

[Almelem theme music fades into crowd and livestock noises]

ALMELEM (Dani Martinek): [footsteps on gravel] Excuse me! [inaudible] Sorry. Excuse me! Sorry, sorry!  
[Door opens and closes and the crowd noise disappears] John the Baptist is dead.

GESTAS (Nat Cassidy): [liquid pouring] Oh, you've gotta be absolutely fucking kidding me.

ALMELEM: Herod.

GESTAS: Really? You think so?

ALMELEM: Gestas.

GESTAS: Was it King Herod that killed John? Amazing! Who could have ever guessed!

ALMELEM: In reality, it was on the request of the queen, but—

GESTAS: —but he always spoke so highly of her!

ALMELEM: They cut off his head. [The sound of pacing]

GESTAS: Well, they might as well have. It was his least useful feature.

ALMELEM: What—what do we do? What should we do?

GESTAS: Yeah, that's—that's an excellent question. We have two thousand Jews at the river and Passover is in a month. We should find out if some devil has arranged this— [a knock at the door]

SALOME (Yeauxlanda Kay)(from outside): Gestas! It is Salome, may I enter?

GESTAS: This is why they say not to speak of devils. Please, let her in. [Footsteps to the door. The door opens, the crowd can be heard softly in the distance]

SALOME: Gestas, I bear terrible news. [door closes] John The Baptist is dead.

GESTAS: [beat] Oh no. No, no, no.

SALOME: [footsteps] I'm very sorry.

GESTAS: He can't be dead. He can't be.

SALOME: [fabric rustles as Salome sits] I know he was an old friend to you.

GESTAS: We were boys together. He—he was one of my first friends.

SALOME: (beginning to tire of the ruse) Yes...

GESTAS: How could this have happened?

SALOME: It was King Herod.

GESTAS: No! [a thumping sound, like Gestas is banging a fist against a table in time with his words] How could God allow this to happen?!?!]

SALOME: Isaiah, 45:15.

GESTAS: “Truly, O God of Israel, you work in mysterious ways.”

SALOME: Yes!

GESTAS: Psalm 44:24

SALOME: “Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression.” [papers rustling]

GESTAS: We could do this all day.

SALOME: Psalm 39:4.

GESTAS: (laughing) “O Lord, let me understand my mortality and the brevity of life. Let me realize how quickly my life will pass.”

SALOME: Well done.

GESTAS: [beat] John was the man for the Torah.

SALOME: You do alright. [Salome and Gestas mourn John quietly for about four seconds] You will need more time to mourn the man.

GESTAS: Nah... we should probably at least talk about what to do next. [fabric rustles, things rattle against wood]

ALMELEM: Salome is right, we need to take the time to—[knocking at the door]

MARY MAGDALENE (Charleigh E. Parker)(from outside the door): Gestas, may I enter your home?

GESTAS: (under his breath) fuuuuuuuck... [the door opens, the crowd can be heard softly in the distance]

MARY MAGDALENE: Gestas, my friend, give me your hands.

GESTAS: (talking over her) Magdalena, you should know—

MARY MAGDALENE: Gestas, I have the worst news. You need to sit down.

SALOME: Mary—

MARY MAGDALENE: I'm sorry, Salome, give me a moment. (sighing) Gestas, I hate to be the one to—oh, you already know.

GESTAS: John the Baptist is dead.

MARY MAGDALENE: (sighing) Such a tragedy.

GESTAS: Not as bad as it could have been. At least we moved our money to the right numbers.

MARY MAGDALENE: That—No. He was a Jew. And he was murdered.

GESTAS: He was one man.

MARY MAGDALENE: Hillel the Elder says whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed the entire world.

GESTAS: What the fuck is it with you people? Are we back in *shul*? Can we drop "The Word" for a minute and figure out what the hell we're going to do? John had two thousand Jews at the river.

ALMELEM: Three.

GESTAS: Three?

SALOME: Three now. Three thousand baptized. And more coming every day. More coming this morning. More coming this afternoon. More coming tonight.

ALMELEM: More tomorrow.

GESTAS: And all of them are waiting for John The Baptist. And all of them call Herod their King. What do we tell them? Three thousand true believers, *zealots*, who would march if John said to march and they'll all soon know that Herod murdered him. Where will they march now?

