

Believe

A Christmas play by
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First produced December, 2011
By Glad Tidings church, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada
The Nativity Experience
Executive producer: Mr. Kristin Pollard, music and arts pastor
Drama director: Mr. Kent Bulmer
Choral director/composer: Mrs. Tania F. Roberts

When no one sees what you see, can you still believe?

Believe is a fictional story based on the life of Simeon, the righteous and devout man who was “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” as described in Luke, chapter two. God promised Simeon he would not die before he sees the Messiah—the one who will rescue Israel from its enemies and from its sin. But Simeon has waited a long time—and so has his family. Simeon’s son and grandson are tired of 600 years of occupation by foreign kingdoms and wonder if they should take their freedom by force.

Meanwhile, Mary hopes that Joseph, to whom she is engaged, will believe her when she tells him the baby she carries is by the Holy Spirit, but Joseph struggles with the news.

From the purple cloth merchant in Jerusalem, to the mother of Jesus, to the shepherds in the fields, *Believe* explores what it means to wait, trusting God’s promises in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Characters

SIMEON, a righteous and devout Jew looking forward to the consolation of Israel. He makes his living as a purple cloth merchant.

EZRA, Simon's father, thirty-something, runs his father's business, zealous to overthrow the Romans

SIMON, Simeon's grandson, about 15, feisty and bold like his father

JUDITH, Simon's mother, Ezra's thirty-something worried wife

MARY, Mother of Jesus, a young teenager from a poor family

JOSEPH, Mary's betrothed, a young respected carpenter in his mid- 20's (at least)

CENTURIONS, unsympathetic Roman soldiers

ANNA, an elderly prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She prays and fasts night and day at the temple.

MIDWIVES, who help Mary through her birth

SHEPHERDS, led to the manger scene by an angelic host greeting them in the fields

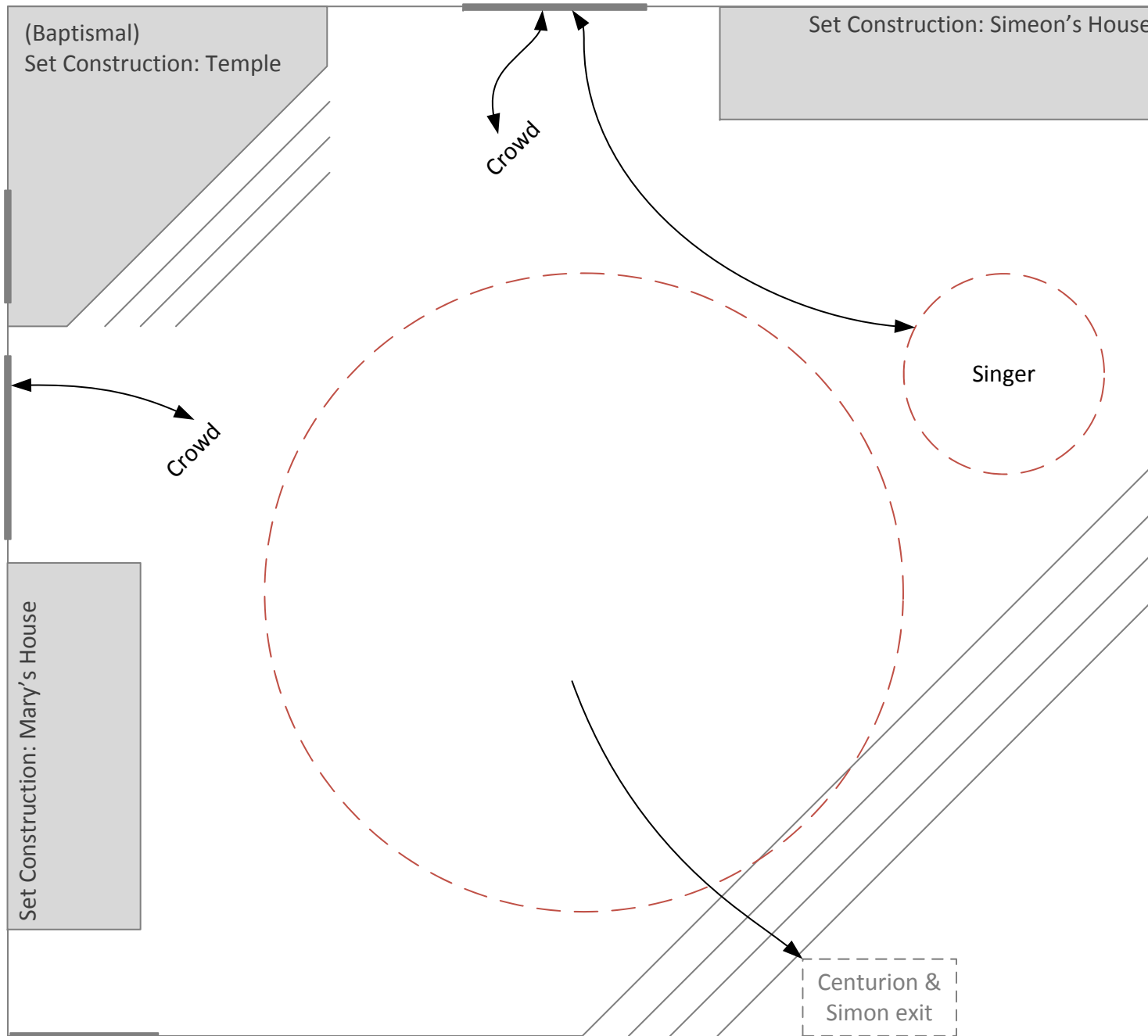
EXTRAS, visitors and residents of Jerusalem milling about the Temple in the final scene

