be tax collectors!

Woman Now, now.

Joseph Are you Israeli?

Man You'd better believe it. Born and raised in Jerusalem itself, and let me tell you: no city I've ever been in since is as grand, and no sight as beautiful as the sight of the Temple. It's the center of the world as far as I'm concerned.

Jesus Cenner of the whirl! Cenner of the whirl!

Woman From the mouths of babes!

Man Are you going to or coming from?

Mary We're going home.

Joseph We've been away for almost two years.

Man Your timing is good. From all I hear, things have been bad at home the last two years, but they look to be getting better, and soon.

Woman Yes, that terrible Herod has finally gotten his just desserts.

Jesus 'sert! 'sert!

Mary *[to Jesus]* Not now, son.

Joseph Yes, we heard that...he died. That's what happened, right? It's why we're returning now.

Man Yup. Dead and finally gone. We got the news here just last week. Did you leave the country in the first place because of him?

Joseph Yes.

Man Same reason I left, only I did it much earlier. I knew he was a rotten king from the start, and that he'd only get worse.

Woman But at least they left before the absolute worst. *[to Mary and Joseph]* If you thought he was bad when you last lived in Israel, you should have seen him after you left!

Man Did you hear what he did?

Woman *[interrupting brightly]* Joshua! Did you know that that lady over there has candies from an exotic, far-off land? And that when children ask her very nicely, she sometimes shares them?

Jesus Canny!

Man What are you doing sending the child to her? She's a Gypsy - and a witch!

Woman She's *Egyptian*, and a wise woman! And the boy shouldn't hear what you're about to say. *[to Mary and Joseph]* Honestly, she's a lovely woman. A wonder with the local children.

Mary Egypt is where we've been living.

Joseph But...a witch?

Woman *[firmly]* She's blind, but sees the heart more clearly than most sighted people. If that makes her a witch, so was my aunt Deborah!

Mary *[to Jesus]* Would you like some candy from the lady?

Jesus Gypsy wish!

Mary Run along, then, but don't stray out of our sight!

{Jesus exits.}

Man Hmph. Well, anyway, this is what happened. Two summers ago, that louse of a "king" had all the children in an entire region killed!

Mary Dear God!

Joseph All the children? In an entire region?

Woman All the very young ones, yes. In and around the city of Bethlehem.

{Mary gasps.}

Man Is that where you were from?

Joseph No, but we spent some time there. Joshua was born there.

Mary *[fearfully]* Did Herod, did he give a reason?

Man No. Or not one that ever reached my ears, though I've heard plenty of theories. Some say it had to do with the great taxation that took place that year. The city came up way short or some such thing. Others say some local had offended him and he decided to enact a terrible vengeance. But me? I think he was half cracked already, and cracked entirely at the end. They say he was a paranoid, raging monster those final few months. Wouldn't eat, had advisors and close confidants arrested or killed, raved about visions and portents. A wrecked human being. But it ended quickly enough, thank God.

Woman Yes, it's over now. Except for those poor mothers, of course. The mothers of Bethlehem. I can't imagine their loss.

Scene 2

Blind Woman , Jesus , Joseph , Mary

{Mary and Joseph go to collect Jesus, carrying on a whispered argument as they walk over there.}

Mary He was trying to kill him!

Joseph We don't know that for sure.

Mary It's what the angel warned you of! It's why we fled to Egypt! What other reason could there be?

Joseph *[with difficulty, trying to comfort her but unused to making complex arguments]* I do believe he wanted to kill Joshua - as the angel warned - but maybe...what he did, later...in Bethlehem...was not because of that. Maybe he was just going mad, like the man said.

Mary *[earnestly]* Joseph. The children of Bethlehem died for our son. You know it and I know it. How can we go back and live there?

{They come within range of the Blind Woman as she dramatically recites a kind of chant or song to Jesus.}

Blind Woman A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they are no more.

Joseph *[concerned about what the woman might have been telling Jesus]* Joshua? It's time to say goodnight to the lady.

Jesus Awww!

Blind Woman Your son and I have been telling each other traveler's tales.

Mary We were told you were Egyptian.

Blind Woman Many years ago, yes. Now, I'm not so sure. I have lived in your land or on its outskirts here for a long time now. I eat your food, I drink your wine. I've studied your scriptures. And yet, I am not one of you. I am alone!

Mary You have no family?

Blind Woman No. I went to your land in search of...a certain thing that I heard would be there. A thing of great value. A pearl of great price! I had no time to get married before I left my native land, and during the days when I still had my beauty and my sight, I was too consumed by my search to ever settle down in any one place. But now that I have finally come to rest, who among the men of this land would marry an old blind woman? *[laughs]*

Jesus *[laughing]* Purr of gay pice!

Mary Why did you settle here rather than in Israel where this thing was? Or go home if you gave up the search?