MARY MAGDALENE: They will march with Jesus!

GESTAS: HOW!?!?

MARY MAGDALENE: My dear man! We have all the tools we need right here! We have coin from the family Magdalena. We have iron will from Salome. We have the perfect spy-bird in Almelem. We have everything we need to implement your idea, Gestas. As soon as you tell us what it is!

GESTAS: Oh, s-so now this is on me? Y-you want to hear my idea so I'll be the one to blame when this all goes ass-up?

MARY MAGDALENE: That was always the plan!

GESTAS: Well, I don't have the first idea what we should do. I need some time to—

ALMELEM: THEY CUT OFF HIS HEAD. [beat] Do none of you care?

MARY MAGDALENE: Of c—of course we care. Of course we do.

GESTAS: No, we don't.

SALOME: I mean—not a *lot*, but—

MARY MAGDALENE: Yes we do. He was a son of Israel, a son of Abraham. His life and death are written in the book and he will be honored.

GESTAS: (realizing) Jesus's mother!

MARY MAGDALENE: What?

ALMELEM: None of you care. He started this revolution and none of you care that he's dead. Ugh!  
[footsteps walking away]

MARY MAGDALENE: Almelem, wait! [The door opens as Almelem leaves, the crowd is heard for a moment before the door closes again and the others are silent for a moment.]

GESTAS: I knew Yahyah when he was a kid, I kn-knew his mom, but-but you're saying "we mourn the son of Abraham"

MARY MAGDALENE: Right. Of course.

GESTAS: (thinking fast) Jesus's mother. Is-is-is she a loon, like they say?

SALOME: (furiously) Who says that? She is magnificent!

MARY MAGDALENE: She is magnificent.

GESTAS: I want to meet her.

SALOME: You can meet with Jesus. I won't have you meeting with Mary.

GESTAS: I don't need to meet with Jesus. The less I know about him the better.

SALOME: You are a whore-monger and a slave-trader. You run numbers, you deal in confidences. You don't deserve to wash Mary's feet.

MARY MAGDALENE: No. he's right, Salome. He's right, it's Mary. Mary is the mother.

SALOME: He will NOT meet with Mary.

GESTAS: Please, j-just listen to me, Salome, please? Jesus can't be the son of Abraham. The sons of Abraham are being crucified in packs. Golgotha looks like a rotting forest some days, we're running out of trees for the crosses. He won't be the child of Israel, the children of Israel—

MARY MAGDALENE: —the children of Israel are in bondage. We don't need a child of Israel—

GESTAS: We need the son of Mary.

MARY MAGDALENE: (sighing) We'll make it so. [she opens the door, there is the sound of the crowd again.] Gestas, *talk* to Almelem? Salome. [footsteps, the door closes]

[The music rises, a threatening tremble of strings]

SALOME: Remember what I said. Don't blaspheme in front of Mary. Poison your own heart, but don't put evil where she can hear it.

GESTAS: I'll be cool as a stone [Salome walks away and leaves, opening and closing the door gently behind her.] FUUUUUUUUCKKKKK.

[The music swells, adding low synth and a mournful tone. It fades into the low sound of a crowd and slow footsteps crunching over sand and gravel. We are next to the river. Peeping frogs, crickets, and cicadas can be heard in the distance.]

BAPTIZED 1 (Dan Kois): It breaks my heart. It just breaks my heart.

ALMELEM: I know. There's no more to be said.

BAPTIZED 2 (Alia Smith): This can't have happened. What do we do now?

ALMELEM: There is nothing to do. Nothing to say.

[They are silent. More footsteps approach.]

GESTAS: Hey.

ALMELEM: Hey.

GESTAS: Can we, uh—?

ALMELEM: Sure. [The footsteps continue as they walk away from the others, slowing as they go but ever present until the end of the scene.]

GESTAS: So.

ALMELEM: I thought he was the Messiah. Then they killed him.

GESTAS: I know.

ALMELEM: She asked for his head. She decided HOW she wanted him to die and they did it. They didn't throw a rock at him, they didn't chase him into a hole, they didn't poison his food—

GESTAS: I know.

ALMELEM: They took off his head. Several men did this. They had a plan, they acted slowly. They acted soberly. Several men had to hold him somewhere while several other men took off his head. Each of those men—

GESTAS: Each of them did it. Each of them. Herod did it, the queen did it, each of the Romans did it. Their names will go in the book.

