

Cousin John

A MUSICAL
ABOUT
JOHN THE BAPTIST
in two Acts

Words and Music: John Earwaker
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SCRIPT

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

John the Baptist/Baptiser is conventionally portrayed as a wild, rough character, whose fierce preaching of doom and gloom in the style of an Old Testament prophet somehow prepared the way for Christianity. This musical, written for a community production centred on St Mark's Church Sheffield, attempts a truer picture of the facts as we know them.

John is a well-educated young man who has been brought up in close contact with the religious and academic life of the Jerusalem Temple (his father was a priest). After abandoning what could have been a promising career he has acquired a following as an itinerant preacher. His preaching is forthright but attractive, and he soon becomes the leader of a revivalist movement, based on open-air preaching and public baptism in the River Jordan.

Herod is not a cruel and wicked king, as usually suggested, but a rather amiable character, genuinely interested in John's ideas. He sends for John and invites him to his palace. John is free to move about within the confines of the court but is not free to leave. He is effectively under house arrest.

Herod has recently married Herodias (previously married to his brother Philip); this is an illegal union which John has no hesitation in criticizing. John therefore represents all explicit threat to the new queen's position.

Salome, Herodias' daughter, has often been seen as a seductress. Here she is an awkward teenager, spoilt and sulky. She is, however, a strong character who is used to getting her own way. Though much praised for her dancing, she is actually a rather clumsy and ungainly girl. Only John has the courage to tell her so.

Jesus, John's cousin, has joined the movement and almost by default becomes its leader during John's absence. He is a minor character in this musical which focuses on the story of John.

SYNOPSIS

Act One

On the river bank, John is surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd, who sing the opening chorus, JORDAN RIVER. The song is interrupted by the arrival of some soldiers, who ask John if he has anything to say to them. Two tax-collectors similarly ask for advice. John's replies lead to a further chorus of JORDAN RIVER from John's followers. Elizabeth appears; she has been looking for John, and is concerned that he has abandoned his studies and potential influence for the life of an itinerant preacher. She sings MY BOY JOHN. This prompts her to reminisce about his childhood..... What follows is a flashback.

The scene changes to the precincts of the Jerusalem Temple, where Zacharias (John's father) is praying aloud. He prays earnestly for the future of his people, for divine intervention. The answer to his prayer seems to be that radical change will come with the next generation. Zacharias is disappointed and angry, until Elizabeth approaches and tells him she is pregnant; he is dumbstruck. The scene changes to Elizabeth's house. Two relatives have come to see the new baby and ask about his name. Zacharias, still unable to speak properly, writes down "His name is John". As the relatives prepare to leave, Zacharias, stuttering at first, begins to chant "Blessed be God", over and over again. This turns into a confident song of praise, BLESSED BE GOD. The song is taken up by the others with overlapping voices in the form of a 'round'. The 'flashback' ends here.

Elizabeth, on the bank of the river, is left alone with her thoughts: her husband lost and regained his voice; her son seems to be hearing voices! John reappears and tries to explain himself in a song, CAN'T YOU SEE? In this song he recalls various Old Testament prophets who were obedient to God's call. John continues to baptise people in the river, while Elizabeth sadly sings her song again, MY BOY JOHN.

The crowd now begin to sing their song again, JORDAN RIVER. They become increasingly noisy and exuberant. Two devout Jews (Pharisees) who happen to be passing complain to each other about the crowd's behaviour. Two scholars from Jerusalem (Sadducees) arrive; one of them has been John's teacher. They have come out of curiosity. They are startled by John's uncompromising rejection of all that they stand for. John then turns to the Pharisees and tells them that their confidence in being "children of Abraham" is misplaced. They, like everyone else, need to make a fresh start. He sings to them CAN'T YOU SEE? They listen to his song, then leave.

Jesus (John's cousin) now appears and asks for baptism, John hesitates at first, then agrees. Afterwards John asks himself "What am I doing?" and sings LOOK AT HIM! A messenger arrives with an 'invitation' from King Herod. Although aware of the possible danger, John can hardly contain himself. He now has a chance of influence at court! He sings IS THIS THE MOMENT? His disciples join in the second part of this song, echoing his excitement. Jesus returns, puzzled, and asks John why, earlier, he had called him 'son'. John denies doing so, and when he is alone again he wonders whether Jesus, too, is hearing the 'voice'. He sings again the verse about the call of Samuel from CAN'T YOU SEE?

After John has been escorted off, two of his followers discuss what will happen now, and appear to be looking to Jesus to act as a temporary substitute leader of their 'movement'. Jesus wonders what to do, He sings about this to the tune of the opening chorus, JORDAN RIVER. The crowd returns and all join in singing the chorus again with great enthusiasm. Jesus gazes uneasily down into the water; all he sees is his own reflection!

Act Two

The scene is Herod's palace. A group of palace servants are rehearsing a song-and-dance act, HELLO! HELLO!, to be performed for the king's birthday party. Salome, who is to be part of the performance, arrives and joins in most of this. Herodias appears as it ends. When the servants have gone, Salome is scornful about her step-father. Herodias and Salome leave, and Herod and John enter, deep in discussion. John tells Herod he is unlawfully married. Herod is amazed at his impudence, but intrigued by his honesty. John leaves and Herod sings about how difficult it is to be a king: DO YOU THINK IT IS EASY? Herodias and Salome return, and Herodias warns Herod that John is too dangerous to tolerate. Herod doesn't listen to her (but Salome does) as she sings HE'S GOTTA GO!

The scene changes. John is on his own, praying (like his father in Act One) and reflecting on the situation. He is beginning to realise the full seriousness of the danger he's in. A messenger enters, bringing news of the movement. John is only partly reassured. He has no doubt about Jesus' integrity, but he feels he may not be sufficiently worldly-wise. He sings another verse about Samuel (CAN'T YOU SEE?), remembering Samuel's prophecy of Eli's downfall, and wondering if he too will in due course be superseded. He expresses his admiration for Jesus by again singing LOOK AT HIM, this time comparing him to an innocent and vulnerable lamb.

The scene changes: it is now the Royal Birthday Party. While they prepare for the feast the servants sing HAVE YOU HEARD? The song expresses their ambivalence about John. They welcome his challenge to a regime they know is utterly corrupt, yet they have too much at stake themselves to want to rock the boat. Herodias is surprised that a place is being laid at table for John, and she tries to get Herod to change his mind, but for once he insists; he thinks it will be fun to see how his other guests react to John. The servants now sing another verse of HAVE YOU HEARD?

The party now begins. Herod introduces John to his guests. Herodias tries to change the subject, but Herod gives John a chance to explain his ideas. John sings CAN'T YOU SEE? John realises that he's being treated simply as part of the entertainment! He talks with Salome, who presses him for an opinion of her dancing. As always, he speaks the truth and she is upset. She runs to her mother, vowing to get her own back. The servants come forward to perform HELLO! HELLO! Salome then takes centre-stage with her song-and-dance act, STAR QUALITY, in which she acknowledges her limited talent but insists she has what it takes to succeed.

Herod, by now rather drunk, compliments her extravagantly, as do the guests. Herod promises Salome anything she wants - on a plate. Although he means something to eat, when she asks for John's head he cannot laugh it off, and Herodias, seizing her opportunity, insists that his promise be kept. Herod sings again, regretfully, DO YOU THINK IT IS EASY? John's head is presented to Herod, who gives it to Salome, who gives it to Herodias. She now sings her song again, HE'S GOTTA GO, but this time with the words "He *had* to go, didn't he?" The servants echo her song but with different words, expressing their regret and shame.

The scene changes and we are back with John's disciples. They express their dismay and disillusionment. Jesus enters and brushes aside their condolences, paying tribute to John's greatness but adding that it was only a preparation for what is to come next. He echoes John's song CAN'T YOU SEE? (this time with the words "*Don't* you see?") and reiterates the words of Zacharias: God will raise up "a powerful saviour who will set his people free". When he has gone, the disciples remember the rest of the words, and begin to sing BLESSED BE GOD. Elizabeth enters. She has been talking with Jesus and now feels that at last she understands what John was trying to do. She is proud of him. The disciples sing again BLESSED BE GOD, and gradually (with audience participating) the song becomes a round. The whole cast come back on stage and sing a hymn while the round continues. [If required, the whole cast can sing a further chorus: "Our show is over now and so....." sung to the tune of HELLO! HELLO!]

