

**Script by Chris Wyatt**

**Music by John McNeil**

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**Summary**

The life of John the Baptist, the man chosen by God to announce the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. From his miraculous birth to his untimely death at the hands of King Herod, John’s life was one of drama, in which he was not afraid to confront the religious authorities of his day while proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God. This powerful musical had its premiere in an eight-night run at Orewa, Auckland, New Zealand.

**Note:**

A video of the original performance of this play is available on YouTube:

Act One <https://www.youtube.com/edit?o=U&video_id=xYEG1nwOQ5c>

Act Two <https://www.youtube.com/edit?o=U&video_id=W4gIBDSjCtk>

Music and backing tracks may be obtained by contacting John McNeil, at soul.communication@outlook.com A small donation will be requested for copying, postage, etc.

**Cast** (in order of appearance)

*Note: Many parts can be doubled – in the original production a cast of 33 fulfilled all parts)*

Zachariah

Elizabeth

Captain

Soldier

John

Mary

Villagers

Very young John

Rabbi

Priest

Joseph

Teenage John

Teenage Jesus

Essenes

Religious leaders

Disciples of John (at least 3 of each)

Disciples of Jesus (at least 3 of each)

Salome

Herodias

Herod

Executioner

**ACT ONE**

**Overture**

*Begins with musical introduction to “Dark Clouds Have Covered the Sun” and a darkened stage. Lights slowly come up (but remain dim) to reveal Elizabeth centre stage, sitting and rocking, and Zachariah front SL bowed in front of an altar (placed opposite prison cell, in front of proscenium arch)*

***Song – Zachariah and Elizabeth: “DARK CLOUDS HAVE COVERED THE SUN”***

**Zachariah**

Long, long years have we served you, O Master. Thou art my Lord and my King.

Yet our lives are filled with a darkness. You’ve forgotten the promise you bring.

 We have tried to be righteous before you. Your commandments have guided our way.

But the prayers that we’ve prayed are unanswered, even though we cry out every day.

**Elizabeth**

 You have closed up my womb, o my Master

 I will never give birth to a son.

 The days of bright hope are behind us.

 The long path to death has begun.

**Together**

We’re fearful because we have stumbled

We’ve lost all our faith in the One

We don’t understand what God is planning

We reject Him for what He has done.

Why is it a life that is holy

That’s devoted to serving the One

Should suffer the slings of misfortune

When dark clouds have covered the sun?

**Zachariah:** Long, long years have I served you, O Master …

**Elizabeth:** You have closed up my womb … *(sung simultaneously with Zachariah))*

**Together:**

We’re fearful because we have stumbled

We’ve lost all our faith in the One

We don’t understand what God’s planning

We reject Him for what He has done.

Why is it a life that is holy,

That’s devoted to serving the One

Should suffer the slings of misfortune

When dark clouds have covered the sun?

*At conclusion of song, both characters sit quietly weeping, lights on these two dim and come up on John and the soldier in cell (SR). John is sitting on floor manacled to wall; the soldier is standing awkwardly looking down at him.*

*The Captain enters and stands at the “door” of the cell. He coughs. The soldier stiffens then leaves the cell and stands to attention beside the Captain. They speak in low voices.*

**Captain:** How is the prisoner? Has he caused any difficulties?

**Soldier:** Sir, forgive me if I speak my mind, but I do not like this situation. Is Herod mad?

**Captain:** Yes, I know. Why has he made *this* man, of all people, a prisoner? It’s likely to start a riot – and we’re the ones who will have to get it all back under control.

**Soldier:** The men are talking, sir; they don’t want him here. Many of us have heard him preaching out in the desert. We are afraid of what the gods might do to us for keeping him prisoner here at Machearus.

**Captain:** You boys are listening to too much superstitious nonsense. But I have to agree that this man, John, does not deserve imprisonment. *(sighs)* And now that he is here, his days are numbered. How long, do you think, will Herod be able to control his scheming wife?

