

Title

*This is a collection of dramatic readings put together for various events from 2007 onwards.
Some were co-written with Miriam Pugh.*

GOD'S BIG STORY

1 God
with a 5 Act story
Act 1 begins with nothing
and then Creation
the world, the universe and everything in it
light and dark, land and water,
trees and grass, fruit and crops
tigers and ants, eagles and penguins
and last but by no means least
human beings – boys and girls, women and men

Act 2 begins with a call to go
To a couple ready for retirement
From Abraham and Sarah
Comes Isaac, then Jacob and Esau
And then a whole people Israel
Divided into 12
A people blessed by God
A people called to be a blessing

And from this people
After many years of Advent waiting
After many hopes longing for his arrival
Comes a new-born babe
And so Act 3 begins with Christmas joy
For a child is given
God has sent himself
Fully human, fully God
And named Jesus the love of God revealed
He is the storyteller, the healer, the master chef,
the prophet, the friend of sinners and the miracle maker
and this life finds its climax in a week
that begins with a donkey ride and a road covered with palm branches
later on the Thursday night friends gather for a late meal
followed by a Garden visit
and then arrest and trial
and the Friday sees Jesus hanging on a cross
A Saturday of grief and loss
is followed by an Easter Sunday surprise
an empty tomb and Jesus returned

40 days later Jesus ascends
returning to God

10 days later on Pentecost day
the Spirit arrives – with fire and wind and tongues
Act 3 is over, Act 4 begins
The church
Sent by Jesus
Empowered from on high
To share good news
to live the way of the cross
to look with hope for resurrection day

and so here we are
part of that church
part of that history
part of that people
blessed by God to be a blessing
following Jesus
filled with the Spirit
looking to when God
Father, Spirit, Son
is all in all
and then Act 5
this salvation story will find its end in God
and new creation

BIBLE DREAMERS

Bible dreamers
See behind the veil
Between heaven and earth
See the purposes of God
The mysterious ways

Jacob dreams
A stairway to heaven
Angels ascending, angels descending
And the promise of God
To bless and be blessed

Abimelek dreams:
a warning from God
You're as good as dead for taking this woman
Truth uncovered
Abraham set straight

Joseph dreams
of wheat bowing down
of sun, moon and stars prostrated:
All his family kneel before him...

Pharoah dreams

Troubling dreams
Of thin cows and fat cows
Of ripe grain and dead grain
No sense is made, no explanation is found
But Joseph the dreamer
finds meaning, a God-given message:
A nation is saved, who,
With his brothers
Bow down before him.

Nebuchadnezzar dreams
Troubling dreams
Of a tree tall and strong
Chopped down to size
No sense is made, no explanation is found
Daniel brings a challenging meaning
God-dreamed answers
Makes the proud king humble

Another Joseph dreams
that Mary's child is a gift of God
and dreams again
This time a warning
Of murderous plans and the need to flee
To Egypt he goes with wife and with child
Where a little while later
he dreams again
That it is safe to return
All the time God had been speaking
God had been guiding

Mrs. Pilate dreams
Disturbing dreams
That keep her restless
And unconvinced
That her husband's right
To kill this Jesus

Bible dreamers
See behind the veil
Between heaven and earth
See the purposes of God
The mysterious ways

ABRAHAM

Without warning
no expectation
no anticipation
God speaks.
God speaks to Abraham
That he will be blessed.

This Abraham is
Without children
No reproduction
No future generation
But God speaks
God speaks you will be blessed
To be a blessing

With hope unswerving
With trust unfailing
Abraham believes.
Abraham believes
That like stars in the sky
And sand on the beach
Will his descendants be

This aged man and his wife
Past child-bearing years
Are promised a son
And the God who spoke blessing
The God who made a promise
Is faithful to his word
Is truthful to his word
A child is given
A son is born
Isaac
A one and only
A one and only and much loved
Son

Without warning
no expectation
no anticipation
God speaks.
God speaks to Abraham
Take your son, your only son
Up the mountain
and there give his life as a sacrifice.
Without reason
No explanation
No justification

Abraham does as he is told
And he takes his
One and only
One and only and much loved
Isaac
With him up the mountain

Without warning
no expectation
no anticipation

as Abraham is ready to strike
God speaks.
God speaks to Abraham
That he should refrain
And go no further
The one and only
The one and only and much loved
Son is spared

God speaks
God speaks again to Abraham
Because you have not withheld
Your one and only and much loved
Son
You will be blessed
With a family
More numerous than the stars in the sky
More numerous than the sand on the beach
You will be blessed
To be a blessing

Another child is given
Another son is born
One of Abraham's family
The Father's one and only
One and only and much loved
Son
Born to be a blessing

And God did not withhold
His one and only
But gave him up for all of us
God's love revealed:
He sent is
one and only and much loved
Son
Into the world
That we might have life
That we might be blessed
To be a blessing

