DRAMA COMPANION
written by
ROSE ASPINALL

Cast: 5 m 2 w

Avram: age 50-70, Rabbi of the small synagogue in Nazareth.
Tovah: age 50-70, Wife of Avram
Mary: Early teens, betrothed to Joseph, mother of Jesus
Joseph: 20-30, betrothed to Mary, Jesus’ earthly father
Shepherds: 2 m, 1 child, any age

Setting: The home of Rebbe Avram and his wife, Tovah, the village of Nazareth.

Avram is kind, upright and righteous. He teaches at the synagogue in Nazareth. In fact, Avram taught Joseph as a young man in Torah school. Avram and Tovah have known Mary and Joseph’s families since birth. The rumors have been a great weight on Avram ever since Tovah told him all that she heard while making her daily trip to the well.
SCENE 1

Scene starts after Yahweh, Hear our Pleas and before Psalm 24 Underscore
(between pages 19 and 20)

Tovah dipping water from a large urn into a shallow wooden bowl. She sets it carefully on the table laying a cloth beside it. In an opposite corner, Avram, sits at a simple wooden desk and reads a scroll lit by a single clay oil lamp. He wears a simple white linen, belted tunic, a tasseled prayer shawl pulled up over his head. Tovah walks to him and touches his shoulder. He looks up preoccupied, sighs, carefully closes the scroll, removes the prayer shawl, folds it and walks to the low table. He lowers himself, and kneeling, dips his hands in the bowl and dries them. Tovah sits on a mat opposite him. She serves in silence. It is a simple breakfast of flat bread, figs and cheese. Finally, she can stand it no longer and breaks the silence.

Tovah: (matter of fact) Three days now you’ve been quiet. (pause) You haven’t slept. You lay your head down, but your eyes remain open. It’s time to speak, husband.

Avram: (shrugging and gesturing) Adonai speaks in the silence.

Tovah: Then he’s spoken enough to fill a scroll. Perhaps you could spare a word or two for me?

Avram: (exhaling, discouraged) I’m troubled, Tovah. Deep in my bones troubled.

Tovah: (gentler) And why wouldn’t you be?! It’s no surprise to hear the same words that were whispered around the well are already being spoken aloud in the streets.

Avram: (sigh) I’m a simple man, am I not? I strive to please the Almighty in all things.

Tovah: I have not known you to do otherwise.

Avram: He says obey—I obey.

Tovah: Always.

Avram: And yet....(trails off)

Tovah: And yet...what?

Avram: And yet, in this matter most essential, the matter of this child of Anne and Joachim, there’s nothing simple. (distress) I can’t make the pieces fit, Tovah! Little Mary—always truthful, always obedient, yes? Of course, yes! And Joseph? Even as a boy in Torah school, always eager to learn the ways of the Almighty, a perceptive student, a delight to this old Rabbi. It’s a mystery. And yet, it cannot be denied, Mary has returned home from Zechariah and Elizabeth’s most blessed event—with child.
Tovah: So it would seem. (pause) It’s been three short days since Mary’s return and the village is already divided. Their opinions run wild.

Avram: I have no interest in opinions.

Tovah: And yet, they look to you! This mystery needs solving, husband.

Avram: And if it’s true? If this IS the doing of the Almighty? Well, you’re right, of course, I suppose it’s time to call the elders. They must be consulted.

Tovah: (frustrated, waving her hands) Already half of the village is avoiding Joseph! They refuse to walk past his home. The other half wants to see Mary put away. Mary! If this IS the doing of the Almighty—then He will deliver her. If it is not...may He have mercy on her—not many will.

Avram: Oh we are a fickle, unreasonable people, Tovah. We must get to the bottom of this thing. A mystery, I tell you. Now, in the matter of Zechariah and Elizabeth, I have a word to say. I know old Zechariah, he is a righteous man. If he claims to have seen a vision, I believe him. He’s seen an angel? I believe him! One moment burning incense before the Almighty in the holy of holies and the next, struck entirely mute for doubting that angel’s words. Too old, Tovah, both of them, far too old! True? Of course true! We all gave up hope years ago. Now, they have a son! These are the facts.