MUSICAL NUMBERS

OVERTURE

ACT ONE

- 1 JORDAN RIVER (Chorus)
- 2 Jordan River (Chorus) - Reprise
- 3 MY BOY JOHN (Elizabeth)
- 4 BLESSED BE GOD (Zacharias)
- 5 CAN'T YOU SEE? (John)
- 6 My Boy John (Elizabeth) - Reprise
- 7 Jordan River (Chorus) - Reprise
- 8 Can't You See? (John) - Reprise
- 9 LOOK AT HIM! (John)
- 10 IS THIS THE MOMENT? (John)
- 11 When Samuel Was With Eli (John) - Reprise (= Can't You See?)
- 12 Jordan River (Jesus and Chorus) - Reprise

ENTRACTE

ACT TWO

- 13 HELLO! HELLO! (Chorus)
- 14 DO YOU THINK IT IS EASY? (Herod)
- 15 HE'S GOTTA GO! (Herodias)
- 16 When Samuel Was With Eli (John) - Reprise (= Can't You See?)
- 17 Look At Him! (John) - Reprise
- 18 HAVE YOU HEARD? (Chorus)
- 19 Have You Heard? (Chorus) - Reprise
- 20 Can't You See? (John) - Reprise
- 21 Hello! Hello! (Chorus) - Reprise
- 22 STAR QUALITY (Salome)
- 23 Do You Think It Is Easy? (Herod) - Reprise
- 24 He Had To Go! (Herodias) - Reprise (= He's Gotta Go!)
- 25 Don't You See? (Jesus) - Reprise (= Can't You See)
- 26 Blessed Be God (Chorus) - Reprise
- 27 Blessed Be God (Chorus) - Reprise (with hymn-tune)
- 28 Our Show, You Know (Chorus) - Reprise (= Hello! Hello!)

THE CAST

Roles with solo songs:	John
	Elizabeth, John's mother
	Zacharias, John's father
	Herod, the king
	Herodias, the queen
	Salome, the princess
	Jesus, John's cousin
Other speaking parts:	Elizabeth as a younger woman
	Two of John's disciples
	Three soldiers
	Two tax collectors
	Two of Elizabeth's relatives (female)
	Two devout Jews (Pharisees)
	Two scholars from Jerusalem (Sadducees)
	Herod's messenger
	John's messenger
	A servant
	Two of Herod's party guests
Chorus representing:	Disciples
	Palace Servants
	Party Guests

ACT ONE

Scene One - On the Banks of the River Jordan

A crowd of people surround John, who is standing in the river. The atmosphere is that of an evangelical revival - a good deal of joyful enthusiasm and lots of smiles. John is the still centre of a fairly noisy group; he alone remains serious, intent on his task of baptising the individuals who come forward in turn for baptism. John does not join in the singing.

1. JORDAN RIVER - OPENING CHORUS

Come and see what's happening on the banks of the Jordan!
People are discovering how to start again!
Years we've waited, and hesitated,
But now's the time for crying out loud 'Ay-men!'

- (1) Oh..... Jordan River, what sinners we've been!
Jordan River, it's time to come clean!
You may wonder
Why one by one we're going under!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!
- Jordan River, the way to begin,
Jordan River, is plunging right in!
In this water
Go all the things we didn't oughta!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

John is baptising
All who repent;
It's symbolising
Old life gone and new life rising!

Jordan River, what sinners we've been!
Jordan River, it's time to come clean!
You may wonder
Why one by one we're going under!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

- (2) Jordan River, the Lord's on His way!
Jordan River, He'll come any day!
We're updating!
Can't go on prevaricating!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!
- Jordan River, we want to confess,
Jordan River, our world is a mess.
Things need changing:
It's gonna take some rearranging!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

We must prepare for
The Day of the Lord,
And say a prayer for
Ev'rything we truly care for.

Jordan River, the Lord's on His way!
Jordan River, He'll come any day!
We're updating!
Can't go on prevaricating!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

The song ends as some soldiers approach.

First Soldier: Now then! Now then! What's going on 'ere?

First Disciple: (scared, placatory) Nothing, officer, nothing at all!

Second Soldier: (aggressively) Don't give us that! We heard you, *(to his colleague)* didn't we? You were singing that the world was in a mess, and that you want things to change!

Third Soldier: (trying to appear reasonable) You know, I don't understand you people. You're under Roman administration - the best-organised system there's ever been, everyone knows that. With us in charge, everything runs *(he searches for the word)* 'smoothly'! *(His colleagues smirk)*. Yet you don't seem to appreciate how lucky you are. Why do you want 'change', for heaven's sake? Why can't you just be content?

Second Disciple: Look, it's not what you think, This is a religious meeting. There's nothing political about it at all. *(John looks up sharply, but says nothing)*. The 'change' we were singing about is the change within ourselves. Each of us is individually turning over a new leaf and we're going to live better lives in the future. That's why we're washing in the river, to show that we're washing our sins away and making a fresh start.

First Soldier: (cynically) Oh yes? And I suppose your teacher wants us to get into the water as well, to wash our sins away? Huh!

The soldiers all laugh.

Second Soldier: How ridiculous! Come on, let's leave 'em to it. They're all mad, these Jewish people.

Third Soldier: Hang on a minute. Let's see what this fellow John has to say to us. *(Calls to John)* Hey, you! Do you have any teaching for blokes like us?

Second Soldier: Professional soldiers, with a job to do, keeping you unruly people in order.

Third Soldier: Overworked and underpaid!

All look at John. He speaks at last, very slowly, thoughtfully: Don't bully people..... Don't accuse people of things they haven't done..... And *(with a hint of a smile)* stop moaning about how much you get paid!

There is a moment's awkward silence. Then the soldiers move off, talking to each other as they go.....

First Soldier: Well, he put you in your place there, didn't he?

Third Soldier: He doesn't know a thing about it. This latest length of service agreement clearly states that someone with my seniority ought to be getting.....

Two tax-collectors come forward, out of the crowd.

First Tax-collector: (speaking pedantically, like a civil servant) Since you've raised the subject of money, I wonder if you have any specific advice for us? We work, as you know, in the public service, and we have responsibility for all matters to do with taxation - that sort of thing.....

Second Tax-collector: (breaks in) One can't help but be aware that the capacity in which we are employed is - how shall I say - a little, er, sensitive.....

First Tax-collector: Not to say 'controversial'.....

Second Tax-collector: And we wondered whether you have any opinion with regard to the ethical considerations involved - the underlying moral principles, or *(he breaks off, lamely)* otherwise.....

John: (looking up, rather impatiently) Look, just ask people for the correct amount, that's all. It's quite simple and straightforward. The trouble is, you're always adding on fees of your own; *that's* what you shouldn't do - as you know perfectly well!

John turns to the rest of the crowd.

John: You see, it's *all* very simple really. You have two coats; someone else hasn't got one at all. So what do you do?

He pauses, and no one answers. John shouts in exasperation:

You *share*, that's what you do! *(He looks round, patient again)* You have some food; someone else hasn't got any. What do you do?

A member of the crowd: Share your food with them.

Another member of the crowd: Yes, that's right. You give them some of yours.

All are nodding in agreement.

First Disciple: (shaking his head) And I'm afraid we haven't always done that.

Another member of the crowd: But from now on we will.....

Another: Yes, we will.....

Second Disciple: From now on we're going to start all over again!

All begin to smile again as they sing another chorus:

2. JORDAN RIVER - REPRISE

(3) Jordan River, we're starting again,
Jordan River, sing loud the 'Ay-men'!
Holy Moses!
In go weeds and up come roses!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

Jordan River, it's such a relief,
Jordan River, to turn a new leaf!
No more sinning;
Time to make a new beginning!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

No need to lie to
Anyone now.
We'll say goodbye to
All that's wrong - at least we'll try to!

Jordan River, we're starting again,
Jordan River, sing loud the 'Ay-men'!
Holy Moses!
In go weeds and up come roses!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

All except a few disciples go off singing and John moves front of stage. Elizabeth enters.

John: Mother, what are you doing here?

Elizabeth: (reproachfully, yet fondly) John, John! Found you at last. I've walked miles looking for you!

They embrace.

John: But honestly! You didn't need to come all this way.

Elizabeth: I wanted to. I'm your mother and you're all I've got. It's weeks since I heard any news of you. So I thought I'd come and see for myself.

John: I'm getting on alright, mother. As you can see, my idea of coming out into the wilderness to be alone hasn't worked. People keep following me around! So I suppose that's what I'm meant to be doing - talking to people, encouraging them to face up to the truth. Then I ask them to acknowledge it before God and to submit to baptism in the river as a sign of a new beginning.