ALMELEM: I'm sorry, Gestas, but don't say that to me.

GESTAS: Almelem—

ALMELEM: Don't say that to me! There is no book for you. *There is no book.*

GESTAS: Alright.

ALMELEM: For you, they will cut off John's head and then tonight they will have supper. Tomorrow, they might play your numbers or visit your whorehouse. The day after that they will hug their children. The days will stretch on and when they die, what?

GESTAS: Nothing.

ALMELEM: Yes. For you. Nothing. You think there will be nothing. They will murder John, then hug their children, then grow old with their wives and then die and nothing will happen for them. There is no book for you.

GESTAS: But you say there is a book so—

ALMELEM: This is what you don't understand! These men that took his head—if there is a book, then tomorrow they could repent. Tomorrow they could be baptized, like you said. Tomorrow they could be forgiven. They could just be walking down a road and then decide to ask for forgiveness—change their name and their family, and then the book would record that. This is why we have to fight for our land now, so we can write the book our way. But you know there's no book. That's why you don't care.

GESTAS: I'm not—Look, maybe there is a book.

ALMELEM: You know that there is no book.

GESTAS: I don't *know* there's no book, I simply have never *seen* the book—

ALMELEM: Oh stop. Just stop. You talk so much, I spend half my time hearing your fucking voice in my head and arguing with it. You know there is no book.

GESTAS: I, ah—Sorry. There—is a—I don't know.

ALMELEM: There is no book.

GESTAS: Oh, you poor thing.

ALMELEM: (fighting tears) I loved him. [beat] That was probably a mistake.

GESTAS: Okay. GOD. Don't make me have to be this guy.

ALMELEM: What do you mean?

GESTAS: I'm no good at being this guy. We need to find another guy to do this part.

ALMELEM: What part?

GESTAS: It wasn't a mistake to love him! It wasn't!

ALMELEM: He's dead. He's just one more person I've lost.

GESTAS: You can't do this, alright? Just stop. [Almelem sniffs.] Look at the river. Look at all those people. They're here because of what you did. They're here because you loved John and you brought him to me and we brought him to the people. Just stop it, alright?

ALMELEM: You can't tell me to stop feeling this way.

GESTAS: Okay. Mmm! Okay. Feel this way. (sighing) For today. Take a day, feel this way, and then! Stop it! This is going to work out, you'll see.

ALMELEM: So help me God, Gestas, if you start telling me to have *faith* that this will all work out somehow—

GESTAS: Just because I don't have any faith, that means you shouldn't? Do you really think you should be more like *me*?

ALMELEM: John dies and you feel no pain at all. I would rather be like that.

GESTAS: That's not what this is! (huffing) If you're—outside and hear a bird sing and I'm inside and don't hear it, are you—are you saying we should debate whether or not the goddam bird is making noise?

ALMELEM: No, but you're not saying there's no such thing as *birds*.

GESTAS: Ahhh! Ge-mmm. This is impossible. Y-you can't look to me to make this better. All this talk of "The Book" and God and all the rest of it, just—*BE. BETTER. THAN. ME.* You can be better at all of this

than I am, *especially* if you don't fall into the same cynical shit that I've fallen into. If I could *believe* in the stuff I'm saying, I'd be a hundred times better. At all of this. At my—my whole life.

ALMELEM: [beat] Okay.

GESTAS: You want to know if there's a book? You want to know if those soldier's names will be written in "The Book?" I don't know! I don't. But I can tell you this: they will be in the book *we're* writing. Me and you. And that'll be one you can put in your *hands*.

ALMELEM: (smiling) Okay.

GESTAS: That'll be a book people actually read.

ALMELEM: Okay, Gestas, GOD, I said okay! (releasing tension with a chuckle) Just give me a day.

GESTAS: Of course. [beat] *One* day. [Silence. They look at the river. We hear the people. The music starts to creep in.] Three thousand people.

ALMELEM: Three thousand people.

GESTAS: That's a fucking *lot* of people.

[The music swells with a low, foreboding drone, then fades out. Street noises: people talking, footsteps over sand and gravel.]

GESTAS: If it turns out she's crazy, I will figure out another way.