Tovah: Yes, a son! Who ever would have believed it? Blessed be the Eternal!

Avram: And then, right before harvest? Mary flew to her cousin’s side having received news of this baby, yes?

Tovah: Yes! She said as much to her mother. Poor Anne...she wanted to believe her.

Avram: (rubbing his beard) Hmm, and now—now she returns with child! What does Mary have to say for herself, Tovah? Has Anne spoken of the matter to you?

Tovah: No, she has been silent and no wonder. It’s a deep grief to them. Still, there are reliable rumors. I’ve heard...well...Mary is claiming that the same angel that told her of Zechariah and Elizabeth, also told her that she too would bear a child. Husband, she is saying that she is to bear the Messiah.

Avram: The Messiah?!

Tovah: Yes! She does not admit to any sin. Nothing is impossible for the Almighty, she says.
Avram: The Messiah?! Well, what of that? One angel carrying two messages, one message for old Zechariah and another for Mary. Yes, a mystery. Tell me Tovah, can one message be true and the other false? As to the first, blessed be! He has heard the prayers of Zechariah and granted him a son who will carry his name. Surely the hand of the Almighty is in this!

Tovah: His name is John, not Zechariah, husband. (slowly, clearly) Zechariah has named his son, John.

Avram: (puzzled) John?! But no one in the family is named John!

Tovah: I know, but the day of circumcision arrived and everyone was gathered, celebrating, calling the baby Zechariah and Elizabeth hushed them—said the baby should be called John! When they questioned the old priest, he agreed. The angel, it seems, said he is to be John.

Avram: Ah, you are right Tovah, this mystery needs some solving. As to the second “angel” message, before sunset I must go to Anne and Joachim, then straight way to Joseph. I can wait no longer. We will judge the matter quickly—before the fires of condemnation burn brighter.

Tovah: Yes, do what you must, husband and may Adonai give you wisdom.

Lights out
SCENE 2

Begins after page 60 (between This Christmas Morn and Now that He is Here)

Bethlehem, several months later.

Mary and Joseph have made the trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They are exhausted. Baby Jesus has arrived and is sleeping peacefully in the manger. Mary's head rests lightly on the manger, while Joseph keeps watch a short distance away, lost in thought. The shepherds will arrive at the close of the scene.

Depict the Nativity scene in the manner which you are most comfortable, whether a cave or a wooden stable. The Bible is not clear as to the structure of the dwelling where Jesus was born, the only indication being that he was placed in a manger. Large jars of water, clay or wooden basins, jars of olive oil, strips of cloth in baskets are all appropriate props for this scene.

Bring lights up on a quiet, peaceful set. Mary stirs, then peers into the manger. She fusses over the baby, strokes his cheek, then looks over to Joseph.

Mary: (softly) Joseph. (no answer, she calls again) Joseph.

Joseph: (starting) Yes?

Mary: (beckoning) Come...look.

Joseph moves to her side.

Mary: He's perfect, isn't he?

Joseph reaches in to the manger, strokes the baby's cheek, lifts his fingers examining them.

Joseph: (looking at Mary, nods) Yes, perfect.

They gaze at Jesus in silence.

Mary: (eyes still on Jesus) What are you thinking?

Joseph: Only that, it seems like just yesterday that my heart was in such turmoil. You remember when Rebbe Avram came to me?

Mary: I remember, of course.

Joseph: We talked long of what must be done. I wrestled late into the night, dreading what I believed I must do. And then the angel...and now...look at him. He's finally here, Mary—just look at him! (distress) To think, I nearly had you sent away.
Mary: (laying her hand on Joseph’s hand) Joseph, Adonai protected me. He gave me a good and righteous man to watch over me. Now, you’ll watch over his Son, your son, too. Everything’s changed!