**Soldier:** *(Hesitantly)* Do you need me to go back into his cell, sir?

**Captain:** No, lad. I’d like to spend time with him - see if I can make his stay with us a bit more comfortable.

 *The relieved soldier exits and the Captain enters the cell. He sits on the stool. There is a period of silence before John looks up at him.*

**John:** Some say it’s impossible to forgive a man who has deliberately set out to hurt you for the sole purpose of destroying you.

**Captain:** Herod?

**John:** *(With a very slight nod of his head.)*

**Captain:**Then what hope have you? Doesn’t seem very fair.

**John:** *(looking up)* Perhaps this “unfair hope” you speak of has come with permission from God.

**Captain:** *(He stiffens.)* Humph. Never taken with that God nonsense. We blame Him when things go wrong. We thank Him when they go right. And we use Him as an excuse to cover every eventuality. Doesn’t the sheer breadth of seemingly pointless pain disprove the existence of a supposedly good God? Why would your God, if He exists, do a thing like that – give “permission” for you to suffer needlessly?

**John:** Maybe He desires to lift my reputation higher than what it used to be.

**Captain:** *(There is a long pause while he considers this statement.)* I’m not sure I understand. You people argue that your God is just. But good people don’t have bad things happen to them, surely. Yet your whole life has beenone long series of disappointments, hasn’t it?

**John:** You could say that. I guess you could even say I was conceived out of disappointment – though my birth was a miracle.

**Captain:**What do you mean?

**John:** Both my parents were very old when I was conceived – well past the age of child-bearing. They had given up hope. Even though they were a devout couple living in Judea – my father was of a priestly family and they lived blameless lives – they thought that God was punishing them in some way.

**Captain:** See what I mean? Didn’t I tell you? Blame God when things don’t go our way.

**John:** Not so fast. God had a higher plan. You see, once in a priest’s life-time, he is selected to burn incense in the temple. When it came to my father’s turn, the angel Gabriel appeared to him – as old as he was – and told him that their prayers had been heard and that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son.

**Captain:** You?

**John:** *(He nods.)* I should have been named Zacharias, after my father – a familytradition – but God told him to name me John. My father, understandably, didn’t believe any of this, so God struck him dumb until I was presented at the temple and he was asked for my name.

**Captain:** And he spoke the name “John”?

**John:** Yes. His voice returned at that instance.

**Captain:** Uncommon, I agree – but hardly miraculous.

**John:** The story doesn’t end there. The angel also told my father how I was to live my life – as a Nazarene.

**Captain:** A Nazarene? You mean that strange religious sect that won’t cut their hair?

**John:** Yes – and that I would be filled with the Spirit and bring people back to God. That I would go before the Lord to make them ready for Him.

**Captain:** Well, you’ve certainly done that. But hasn’t that been just a self-fulfilling prophecy over your life?

**John:** It’s not so easy to manipulate your own life like that. Especially when you are surrounded by those who wish to destroy you. But another strange thing happened even before I was born. My mother had a distant younger cousin – Mary, a teenager living in the north. She too was expecting a baby. A bit of a family scandal actually. Her husband Joseph found out she was already pregnant and hurriedly arranged to marry her.

**Captain:** Sounds like an honourable man.

**John:** *(As he speaks, the light over the cell dims, and comes up centre stage, where we see Elizabeth washing clothes over a basin. John’s voice fades with the light.)* Well one day, Mary unexpectedly turned up at mymother’s home….

**Mary:** *(Enters, carrying a small wooden gift.)* Shalom, cousin Elizabeth.

**Elizabeth:** *(Looks up, surprised.)* Mary! (*She suddenly clutches her stomach and gasps.)*

**Mary:** Elizabeth, are you alright?

**Elizabeth:** *(Struggling to her feet.)* Yes, yes. But when I heard your voice, the baby within me leapt!

**Mary:** Yes, Joseph and I heard you were due to have a baby and I have come to offer our congratulations and to give you this gift.