Elizabeth: I wish you hadn't left home like that, John. We've always got on so well (*John looks surprised and raises an eyebrow*) and when your father died I hoped we could be together - just the two of us. I hoped you'd stay with me - not wander off on your own. I felt I'd lost a husband *and* a son!

John: I know, mother, I know. But I have to do what I'm called to do, I'm afraid. Surely you see that?

Elizabeth: We all thought you'd be a priest, just like your father. I thought.....

John: I know what you thought! You thought I would fit into a nice little mould and do what *you and Dad* wanted. But God seems to want something different for me.

Elizabeth: What is it, John? If only you would explain to me!

John: (shaking his head) I'm not sure exactly, even now. But I knew I had to begin here. I had to leave Jerusalem, abandon my studies, and get right away - to be alone with God.

Elizabeth: But you're not alone!

John: I know..... It's as if God's pushing me along. I'm confident that he'll show me the next step when the time comes. All these people who've followed me out here, *they're* responding to God's promptings too. It's like the beginning of a movement!

Elizabeth: But here? In the middle of nowhere?

John: Yes, here - in this most unlikely place - this is where we start. *(He pauses and smiles)* No, it's not quite what I had in mind either! But I'm sure it's right.

Elizabeth: (anxious) I've heard people saying that you're a prophet. They've even been comparing you to the great Elijah! I hope you're not encouraging that sort of nonsense, John. You must keep your feet on the ground!

John: (laughs) Yes, I've heard them say that. I always say I'm just a voice - no more. And no less! *Someone's* got to speak out.

Elizabeth: But it's so dangerous! Have you really thought this through? Do you realise what risks you're running? You could get into terrible trouble.

John: (soberly, grimly) I know, mother, I know. But this is one voice that won't be silenced.

Elizabeth: (looks straight at him) Dear John. I wish I understood what you're up to. *(She sighs)* I don't know what your father would have said. We had so many hopes for you!

John rejoins his friends while she sings, as a sort of soliloquy:

3. MY BOY JOHN

He's my boy John.
Where did we go wrong?
We had so many dreams,
We had so many schemes
For my boy John.

His will's so strong!
Where's he get it from?
He has made us look fools,
He has changed all the rules
Has my boy John.

Maybe we were always spoiling him,
Wanting him to have the best?
Maybe we were always foiling him,
So making him protest?

He's my boy John.
Where did we go wrong?
We had so many dreams,
We had so many schemes
For my boy John.

Youth is so keen to have its way,
Best save your breath!
Truth is, in spite of what I say
I love him to death!

He's my boy John.
Where did we go wrong? .
We had so many dreams,

We had so many schemes
For him, my boy John.

(Possibly repeat whole song with chorus singing - or humming - in the background)

When her song is over, Elizabeth continues to reminisce: A voice! He says he's a voice! (Shakes her head) I just don't get it! (Smiles wryly) Odd, really. That was the one thing his father didn't have, a voice! Not when he heard I was pregnant! I remember that day as if it was yesterday! He couldn't speak for days..... (laughs)

The scene changes to

Scene Two - The Temple Precincts

We go back in time some 30 years. Zacharias is revealed, back view only, kneeling down saying his prayers. (A younger) Elizabeth looks up, and watches him fondly.

Zacharias: Lord, I pray for my people. Well alright then Lord, your people. You know what a mess we're in, ruled by that dreadful Herod family, living their decadent lives quite remote from the poverty all around. They don't have our interests at heart. They're not even real Jews! Yet they pretend to represent us, and the Roman authorities don't know the difference! They don't know and they don't care. All they care about is discipline - keeping law and order - that is, according to their laws!

You'd think, Lord, that the Romans invented laws, the way they go on! They seem to have no idea that in this Holy Land we have our own laws, the laws which came from you, given to us many years ago by your servant Moses. Your holy law counts for nothing with the Romans.

So now, Lord, we have soldiers everywhere, trying to run our Holy Land as if it were just another bit of their Empire! And our leaders compromise the truths of our religion and cooperate with them!

Who speaks up for us, Lord, in this situation? Where's our voice? Trouble is, none of us know what to say! There aren't any prophets these days! What's that, Lord? Who speaks for you? Where's your voice? Well yes, of course, that's what I mean. You know that, don't you? You know everything!.....

But I still want to know - What are we to do? Look, I'm an old man now, Lord, and I've been praying like this for years - and still you give me no answer! So I wait. I'm still waiting for an answer, Lord. (Pauses) What do we do? (Pauses) What do I do? (Pauses) Okay, Lord, I know: that's not the right question. The question is what are you going to do. Right, well what are you going to do, then, and when are you going to do it?

What do you mean, it's none of my business, Lord? Well okay, I see what you mean. We just have to wait a bit longer, do we? Wait quite a bit longer? (Pauses) What do you mean, Lord? What, like a whole generation? Oh no, Lord, surely not! (Aggressively) Now look here, Lord, I can't wait that long! I'll be dead by then! Well yes, of course you know that. (Chastened) You know everything, Lord, and you know what's best. But (he's shattered by the thought) a whole generation? A whole generation!.....

After a moment's silence, Elizabeth calls to him: Zacharias! Zacharias!

He gets up slowly and walks towards her.

Elizabeth: Zacharias, I've got something to tell you. (She is grinning from ear to ear) We're going to have a baby!

Zacharias can't take it in at first, then staggers a few steps backwards, making a few incoherent noises.

Elizabeth: Well come on, say something, can't you? (And then, anxiously) What's the matter? What on earth's the matter?

The scene changes (a moment's blackout?) to

Scene Three - Outside Elizabeth's House

Elizabeth is nursing her child. Zacharias is sitting some distance away, gazing into space. A couple of relatives approach. They are talking to each other.

First Relative: So I said to him. I said, Oh we'd better go and see what's what. 'Cos there she is with a new baby - at her age, mind, and she's no chicken - and him no help at all, just sitting there!

Second Relative: Poor Elizabeth! Gained a son and lost a husband, that's what they're saying!

First Relative: Well, we shall soon see for ourselves

Elizabeth gets up to greet them.

First Relative: Oh, Elizabeth! (*kisses her quite formally, and gazes at the baby*).

Elizabeth: It's good to see you.

Second Relative: (*hugs Elizabeth warmly*) What a beautiful baby!

First Relative: At last! I always said you'd do it one day!

Second Relative: (*still gazing at baby*) He looks so solemn and serious!..... And what are you going to call him?

First Relative: Oh, you'll be calling him Zacharias, won't you? After his father?

Elizabeth: (*sharply*) No! That is, well, we haven't quite decided yet.

The two relatives exchange glances, implying "What's going on? Have they had a row or something?"

Elizabeth: (*brightly*) I thought something different. Like John perhaps? Or..... (*pauses, then continues lamely*) something different anyway.

First Relative: (*disapproving*) Humph! What's wrong with the traditional way of doing things, I'd like to know? John, indeed! Why, it's not as if anyone in the family was called that!

Second Relative: (*to Elizabeth, trying to pour oil*) It *would* be a bit unusual, you know. And after all most fathers (*looking at Zacharias*) like their name to be carried on after them, don't they? (*Goes over to Zacharias, who has not responded, and shouts to him, as if he's deaf*) Isn't that so, Dad?

Zacharias shakes his head vigorously, and tries to speak.

Zacharias: (*mouths*) Jer - Jer - Jer(*as if trying to say 'John'*)

Second Relative: (*fetching pencil and paper*) Here you are, Dad, write it down.....

Second Relative looks over his shoulder as he writes, and reads out, as he writes each word: His - name - is - John!

First Relative: (*indignantly*) Here, let me see. (*Goes and looks*) Well, I must say!

Second Relative: (*firmly, but with a twinkle*) No, you mustn't, dear. (*Takes her by the arm to lead her away, and they start to go off*)

Meanwhile Elizabeth has gone over to Zacharias. She kisses him. He smiles at her. Then takes a deep breath.

Zacharias: Ber - Ber - Ber.....

The two relatives stop in their tracks and turn round.

Second Relative: Listen, he's trying to say something!

Zacharias: Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed!

First Relative: What was that?

Elizabeth: I thought he said "Blessed"!

Second Relative: Give him a chance, he's trying to say some more.....

Zacharias: Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed be Ger - Ger - God!