MARY MAGDALENE: She isn't crazy.

ALMELEM: I will need some help. If she says something crazy, you've gotta help me.

MARY MAGDALENE: She isn't crazy.

ADLAI (Sean Williams): Gestas! And Magdalena, such an honor!

GESTAS: Adlai. How goes the Roman trade, my friend?

ADLAI: (laughing) Gestas! We don't need to talk business in front of the Magdalena! Surely she has *loftier* things to think about.

MARY MAGDALENE: (laughing) I do try to let the world of coin leave my mind. Let the men talk of that, I say.

ADLAI: Yes! Let your mind stay on God.

MARY MAGDALENE: And our people.

ADLAI: (laughing) Yes! Yes! (suddenly serious) Ah, I was sorry to hear about Yahyah, Gestas.

ALMELEM: John.

ADLAI: What? Oh! (laughs) Yes, apologies. Of course. *John*.

GESTAS: His death was in the service of the thing he loved most.

ADLAI: Pissing off the queen! (laughs)

GESTAS: Funny! That's funny, Adlai.

ADLAI: (laughing) Thank you!

GESTAS: That is funny. Let me ask you, did you see John?

ADLAI: Of course! Did I... Gestas, we've known each other since we were boys!

GESTAS: Did you see John at the river?

MARY MAGDALENE: Adlai, were you baptized?

ADLAI: Was I—What? [the crowd quiets]

MARY MAGDALENE: Were you baptized?

ADLAI: (laughing nervously) Well, that's uh—I-I-I know many of us are now—Is it not Jesus who will—

MARY MAGDALENE: Of course. And Jesus was baptized.

ALMELEM: By John.

MARY MAGDALENE: Yes, by John. [beat] Adlai, were you baptized?

ADLAI: I—This is a question that-uh—(laughing nervously) I feel like my relationship to God is a—i-i-it should be between me and—You *know* that I’ve always wanted o-our freedom, that I—this is a personal question.

GESTAS: Almelem, were you baptized by John?

ALMELEM: Yes.

GESTAS: Magdalena?

MARY MAGDALENE: Yes.

GESTAS: You there, boy. Did you visit the river? Were you baptized by John?

BOY (Marlena Williams): Yes!

GESTAS: You, Chuldah? I thought I saw you at the river.

CHULDAH (Jordana Williams): Yes. I went, I was baptized. By John. I was baptized with joy.

GESTAS: So? Adlai?

ADLAI: Gestas, come on, Yahyah has just been—

ALMELEM: *JOHN*.

ADLAI: (sighing) Yes. Yes, of course. He’s just been—

GESTAS: Adlai, you’ve always been a rat digging in shit. [The crowd laughs]

ADLAI: Gestas!

GESTAS: Apologies, Magdalena, but Adlai, you have always been a rat swimming in the toilets, looking for whatever you can find in the waste. (He performs to the crowd) While the rest of Jerusalem is building a new world, or at least lying in the river to wash the filth off of them, [more laughing] you hold up seeds and corn that have already been through a person and say “I’m the richest rat in Jerusalem!” [cheering from the crowd] and the rest of us just wonder why you are covered in shit.

ADLAI: You cannot speak to me this way. Mary, tell him, he cannot speak to me this way in public! (whispering) The people are laughing!!

MARY MAGDALENE: Oh, I have no head for business, Adlai. It is not for me to say. [The droning music creeps in]

ADLAI: (beginning to laugh) Of course! Of course. Gestas, you have such a way with words. (to the crowd, as if he is in on the joke) Gestas is our greatest wordsmith!

GESTAS: Thank you.

ADLAI: And any time the people laugh is good. It's good. I-I'll be on my way, I have—I-I w-will—  
Magdalena, it is always such an honor.

MARY MAGDALENE: The honor is mine.

ADLAI: Gestas. May God guide you to your reward.

GESTAS: And you, my friend.

[Footsteps as Adlai walks away. The music fades. Mary Magdalene, Gestas, and Almelem resume walking, the crowd returns to their business.]

MARY MAGDALENE: And what of your baptism, Gestas?

GESTAS: Stop. I don't matter in this. The people need to know that Baptism is mandatory.

MARY MAGDALENE: I fear you may have made an enemy.