Setting

The play takes place over several months in four suggested settings: Jerusalem (Simeon's home and a final scene in the Temple), Nazareth (Mary's hometown, located in the hills in the center of Galilee in Northern Israel) and the manger of Bethlehem (Jesus' birthplace).

Time

First century, second temple period.



Believe!

Nativity Experience 2011
Stage Directions

Sequence: 02

Synopsis:

Opening song: "I Believe" while miming the centurions beating Simon.

Actors:

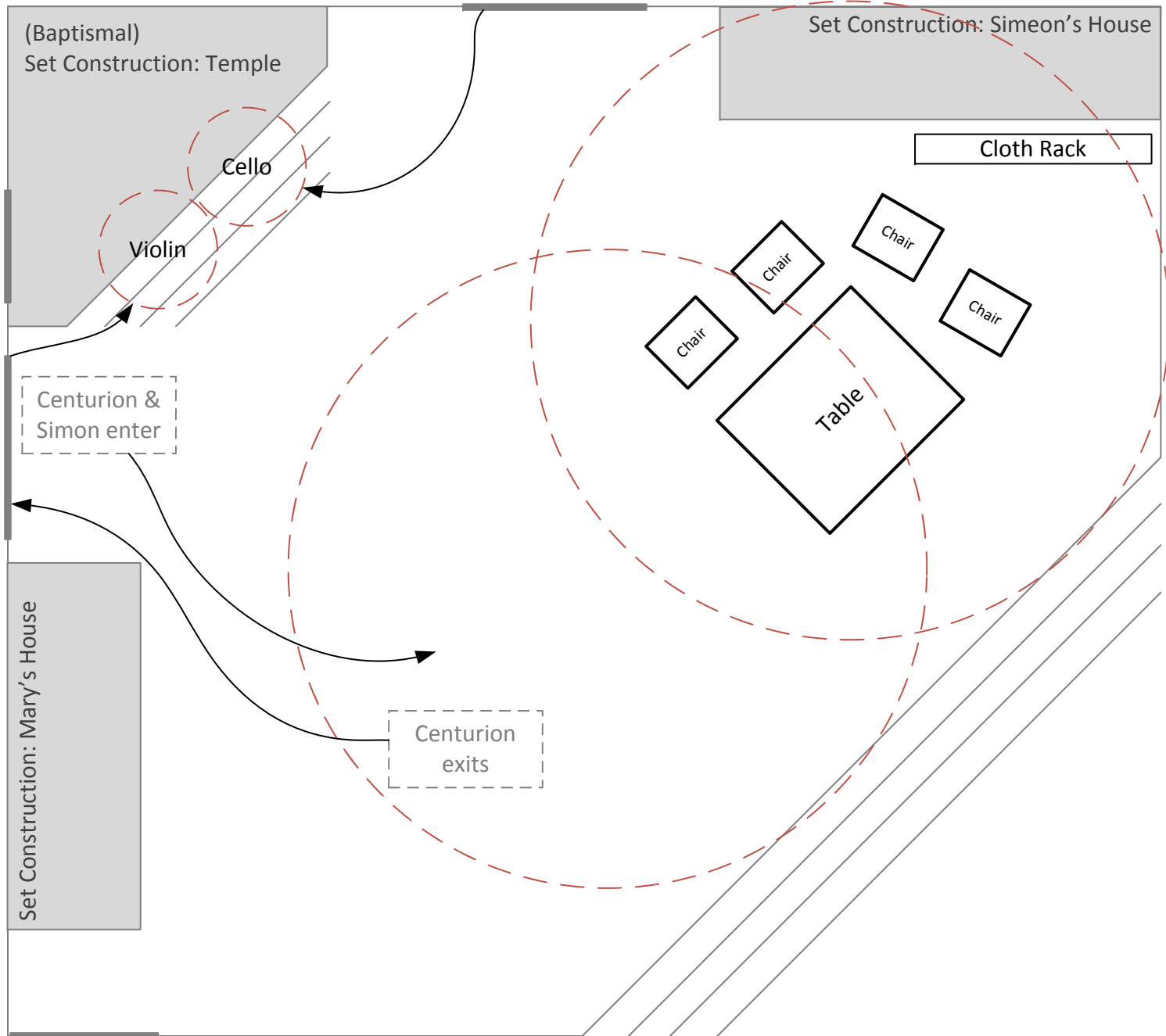
Simon, Centurion, Soldier(s)

Singers:

Kim Donnell

Notes:

Action happens in 1:30 for actors.



Believe!

Nativity Experience 2011
Stage Directions

Sequence: 03

Act: 1
Scene: 1

Synopsis:

The centurion bring Simon home.

Actors:

Simeon, Ezra, Judith, Simon,
Centurion, Soldier(s)

Props:

Food / bread, wine jug, cups, plates,
bucket, cloth, laundry, soldier
weaponry.

Notes:

- Actors stay on stage in tableau for sequence 4 & 5.
- Cello and Violin enter during segue music at the end of the scene.

ACT I
SCENE 1

At RISE: *(SIMEON's home in Jerusalem. A low table is placed at LEFT around which SIMEON and EZRA are eating. JUDITH, thirty-something wife and mother, is serving bread, olives, and cheese.)*

JUDITH Ezra, where is Simon? He's late. I sent him to the market for bread and he hasn't come back. I'm beginning to worry.

EZRA I'm sure he's all right, Judith. You know how he dawdles.

SIMEON He's a good boy—very smart, I've always said that about him. The last time he sold cloth with me in the market, he talked with every shopkeeper up and down the street. He knows everybody's family and all their business.

JUDITH But it's nearly sundown.

EZRA So? He's not a kid anymore.

JUDITH That's what I'm afraid of.

(Two Roman soldiers stride in, one dragging SIMON by his shirt. Everyone stands to their feet and freezes. His eyes are blackened, he looks bruised. Only one soldier speaks.)

CENTURION Which one of you is Ezra?

EZRA *(Steps forward)* I am Ezra bar Simeon.

CENTURION Is this your son?

EZRA *(Nodding)* Yes.

CENTURION He's a thief. I caught him stealing bread in the marketplace.

(They push SIMON to the middle of the room and get in EZRA's face. No one dares move.)

You know, I've been in Judea for years, and I still don't understand you Hebrews. All we want to do is protect the Pax Romana. (*Walks closer to EZRA.*) Instead, we have to put down one rebellion after another. You wouldn't be teaching your son how to cause trouble, would you?