Second Relative: (*excitedly*) Blessed be God! That's what he said, I think.....

Zacharias: (over and over again) Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed be Ger - Ger - God! (gradually settling into the rhythm of song)

The accompaniment starts up quietly, matching his rhythm, and Zacharias gradually starts chanting:

Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed be Ger - Ger - God!

Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed be Ger - Ger - God!

The others begin to join in, parodying.....

All: Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed be Ger - Ger - God!

Ber - Ber - Ber - Blessed be Ger - Ger - God!

Then straight into song, sung solo by a smiling Zacharias:

4. BLESSED BE GOD

- (1) Blessed be God, the God of Israel,
With his people to set them free,
Raising up a powerful saviour
Born from David's fam'ly tree.
- (2) Prophets of old foretold his coming,
Now the enemy cannot win.
God will keep his promises always
And will bring his kingdom in.
- (3) This was the oath he swore to Abra'am,
He would rescue us from our foes.
We'd be free to worship him safely,
Knowing we're the ones he chose.
- (4) This little child will one day witness
And will help to prepare the way.
Showing people how to escape from
All that's leading us astray.
- (5) Tender compassion. gently warm us!
Sun from heaven. your day begin!
Shine on those who live in the darkness:
Light the way we're walking in.

All now join in, singing verse 1 repeatedly as a 5-part round.

More 'relatives' and 'neighbours' come on stage and join in the singing.

Still singing, everyone moves off, the singing peters out and Elizabeth is left alone.

The scene changes back to

Scene Four - The Banks of the River Jordan

We go forward in time again.

Elizabeth: (talking to herself) We were so happy when Zacharias got his voice back again! I'd prayed as I'd never prayed before: 'Lord, please, please give Zacharias his voice again!' But of course God didn't give him back his old voice, he gave him a new one. That old worried voice, always so concerned about the political situation, going round in circles, wondering what to do, and constantly bewailing the fact that there were no prophets any more - that had gone, gone forever. His new voice was different. Calmer, more confident, more - well - joyful, I suppose. Those last years were so happy.....

And now I've got John going on about a voice - he seems to be hearing a voice in his head which tells him what to do. I'm so worried about him. I think he may be going mad.....

John reappears.

John: Still here, mother?

Elizabeth: Yes, dear. I was just thinking about when you were little, and your father was alive. If you marry an old man you must expect to be left alone, I suppose. Like your Auntie Mary. Did I ever tell you about when she came to tell me she was pregnant? (*John smiles indulgently - he's heard the story many times before!*) And I said "So am I!" She said "What - at your age?" How we laughed that day! We were so happy..... And then she married her carpenter from Nazareth..... (*Pulls herself together*) Still, that's all a long time ago now.

John: Nearly thirty years.

Elizabeth: Yes, I suppose it is. And you're a grown man with your own life to lead. But..... oh dear! I do wish you hadn't left Jerusalem where you were getting on so well. We had such hopes for you, and ever since that teacher of yours said you showed promise, I thought, well.....

John: I'm sorry, mother. 'That is, I'm sorry if you're disappointed in me. But I'm not sorry about what I'm doing. I think Dad might have understood - he was always looking forward to the time when a prophetic voice would at last speak out again.....

Elizabeth: (*bursts out*) But you're *not* a prophet, John, and you mustn't let people call you that.

John: Look, mother, I've said to them, I'm *not* claiming to be a prophet. I'm just a voice. A voice that speaks out, that shouts, that screams if necessary! I say things that *must* be said. Things that I hear in my head, things that I know in my heart - that's what I say.

Elizabeth: But nobody is going to listen to you! Not now! Nobody really important, that is. You'll never have any real influence as a sort of gypsy - wandering round the countryside! Jerusalem is the place that matters. There, you had the world at your feet - and you just walked away from it all..... Oh John, you've got such a lot to give! Yet you seem set on throwing it away - and all for the sake of a voice in your head!

John: Listen, mother. Let me try to explain.....

John sings:

5. CAN'T YOU SEE?

Can't you see?
I haven't any choice!
It isn't me -
I'm just prompted by a voice!
I'll try to explain
'Cos to me it's very plain
And I know I'm not insane!
No, no!

This 'refrain' is repeated between the verses:

- (1) When Moses saw the burning bush and stared into its flame,
Amazed at this extraordinary thing,
He seemed to hear a roaring noise which sounded like his name
And ordered him to go and see the king.

'Who me?' he said, 'Oppose the Pharaoh? Challenge his great might?
But I stammer when I'm talking to my friends!'
'I'll teach you all the tricks you need' said God, 'You'll be alright!'
And we all know how the splendid story ends!
- (2) When Samuel was with Eli his response was most polite:
'I'm here, sir, tell me what I have to do'.
Then Eli said 'Not now, lad, it's the middle of the night!
This time it wasn't me that called to you.'

Eventually old Eli worked out what was going on:
‘The Lord is calling you direct’, he said.
‘The next time that it happens you must answer him, my son,
And whatever task he gives you, go ahead!’

- (3) Elijah was the prophet who faced down a king and queen:
Queen Jezebel, the power behind the throne.
When all the other prophets lied, he had to intervene.
Against them all, Elijah stood alone.

But afterwards, depressed, he ran away and tried to hide;
He felt that he had failed to stop the rot.
Yet still the voice of God was there to whisper at his side
And tell him how to stage the counter-plot!

As the song finishes, Elizabeth shakes her head sadly.....

One of John’s disciples (Second Disciple) enters.

*Second Disciple: (excitedly) Some more people are here, John. They are asking you to baptise them in the river,
like you did for us.*

John: Tell them to come quietly, one by one.....

*John now baptises (at the side of the stage?) first one person, then another..... While this is happening
(nothing is said), Elizabeth sings again, very quietly:*

6. MY BOY JOHN – REPRISE

He’s my boy John.
Where did we go wrong?
We had so many dreams,
We had so many schemes
For my boy John.

Oh my boy John!
Is it time for moving on?
I just don’t understand
Why it’s not as we planned
For my boy John.

I would have loved to have him stay
With me at home.
But it’s no good! He’s doing it his way –
I must leave him alone!

Dear, dear John,
Where did we go wrong?
We are drifting apart
And it’s breaking my heart,
Yet you’re still my boy John.

At the end of her song, Elizabeth leaves.

The crowd now come back on stage, singing their song:

7. JORDAN RIVER - REPRISE

It begins quietly, but quickly becomes louder and more exuberant.....

- (1) Jordan River, what sinners we’ve been!
Jordan River, it’s time to come clean!
You may wonder
Why one by one we’re going under!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

Jordan River, the way to begin,
Jordan River, is plunging right in!
In this water
Go all the things we didn't oughta!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

John is baptising
All who repent;
It's symbolising
Old life gone and new life rising!

Jordan River, what sinners we've been!
Jordan River, it's time to come clean!
You may wonder
Why one by one we're going under!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

- (4) Jordan River, we're changing right now,
Jordan River; John's showing us how.
What a preacher!
May look fierce but he won't eat ya!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

Jordan River, as judgement day nears,
Jordan River, you're flowing with tears.
We're regretting
Things we'd like to be forgetting;
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

Nobody minds who
You used to be!
When the word finds you,
Slip away from all that binds you!

Jordan River, we're changing right now,
Jordan River, John's showing us how.
What a preacher!
May look fierce but he won't eat ya!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

The song is interrupted by the arrival of some devout Jews (Pharisees), who look on disapprovingly, and gradually the song peters out and the crowd drifts away. John and one or two of his disciples remain on stage, at the side, 'overhearing' the next bit of dialogue.

First Pharisee: (sadly) You know it really upsets me when people do this sort of thing. I find it so embarrassing! All this enthusiasm! Don't they realise that true religion is saying your prayers quietly and privately, not all this noisy shouting and singing?

Second Pharisee: And look - down by the water? It looks as though they are taking it in turns to plunge in! So undignified!

First Pharisee: The law tells us to wash, to purify ourselves - but not like that! How can they think they're getting themselves clean by splashing about on a muddy bank? Ugh!

Second Pharisee: It must be this fellow John the Baptist that everyone is talking about. See? That must be him, over there.

First Pharisee: Oh yes, I've heard of him. People are calling him a prophet. That just shows how little they know about these things, doesn't it? The age of the prophets is long since past - there aren't going to be any more.

Second Pharisee: No. Not until the Messiah comes! And then it will be Elijah that returns first, as the herald of his coming. Everyone knows that!