THE NATIVITY

First there was Adam and Eve
and a long while later there was Abraham
and a long while after that there was David
and a long long while after that we get to our story

There was Mary
no more than 14
in love with Joseph

who made things from wood

There was Mary
and then there was an angel
saying DO NOT BE AFRAID
God has smiled on you and
you're going to have a baby
Mary said 'But ...' and then 'Ok, if you say so'
There was Mary
getting bigger by the day
and there was Joseph
who was getting more and more
suspicious
until the truth could be hidden no more
Joseph was not best pleased
until he had a dream
in which there was an angel
saying DO NOT BE AFRAID
Mary's baby is from God
and he will be the saviour of the world
When Joseph woke up
he was well pleased
and took his Mary with baby inside
to be his wife

There was Mary
no more than 14
married to Joseph
and going to have a baby
5 months, 6, months, 7 months, 8
when the news was announced
that all the people had to go
back to where they were born to be counted

There was Mary
heavy with child
and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem
Mary was read to give birth
when they arrived
but there was no where to stay
apart from a stable

There was Mary
no more than 14
There was Joseph
who made things from wood
and then there was also Jesus
born in the night
and put to bed in an invented cot

There were shepherds
with their sheep

on a hillside
out in the cold night
and there was suddenly another angel
saying DO NOT BE AFRAID
great news to tell
a baby is born
who will save the world
and there were suddenly more angels
and they were all singing
happy songs of joy

There were shepherds
running down the hillside
all the way to Bethlehem
and found the baby
the little child Jesus
and crying he did make

There were wise men
who gazed at the stars
and one day spotted a bright one
which they followed
many miles by camel.
When finally the star stopped
and so they did too
and there they found
Mary
no more than 14
and very tired
with Joseph
who made things from wood
also very tired
with Jesus
who was very much awake

There were wise men
with gifts
gold for a king
frankincense - maybe to cover the smell
for we all know what babies do
and myrrh
a strange gift that one
not one you would expect
not one you or I would think to give
but it was used some years later
but that's another story
for another day
There was Mary
no more than 14
and Joseph
who made things from wood
and there were shepherds

and their sheep
and there were wise men
with presents to give
and there was Jesus
born in the night
a miracle of God
sent from above
to bring us God's love

ELIJAH + ELISHA

God calls a chosen people – Israel
He tells them his name Yahweh, I AM
They want a king like the other nations
It all starts with Saul
Then David
Then Solomon
Then Rehoboam
Then Jeroboam
Then Nadab
Then Baasha
Then Elah
Then Zimiri Then Omri
Until we get to Ahab – a new champion of evil!

So God sends Elijah to tell him
That drought is coming, no more rain!
Elijah is a voice standing out in a world of echoes
He is fed by ravens in the wilderness
And then the stream dries up

So God sends him to a widow in Zapharath
She has almost nothing left
But in her giving, God provides more
And more and more
Things take a turn for the worse
As her son gets ill and then his breathing stops
Elijah calls on God
For whom nothing is impossible
And breath returns to the boy

Three years go by without a drop of rain
and Elijah tells Ahab to bring the people to Mount Carmel It's Yahweh versus Baal, who is really
God?
The prophets of Baal dance and shout
And nothing happens, not a flicker
Elijah takes his turn
Having made it all ten times harder
As water is poured not once but three times onto the altar
He prays that Yahweh will show himself to be God

And
Fire comes
Burning strongly, all-consuming
The people of Israel cry
Yahweh is God!
Then Elijah prays again
A cloud appears, and then another
And it rains and rains and rains
When Jezebel hears, King Ahab's wife
She is furious and lets it be known she wants Elijah dead

He's on the run for his life
Worn-out and wanting it all to end
He collapses under a lonely tree
He is woken by angels who tell him to eat
Not once but twice
And then he's on the move again
To the mountain of God
Where God is not in the wind, the earthquake or fire
But found in the sheer silence
God is there in the midst of troubles
Every rock-bottom
For God doesn't grow weary or faint
he's there in every moment morning and night
He picks up Elijah and tells him to go
Giving him new help in Elisha

Elijah and Elisha become a good team
Doing God's work together
But then comes the time for Elijah to go to heaven
Just before, he goes to Bethel, Jericho and Jordan, the river
And Elisha won't let him out of his sight
Hanging on to every last moment
In a whirlwind Elijah goes
Leaving only his cloak
Elisha stands watching
And then rips up his cloak because he's so sad
He then picks up Elijah's cloak
And it's like the baton has been passed
The spirit of Elijah lives in Elisha

There's a general called Naaman
Proud and important
But covered in leprosy, he's desperate to be healed
When nothing else works
A servant girl says what about Elisha, the prophet from Israel?
When Naaman arrives at the house of Elisha
The prophet stays indoors and sends out a message
To wash seven times in the Jordan
Naaman is furious with the lack of face-to-face
And the instruction to wash in a river, and the Jordan to boot!
But he's finally convinced by his servant who helps him see sense