**Elizabeth:** Why, thank you. What beautiful workmanship. Your Joseph is a wonderful carver of wood.

**Mary:** I have been so blessed that God brought us together, even though he is much older than me. Our engagement has been much celebrated.

**Elizabeth:** And now I perceive that he is also such a man of honour.

**Mary:** (*Gasps.)* Why, what – what do you mean?

**Elizabeth:** *(Gently)* Mary, it is alright. God has just told me you also are with child – though not as advanced for it to be obvious. Not like me! *(She pats her stomach.)*

**Mary:** But - but I haven’t told a soul. Only Joseph knows.

**Elizabeth:** This must be very difficult for you. Tell me, how could such a thing possibly have come to pass?

**Mary:** The shame of it has been almost too much for Joseph and me to bear. I cannot explain it, but I am still a virgin yet I am with child.

**Elizabeth:** What? How can this be?

**Mary:** God spoke to both of us in dreams, telling me I would bear a son – the child of God Himself. Apparently, God is the father.

**Elizabeth:** But how could God impose this upon a young girl? What will happen to you when your family, let alone your whole village, finds out?

**Mary:** I just don’t know. Joseph and I have already spoken of divorce.

**Elizabeth:** Divorce!

**Mary:** And there is always the possibility of stoning, if people assume I have slept with another man before my marriage. How could God allow this to happen to me? After such a happy engagement. We were convinced God had brought us together. But for what purpose? To bring shame upon us? Is our God really so cruel?

**Elizabeth:** Do not doubt God, my child. Look how he has brought blessings for Zachariah and me out of heartache and despair. We cried out to him for many years, and had lost hope. Now he has given us this gift in our old age.

**Mary:** But what if God lets you down and brings sorrow and hurt through yourchild’s life?

**Elizabeth:** Surely not! Perish the thought. We have lived lives of dedication and commitment to God. Isn’t that sufficient? Surely God will keep us, and the child, from all harm as a reward?

**Mary:** I would like to think so, Elizabeth, but a shadow has passed over my heart.

**Elizabeth:** Our God is the revealer of all truth. And He tells me you are blessed among women, and that the child you will bear will also be a blessing to many. I shall not be judging you. And do not fear; neither will others. Your name will become revered and honoured. Why have I been so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

**Mary:** Oh, Elizabeth. This is all a mystery to me. I am frightened. I am unmarried, and yet with child, by some miraculous force. But God reassures me with words of salvation and hope.

***Song - Mary (with Elizabeth adding harmonies): MAGNIFICAT***

Oh, how I praise the Lord,

How I rejoice in God my Saviour,

For He took notice of his lowly servant girl.

And now the generations still to come

Will call me blessed,

For He the one, the Mighty One, is holy,

And He has done great things for me.

His mercy ever rests on all those who fear Him.

 He fills the hungry with good things.

 He scatters proud men, brings down rulers from their thrones,

 But lifts the humble and the poor.

 Mighty are His ways.

 How he has helped His servant Israel,

Rememb’ring to be merciful,

As He has promised to our fathers forever.

Oh, how I praise the Lord,

How I rejoice in God my Saviour,

For He, the One, the Mighty One, is holy,

 And He has done great things for me.

**Elizabeth:** *(Stares at Mary in wonder.)* The way my babyleapt within my womb when you arrived, I wonder if there will be some special relationship between our offspring.

**Mary:** If God wills it.

**Elizabeth:** Farwell, my cousin. May God’s grace rest upon you.

 *(As they embrace, the light on them fades and comes up on the cell.)*

**Captain:** I hear you did have some kind of special relationship with your cousin, did you not?

**John:** Yes, but that was much later. First, let me tell you about my temple dedication. Remember that I told you Mary gave a wonderful prophecy about her son when she was with my mother?

**Captain:** A prophecy?

**John:** Yes, when God seems to take over what a person is saying and speaks His words through them.

**Captain:** Sounds bizarre. Not sure I can believe in that.

**John:** Well, you can choose to believe it or not. Anyway, as soon as my father got his voice back, and once he had named me “John”, he broke into a song – much to everyone’s surprise, including his own!