GESTAS: I didn't make an enemy, I revealed one. He's worse than a Roman.

MARY MAGDALENE: Nevertheless.

GESTAS: Besides, what is an enemy anyway? It's just someone who doesn't want to follow where you lead. An enemy isn't an enemy, it's just a man who needs to be pruned [the music creeps in] or pushed back in line.

[The music plays, eerie strings over plodding drums and a chiming melody. The music fades, and we hear the faint sound of a fire crackling on a hearth. Birds are singing faintly.]

MOTHER MARY (Kristen Vaughan): I wasn't much more than a baby myself. My father spoke to my husband and they arranged it when I was—thirteen? I think I was thirteen. Many of my friends were being promised and Joseph was much older than I was. I thought he was ancient! (laughing) But of course, I'm older now than he was then. And I am not that old. [beat] We hadn't yet married. Joseph

had to make chairs. He was to be gone for almost a year, to make chairs for the market men. So, Joseph went to Jerusalem—he came here—to make chairs and I stayed in Nazareth.

GESTAS: You stayed with your family?

MOTHER MARY: Well, yes, I stayed with my new family. With Joseph's family. But not my old family. I had been promised, so I stayed with them.

MARY MAGDALENE: In Nazareth.

MOTHER MARY: Yes.

MARY MAGDALENE: I'm sorry. (laughing) Go ahead.

MOTHER MARY: That summer, I slept outside in the garden. It was a terribly hot summer and the air inside the house wouldn't move. A candle flame would drift up the length of two hands from the wick without flickering. And I couldn't stand it, inside. I would wear as little as I could and drench the nightclothes with my sweat. So I slept outside in the garden.

GESTAS: What did you use for a bed?

MOTHER MARY: I slept in the garden. I slept on the soil.

GESTAS: Y-you—

MARY MAGDALENE: (warning) Gestas.

GESTAS: Fine. I'm sorry, go on.

MOTHER MARY: I used to hear my husband's father and mother moving around at night. And I could see the stars spraying about in the sky and I would drift between dream and waking, dream and waking. (taking a deep breath) The same way I do now sometimes, but so much more. As a child, that drifting is so much more. [The sound of crickets comes in to join the birdsong.]

MARY MAGDALENE: Mmmm, yes.

MOTHER MARY: Gabriel came to me that summer and told me he had a message for me. He said—

MARY MAGDALENE: Wait! Uh, who is Gabriel?

MOTHER MARY: The angel Gabriel.

GESTAS: The angel, Gabriel.

MOTHER MARY: Yes.

GESTAS: Gabriel. The Angel.

MARY MAGDALENE: (interrupting him) Gestas, she clarified that. It was the Angel Gabriel. I'm sorry, Mary, please go on.

MOTHER MARY: Gabriel visited me several times. He liked that I slept in the garden, he liked the soil. He said that I was most highly favored in God's eyes. I remember him saying that because I didn't understand it. The words, "Mary, you are most highly favored in God's eyes". (laughing) I didn't understand it.

GESTAS: And did this *angel*—Gabriel—uh, did-did he *do* anything to you?

MOTHER MARY: He spoke to me. And when I didn't understand him, he led me to understanding.

GESTAS: C-can you—ah. Hmm. I'm trying to, ah, figure out how to ask you this. *How* did he lead you to understanding?

MOTHER MARY: He said the same thing again and again until God let me understand it. He said, "you are most highly favored in God's eyes" and—he pushed that idea into me so that the parts of my mind that were cluttered began to push away and out, until the mess in my mind was made clean and this one idea pushed further and further into my heart until suddenly my heart shattered like glass and came back together again in an instant before shattering and repairing again and again. I lay in the soil in my husband's father's garden, looking up at Gabriel and I—I thought I knew what it meant. I was God's most highly favored, and I would bring his son into the world.

GESTAS: Right, I—yes. I think I got it.

MOTHER MARY: When Joseph came home, he was so kind with me. I was already carrying the Son of God. I was already carrying Jesus. I remember, he sat with me and asked me how this had happened and I told him the story. And as I told him, I watched how his face moved, how it shifted and swam. It was like watching the stars spin in the sky when I slept in the garden. [beat] He went into the house and sat alone for some time. Then he came out and he sat by me. He had shimmering eyes and he held me and said, "if you tell me you are carrying the son of God, then the son of God he is." [beat] I had known the love of my family, I had known the love of his family, and I had even known the infinite glory of God's love, but I had *never* experienced love like that. (tearfully) And I thought, maybe I am most highly favored in God's eyes, for he gave me Joseph.