(*SIMEON steps between them quickly.*)

SIMEON I assure you our family respects Caesar and—and the Roman Peace. I beg your mercy on my grandson.

CENTURION And from your god, as well, I hope? Your god *does* condemn stealing?

SIMEON Hashem is merciful and just.

CENTURION Hashem? “The Name,” you mean? “*The Name*” is merciful? (*Addressing the other soldier*) These Jews are so superstitious! They won't even speak their god's name in ordinary conversation. They think it's disrespectful. Does your god even have a name?

EZRA He says, “I am who I am.”

CENTURION (*He picks a bit of food up from the table, where JUDITH had been serving. He puts it in his mouth, throws some bread to the other soldier.*) Okay....call him whatever you want. Just remember: it's King Herod who sits on the throne in Judea, under the patronage of Caesar “Divi Filius” Augustus, not... “The Name.” You do remember what “Divi Filius” means, don't you? “*Son of a God*”?

EZRA You're absolutely right. You Romans really know how to run a country.

(*CENTURIONS EXIT.*)

EZRA I hate that guy.

JUDITH (*As soon as they're gone, JUDITH runs to embrace SIMON and examine his wounds.*) Simon, are you all right? What did they do to you?

- SIMON** I'm all right, Ima. Don't fuss over me.
- JUDITH** Don't fuss? Look at you! (*Goes OFF to get a wet cloth.*)
- EZRA** Tell us what happened.
- SIMON** Ima asked me to buy bread, so I went to the market. It was busy, loud like always. Then, a group of soldiers came through, and everybody stopped talking. The centurion who was just here...he took the bread in front of everyone and ate it. We all saw. (*JUDITH comes back, starts wiping SIMON's face while he tries to talk.*) But I was standing there alone, and he decided to punish me for taking the bread. "Don't you know stealing's a crime?" he said. "I should cut off your hands for that." Instead, he gave me this.
- JUDITH** Well, I'm glad you didn't talk back, or it would have been a lot worse. I'm sorry—I shouldn't have sent you.
- SIMON** It's just another day in Jerusalem. Herod's soldiers are no better! When they mistreat us, it makes me hate them more. I hate the Romans! (*Pushes the cloth and his mother away.*) That's enough. I hate how they control everything we say, and everything we do! Someday *I* will give them something to worry about! We will win our freedom back!
- JUDITH** No, Simon! Talk like that will get you killed. Hmph... "Divi Filius."
- SIMEON** He's Julius Caesar's nephew and adopted son. Why shouldn't he think he's the "son of a God"?
- EZRA** Because he's not! We try to fight our enemies off, and they keep coming. But when Messiah Son of David comes, He will win our freedom for us. Let them do what they want now. When that day comes, they won't be able to do this to you anymore. To any of us.
- (JUDITH offers SIMON a drink of water. He accepts. JUDITH begins to put the food away while the men talk. SIMON recaptures some of the food and eats.)*

- SIMON** I know it's written. But when? We keep waiting. It feels like we've been waiting forever.
- SIMEON** Yes, it feels that way. We've been waiting so long that generations of us have forgotten the promises. But a while ago, in prayer, Hashem told me I will not see death before I see the Messiah.
- SIMON** So... he's coming soon, then?
- SIMEON** Very funny. They didn't beat the humor out of you, I see. I believe Messiah son of David will do even more than win our freedom and settle disputes between nations. He will be a ruler for *everyone*, not just for us. (*Looks at Simon*) For the Gentiles too. Don't forget it! The whole world will inherit Hashem's salvation.
- EZRA** Abba! We are Abraham's children, not them! Are you saying these uncircumcised Romans will inherit the promises of Abraham?
- SIMEON** Yes, but...what are those promises? That the whole earth would be blessed through Father Abraham's seed...What do you think that means?
- EZRA** Peace, I guess...safety...right now, I would settle for fewer taxes and the freedom to make my own decisions.
- JUDITH** Oh, stop with your Messiah, Son of David! You argue about prophecy, and in the meantime, this is what Rome does—(*She gestures to SIMON*)
- SIMON** —I'm all right. They don't scare me.
- JUDITH** Rome is just doing what every other conqueror has for the last 600 years. First Babylon, and then Persia, and then the Greeks. And what do women do? (*She keeps trying to wipe the table clean, navigating around SIMON who again fights to keep the food.*) Clean up the messes men leave behind, that's what we do.
- EZRA** Yes, that's the point! The Romans are the fourth kingdom, told to us by Daniel the prophet. Don't you remember? The fifth kingdom will be established by the Messiah! So no more waiting! We fought

