



The Word Made Flesh:
A Scriptural and Eucharistic
Journey

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THE CHARACTERS

The Narrator/God the Father

Abraham

Isaac

Moses

Pharaoh

The Israelites/The Crowd

Elijah

The Angel

Jesus

Peter, James, and John

SCENE 1

THE CALL TO WORSHIP AND REFRESHMENT

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

A procession of the actors takes place with Maurice Duruflé's choral rendition of Tantum Ergo as background music. After this the major actors should be arranged in four groups, in the shape of a cross angled against a stage representing a mountain. At the foot of the cross stand Abraham and Isaac. At the left side of the cross stand Moses and Pharaoh. At the right side of the cross stands Elijah. At the head of the cross stands Jesus. The Narrator stands at a podium off-center on stage, flanked by the Angel, who holds a censer filled with burning incense. Candles light the darkness, while a cast member stands at center stage and begins to sing.¹

Musical Solo: Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessings in his hand,
Christ, our God, to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.²

[The cast member exits.]

¹ All musical verses in the play, regardless of origin, should be sung to the 17th century French folk tune *Picardy*, as arranged by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1906) for the hymn *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*.

² From the Cherubic Hymn of the 5th century Divine Liturgy of St. James, as adapted by Gerard Moultrie (1864).

Narrator:

Welcome! You are invited to join us on a journey to this sacred altar [*he points to center stage*], which really represents three mountains. The first of these is Mount Moriah, on which Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The second is Horeb, the mountain of God also known as Sinai, where Moses received the Law of God in the form of the Ten Commandments. Horeb was also the mountain to which the prophet Elijah journeyed for forty days and forty nights after challenging the prophets of Baal. The last of the three mountains is Tabor, upon which Our Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured while in the company of the apostles Peter, James, and John.

In this journey, we shall see how the Word of God in Scripture, that is the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament, was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, who then became for us the refreshing bread of the Eucharist. This bread is the true object of the petition in The Lord's Prayer, in which we pray to the Father, "Give us this day our daily bread." For in its original Greek, the prayer refers not merely to "our daily bread," but to the "super-substantial bread" that comes to us daily from Heaven, as manna once rained down upon the Israelites.³

Let us begin our journey with the 22nd chapter of Genesis, when God tested Abraham.⁴

[*He shouts in a loud voice.*] Abraham!

Abraham:

Here am I.

God the Father:

Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

[*Abraham and Isaac take several steps toward the mountain. They then pause, while Abraham looks around, craning his neck. After a few moments, he points to the stage and speaks.*]

Abraham:

Finally! After three days journeying, I see the Lord's mountain in the distance.

[*Abraham now takes a wooden cross and puts it on Isaac's shoulders. He also carries a fire brand and a knife in his hands. The two of them take several more steps toward the mountain.*]

Narrator:

Let us leave those two for a moment and turn to the 8th chapter of Exodus, where we see Moses pleading with Pharaoh to let the Israelites worship God in the wilderness.⁵

³ Mt 6:11. Greek New Testament: τον αρτον ημων, τον επιουσιον,δος υμιν σημερον. Latin Vulgate: *Panem nostrum supersubstantialem da nobis hodie*. Douay-Rheims: *Give us this day our super-substantial bread*.

⁴ Gen 22:1-5

Pharaoh:

Go, sacrifice to your God within the land of Egypt.

Moses:

It would not be right to do so; for we shall sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes. Will they not stone us? We must go three days journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he will command us.

Pharaoh:

I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness, only you shall not go very far away.

Narrator:

Sadly, Pharaoh was reluctant to let go of the Israelites, for he hated them so. The prophet Elijah too was persecuted by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel of Israel. Elijah had slain their false prophets with the sword, as it says in the 19th chapter of the First Book of Kings. And so Queen Jezebel sent a message to Elijah.⁶

[Elijah opens a letter and begins to read aloud.]

Elijah:

Thus says Queen Jezebel, “May the gods curse me, if I do not kill you by this time tomorrow.” *[He puts the letter away and speaks in fear.]* I must flee into the wilderness, lest my life be taken from me.

[Elijah takes several steps toward the mountain and sits down, dejected, under a small tree.]