GESTAS: Okay.

MARY MAGDALENE: Mary, I need you to focus now. We need to talk about the birth.

MOTHER MARY: Yes. Yes. There was a census.

GESTAS: Which one?

MOTHER MARY: There have been more? I thought there was just the one.

MARY MAGDALENE: 3755

GESTAS: Right.

MOTHER MARY: And we had to travel. Joseph had been born before his family moved to Nazareth and we had to travel for weeks to get where he was born.

MARY MAGDALENE: Where did you go?

MOTHER MARY: I don't remember.

GESTAS: Bethlehem.

MOTHER MARY: Yes. [beat] Yes? (laughing) I don't remember.

GESTAS: It was Bethlehem. (to Mary Magdalene, meaningfully) Micah.

MARY MAGDALENE: Yes. Yes, Bethlehem.

MOTHER MARY: I was so heavy. I couldn't walk. I couldn't ride the donkey. I was so tired. We thought it would be ten days. It was more. It was weeks. Maybe it was years. I couldn't walk and all we had was the donkey and the road. I wanted to lie down. I remember, this feeling, this *needing* to lie down there on road. [beat]

GESTAS: Um—

MOTHER MARY: On the first day, I couldn't imagine the second. On the second day, the third was impossible. I looked at the dry road and I saw the cool moist garden where I'd slept the summer before. The road became the garden and I was consumed with desire, this desire for sleep. [beat] And Joseph saw me and knew I was suffering. (taking a breath) So on the third day, he told me a story. It was long and funny, about an orchard. (laughing) A-and the next day he told me stories, and the next and the

next, over and over. He told me stories from the Torah. He told me stories from his mother. He told me one story and I knew it! (laughing) My mother had told me! And we started to laugh and it was ten days and twelve days. He helped me on the donkey and then helped me back down and all the while he told me stories that made me laugh and forget the walking.

GESTAS: (to Mary Magdalene) This is crazy, we're nowhere with this—

MARY MAGDALENE: (hissing at Gestas) Stop. (to Mary) Mary, please, go on.

MOTHER MARY: One day the walking was done. [beat] The baby had been kicking, but now he was just lying like a swallowed stone. We arrived weeks late, and the census was to be the following day, but we had nowhere to go. We went from house to house, but all the houses were full of families. We had lost hope, we would have to lie on our coats in the street. Not in a garden, but with stones and sticks. (she takes a deep breath) Joseph found a man who would let us put up the donkey. A stableman. We brought her into this thatched clay room and—it was miraculous. It was perfect. The stableman saw my face and smiled and said we could sleep here if we wanted. In the stable! (laughing) I looked to Joseph but his eyes were already dancing when he saw my face. (taking a deep breath) How can I describe the stable? It was no different than anywhere I had ever been, but the animals were creeping and mewling and their heat filled the walls. The walls were full of the warmth of life. It was majestic. (taking a deep breath) It was humble. It was princely. It was a home. My boy knew. He awoke.

MARY MAGDALENE: (sighing) Baruch Hashem.

GESTAS: You gave birth there?

MOTHER MARY: A shepherd came in, saw me crying, and ran. (laughing) I thought we would be thrown out. I thought I would bring Jesus into the world lying in the street. But the stableman smiled and said nothing. He had spoken to Gabriel, I thought. He knew that I was most highly favored in God's eyes. He began to pile up straw. Then he lay his cloak on the straw and told me to lie down. [beat] Joseph was so frightened! I had never seen that look in his eye. He said later that he wasn't, (laughing) but I know, I saw. And the animals were frightened too, for Joseph was pacing and his eyes were like jewels. The stableman touched each animal, saying, "there, there. These are just weary travelers. And you and I have seen this many, many times". Then he turned to Joseph and smiled, I remember, he said, "every living thing here was born in this room. Fear not. This will be a day of great joy." [beat] The pain was—

MARY MAGDALENE: Yes.

MOTHER MARY: (laughing) You have children?

MARY MAGDALENE: I have six.