off the Seleucids with Maccabean leadership. We can fight off the Romans, too. We can usher him in!

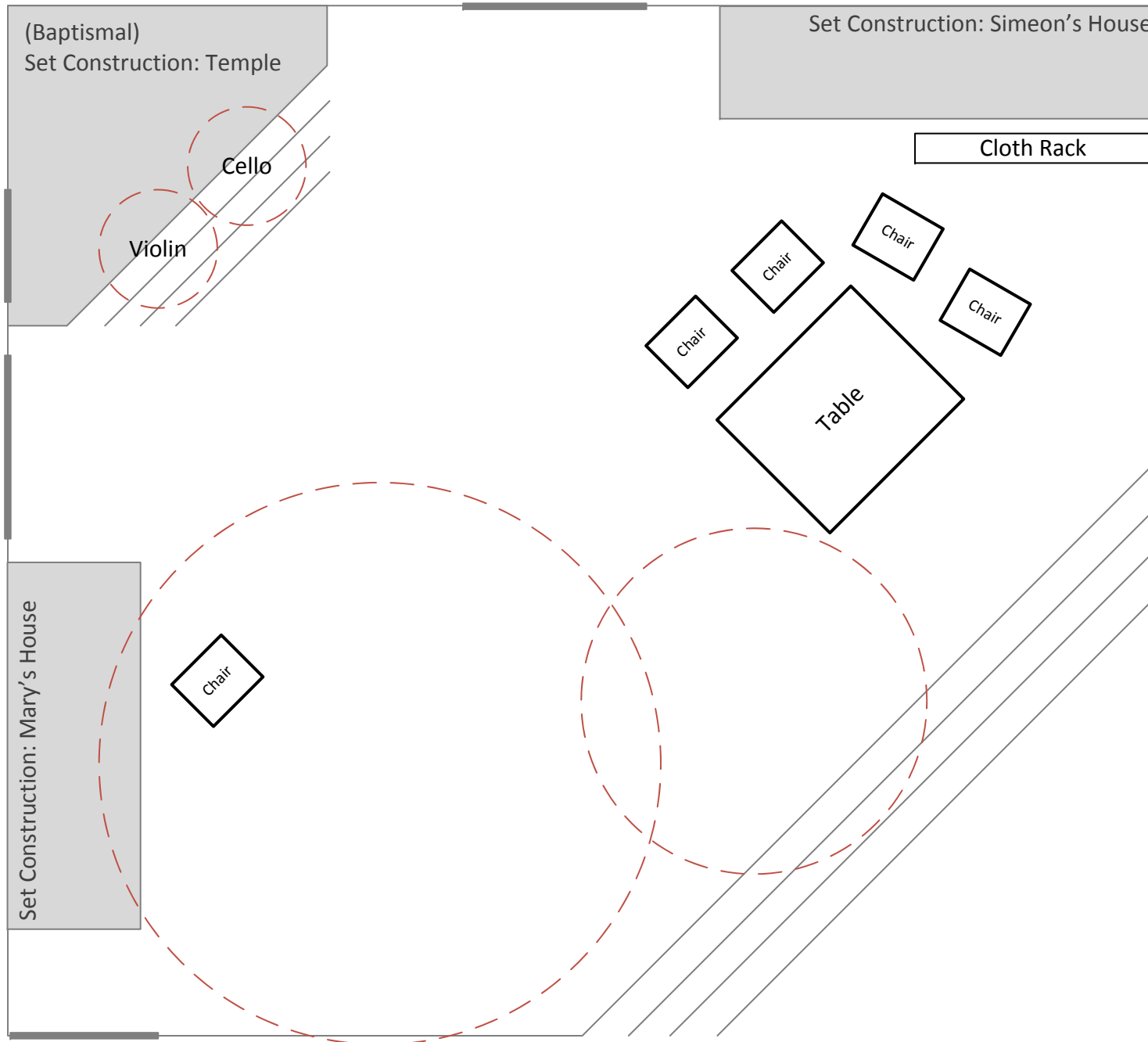
SIMEON

You're forgetting something. We're in this position because of Adam's sin, and we can't find our way out of it. Such a kingdom will not be perfect very long if we are in it. There has to be something more to his deliverance than just political freedom.

EZRA

That's not for me to know. All I know is, our deliverance will come at the end of a blade.

(Ezra goes OFF. Blackout.)



Believe!

Nativity Experience 2011
Stage Directions

Sequence: 04

Act: 1
Scene: 2

Synopsis:
Gabriel speaks to Mary

Actors:
Mary

Props:
Wooden bowl

Notes:
-Lights and sound enhance the "Angel" experience.
-Scene transitions directly into song.

ACT I
SCENE 2

At RISE:

Spotlight on MARY, a young girl from Nazareth, sitting at RIGHT on her knees, kneading bread dough in a large bowl on her lap. A MARY is humming to herself. She's startled by the sound of voices calling her name, like the sound of wind blowing into the room. (A pre-recorded voiceover, a dream-like whisper, it echoes and sounds like more than one person: "Mary, fear not, do not be afraid, Mary") at first, she thinks it's her imagination. When she hears her name a second time, she is more frightened and peers up into the spotlight to discover the source of the sound.

MARY

Who said that? Who are you?

(She drops the bowl of bread in her fear. Standing MARY listens to the angel's words in voiceover... "Favour, you have found favour with God..." it sounds somewhat garbled to the audience. She repeats some of the words she hears.)

I have found favour with God...? What does that mean?

(She looks down and touches her belly briefly and then throws herself on her knees, head to the ground. She echoes the words of the angel as she hears them.)

...Birth to a son?...Yeshua...the Son of the Most High?

(Mary is really frightened now. Mary looks up at the spotlight while listening to Gabriel's words. She continues to echo the words she hears.)

MARY

His Kingdom will never end...? How will this be, since I am...I am...I am a virgin? I'm pledged to be married to Joseph. It's all been arranged...

(The message continues. Mary echoes what she hears in tandem with the whispered voice-over:)

The Holy Spirit will come upon me...power of the Most High... overshadow me...holy one to be born will be called the Son of

Hashem...my cousin Elizabeth will have a child in her old age...For nothing is impossible with Hashem.

(There are a few more seconds of silence, save for the blowing wind, while Mary considers the enormity of the announcement.)

I am Hashem's servant. Let it be to me as you have said.

(The sound of the angel's presence disappears, and everything is as it was before. She stands, walks out to face the audience and recites The Magnificat, as though prophesying.)