Blind Woman All travelers from Egypt pass through this town, and as it has been written by one of your own prophets, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son!"

Jesus Ow of Egyp!

Joseph *[suspiciously]* What exactly are you looking for that you think is going to pass through this town?

Blind Woman *[insinuatingly to Joseph]* Oh, I think you know. For though you appear to be a man who walks beneath the plainest light of day, in the nights, you are haunted by visions from beyond this world. Are you not?

Joseph *[fearfully but steadily]* Are you a witch?

Blind Woman *[laughing]* I dream of a fiery visage that calls itself the angel of God and speaks to me of that which is to come. If that makes me a witch, perhaps you are a warlock!

Joseph *[in alarm]* Joshua! Mary! Let's go. *[But Mary doesn't budge, and an uncomfortable moment of silence ensues.]* Mary!

Mary *[to the Blind Woman in a low, urgent voice, deciding all at once to trust her]* Two years ago, an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to move us to Egypt because Herod would try to kill our son. Two weeks ago, he appeared again to tell us that we could return, because Herod had died.

Blind Woman And so he did. But your danger is not passed. Beware Archelaus, Herod's son. The people of Judah are breathing easy, thinking the terror is over, but the son will be worse than his father. The father killed, but always for a reason. (As you know well!) The son will kill for pleasure.

Joseph *[stiffly]* The angel told us we could safely return.

Blind Woman Then return! But not to your old home. Go to Galilee instead. (For has it not been prophesied that, "He shall be called a Nazarene"?) The son of Herod who rules there is right-minded, and it will be a land of peace. A land of carpenters and fishers. There the pearl will grow!

Joseph *[still a little stiff]* We thank you for your advice, and will think carefully about it.

Blind Woman Don't *think* about it! *Sleep* on it. And perhaps in your sleep, you will dream!

Scene 3

Jesus , Joseph , Levite , Mary , Priest

{On the road again, Mary and Joseph chat with a couple of fellow travelers.}

Priest Two years you say? That's a long time.

Levite Has the boy never seen his homeland, then?

Joseph Never.

Levite *[bending to Jesus]* Well, then, I wish him joy of the sight.

Jesus Oy of the sigh!

Priest What city will you be returning to?

Joseph We're not sure yet.

Mary *[jumping in]* We were thinking about some place in Galilee.

Priest That's where I'm from! I can highly recommend it. Anywhere in our region, but especially by the water.

Jesus Gallee! Gallee!

Joseph Where in Galilee do you live?

Priest Nazareth.

{Mary gasps.}

Priest Have you heard of it? Do you have friends or family there?

Mary No. We...heard it mentioned at the inn last night.

Levite *[teasingly]* Are you sure what was said wasn't, "No good thing can come from Nazareth"?

Priest *[in good humor]* Now, now! *[to Joseph and Mary]* It's true that's a saying, but I take it as a badge of honor. All they mean by no good thing is: No famous generals or politicians or messiahs, but to my mind, that's a virtue. We live quiet, peaceful lives there.

Mary A land of carpenters and fishermen.

Priest Exactly! Come with me all the way to Nazareth and let me show you around. If you decide you don't like it, you can always move on.

Jesus Fishers men!

Mary Thank you!

Joseph *[still worried about the words of the Blind Woman]* You're experts in the scriptures. Can you answer a question?

Priest I can certainly try.

Joseph Last night, at the inn again, someone mentioned a prophecy that went, "He shall be called a Nazarene." Can you tell us anything about it?

Priest "He shall be called a Nazarene"? I don't recognize it at all, I'm afraid! *[to the Levite]* Do you?

Levite No, at least not from any of the books of the law. You're probably better with the prophets.

Priest *[to Joseph]* I'm sorry, but I think whoever told you about that prophecy must have gotten the words wrong.

Joseph I see. What about this one? "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

Jesus Ow of Egyp!

Levite That's no prophecy! That's...Hosea, right? Referring to the deliverance of the nation from bondage in Egypt.

Priest That's right. I'm afraid someone at that inn doesn't have a very precise knowledge of the scriptures.

Joseph Thank you. *[to Mary]* She lied! Or was just wrong.

Mary She was right about Nazareth.

Joseph Only if we end up living there.

Mary We have to live somewhere, and even if the woman was wrong about the prophecy, there's what she said about the new rulers of Judah and Galilee. And the priest is recommending Galilee, too.

Joseph *[an honest but painful admission]* I don't know what to do. I want to be a good husband, and a good father to...to *him*. But...kings and witches and prophecies. It's too much for me! *[deflatedly]* I'm letting you down.

Mary No, you aren't! You never have and you never will. You're a man the angels visit, and you obey their commands no matter how hard they might be. Did you dream last night?

Joseph I couldn't sleep at all.

Mary Maybe you will tonight. And then we'll know for sure!

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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