**Captain:** What did he say? What was it about?

**John:** It was about me. Another prophecy.

*(Light comes up on Zachariah, Elizabeth, holding a baby, and a number of Villagers, standing SL well in front of altar.)*

**Villager 1:** But Elizabeth. You want to name him John, not Zachariah?

**Villager 2:** Now listen, my cousin shall be named Zachariah.

**Elizabeth:** No! He is to be called John.

**Villager 3:** But there is no one among your relatives who has that name.

**Villager 1:** Zachariah should have the last word. Let’s ask him.

**Villager 3:** But the man’s mad. Ever since he lost his voice, all those months ago, he just keeps to himself. You can’t trust anything he says. Come to think of it, he can’t say anything, anyway! *(Laughs cruelly.)*

**Villager 2:**I insist. He is to be called Zachariah. We can’t break with family tradition at a time like this. This will be your one and only son, given your ages.

**Villager 3:** And this one raised a few eyebrows and all, eh. *(Chuckles)*

**Elizabeth:** *(Firmly)* Enough! He is our child and I have decided. He is to be named John.

**Villager 1:**I’ve already suggested we ask Zachariah. After all, the male is the head of the family – even if he can’t speak for himself. Don’t take any notice of this woman. Come on – ask him.

**Villager 3:** *(speaking slowly and deliberately, signing with hands)* What is the boy to be called? What is his name?

*(Zachariah mimes writing. A slate and stylus is handed to him and he writes.)*

**Villager 3:** *(reading)* “His name is John.” John? Not Zachariah?

**Zachariah:** Yes – John. That is what the Lord told me is name is to be.

**Elizabeth:** Zachariah! Your voice has returned!

**Villagers:** *(Various)* Praise our Almighty God! A miracle! He can talk again!

**Zachariah:** What a wonder. I thought I would never speak again. It was so difficult to accept the word of God and obey it. Nothing He was saying made sense to me. Now He has rewarded me for that simple step of obedience. *(He takes the baby from Elizabeth and looks down on him in wonder.)* What then is this child going to be? *(He moves across to stand in front of the altar. The lights on the others dim and a bright spot comes up on Zachariah.)*

***Song - Zachariah: ZACHARIAH’S SONG***

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
    he has turned His face to us and set us free.
He set the power of salvation in the centre of our lives,
     in the house of David his servant.
Long, long ago through the preaching of his prophets,
He promised deliverance from our enemies
    and every hateful hand;
Mercy to our fathers, yes to Abraham himself
    as he remembers what he said he would do. So we can worship him without a care in the world,
    made holy before him as long as we live.
And you, my child, “Prophet of the Most High,”
    will go before the Master to prepare his ways,
And tell of His salvation.
Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
    whose sun will rise,
to break upon those in the shadow of death,

The tender mercies of our God will show us the way,
one foot at a time, down the pathway of peace.

*(The light on Zachariah fades and the spot comes up on the cell again.)*

**Captain:** Those were amazing promises! You should have had a charmed life, then.

**John:** Yes – now you can understand why I asked that question when you first came in: Can you forgive another who deliberately sets out to destroy you? God gives you hope, then you are stung with sorrow after sorrow. Where is the fairness in that? How come Herod has the last word?

**Captain:** I can’t answer that question, my friend. But while you are with us, I will make it my duty to see that you are as comfortable as possible. But a question springs to mind. You say your parents were old when you were born. How long did they live after your birth? Surely, with you being such a special “divine” gift to them, they were able to enjoy you for many years?

**John:** If only that were true. My earliest years were filled with grief and sorrow. Not long after my birth, my father was arrested by Herod the Great, who had him killed. We never found out why, but one wonders if someone knew what God had in store for this world through me, and they were trying to destroy me.