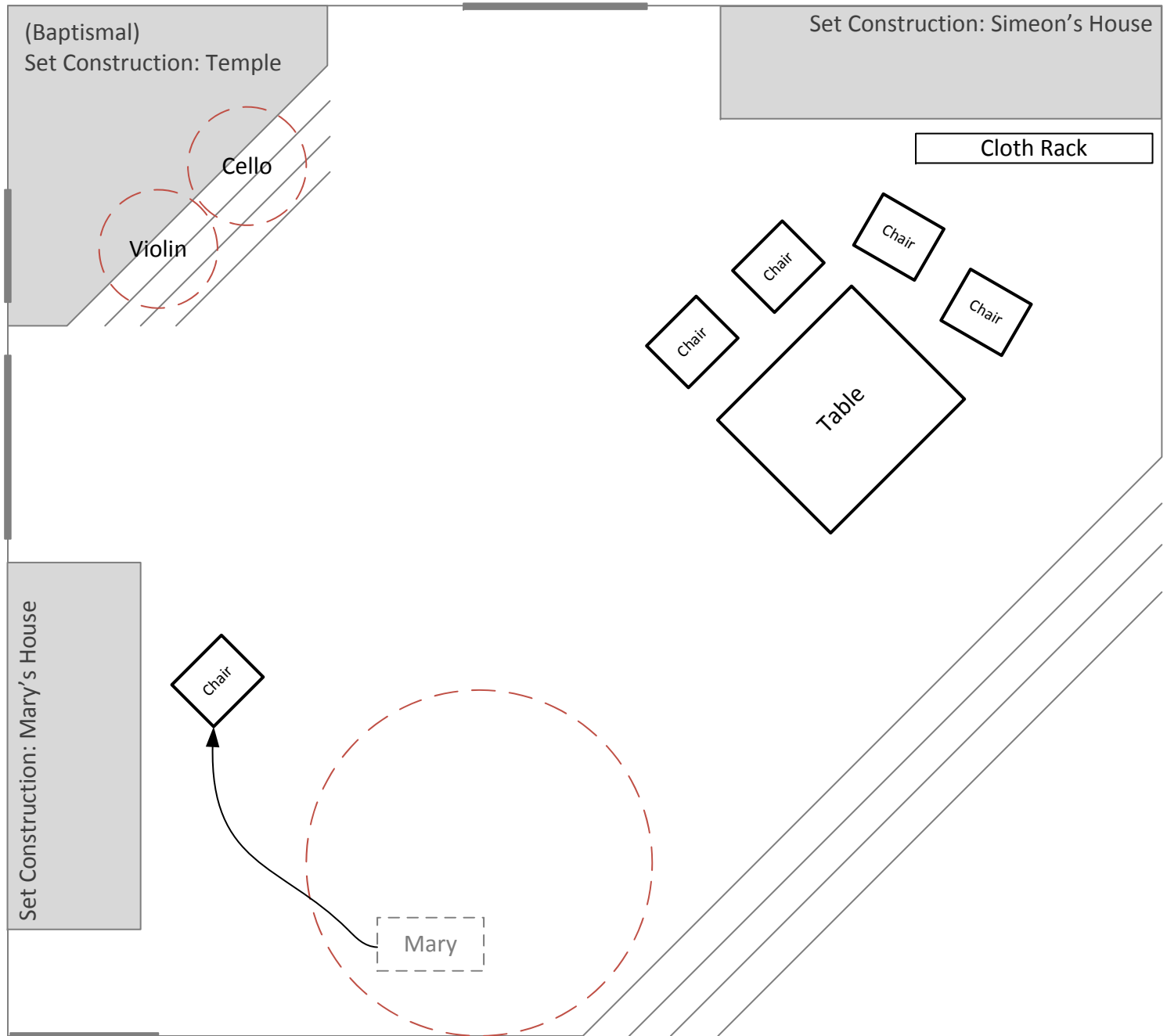
My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant: From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.

(When the song is over, Mary sighs, touches her belly. She dissolves into tears as she prays out into the air above the audience.)

MARY

Oh Adonai...Who's going to believe me?

(MARY sings "Mary's Song" at RIGHT while SIMEON, JUDITH, EZRA and SIMON enter LEFT to gather round the table for Shabbat Eve dinner. SIMEON is at the head. When MARY is finished singing, she kneels and goes into tableau while the lights come up on the table for ACT I, Scene 3.)



Believe!

Nativity Experience 2011
Stage Directions

Sequence: 05

Synopsis:
Mary's Song

Actors:
Mary

Notes:
Mary stays on stage in tableau

Simeon's Song

: 1 3 . 1 # 2 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100
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Violin

Cello

Alto

Bass

G D A

A - don ai ____ You are my source of hope. Through

Vln.

Vc.

A

B

Em D A G D

all my years ____ You've prov-en and I know: You have been faith ful, ____ Your

Simeon's Song

Vln. F# Bm G D A Bm

Vc.

A

B

prom-is - es are sure, but who be lieves an - y more? Help them see what I

Vln. E Bm F#m C#m

Vc.

A

B

see. Help them know what I know. There are some things that



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Believe!

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