First Pharisee: Not this lot, obviously! Though I believe some of John's followers have actually been calling him their 'Elijah'! What a lot of nonsense!

Second Pharisee: Huh! They just make themselves look ridiculous, don't they?

First Pharisee: I'm afraid so. And there's so many of them! I wonder what it is that draws them to him?

Second Pharisee: And why does he have to hold his meetings out here? Why doesn't he just come and speak to us in the synagogue, if he's got things to say? *That's* the place for religious meetings. Out here you get all sorts of people tagging along, getting the wrong idea. Next thing you know, it'll be turning into a political movement, mark my words!

The Pharisees move aside as some scholars (Sadducees) approach.

[Note: Whereas the Pharisees are quite ordinary folk, sincere and devout, the Sadducees are posh 'city' people from Jerusalem, expensively dressed, sophisticated and worldly]

First Sadducee: I couldn't believe my ears when they told me. One of my best students he was. And they just said: 'John won't be coming to classes any more, sir. He's decided to take some time out'. 'Where's he gone?' I asked. 'The desert' they said! Well he's certainly put himself in the wilderness now! He could have had a splendid career in Jerusalem. I was looking forward to introducing him in all the right circles. Still, *(sighs)* it looks as if he's blown all that now.

Second Sadducee: I'm looking forward to meeting him. I'm intrigued. It's such an extraordinary thing to do! I knew his father slightly, of course. Not that he was any sort of scholar - always inclined to oversimplify things. You know, I heard him say, once, "My wife Elizabeth's got more real religion in her little finger than all the books of the Law"!

First Sadducee: *(shocked)* Really?

Second Sadducee: But a nice man - and a nice family.

First Sadducee: You'd think he'd show more consideration for his mother, poor woman.

Second Sadducee: I bet you never thought we'd find him here in this valley, living rough?

First Sadducee: No, and I didn't expect to see him surrounded by this..... this rabble! Where have all these people come from? The story I heard was that he was going off into the desert to be on his own. But look at the way the crowds follow him around!

Second Sadducee: *(sighs)* It'll be the oversimplified preaching - people love it, I'm afraid. But I hope he's careful in what he says. You know what it's like if there's any hint of a political dimension. We have to act. We can't have people rocking the boat.

First Sadducee: *(sees John)* Hello, John. Good to see you, my boy. I've been telling my friend here all about you. My star student, what? Who suddenly decides to pack it all in! Goes off into the desert! *(chuckles indulgently)*

John: *(bluntly)* You're the ones in the desert, if you ask me. Stuck in your own little academic world, having barren discussions about sterile issues. No life there!

The Sadducees are startled at this outburst, but John goes on, uncompromisingly, confronting them with the stark truth.....

Why have you come here? You don't really want to understand, do you? You're not seriously interested. You just want to make trouble.

The Sadducees are nonplussed.

First Sadducee: My dear fellow, I only said.....

John: *(more heatedly)* Can't you just leave me alone?

Second Sadducee: I say, calm down, old boy; there's no need to get so steamed up.....

John: *(trying to speak calmly)* Look, let me have one more go at trying to explain. *(Takes a deep breath)* With every day that passes we're getting closer to the day of reckoning. I'm trying to rescue these people before it's too late; and they're grateful and they're responding to what I say. But you! I know you! You have your own ways of surviving. A bit of negotiation here, a bit of compromise there. Gossiping,

starting rumours, playing power games. You're like a lot of snakes, frantically wriggling to get out of the impending disaster. Dodging and weaving. Well, alright, that's your way. But here we're starting to do things differently. It means going back to basic principles, starting all over again. Tell me, are you interested in that? Would you step down into the water and be baptised? Are you willing to change your lives quite radically?

First Sadducee: (settling into his role as John's 'tutor') Well now, that's more like it. You always were one for going back to first principles. An interesting idea, that. *(Adopts a 'thinking' pose, and speaks as if taking part in a public debate)* Is it always possible - or appropriate - to derive practical policies from theoretical principles? Or can one - *should* one - *does* one in actual fact - make decisions on an 'ad hoc' basis as one goes along, just deciding things one thing at a time as they crop up? *(Musing to himself)* 'Life is a balancing act in which rigid principles of behaviour are a positive hindrance. Discuss.' That would make a good examination question.....

John: (exasperated) There you go again! I challenge you to *do* something and you immediately turn it into an intellectual discussion!

Second Sadducee: But I was told you're very good at intellectual discussion? In Jerusalem.....

John: (shouting now) Jerusalem, Jerusalem! I'm sick of everyone going on about Jerusalem all the time. Let me tell you *(wagging a finger)*: all the education of all the scribes in the whole of Jerusalem will not save you! This is no time for discussion! This is no time for clever-clever point-scoring and intellectual games. This is for real. We're living at a critical time. We're faced with urgent, stark choices. Good or bad. Right or wrong. Honesty or lies. Kindness or cruelty. Selfishness or sharing. *(He pauses and glares at them)* You can't see it, can you? Alright then. Off you go, back to your precious Jerusalem. I want none of it.

The Sadducees back away. As they go off they say to each other in concerned voices:

First Sadducee: I'm sorry, I had no idea he had become so wild.....

Second Sadducee: His poor mother..... No husband, and a son gone crazy.....

John: (turning back to his friends. He's still angry, but speaks very deliberately) Look at them! Everywhere they go they leave their slimy trails behind them. I meant what I said. They *are* like snakes. Slippery customers! *(He suddenly relaxes and grins, unexpectedly)* In fact they're like vipers; they can sting you with their poison if you don't look out!

John now catches sight of the Pharisees again, who have been enjoying his treatment of the Sadducees. He now turns to them.

John: And what about you? Will *you* repent and be baptised, like all these other people? Do *you* want to make a fresh start?

First Pharisee: Well, er, no thank you. It's, er, not quite our sort of thing if you don't mind.

Second Pharisee: We go to the synagogue, you know. Regularly. And we say our prayers. And we do our best to abide by the law of Moses - all of it, you know, not just the Ten Commandments.

First Pharisee: And of course we're descendants of Abraham. It's all been traced right back. No breaks in the line, no foreign blood. So you see.....

Second Pharisee: We don't really need.....

First Pharisee: anything else

Second Pharisee: a new start.....

John: (this time, calm and cold) Descendants of Abraham! And you think that'll save you! You know, it's not such a big deal being descended from Abraham. Do you think God can't produce *more* children of Abraham any time he wants? What makes you think you're so special?

First Pharisee: It's not that we think we're superior or anything. It's just that, well, we've had a lot of advantages.

Second Pharisee: That's right. So the sort of things you're talking about - repenting of sins and making a fresh beginning - we're not against those things exactly.....

First Pharisee: Oh no, of course not.

Second Pharisee: It's just that they seem, well, sort of.....

First Pharisee: unnecessary

Second Pharisee: for us, anyway.

John: (shakes his head) You have all this faith in your family tree! Well, let me tell you: at this very moment there's an axe chopping away at the bottom of your precious tree! And there you are, sitting complacently on your own little branch of it! You're going to get a terrible shock when it comes crashing to the ground!

First Pharisee: Oh no, surely not!

Second Pharisee: Are you saying we can't rely on the traditional faith of our fathers?

John: What happens to trees in an orchard that don't produce any fruit? They get chopped down and burnt! They become part of God's great bonfire of all that is wrong! And why? Because they're *useless!* They haven't done what they were supposed to do.

He looks at them, with real compassion. and continues more encouragingly:

But you've still got a chance. Take it. Save yourselves by making a fresh start here and now!

He looks at them again, then turns away in exasperation as they show no sign of responding..... He looks again at the Sadducees who are standing well back, keeping out of his way. He addresses both groups (Sadducees and Pharisees):

You think you're safe already, don't you? Oh dear, oh dear! How can I get you to see? .

John sings his song again. This time he doesn't sing the verses, just 4 choruses, as follows:

8. CAN'T YOU SEE? - REPRISE

Can't you see?
I haven't any choice!
It isn't me -
I'm just prompted by a voice!
I'll try to explain
'Cos to me it's very plain
And I know I'm not insane!
No, no! No, no! No, no!

Anyone who hears this voice must shout,
Criticising all that's wrong.
Offering a chance of life without
Dragging all that guilt along.

Don't you know
I'm saying nothing new?
Long time ago
Lots of others said it too.
I tell you straight
You are leaving it too late,
And the judgement will not wait,
No, no!