**Captain:** What makes you say that?

**John:** Well, a few years after my father’s death, cousin Mary sent a message to my mother*.*

 *(Light fades on cell, and comes up on Elizabeth, crouched down talking to a small child on a chair, centre stage.)*

**Elizabeth:** … and then little Samuel heard the voice again, calling, “Samuel, Samuel!”. Well, Samuel jumped out of bed and ran back to Eli’s room again, and said to the old man …. *(Alternatively, she could be singing an Israeli children’s song – there are plenty on Youtube and Vimeo)*

**Messenger**: *(Enters SL and Elizabeth rises; hands Elizabeth a message and a small pouch*.) Forgive me. I have an urgent message for you from Mary and Joseph, living in the city of David.

**Elizabeth**: Mary and Joseph? What could they say? *(Handing the paper back to the boy).* Thank you – but please, my eyes have grown dim with age. The letters are too small. Please read it to me.

**Messenger**: *(Clears his throat.) “*Greetings. We were saddened to learn of the death of your upright and loving husband, Zachariah, at the hand of that devil Herod the Great. It is with regard to this matter we send this urgent message. Strange things have happened of late. Recently, we were visited by a number of Babylonian astrologers, who somehow had learned of the birth of our son, Jesus. Then last night, Joseph had a very disturbing dream. In it, our son was seen as being in great danger from the madness of Herod. We are leaving Bethlehem this instant. We are going to the land of Egypt, and will stay there until this present danger passes.

 “But knowing what has already befallen your beloved Zachariah, we fear that John is also in danger. Perhaps all the first born sons in Judea are in danger. Elizabeth, we urge you to take John and leave Judea immediately. Go wherever is closest and safest. Maybe the best place is the desert. Our visitors gave us gifts. We want to share a little of the gold they gave us to get you through this difficult time. Please, in the name of God, flee today. Tomorrow may be too late. We hope to find you again at some better time, when we are free from the tyrannies of the Herods of this world.”

**Elizabeth:** *(Looking down at John.)* What shall we do, my darling? Where shall we go*? (Turns to Messenger.)* This is difficult news indeed. Tell me, friend, how are Mary and Joseph coping?

**Messenger:** They were greatly disturbed by the dream. I have never seen them so upset and uncertain.

**Elizabeth:** But how likely is it that Herod will do as the angel told Joseph?

**Messenger:** You live a long way from Herod’s palace, madam, and will be out of touch with what is going on politically. Many believe Herod is a madman. He treats the people cruelly and seems to take pleasure in seeing others suffer. He is capable of the most heinous acts.

**Elizabeth:** How can God allow a man like this to rise to a position of such power and influence, and make life so miserable to so many people?

**Messenger:** I know not. I am mystified. I would have expected God to bless such a lovely couple as Mary and Joseph. Doesn’t trouble only come to the unrighteous and the sinner?

**Elizabeth:** That is what I have always believed. But now, I am not so certain. *(Empties a few gold coins from the pouch into her hand.)* Thank God for the generosity of our cousin’s family. We at least may survive a few weeks in the desert. *(To the messenger.)* Thank you for bringing us this message so promptly. This news of Herod doesn’t surprise me in the least, that the enemy of God would do such a thing. We will leave for the wilderness at once. Go, and tell no one of this.

**Messenger:** *(Bows).* You can trust me. But how will you endure in the desert? Can anyone survive out there?

**Elizabeth:** The Essenes survive. They have families - they have children and homes out there. If they can manage it, then so can we. My son *will* survive. Shalom.

 *(They all leave the stage, Messenger one side, Elizabeth and the child the other. Lights back up on the cell.)*

**John:** Mother told me the winds were deadly out in the desert. It was like walking into a furnace. The hot sand stinging your face, the desperate search for water and shelter.

**Captain:** I know, I know. Many is the time we have searched for fugitives out there. Mostly we give up and leave them to the elements. How long *did* you survive out there?