Joseph: Everything. (pause) Mary?

Mary: Yes?

Joseph: Are you scared?

Mary: Not so much anymore. (a beat) Well, maybe a little—but now that he’s here—I don’t know, I mean look at him, Joseph. He’s a baby. I know how to take care of a baby.

Joseph: But he’s not ours.

Mary: (tolerant smile) Oh, I know, but part of him is, don’t you think? Ours to take of. (stroking Jesus’ face) This part right here? This is the part I know about—this baby. The rest is up to Yahweh.

Joseph: (shaking head in disbelief) How is it that are you so wise?

Mary: Am I? I don’t know if I’m wise. I have so many questions. All I know is that I love him and if Yahweh trusted him to us, then I only need to do what I know to do. I don’t know what will happen—not now and not when he’s grown. I just want to close my eyes and take it all in. Every moment, because now that he’s here, nothing will ever be the same.

Joseph: I have at least as many questions, but maybe Yahweh doesn’t mind as long as we trust him in our questioning. I don’t mind not being able to see so far down the path anymore.

Mary: Me either. Maybe we trust more now because we have seen his love.

Joseph: Yes, Mary! Just look at his love! It’s sleeping right here.

He puts his arm around her. Suddenly they hear a rustling. They look up to see shepherds; 2 adult and 1 child, approach. Seeing Mary and Joseph’s openness, they step tentatively just inside the stable.

Shepherd 1: (a loud whisper) It’s him! See how he lies in a manger! (he motions the others in)

Stepping a bit closer, they peer at the baby in awe, then talking all at once, excited explanations come pouring out!
Shepherd 1:  *(all in a rush)* The sky! It was full of angels, the ground shaking beneath our feet! It was so bright! We saw them! They said that he would be here—the Messiah!

Shepherd 2:  Yes, the Savior! They said he was born right here! They told us to come, that we would find him, just like this. It’s exactly as they said!

Child Shepherd: We were scared. They said not to be.

Mary:  *(to the child)* It’s okay. They were right, you don’t need to be afraid. Come closer. You can touch him if you like.

Child Shepherd: *(nodding, reaching out, he touches the baby’s fingers tentatively, then looks back at the older shepherds. They reach out and touch the tips of his fingers too.)*

Shepherd 2:  What is he to be called?

Joseph:  Jesus. His name is Jesus.

*Lights fade*
SCENE 3

After page 78 (between The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy and Gifts Fit for a King)

Scene 3 opens exactly the same way that Scene 2 ends. After seeing the baby, the shepherds thank Mary and Joseph and with barely subdued excitement leave. Off stage we hear their excited voices calling out to passersby, “Good news! We have good news! You won’t believe what’s happened this night! This very night!”

Mary and Joseph exchange glances. Then Mary reaches into the manger and picks the baby up. As she rocks him, she talks while Joseph looks on.

Mary: Oh, little one, dear sweet little one. Do you see how they come? Your Father sent them—to welcome you. Do you see how they look at you? They know, little one, they know. Oh, I might have a thousand questions, but tonight—tonight you’re here. Nothing else matters.

Mary lays Jesus tenderly into the manger. Joseph puts his arm around her.

Joseph: Mary, why don’t you rest now? I’ll watch over the baby. (Mary looks at him reluctantly.)

Mary: I’m not sure I can, Joseph. The night—it’s full of wonders. Did you see how they looked at him?

Joseph: (smiling and nodding) I did. (gesturing outside) I can still hear them out there! Do you think we need to brace ourselves for more visitors?

Mary: Maybe. I think from now on, we’ll have to be prepared for many things. (small laugh) The Almighty has proven to be unpredictable.

Joseph: (looking around) I would not have predicted any of this; this cave, this manger. I’m sorry Mary. Truly. I’ve let you down.