Are you sure
You've done all that you should?
And kept the Law
And in ev'ry way been good?
Now hear my song
For you haven't very long
To repent of all that's wrong,
No, no! No, no! No, no!

Suddenly we find new life begin
Once we've got our sins to go.
Wonderful new worlds come breaking in,
(*slower*) Threatening the status quo.....

Won't you hear
What I have got to say?
Have you no fear?
Is your God so far away?
Beware, my friends,
Think of when the counting ends
And you haven't made amends,
No, no!

(*slower*) The message of my song
Is you haven't very long
To repent of all that's wrong,
Oh no!

As the song ends, the Pharisees and Sadducees slink away - separately.

Now Jesus enters. He comes in a bit hesitantly.

Jesus: John?

John: Greetings, cousin.

Jesus: John, you're baptising people now, aren't you? Starting a movement? I'd like to join. Would you baptise me?

John: (*embraces him, then holds him at arms length and looks straight into his eyes*) I don't think you've got any sins to wash away. You're so innocent! God's young lamb, unblemished! (*Adds, more quietly, almost to himself*) And all ready to be sacrificed?

Jesus: (*laughing*) Young? I'm almost as old as you, cousin. It's just that (*regretfully*) well - I suppose you've seen more of the world than I have. And you've sat at the feet of all the famous scholars in Jerusalem.

John: I've left all that behind me now. All those classes and seminars in Jerusalem. They taught me a lot, I know, and I'm grateful for that. But everyone expected me to stay there and spend my whole life as a student! Most of the lads were quite happy to do that.....

Jesus: (*wistfully*) I was one of those lads - just once!

John: (*puzzled at first, then.....*) Oh, you mean that time when you stayed after the Passover Festival? That was ages ago!

Jesus: Yes - and it was only for a few days. Just until my parents came and took me off home again.

John: I remember! You got into trouble for that, didn't you? My mother said it was all *my* fault for taking you along to the classes in the first place!

Jesus: My parents didn't seem to understand. It started me thinking. It was the first time I'd ever been encouraged to think things out for myself.

John: I suppose I've been lucky to have such a good education, but..... Well, what's it all *for* if you don't actually *do* anything? In the end it just seemed like endless discussion - talk, talk, talk - just going round and round in circles. All those clever people in Jerusalem, yet none of them seemed to see the urgency of the situation!

Jesus: (*enthusiastically*) Oh yes! I feel that urgency too.

John: It all seems so clear to me now. And so simple. What matters in the end is not being clever but being good. But I think you know that as well as I do. (*To himself*) Perhaps better than I do? (*He turns away abruptly, shaking his head*) Look, you don't need my baptism.

Jesus: Please.

John turns round and looks at him.

Jesus: (again) Please.

John: (pauses) Are you sure?

Jesus simply nods and walks towards the water, taking off his robe. John follows. The baptism takes place off stage (or out of sight anyway) to some quiet music in the background. Jesus goes off and John comes forward.

John: What am I doing? What am I doing?.....

He then sings:

9. LOOK AT HIM!

What am I doing, baptising today
Someone better than I am in every way?
Shall I invite him to turn his life around,
The most shining example of goodness I have found?

I've been insisting that all must repent,
Yet already here's someone living just as I meant!
Why wash a man who is quite without blame?
Here there's nothing to criticise, much to proclaim!

Look at him!
Look at him!
He's a good, good man.
Look at him!
Look at him!
Be like him if you can.
Search the house of Israel:
There's no one better than
This simple, honest carpenter,
This good, good man.

You may forget my teaching,
Every word I've said.
Never mind all my preaching,
Just look at him instead!

Copy him,
Follow him,
Your whole life long. Study him,
Learn from him
And you won't go wrong.
Sing his simple melody;
You'll find no better song.
Follow the carpenter
Your whole life long.

Repeated from 'Look at him.....' (10 lines chorus in harmony; 4 lines John solo; 10 lines John solo and chorus hum).

As the song ends, Elizabeth returns, together with a messenger from King Herod's palace.

Elizabeth: John, this gentleman wants to speak to you. He's from the king!

John: The king?!

Messenger: I'm looking for John the Baptist, the one they call the Prophet?

John: I'm no prophet, I keep telling everyone that. I'm just a voice that blurts out in the silence what has to be said. But, yes, I'll answer to the name of John.

Messenger: I bring you greetings, sir, from the court of King Herod. Your fame, sir, has spread through the whole country and has now reached the ears of the king. I have been sent on the king's personal

instructions with an invitation to you, sir, to accompany me to the palace. The king is interested to know of your new teachings.

John: I teach nothing new! I preach a return to the old! I implore people to return to the God of their fathers while they still have the chance.

Messenger: Well, will you come, sir, and explain this to the king?

John: Oh yes, yes, I'll come. Of course I will. *(To Elizabeth)* You said nobody important would take any notice of me! But you were wrong! Ever since I left Jerusalem, people have been telling me that I'd never have any influence. And now I have the offer of an audience with the king himself! *(To messenger)* The king really wants to know what I have to say?

Messenger: Yes, sir. He was very particular on that point. He wants to talk with you about your ideas.

John: Then I must go, mustn't I, mother? *(To messenger)* Yes, I'll come with you straight away. But let me talk to *you* first and explain to you the great *danger* we are in. Do you realise that the day of reckoning is near? And we are unprepared! What we have to do is confess our sins before it's too late, washing them away in a baptism of repentance. Tell me, are *you* ready to face the judgement of God? Don't you want to make a fresh start in your life? I urge you, now, to repent of your past life, and to turn over a new leaf while you still have time!

Messenger: *(smiles diplomatically, dismissing the idea)* I have my instructions to carry out, sir. I am to take you back with me immediately.

John: Yes, I understand. It is an invitation I can't refuse, even if I wanted to. That's how things are in this country nowadays.

Elizabeth exits, upset. She is proud of John, yet puzzled at this 'invitation' and very fearful of where it may lead. The messenger stands back while John sings:

10. IS THIS THE MOMENT?

Is this the moment I've (we've) been waiting for,
The nation's been stagnating for?
The dawn that ends the night?
Is this what God's been all this time creating for?
The moment when things start to come right?

Is this the moment I've (we've) been aching for,
Foundations have been shaking for?
At last a chink of light!
Is this the point that all our history's been making for?
The moment when things start to come right?

You can't help thinking of the danger.
Who knows what Herod will do?
This summons could hardly be stranger
Seems I'm (he's) called for an interview!

Is this the moment I've been waiting for,
The nation's been stagnating for?
The dawn that ends the night?
Is this what God's been all this time creating for?
The moment when things start to come right?

The crowd now all join in the song, singing the first 3 sections above, followed by John:

Is this the moment I've been waiting for,
The nation's been stagnating for?
It feels like the first day of Spring!
This is something I was not anticipating, for
I'm going to confront the king!

Barely able to contain his excitement, John becomes quite exuberant as he sings:

Who would have thought it would happen like this?
The king inviting me to tea!
A messenger coming all this way
Just to speak to me!
My mother said "Why must you throw it away?
Your chance to be a V.I.P.?"
But ev'rything's turning upside-down,
So it seems to me!

If I tried to get an audience with royalty
It's unlikely I would get beyond the gate!
There'd be questions to make certain of my loyalty;
Yet here's my invitation - on a plate!

What have I done that the king should take note?
Just said what everyone should know!
But possibly he's had a change of heart?
Then clearly I must go!
My mother said I was doing so well,
Why did I want to break away?
Well now you see! It's like a dream come true!
Got my chance today!

There are moments in your life for celebration:
Opportunity just stares you in the face;
You experience a sense of vindication;
God has granted you a glimpse of his grace!

Could it be true that there's people at court
Ashamed and longing to be free?
They want to know how they can start again?
Just the job for me!
My mother said I'd excluded myself
From the corridors of power.
But now I'm going to be a guest at court!
(slower) Or shut up in the Tower!

You can't always do what commonsense advises;
Take no risks and you'll never do a thing!
Put your trust in the God of big surprises;
You never know quite what the future will bring!

Then the Crowd join in again with:

Who would have thought it would happen like this?
The king inviting him to tea?
You never know: perhaps the king will change?
There's no guarantee.
But just suppose he's converted by John!
And then the whole of Galilee!
John always said we'd get a new regime:
Just you wait and see!

Just imagine if King Herod joined the movement!
What amazing transformations would we see?
There would surely be a wonderful improvement
In the quality of life, for you and me!

Who would have thought it would happen like this?
The king inviting him to tea?