**John:** After a week’s journey in that boiling hell, we arrived at an Essene village. They were gracious and took us in, and we soon became a part of this strange community of religious pilgrims. Over the years, I began to feel more and more like I was one of them. Although mother had earlier told me of the prophetic words of promise my father had sung over me, I soon forgot all about them. The promise of being a bright light to bring hope to others seemed increasingly distant and impossible. I just lost myself in the isolation of this desert community and became a loner, focussing on God.

**Captain:** You see why I think religion becomes an obsession. I’ll have nothing to do with it. But what about your mother? How did she manage?

**John:** She did her best to cope, but the heat got to her and she became increasingly ill. Fortunately news eventually arrived that Herod the Great had died, and so we returned home to the cool hills of Judea. I was about ten at the time. Some of our closest Essene friends accompanied us and settled there. But even before I reached my Bar Mitzvah, what little strength she had left her and I became an orphan.

*(Lights fade on cell, come up centre stage, where we see a wooden coffin covered with a white cloth, and with candles at the head and the feet. Villagers are gathered to mourn. A small group of women are wailing a melody, accompanied by two flute players. The melody soon changes into the Elegy. Note: at an appropriate moment during the remainder of this Act, John and the Captain surreptitiously leave the cell.)*

***Song – Village women: “WAILING / ELEGY”***

**Women:** Gone! Gone is Elizabeth the beautiful.
  She became a dwelling for the grace of the Almighty
and a lodging place for every pure spirit,
    a home for every sweet smelling blossom,
    a habitation for every good and holy thing.
For all the saints have drunk
    the fragrant wine of her righteousness.
The upright of the earth have received true light from her,
    and the righteous of the earth have grown rich,
for she is blameless.

***Dance: The villagers perform the FUNERAL DANCE.***

 *(During the dance, the Rabbi speaks to the mourners and begins praying. At the conclusion of the dance, the music continues quietly as we hear the Rabbi conclude the prayers.)*

**Rabbi: .**... may her place of rest be in Gan Eden. Therefore, may the All-Merciful One shelter her with the cover of His wings forever, and bind her soul in the bond of life. The Lord is her heritage; may she rest in her resting-place in peace; and let us say: Amen.

**All**: Amen.

**Rabbi:** Remember God that we are dust. May she come to her place in peace. *(He looks up at the mourners.)* May the Almighty comfort you among the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem.

**All:** May the Almighty comfort you among the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem.

 *The music builds as the coffin is lifted and carried off, with the dancing, and all follow it out.*

 *There is a brief pause, a fading and lifting of lights, and we see the Priest and 2 Villagers front of stage.*

**Villager 1:** What do you think is going to happen to the boy?

**Villager 2:** Yes, he is an orphan now.

**Priest:** We are clearly commanded in the Holy Writings to look after the widows and orphans. He cannot be abandoned. And being the son of a fellow priest, I feel some kind of responsibility for him.

**Villager 2:** The trouble is he has lived so long out in the desert with these weird Essenes, he has no idea of how to live in civilised society.

**Villager 1:** He has no airs and graces at all. A wild and ill-mannered child. I’m not sure I would want him living with me.

**Priest:** Come now. He has some education and his mother has brought him up well.

**Villager 1:** But he claims to hear voices and see visions. He’s half crazy. He’s determined to become a Nazarite.

**Priest:** I think I can talk him out of that. Make him see sense.

**Villager 2:** I also feel some sense of responsibility towards the boy. After all, he is a nephew.

**Villager 1:** Just so long as he doesn’t go back out into the desert with those fanatics.

**Villager 1:** Hush! Here he comes now.

 *John, as an 11 year old, Mary, Joseph & the boy Jesus, and three Essenes enter. The boys sit front of stage.*

**Priest:** John, we grieve for the passing of your mother, Elizabeth. Nevertheless, a decision must be made. In a few days we return to our homes, and you must choose who to live with. Although I am not strictly of your family, your father was a fellow priest, and both your parents were descended from Aaron. Knowing too that you are devoted to our religion, it seems sensible that you live with us and be trained as a rabbi. In fact, your father prophesied that you would one day serve God.