Mary: (gently) Joseph, look at me. Everything—everything is as it was meant to be. I am certain. We’re safe and warm. We have clean, fresh straw. Jesus is resting. What else do we need? You drew water from the well, when I was thirsty. You drew water from the same well to bathe our baby. You have seen to every practical thing.

Joseph: To honor the Almighty, to care for you and the baby, the only way I could. Such small things, Mary, all of them!

Mary: And when you were drawing the water, did you hear the voice of the Almighty, Joseph? Did he remind you of this well and its story?
Joseph: *(Thinking)* I know this well. It’s the ancient well of King David.

Mary: Yes, the very same. Will you tell me its story, Joseph?

Joseph: It’s story. Yes...*(Pondering)* I know it. It was during harvest time. David was in the stronghold, the cave of Adullam. He wanted water.

Mary: *(encouraging)* Yes. That’s the story.

Joseph: He said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” Three of his mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines—risked their lives to draw the water and bring it to him. They loved him that much.

Mary: Yes! The same water! From the very same well. Oh, think of it Joseph. Our Son of David was bathed in the water from the very same well.

Joseph: In my haste, I had not thought of it Mary.

Mary: This very day, you have brought water to Jesus from the well of His Father David. The Almighty promised David that his seed would last forever. Now, he has brought his Son, to this very place. So you see my dear Joseph, all is as it was meant to be.

Joseph: Is this real? Or are we imagining it? The promise fulfilled on this night! Since neither of us can sleep, Mary, will you tell me again—about the night the angel came? I want to seal it—seal it forever, so we won’t forget. All of this, *(gesturing to the stable, the manger)* it’s the beginning.

Mary: Yes, of course, Joseph.

Joseph: Because Jesus must know every detail, yes? I learned the ways of the Almighty, the teachings of the Torah from my Father and then Torah school from Rebbe Avram. So will I teach Jesus. He must know that he is descended from the great family of King David and King David descended from our Father Abraham. Jesus will recite the Shema and Adonai willing, just as I learned from Avram, so will he. Jesus could ask for no better teacher than Rebbe Avram.

Mary: *(a small smile)* Perhaps it is Jesus who will teach us—who will teach Avram.
Joseph: \textit{(conceding)} Perhaps, perhaps. You’re right Mary, how can I assume that I—or anyone will teach this little one anything, but just as you said, I can do only what I know. You know what the angel told me Mary? He said, he’ll save his people from their sins. This Baby! We will care for him now, and he will grow—and then, he will save us. I don’t know how or why the Almighty chose us, but on my life, I promise, I will offer to him all that I am, all that I know. He will call on the name of His Father. Baruch Hashem, Blessed be God. I will never dishonor this vow. Never.

\textit{Lights fade}
SCENE 4  
*After page 88 (between Gifts Fit for a King and Three Gifts)*

Many months have passed. We are back at the home of Avram and Tovah. Tovah’s hands are busy. Choose some household chore; tying herbs for drying, sorting beans, clearing dishes or folding fabric. Avram has been at the Synagogue. He enters.

Tovah: *(looking up expectantly from her work)* You’re late. It’s nearly Sabbath. The ram’s horn will sound at any moment. Do we have any word yet? Everyday I ask. Surely by now—.

Avram: *(excited)* Yes, Tovah! Finally today, some word reached me while at the Synagogue—reports from travelers passing through on their way North to Sepphoris. I spoke at length to one in particular—Elias, a friend of Joseph’s. He seemed quite fond of him. I gathered they struck up a friendship in the time they spent in Bethlehem. Odd though.

Tovah: How do you mean?

Avram: Well, he was seeking Anne and Joachim.

Tovah: *(Impatient)* And?

Avram: Mary and Joesh are well. They sent word.

Tovah: *(exhaling, relieved)* Yes! It’s what we’ve been hoping. And the Baby?

Avram: Healthy. Born in a lambing cave, I’m afraid! But healthy! Blessed be the Eternal!

Tovah: Oh, praise be! Poor Mary. Bethlehem must have been busting at the seams! But why do you say odd?