After he washed, seven times in all
His skin is healed and so is his heart
The disease of his soul is cured
Thanks be to Yahweh, the God of miracles
Who is there
In
Every
Situation

PETER

'I am fishing
I am fishing
Cross the waters
Cross the sea'
Jesus comes on the scene
Follow me.
Everything left
An adventures begins
A journey gets going
John the Baptist dead
Then 5,000 fed
Then Peter and Co.
Set sail from the shore
When
'what's that coming over the sea is it a monster is it a monster? ...'
No, it's Jesus water walking
Peter says
Coming ready or not
Jumps out and takes a few steps
Before looking down
then sinking down
Jesus reaches out
And says look at me!
Keep your eyes on me
Walking together:
Who do they say that I am?
Replies come thick and fast
Some say ... (Elijah!)
Some say ... (John the Baptist!)
And others say ... (Elvis!)
How about you? What do you say?
Peter says the one who can save
Jesus says this is God-given insight
From now on you're 'Rocky'
And then
'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'
I will build my church
People not buildings
Befriended
Invited
Be loved
To be loving

Round a table
Friends ask questions
Where is the kingdom
The promised kingdom
When is the moment
All will be right
Instead of an answer
Jesus brings questions
They all remember
(the boy with his lunch- feeding many from little)
(the girl who ran up with jam on her face)
(Matthew's lunch- where Jesus served up God's love to the unloved)
(the good man whose wealth blocked his way to the kingdom)
Stories - moments
Where love surprises
where love changes
'love changes everything ...'
rejection
loneliness
sin and shame
into
kingdom moments
mustard seed moments
One cool evening
One familiar garden
Peter claims he will follow
But can't stay awake
Soldiers arrive
Off comes the ear
But Jesus leaves without a fight
All the others takes flight...
The High Priest's courtyard
Alone with the fire
Aren't you?
I do not know the man
Surely you are?
I do not know the man
But your accent ...?
I do not know the man
Cock crows.
Peter weeps.
Next day
Jesus is dead
Seems like game over.
And Peter is left in the mess
He has made
But God through the cross
loves and he loves whatever wrong word
wrong thought
or wrong act
that binds or imprisons
weighs down or holds back

God loves and he loves.

Three days later:
'He raised me up ...'
Jesus is back
Body and soul

And Peter is gone...
Back to Galilee
Back to the start
Back to fishing
But dawn arrives with no fish biting
A stranger calls: try fishing again
Fish come a-plenty
Boat is heavy
"If you don't know me by now..."
It's Jesus!
Peter jumps out
And gets wet all over – again!
Pete and JC face to face
the past needs healing
breakfast comes with
difficult questions
and
difficult answers
'once, twice, three times ...'
which
finish with love
and a fresh commission
same as the old one
but deeper and stronger
follow me
know me
and show me

RULER

He was a long-awaited
and long-hoped for Ruler who would come
And be Israel's king and judge
The psalmist writes
'Give the king your justice, O God
May he judge your people with righteousness
And your poor with justice
May he defend the cause of the poor
Give deliverance to the needy
And crush the oppressor'
Like an architect measures carefully with a ruler the dimensions of a building
This ruler would carefully intervene to set things right
To deliver the poor and oppressed
To pardon the wronged

To give voices to the marginalized

He was a long-awaited
and long-hoped for Ruler
who would come
And be Israel's king and judge
The prophet Isaiah writes,
'with righteousness he will judge the poor
and decide with fairness for the meek of the earth'
Like a builder uses a spirit-level to make sure a wall is level
This ruler would be the greater leveller
Lifting up the humble and lowly
And bringing down the proud and pompous
Filling the hungry with good things
And sending the rich away empty

He was a long-awaited
and long-hoped for Ruler
who would come
And be Israel's king and judge
The prophet Micah writes,
'But you, Bethlehem
though you are one of the littlest clans of Judah,
from you will come forth for me
a ruler of Israel
a shepherd of the people'
not from Jerusalem, home to Herod and failed dreams
but back to Bethlehem, home to David and new hope

He was a long-awaited
and long-hoped for Ruler
who would come
And be Israel's king and judge
And Jesus, born in Bethlehem, says,
'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor
he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind
to let the oppressed go free'

CITY

The city is not a modern invention
but can be found at the start of the story of humanity
And Cain built a city (Gen 4.17)
and it was not long after the earth was flooded
when humanity gathered again and said
'Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name
for ourselves ...' (Gen 11.4)
The city is not a modern invention

But a human creation
From the earliest days
An attempt at the transcendent
A permanent symbol of our godlike desires