 *(There is pause. John just looks down at the floor and makes no response.)*

**Villager 2:** John, son of my cousin Zachariah, I understand from our Essene friends here that whilst you lived with them you took the Nazarite vow of poverty and dedication to God. But now that you have returned to our village, you may feel like changing the direction of your life. I am a rich and influential man in this community and I can offer you a comfortable upbringing with a good education. Zachariah’s prophecy made it clear you would hold great influence over others, and I can introduce you to important and significant people.

**Mary:** John, we have little to offer you. Mostly the companionship of cousins. You can grow up with our boy, Jesus. I know from what God has already said that your paths of service to Yahweh are bound to cross.

**Joseph:** Here is the chance to work with Jesus in my carpenter’s shop and plan your ministry together. Who knows what the Lord will accomplish through you both.

**John:** *(Looks up and smiles at Mary & Joseph).* Thank you – nothing would please me more than having the chance to get to know my cousin, who is still a stranger to me.

**Jesus:** Does this mean you will come and live with us? *(looks at Mary)* Mother, please can he come?

**John:**No cousin. That’s what my head tells me to do. *(Looks around everyone present.)* But I know what God has called me to do.

**Mary:** *(With a trembling voice.)* To live with the Essenes?

**Jesus:** Surely you can’t mean to go back out into the desert to live?

**John:** Yes. That’s just what I mean. I cannot forget the words of God’s promise through my father, and I feel compelled to pursue a life of single dedication and devotion to God out in the wilderness.

**Priest:** But if God has called you to prepare a way for him and proclaim his Kingdom to his people, what on earth is the point in living in total isolation?

**John:**  I do not pretend to understand the plans and ways of God. But I do know that I *must* live among the Essenes in order to discover what it is my God wishes me to do. The desert is to be my training ground. *(He stands and walks over to be with the Essenes present.)*

**Essene:** Brother John. We can claim no hold over you. We are not relatives, nor do we have any standing or influence in Israel. Nevertheless, we commit ourselves to protecting you and providing for your needs as best we can.

 *(Those not Essenes embrace John and leave. As Jesus leaves with his parents, he turns and looks at John sadly.)*

 *(John and the three Essenes move to the front of the stage. They are joined by the rest of the Essenes.)*

***Song - the Essenes: “CARRY THE LIGHT”***

Welcome to the brotherhood of holy men and women

We’re the “holy ones” who wait for the Messiah

Live with us in humbleness and you’ll receive a mission

As your soul awakes, you’ll walk the royal path.

Carry the light, you’re entrusted with this mission

Carry the light, a light that conquers dark and makes us whole.

Carry the light, let all the world become God’s daughters and his sons,

Receive the light and purify their souls. (Repeat)

**John (boy):**

I’ve heard the call to live a life of discipline and candour

To seek the sacredness of solitude and prayer

I seek to live in piety, simplicity and worship

As a guardian of the truth and find my call.

**All:** Carry the light …

**Essenes:**

We’re a brotherhood, a school of prophets, hosts and healers

A community of love that’s pure and true

Come live with us, together we will hear the call to mission

God will speak through us and purify your soul

**All:** Carry the light …

**John (boy)***: drawing aside from the others*

But no, my God is telling me to walk this path alone

To spend this time with Him in solitude and prayer

 Forsaking all life’s pleasures, I will wander in the desert

The sun and wind will be my constant friends. *(He wanders off stage)*

**Essenes:**

Carry the light …

*(The melody changes to that of Zachariah’s song. John as a man enters during this, and he joins in the singing.)*

And you, my child, “Prophet of the Most High,”
    will go before the Master to prepare his ways,
and tell of His salvation.
Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
    whose sun will rise,
to break upon those in the shadow of death,

The tender mercies of our God will
 show us the way,

One foot at a time, down the pathway of peace.

*John adopts the pose of a preacher, centre stage, as the Essenes gather around him.*

**All:** Carry the light …

*The chorus is repeated as the company moves through the audience to the exits and the House lights come up.*

**END OF ACT ONE.**

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