MOTHER MARY: It got easier. With each.

MARY MAGDALENE: Easier, but never easy!

MOTHER MARY: And I was only a child with the first.

MARY MAGDALENE: As was I. No more than fifteen.

GESTAS: Augh.

MOTHER MARY: They will never know.

MARY MAGDALENE: Their burden is that they know they will never know. [The women laugh.]

MOTHER MARY: When he was still alive, not a day went by that Joseph didn't hold me in wonder. Watching that birth changed him. My memory of it is like a dream, I could leave it behind. His memory of it was like the width of his palm, like a unit of measure. He could close his eyes and see it without trying.

GESTAS: Yes, yes, you are both miracle workers. I wonder if Jesus would say the same thing about my mother who was a whore.

MOTHER MARY: Of course he would! Jesus loves whores!

GESTAS: See? And you guys were worried about how to shape the message. We could just go with "Jesus Loves Whores".

MOTHER MARY: He loves everyone.

GESTAS: Fine.

MARY MAGDALENE: Gestas. Please. [Mary Magdalene shifts in her seat and it creaks] Mary, tell me.

MOTHER MARY: I gave birth to Jesus. I was a fright. He was as well. I was able to give him my milk, but we looked as if we'd been ripped apart. The stableman cleaned me and the baby while Joseph—You won't believe this, but he lined the manger with straw. I was so tired. I had walked from Nazareth and been torn in two and I couldn't lift the baby. And the-the shepherd, who had run away before, came back with his wife and sisters. The sisters had babies themselves, they had swaddling clothes, and we wrapped Jesus and set him in the manger with the straw to sleep.

GESTAS: You put the baby in the manger.

MOTHER MARY: I couldn't hold him anymore. B-h-he was so big and I was so tired. The sisters and the mother stayed. The stableman stayed. For him, this was another birth, another foal, another lamb. (laughing) The shepherd ran away! Of course! But other shepherd's wives came. And carpenter's wives. And farmer's wives. They brought their children and their babies—

GESTAS: Why?

MOTHER MARY: W-because they didn't want to leave their babies alone, and—

GESTAS: (talking over her) No, why did they come? Why did they come at all?

MARY MAGDALENE: Because they knew the Son of God had come. They came to see the newborn King.

MOTHER MARY: No.

MARY MAGDALENE: Mary, you have to understand, Jesus will be a—

MOTHER MARY: No, I'm sorry Magdalena, but no. When he was born, he was an angel's baby. That is all.

GESTAS: Oh my God—

ALMELEM: Quiet.

MOTHER MARY: Like every baby, he was an angel's baby. But when the women came, the sisters and wives, they blessed him. They made him holy. It was then that I understood. I am most highly favored not in *God's* eyes. *God's* eyes look *everywhere*, not with favor on any one of us. I am most highly favored because of us. Because of our people.

GESTAS: He has to be anointed. He has to be the promised one.

ALMELEM: Don't worry, he will be.

MOTHER MARY: He is. Not because an angel put him in me. [The music creeps in.] He is glorified by the goodness of Joseph. He was made holy by the crucible of the journey. He was blessed by the stableman. And then he was sanctified by the shepherd mothers. I am most highly favored because of what *Israel* did for my little baby, born in a barn and laid to sleep in borrowed swaddling clothes. *We* led him into this world so he could *destroy* it! And make it new.

[They are quiet while the music peaks, and then retreats.]

GESTAS: Almelem. You can do this?

ALMELEM: Oh yes. This I can do.

[The theme rises and plays under the following voiceover.]

VOICEOVER (Jordana Williams): Gideon Media presents ALMELEM by Sean Williams, directed by Jordana Williams, sound design by Bart Fasbender, music by Adam Blau, produced by Cara Ehlenfeldt. Featuring Dani Martinek, Nat Cassidy, Yeauxlanda Kay, Charleigh E. Parker, Sean Williams, and Kristen Vaughan. Special thanks to Augustus Alexander, Steve Alexander, Micah Busey, Julie Castle, Dan Kois, Harper Kois, Lyra Kois, Kate Cosma, Will Lowry, Lori Parquet, Stacy Raymond, Alia Smith, Moira Stone, Barnaby Williams, and Marlena Williams.

END OF EPISODE FOUR