You never know: perhaps the king will change?
There's no guarantee.
But just suppose he's converted by John!
And then the whole of Galilee!
John always said we'd get a new regime:
Just - you - wait - and - see!

Whereas John himself is aware of the possible risks, the crowd are getting carried away and are seeing it only as a splendid opportunity. John smiles benignly at their enthusiasm.

John: (now concerning himself with practicalities) But what will happen to the movement while I'm away? I wonder.....

Jesus comes forward again, still a bit diffident: Cousin John?

John: Yes?

Jesus: Can I ask you something?

John: Yes, of course you can.

Jesus: Well, I wanted to ask you: Why did you call me 'your son'?

John: What?

Jesus: You know, when we were in the river together, and you baptised me? What was it you said?

John: I didn't say anything.

Jesus: That's funny. I thought I heard you say 'My son', or 'You are my son' something like that.

Jesus, puzzled, wanders away again, but stays on stage.

John: I wonder. Could it be that voice again? The voice I hear so often? The voice I know so well? The voice I'm trying to be?.....

He sings, quietly, musingly, to himself:

11. WHEN SAMUEL WAS WITH ELI (CAN'T YOU SEE? - REPRISE)

When Samuel was with Eli, his response was most polite:
'I'm here, sir, tell me what I have to do'.
Then Eli said 'Not now, lad, it's the middle of the night!
This time it wasn't me that called to you.'
Eventually old Eli worked out what was going on:
'The Lord is calling you direct', he said.
'The next time that it happens you must answer him, my son;
And whatever task he gives you, go ahead!'

The messenger comes forward again: Are you ready to come with me now, sir?

John goes out with him.

Two of John's disciples are left on stage - the same two that spoke before. They have been on stage, observing John's departure with some concern. Jesus comes centre stage again.

Second Disciple.: Well, I suppose he had to go, didn't he?

First Disciple: He didn't have much alternative! All very politely done, but he was being arrested, wasn't he?

Second Disciple: Will Herod keep him there? (To Jesus) What do you think?

Jesus: We'll just have to wait and see. He's certainly putting his head in the lion's mouth! And yet Herod might listen. By all accounts he's no fool, and I guess he'll be genuinely interested in what John has to say. And you know how persuasive John can be! I just have this awful feeling that he's not going to come back to us.

Second Disciple: Oh surely not? I think Herod probably just wants to find out what's going on. John will be back with us in a few days' time, you see!

First Disciple: But you know how jumpy he gets whenever anyone starts what looks like a popular 'movement'. I guess he'll want to keep him out of the way for a bit. But he can't keep him all that long, can he? (*Stops and thinks*) Can he?

Jesus: Almost anything could happen to him in *that* household! But there's not just him to think about. There's all those people - like us - who have come forward and made a commitment. There's quite a group of us by now. How many? A few dozen, anyway. People have had their hopes raised, they've responded to John's message and they've been through John's baptism. What's going to happen to them now?

First Disciple: That's right. Continuity - that's what John would want. Not to worry about when he's coming back but to get on and organise things while he's away. So what are we going to do?

Second Disciple: Yes, what's going to happen now? If we don't look out it will all fall apart. We mustn't let that happen. It's the best thing that's happened for years!

First Disciple: Well we certainly can't leave people up in the air. Thanks to John, we've got the beginnings of a renewal movement. But someone's got to give us a *lead*.

The two disciples are both looking at Jesus. There's an awkward pause.

Jesus: What are you looking at me for? (*Another pause*) Look, I'm very different from John. I couldn't possibly step into his shoes! Any more than he could step into mine! You know how strict he is! You know how he comes down on people like a ton of bricks! I'm not like that. My trouble is (*smiling*) I always see the other person's point of view! What was it you were singing about John? "He may look fierce, but he won't eat ya"? Well, it's true, he *does* put the fear of God into people. I can't do that! Besides, I don't want to do that! I don't want to shout at people. I want to get alongside them, understand them.

The two disciples remain on stage, but Jesus is almost talking to himself by this time. He leans over and stares into the water.

Jesus: I wish I could see the way ahead. (*Pauses*) That's funny. I look into the water, and all it shows me is my own face!

Jesus sings:

12. JORDAN RIVER - REPRISE (*Much slower this time. Jesus is musing*)

Jordan River, it's now up to John,
Jordan River, while we carry on.
Goodbye cousin,
You've left a group of several dozen,
Jordan River, where d'we go from here?

Jordan River, I'm looking to you,
Jordan River, to know what to do,
What direction?
You give me back my own reflection!
Jordan River, where d'we go from here?

The crowd come on, the tempo picks up, and all join in singing the original song, almost as if nothing has happened! This time they introduce some different words, hinting at a more radical political agenda.

- (5) Jordan River, at last we can see,
Jordan River, just how it must be:
Inspiration
To bring about a better nation!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!
- Jordan River, what Israel needs:
Jordan River, a leader who leads!
Our baptiser -
Who is stronger? Who is wiser?
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

He's our Elijah,
Lays down the law!
He's said "Goodbye, Jer-
-usalem, I can't abide ya!"

Jordan River, at last we can see,
Jordan River, just how it must be:
Inspiration
To bring about a better nation!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

- (6) Jordan River, we're over the moon!
Jordan River, the End will be soon!
What excitement!
Our leaders - what a grim indictment!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!
- Jordan River, our John is the one!
Jordan River, and now it's begun!
We're ignoring
The priests and scribes - they're far too boring!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

You can defy Jer-
-usalem now!
So says 'Elijah':
"Listen to that voice inside ya!"

Jordan River, we're over the moon!
Jordan River, the End will be soon!
What excitement!
Our leaders - what a grim indictment!
Jordan River, wash our sins away!

*After singing **JORDAN RIVER** through twice, the crowd continue humming it, while Jesus sings across them a slightly different version of the tune, with the words:*

Oh dear, oh dear! This will never do!
Oh dear, oh dear! How to get it through?
Time for doubting -
Not for all this noisy shouting!
Jordan River, where d'we go from here?

All except Jesus go off, singing loudly and confidently. Jesus is the last to leave, and before he goes off he sings his verse again - very slowly - if possible unaccompanied.

Jordan River, I'm looking to you,
Jordan River, to know what to do.
What direction?
You give me back my own reflection!
Jordan River, where d'we go from here?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One - Herod's Palace

A group of servants are 'rehearsing' a song-and-dance act to be performed for the king's birthday party. Possibly they could enter in ones and twos, each singing a line of the verse? By the end of the verse, they're all on stage. Salome enters separately, after a few lines of the chorus, perhaps leading the singing from then on?

13. HELLO! HELLO!

It's party time at the palace,
That's why there's so much ballyhoo!
Now we're asked on behalf
Of the king's loyal staff
To perform an amusing revue

As servants we don't have opinions
About how the royals behave.
Our consciences sold,
We just do as we're told.
So what - if our king is a knave?

So let's fix our smiles on our faces,
Any shame or embarrassment hide.
Too risky revealing
What we're really feeling,
When often we're crying inside.

(1) (We'll sing)
Hello! Hello!
We're putting on a show
We hope you will enjoy.
We must aim to entertain
Each honoured guest;
They'll be impressed
'Cos we're the best!

A show, a show,
To make the party go.
It's no use acting coy.
A splash!
A bash -
With loads of panache
For birthday boy!

This is his way
To say
You're all welcome here;
He counts you all his friends.
And at this feast
At least
There's nothing to fear,
For nothing here offends!

A show, a show,
To make the party go.
It's no use acting coy.
A splash!
A bash-
With loads of panache
For birthday boy!

(2) His lazy days
Go by in quite a haze,
He needs some kind of thrill.
Here's a date to celebrate
In careless play,
A special day
In ev'ry way.

It's done for fun,
The party has begun:
A chance to drink your fill.
A treat
To meet
And be indiscreet
With time to kill.

This is the time
To climb
Right out on a limb,
Behave just like a child.
Here is a space,
A place
To fill to the brim,
Where you can go just wild!

It's done for fun,
The party has begun:
A chance to drink your fill.
A treat
To meet
And be indiscreet
With time to kill.

Herodias enters as the song/dance is finishing.

Herodias: Thank you, everyone. I'm sure that will be most suitable for the entertainment at His Majesty's birthday party. But I must ask you to stop now. The king will be here shortly and I want it to be a surprise for him. See if you can liven it up a bit more, though; you know my husband likes his parties to go with a swing.