Narrator:

Poor Elijah; he was harried and persecuted, just as Moses and the Israelites were, and so was tired and worn out. So were the apostles, who had spent themselves ministering to the crowds while avoiding King Herod, who began to fear that Jesus was Elijah or John the Baptist raised from the dead. Let us now turn to the 6th chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark, where we see the apostles returning with news to Jesus.⁷

[Peter, James, and John run breathlessly toward Jesus.]

Peter:

Master!

⁵ Ex 8:25-27

⁶ 1 Ki 19:1-4

⁷ Mk 6:14-32

James:

King Herod has killed your cousin, John the Baptist!

John:

We took his body and buried it. We have had no rest ever since because of the crowds!

Jesus:

Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile. [*Jesus turns toward the audience.*]
Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy, and my burden light.⁸

[*Jesus and his disciples move to the foot of the mountain and sit down.*]

SCENE 2

THE HEAVENLY MEAL

He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said: "Take this all of you and eat it."

The scene opens with the actors frozen in their previous positions, except for Moses and the Israelites, who are gathered at a table several paces from the foot of the mountain. Two of the cast members stand at center stage and begin to sing.

Musical Duet: King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords in human vesture,
In the body and the blood
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heav'nly food.⁹

[*The cast members exit.*]

Narrator:

Let us return to the 22nd chapter of Genesis, where we see Abraham and his son Isaac approaching the mountain of Moriah, with the wood of the sacrifice upon Isaac's back, while Abraham carries both the knife and the fire of the holocaust.¹⁰

Isaac:

My father!

⁸ Mt 11:28-30

⁹ From the Cherubic Hymn of the 5th century Divine Liturgy of St. James, as adapted by Gerard Moultrie (1864).

¹⁰ Gen 22:6-8

Abraham:

Here am I, my son.

Isaac:

I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham:

God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

[Abraham and Isaac now move to the foot of the mountain.]

Narrator:

God would indeed provide the lamb of sacrifice, of which Isaac was but a dim foreshadowing, as was the Lamb of the Passover that the Israelites ate on the eve of their escape from Egypt. Let us now turn to the 12th chapter of Exodus, where we see Moses explaining the Passover liturgy to the Israelites, the liturgy that today takes its form in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.¹¹

[Moses reads to the Israelites gathered around a table.]

Moses:

This month shall be the first month of the year for you. Each household shall take a lamb without blemish, a male a year old. You shall kill it on the evening of the fourteenth day of this month. Then you shall take some of its blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of your houses. You shall then eat the flesh that night, roasted, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. You shall eat it in haste with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon your houses. When God sees the blood, he will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you when he smites the land of Egypt. This day shall be for you a memorial day, which you shall keep as a feast to the Lord forever throughout your generations.

[Moses and the Israelites now move a few paces toward the mountain.]

Narrator:

After the Israelites escaped from Egypt across the Red Sea, they started to complain to Moses about their lack of food, as described in the 16th chapter of Exodus.¹²

The Israelites:

Would that we had died in Egypt, where we had our fill of meat and bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill us with hunger.

¹¹ Ex 12:1-14

¹² Ex 16:1-15

Moses:

The Lord has heard your murmurings. At twilight you will eat flesh and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.

Narrator:

So God rained down quail and manna upon the Israelites in the evening and morning following their complaint. This manna and quail foreshadowed the transformation of bread into the genuine flesh of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, as taught by the Catholic Church through the doctrine of Transubstantiation, which is the darkness of night to the mind, but the light of morning to the spirit. Like the Israelites journeying in the wilderness, the prophet Elijah was also fed miraculously as he sat under a broom tree, exhausted and hoping only for death, as written in the 19th chapter of the First Book of Kings.¹³

[As the narrator speaks, Moses and the Israelites move to the foot of the mountain. The Israelites, once there, now join Jesus and become The Crowd.]

Elijah:

O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.

[He lies down and sleeps. Meanwhile, the Angel descends from the mountain and lays a cake and a jug of water beside Elijah. The Angel then wakes him.]

The Angel:

Get up and eat, Elijah, else the journey will be too great for you.

[The Angel returns to his post beside the Narrator. Elijah wakes up, eats and drinks. He then stands and walks to the foot of the mountain.]

Narrator:

Strengthened by the miraculous food of the angel that foreshadowed the super-substantial bread of the Eucharist, Elijah was able to journey for forty days and forty nights until he reached Mount Horeb. Like Moses and Elijah, Jesus' disciples would be fed miraculously as they journeyed with the crowd in the wilderness before ascending Mount Tabor, as described in the 6th chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark.¹⁴

Peter:

This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late; send the crowd away so they can get something to eat.