For David and Israel
The city became God's home
The mountain where he dwelled
The city of Zion, the joy of the whole earth (Ps 46)
For the kings that followed
The city they believed was everlasting
Established forever
But faithless hearts
Led to destruction and exile
And Israel wept in
By the rivers of Babylon (Ps 137)
The city's fall from splendour to rubble

The city is a place where
Life can flourish, culture is cultivated
Beauty is nourished, and goodness can grow
For the psalmist says that
God is in the midst of the city (Ps 46.5)
And one day its gates will never be shut (Rev 22)

The city is also the place where
Demons can dwell, and foul spirits can haunt (Rev 18.2)
Injustice can reign, and blood is shed
Where the psalmist says that
I see violence and strife in the city ... ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace (Ps 55)

Jeremiah says 'seek the city's welfare' (Jer 29.7)
The psalmist says 'pray for peace' (Ps 122)
Micah says The voice of the Lord cries to the city ... (Micah 6.6)
angry at its unjust scales and its dishonest words,
at its violent hearts, and its wicked ways
John of Patmos says Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins (Revelation 18.4)
Jesus saw and wept for the city (Lk 19.41)
and then a week later was crucified on a hill outside it's walls

The city is not a modern invention
its design is in God
what is yet fragile and unformed
will come to be
transfigured and transformed
I saw a new heaven and new earth
For the first heaven and first earth had passed away
and God showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem
descending out of heaven from God (Rev 21.1-2)
The city to come is not

Quartered, partitioned, and zoned
People are not divided by post-code and prejudice
But says the prophet
Its gate shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there) (Rev 21.25)
Blessed are those who do his commandments
That they may have the right to enter through the gates
Through the city (Rev 22.14)

TENEBRAE

Betrayal
'What will you give me?'
And Jesus is betrayed
A shadow is cast
A death comes closer

Was this all planned
Months before?
Or is it the betrayer
Feeling betrayed by a Jesus
Who is not the messiah wanted

One, two, three,
Thirty coins in all
A life bought for
A month's manual labour

At the table
a meal to remember
bread is broken
wine is poured
a visible sign
to a new passover coming

The betrayal is known
The betrayed has knowledge
'One of you' he says
'Surely not I'
all the disciples reply

Denial
The one who is betrayed
Will be also be the one who is denied
As it is written
As Zechariah spoke
'When the shepherd is struck
the sheep will scatter'
'Not I'
a bold Peter replies
but Jesus predicts

before the night is over
before the cock crows
three times will Peter's boldness
give way to fear
the shadow grows longer
the darkness stretches out

Anguish
In the garden
overwhelmed with sorrow
lost in anguish
'Take this cup'
– let there be another way
a different road
an alternative path –
but then
with deep resolve
'not my will but yours'
Jesus prays
The disciples sleep
Jesus prays
The disciples sleep

Treachery
Arriving on the scene
With swords and clubs
A crowd with religious consent
And at their head
Judas
Who betrays with a kiss
Not a sign of love
Not a greeting of peace
but a slap in the face

Seized and arrested
Jesus is led away
And the disciples scatter
Run for their lives
Head for the hills
Friends disunited
Shadows surround
Only the Night lies ahead

Deceit
'Are you the Christ ...
the son of the blessed one?'

Silent has Jesus been
Mute in the face of condemning claims
but now he speaks
two words
'I am'

into the darkness of the night
into this midnight trial
a legal sham
at his most vulnerable
where he is seemingly powerless
he names himself
with the name of God

Hypocrisy
Jesus
Now stood before Pilate
Silent and still
No sound does he make
No word does he speak

Pilate is bewildered at this
Strange mute preacher
No crime to be found
And so
to the crowd
he asks
'Barabbas or Jesus?'
for the former they shout
for the latter they condemn
a rebel's death to die

Hands are washed
innocence is declared
but no one is fooled
Pilate's conscience is stained
as
Barabbas is freed
and
Jesus is sentenced
His life to be ended

Humiliation
clothed in purple
crowned with thorns
mocked with homage
led out to die

all is darkness
all is shadow
death's door is open
the long road will find it's end
at calvary hill

Between Cross and Resurrection*

Between cross and resurrection
There is only silence
A body dead in a closed tomb

Between cross and resurrection
There is only sorrow
Grief caught in the horror and the loss

Between cross and resurrection
There is only looking
A sign of hope, a sign of life

Between cross and resurrection
Is where we find our lives
Trapped in the space between death and living
Struggling to believe another world is possible
Seeking to make sense of the whys and the wheres

Between cross and resurrection
Is where we wait
Wedge in the space between despair and hope
Where time stands still
Where reality plays games with our senses
Where a chapter is ended
And no possibility of a new one beginning

Between cross and resurrection
In silence, in sorrow, looking
Struggling, seeking, waiting

**This phrase is borrowed from the title of a book by Alan Lewis: Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*

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