Avram: Well, it’s just that Joseph and Mary are no longer in Bethlehem.

Tovah: *(registering surprise)* Not in Bethlehem? And not in Nazareth either? Where are they?

Avram: Well, I’d assumed that Joseph found work there in Bethlehem—some barn or perhaps the inn. There’s always something for a man of Joseph’s skills, if not in Bethlehem, then perhaps Jerusalem.

Tovah: Yes, I assumed so, as well! Poor Anne, so homesick for Mary. But where are they?

Avram: Egypt!
Tovah: Egypt?

Avram: Yes, they’ve gone to Egypt.

Tovah: Are you sure?

Avram: Yes, I believe so! I warrant it was King Herod that drove them away! You remember the report we heard—so terrible! About the children?

Tovah: Of course! That butcher! Full of hate and sickness! Murdered his own wife and sons! And now, more of Israel’s sons dead too, by his hand. Enemy, friend, or his own flesh and blood, it makes no difference to him. No one is safe!

Avram: There is no telling how many were lost to his soldiers swords. I feared that Mary and Jo- seph were caught up in it as well. I didn’t want to speak my fears aloud, but now, it seems once again, the Almighty has made a way.

Tovah: How do you mean?

Avram: The traveler Elias said that Joseph told him explicitly that Anne and Joachim must know, that he was to say these words exactly as were told to him. An angel of Adonai, appeared again to Joseph. Another dream. He said, “Arise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay until I bring word, for Herod seeks the child to destroy him.”

Tovah: So close to danger! Truly, the Almighty is with them! Egypt! But how did Herod find out? A baby born in a lambing cave could not matter much to him.

Avram: Herod? He boasts eyes and ears everywhere. Elias said that Joseph told him there were visitors—of more than one kind. First, on the night of the birth—shepherds.

Tovah: Shepherds?!

Avram: Yes, they told Joseph that angels appeared in the night sky, a whole host them. Scared them nearly to death. Told them where to find the baby. Then later, a caravan of foreigners, Magi! They came through Jerusalem seeking the child. One morning Mary and Joseph woke up to find them outside their door! With all that and Jerusalem such a short distance from Bethlehem, I don’t think it was hard for Herod to discover the family!

Tovah: Is there no end to the wonders of the Almighty? Truly he has done a great thing. But what do you think, husband, will poor Anne get to see her Mary again? And will we ever lay eyes on this promised one?
Avram: Only the Almighty knows, but now that Herod has breathed his last venomous breath, we can hope. Oh, I tell you, it would do this poor soul good to see Joseph once again, but to see with my own eyes, the promised one of Israel? To hold in my arms the Lord’s Christ? I could leave this world and peace would be mine.

Tovah: Yes, I too long to hold the child.

Avram: I’ve searched the scrolls, wife, every day since that first conversation with Joseph. I’ve searched that I might know the intentions of the Almighty. Now, I’m convinced he is there, in the scroll of the prophet Micah.

Tovah: Tell me, husband. What does it say?

Avram: This. (pause) “And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you will come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Tovah: Little Bethlehem?

Avram: Yes, wife, little Bethlehem. It was by no coincidence that Mary and Joseph traveled there. Even in the far reaches of Rome they bow to the wishes of the Almighty. And now? Now, we find that Herod himself was hunting the baby, that the Almighty has safely hidden him away from this evil! Make no mistake, this baby is the Lord’s Messiah, come to redeem us! His origin is of old, from eternity. I know it, in my bones, Tovah, Adonai has answered our prayers!

Tovah: (eyes tightly shut) Truly, he has covered them and under his wings they find their refuge. Imagine it! The Messiah, in our lifetime! Oh, blessed be the Eternal!

Avram: Yes, blessed be the Eternal! Blessed be the God of Mary and Joseph. Come wife, the first evening star is in the night sky and Sabbath is upon us. There is much to celebrate.

Lights fade

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