¹³ 1 Ki 19:4-8

¹⁴ Mk 6:33-45

Jesus:

You give them something to eat.

James:

Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?

Jesus:

How many loaves do you have? Go and see.

[The disciples stand up and show Jesus a basket of food.]

James:

See here, we have only five loaves and two fish.

Jesus:

Let the people sit down in groups of fifties and hundreds, then give them the loaves and fish.

[Jesus stands and looks toward Heaven while praying over the basket of food.]

Father, let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy.¹⁵ In the future, bread such as this will become my body, which shall be broken and multiplied for the life of the world.

[The apostles now do as Jesus instructed, while the crowd becomes increasingly elated as the people discover the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fish.]

John:

Master! We have fed over five thousand people, and still there are twelve baskets of leftovers from the five loaves and two fish!

Jesus:

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. I am the living bread which came down from Heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever.¹⁶

Peter:

Lord, you have the words of eternal life.¹⁷

Jesus:

Peter, James, and John, you must come with me to where the Father calls me.

[The Crowd now rejoins Moses to once again become The Israelites.]

¹⁵ From the Epiclesis in the Order of the Mass.

¹⁶ John 6:49-51

¹⁷ John 6:68

SCENE 3

THE ALTAR AND BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

As the scene opens, three of the cast members stand at center stage and begin to sing.

Musical Trio: Up the mountain he ascended,
And with glorious light was clothed;
As the Law and Prophets portended,
Christ his sacrifice foretold,
That our bondage might be broken,
And the Father's love us enfold.

[The cast members exit.]

Narrator:

We are now ready to ascend the mountain of God, after escaping the persecution and cares of this world, so that we may be refreshed in our spirits with the heavenly bread of Christ's body. We must also worship God by sacrificing to him that which pleases him most. But what do we have of our own that can please him? Abraham thought it was the sacrifice of his own dearly beloved son that would propitiate God. *[Abraham and Isaac ascend the mountain.]* See, even now, Isaac mounts the altar of sacrifice carrying with him the wood of his immolation.¹⁸

[Abraham kneels, places Isaac upon the cross in the middle of the stage, then raises his knife.]

God the Father:

Abraham, Abraham!

Abraham:

[Abraham pauses and looks around, while continuing to kneel.] Here am I.

God the Father:

Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

Abraham:

But what, then, Lord shall I sacrifice to you in place of my son?

God the Father:

I myself shall provide the lamb of the burnt offering. You will recognize him among the thorns.

¹⁸ Gen 22:9-13

[Abraham embraces Isaac; they remain seated on the stage while the play continues.]

Narrator:

But who is this who now ascends the mountain of God? It is Moses, for as it is written in the 24th chapter of Exodus, he alone was called to come near the Lord.¹⁹

[Moses ascends to the altar bearing a cup, and stands to the left of Abraham. He then lifts up the cup and speaks to the Israelites waiting at the foot of the mountain.]

Moses:

Here is the blood of an ox that we have sacrificed as a peace offering to the Lord, which I now sprinkle upon the altar of God *[he sprinkles some of the blood upon the wooden cross, then raises the cup in the air]*. This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you!

[As Moses begins sprinkling the blood, Jesus, Peter, James, and John ascend the mountain. The disciples then remain in the background, while Jesus takes his place beside Moses at the altar, standing over Abraham and Isaac, to the right of Moses. Moses looks at Jesus with awe.]

Narrator:

Soon after Moses sprinkled the blood on the altar, he and seventy of the elders of Israel saw the God of Israel. They did not die upon seeing him, for they were covered by the blood of the covenant, and were thus spared. The God of Israel they saw was the same Jesus transfigured in glory, who the apostles Peter, James and John beheld upon Mount Tabor, as it is written in the 9th chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark.²⁰

[Peter, James, and John kneel in reverence and cover their eyes before the transfigured Christ.]

Peter, James, John, and the Israelites:

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts! Heaven and earth are filled with your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!²¹

Jesus:

Moses, come with me and I shall give to you the law which I have written not with letters in stone tablets, but with grace and truth in the hearts of men.²²

Narrator:

But wait, there is another who ascends the mountain of God to speak to the Lord in a cave.²³

¹⁹ Ex 24:1-12

²⁰ Mk 9:2-13

²¹ From the Sanctus in the Order of the Mass.

²² John 1:17

²³ 1 Ki 19:9-10

[Elijah now ascends the mountain and takes his place to the right of Jesus opposite Moses.]

Jesus:

What are you doing here, Elijah?

Elijah:

I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.

Jesus:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.²⁴ Elijah, you will come back and restore all things, yet the world will do to you whatever it pleases, as it did to my servant, John the Baptist, in whom your spirit dwelt. The Son of man himself will suffer many things and be treated with contempt.²⁵ Indeed, not long after he enters Jerusalem to the shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David," he will be delivered into the hands of men, who will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.²⁶

Moses:

Lord, was it not you who once spoke to me from the burning bush at Horeb?²⁷ See, I have kept these thorns in remembrance of that day. *[Moses lays a crown of thorns upon Jesus' head.]*

Jesus:

Indeed it is I who spoke to you amid those very thorns, for I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I have seen the affliction of my people, and have heard their cry. I now come to proclaim release to the captives, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed.²⁸

[Abraham kneels in front of Christ facing the audience, with his hands in the orans posture.]

Abraham:

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!²⁹

Moses:

Lord, show me your glory as you once did in the cleft of the rock, when you passed by me pronouncing your name. For I now see your face that you hid from me then.³⁰

²⁴ Mk 8:34-35

²⁵ Mk 9:11-13

²⁶ Mk 9:31

²⁷ Ex 3:1-5

²⁸ Ex 3:6-8; Lk 4:18

²⁹ From the Communion Rite in the Order of the Mass.

Jesus:

If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me. Abraham saw my day and was glad. Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.³¹

[After this, Abraham and Isaac quietly descend from the stage and join the Israelites.]

Peter:

Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

[The sudden sounds of wind, earthquake, and fire alarm the disciples. They cower in fear.]³²

God the Father: *[in a soft, gentle voice]*

This is my son, my only son whom I love. Listen to him!

John:

This is indeed the prophet whom Moses said we should listen to.³³ How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news!³⁴ For the Word has become flesh, and has pitched his tent among us. We have beheld his glory, the glory of the only Son from the Father.³⁵ Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours almighty Father, forever and ever.³⁶

The Israelites:

Amen!

Jesus:

Let us descend and proceed to Jerusalem, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from there.³⁷ Tell no man what you have seen until the Son of man has risen from the dead.³⁸

Narrator:

And so we come to the end of our journey. But this journey never truly ends, for it takes place daily at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At this banquet of grace and thanksgiving, the Father sacrifices his only begotten son whom he loves in place of Isaac and everyone who has lived or

³⁰ Ex 33:18-22, 34:5-7

³¹ John 8:54-58

³² 1 Ki 19:11-12

³³ De 8:15

³⁴ Is 53:7

³⁵ John 1:14

³⁶ From the Doxology and Great Amen in the Order of the Mass.

³⁷ Lk 9:51, 13:33

³⁸ Mk 9:9

ever will live. He then allows us to offer his son Jesus back to him in worship, so that through him, with him, and in him we are accepted by God in a covenant of love that will last forever. The super-substantial bread of the Eucharist thus becomes our life, allowing us to make the journey home to Heaven despite the many trials and tribulations we face in this world. May this living bread refresh us daily, so that we may with Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and Elijah, as well as the apostles Peter, James, and John, and all the saints, praise God for all eternity.

[The Israelites begin to sing, waving palm branches when Jesus and his companions descend from the stage. The Angel kneels in adoration and veils his face at the end of the song.]

Musical Finale:

Down in adoration falling,
Lo! the sacred Host we hail,
Lo! o'er ancient forms departing
Newer rites of grace prevail;
Faith for all defects supplying,
Where the feeble senses fail.

To the everlasting Father,
And the Son Who reigns on high
With the Holy Ghost proceeding
Forth from each eternally,
Be salvation, honor, blessing,
Might and endless majesty.³⁹

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the pow'rs of hell may vanish,
As the darkness clears away.

At his feet the six-winged seraph;
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, Lord Most High!"⁴⁰

³⁹ Translation by Edward Caswall (1873) of St. Thomas Aquinas' 13th century hymn, *Tantum Ergo*.

⁴⁰ From the Cherubic Hymn of the 5th century Divine Liturgy of St. James, as adapted by Gerard Moultrie (1864).