The servants go off, leaving Salome alone with her mother.

Salome: Oh mother, I'm so excited about the party. You'll have to let me stay up late, won't you?

Herodias: (shrugs) Well, I suppose so – now I've let you join in. Just so long as you never forget, you're the princess - the rest of them are just servants. I must say I don't know why you're so keen on all this dancing. Your father seems to like it though.

Salome: (petulantly) He's *not* my father! I wish you wouldn't keep saying that! He's my *step*-father, which isn't the same thing at all. I don't have to take any notice of anything he says if I don't want to!

Herodias: (dryly) He also happens to be king!

Salome: So what? Big deal! It's only a little kingdom anyway. In fact it's not really a kingdom at all - just a little part of one.

Herodias: Now I won't have you talking disrespectfully of your father.

Salome: There you go again! *(Scornfully)* Just because you're his wife doesn't mean he's my father! Anyway *(smiling to herself)* he doesn't boss me about much. In fact *(smugly)* I know just how to deal with him.....

As Herodias and Salome go off, Herod enters, talking to John.....

Herod: Oh I'm always interested to know what's going on. I like to keep in touch. Finger on the pulse, you know. When I heard you were drawing large crowds, well, naturally I wanted to know what you had to say.

John: I have no new doctrines. I'm simply reminding people of what they should already know. I'm calling them back to what it says in the scriptures, pointing out where they're not obeying the laws that God has given us. I'm telling them to repent of their sins while they still have time, and inviting them to make a fresh start.

Herod: Yes, there's a story going round about when some soldiers came to you. Apparently you told them to be content with their wages! (*laughs*)

John: Yes, I did.

Herod: (*still laughing*) I like it! You're accused of stirring up trouble, whereas actually you're in favour of the status quo! (*Goes on chuckling*). You don't sound much like a revolutionary to me!

John: (*relieved*) That's right. I'm not trying to stir up trouble. I just speak the truth as I see it. Of course, sometimes people find the truth disturbing.

Herod: Yes. I gather you've been upsetting some of the religious leaders, calling them 'snakes'! (*confides*) Actually, I'm rather inclined to agree with you - they *are* slippery customers! But they wouldn't like you telling them that. Even *I* don't talk to them like that! I have to play their game and dress everything up in diplomatic language. And if you take my advice you'll learn to do the same. Blurting out the truth offends people, you know. Makes enemies.

John: I speak as I must. I have no choice. What I say is true. There can be no question of 'toning it down' or 'wrapping it up' so as not to hurt people's feelings. Things that are wrong must be *said* to be wrong.

Herod: (*mischievously, tongue-in-cheek*) Well, what about me then? Do you have a message to give to me?

John: I think you know already what I have to say to you.

Herod: No I don't.

John: It is the same simple and straightforward message I give to everyone. To return to the Law of God. To repent. To make a fresh start.

Herod: (*smiles*) Repent? What do I have to repent of?

John: You really want to know?

Herod: (*impatiently*) Yes, of course I do. I thought you were famous for being outspoken! Well? Out with it, man!

John: (*facing him directly and speaking slowly*) You are unlawfully married. You married Herodias, but she was your brother Philip's wife. That is not allowed. The Law of Moses forbids it. You *have* to put this right.

Herod: (*defensively*) Well, yes, I know there's been some ill-informed criticism of my - er - domestic arrangements, but you'd be surprised how little criticism I've had from the leaders of religious opinion. You'll see. They'll all come round in time. After all, I am in a fairly unique position.....

John: You don't understand. I mean it. The judgement of God is very close. You cannot defy God's laws like this and go unpunished.....

Herod: (*stares at John, incredulous*) You - You really *do* speak the truth straight out, don't you? No one has ever spoken to me like that before. Well, well, well! Blunt honest John does it again - and this time to the king!

John: I simply say what has to be said.

Herod: You realise, don't you, that I could get rid of you - just like that! (*clicks his fingers*). But (*shakes his head in amazement*) no, you've got me interested now. I want you to stay here with us in the palace, and I shall want to talk to you again.

John leaves, and Herod sings:

14. DO YOU THINK IT IS EASY?

(1) To live like a king
Is ev'ry man's dream
It's the height to which all aspire,
With a palace that's grand
Lots of servants on hand
To provide for your ev'ry desire

If that is your dream
Then it's time to awake
And to listen to someone like me;
For the life I am leading
(Without any special pleading)
Isn't all it's cracked up to be!

(2) I'm surrounded by soldiers
Who've come here from Rome;
And the Jews have their leaders too.
I suppose it's OK
That they all have their say
And express ev'ry point of view.

Then I patiently weigh up
The bad and the worse
And I try to preserve 'status quo' .
When disputes are rabbinical
I s'pose I'm rather cynical;
I like a plain 'Yes' or 'No'!

(B) Do you think it is easy to be royal?
To be in charge of ev'rything?
People offer you suggestions
And they ask you lots of questions,
It's an awful job being king!

Do you think it's a pleasure to be wealthy?
To have enough money for a fling?
But then who are you to trust?
They all want you to go bust!
It's an awful job being king!

The leaders of the people that I deal with
Are as obstinate and awkward as can be;
The smokescreens they are using to conceal with!
And the arguments I have to referee!

(Guests and Servants join in singing:)

Do you think it is easy to be royal?
To be in charge of ev'rything?
People offer you suggestions
And they ask you lots of questions,
It's an awful job being king!

(Herod sings:)

(3) Perhaps you may think
I've a comfortable life,
Living safe and secure as king?
But in actual fact

It's a difficult act
And I worry about ev'rything.

My position's precarious,
It's bound to be so,
For the Romans have got all the power.
I'm allowed to keep going
Just so long as I am showing,
How to keep things from going sour.

- (4) I'm a juggler who keeps
Lots of balls in the air,
I perform on a high trapeze;
And I walk on a rope
That is smothered in soap;
And there's lions I've to tame and tease!

Potential rebellion
Wherever you look,
Constant whisp'rings and rumours are rife.
Lots of problems are still hidden
'Cos I try to keep the lid on;
It's a struggle, but it's my life!

- (B) Do you think you would like to be a ruler?
Make things happen by pulling on a string?
No - you do your best to please
Then you get accused of sleaze!
It's an awful job being king!

Do you think it is nice to be important?
To wear a purple robe and ring?
But there's lots and lots to do,
And the buck will stop with you!
It's an awful job being king!

I suppose I get a little satisfaction
From persuading different parties to agree.
But my scope for really independent action
Is extremely small and limited, b'lieve me.

(Guests and Servants join in singing:)

Do you think you would like to be a ruler?
Make things happen by pulling on a string?
No - you do your best to please
Then you get accused of sleaze!
It's an awful job - it's an awful job - it's an awful job being king!

Towards the end of the song, Herodias and Salome enter.

Herodias: You're just too soft, that's your trouble! First of all you bring that man here against my advice; now you have cosy little chats with him!

Herod: He's a highly educated man, dear. Quite a scholar. We might even ask him to give Salome some lessons while he's here.

Herodias: What? Have you taken leave of your senses? I keep telling you, he's a very dangerous man!

Salome: I'm not having lessons from a madman! And you can't make me, so there!

Herod: (weakly) Well, alright then, perhaps no lessons. But he is a very clever chap. Interesting too. Whatever subject comes up, he has something to say. And it's nearly always simple and direct and absolutely honest. You've no idea what a refreshing change that is, after dealing with the Sadducees all these

years, with their clever-clever arguments. He believes in plain speaking. No ifs and buts. (*To Herodias*) You know what he said to me, dear? (*chuckles again*) He told me I should never have married you! Just came straight out with it!

Herodias: (explodes) And you let him talk to you like that? A crazy preacher?

Herod: Oh. I don't know. I think you're over-reacting.....

Herodias: For heaven's sake, you're the king! You're allowed to do what you like! You don't have to obey any old laws written in a book years ago. You're the one who *makes* the laws round here!

Herod: Huh. I wish I did!

Herodias: (seriously) Look, that man means trouble. You've *got* to get rid of him (*Salome looks up sharply*), otherwise he'll destroy you..... (*getting hysterical*) He'll destroy us all! The man's just got to go!

Exit Herod. Salome listens while Herodias sings:

15. HE'S GOTTA GO

- (1) He's gotta go -
The man's just gotta go -
Hasn't he?
He's gotta go -
That's my scenario -
Hasn't he?
The throne secure!
It may mean one man fewer -
And so
It's cheerio.....
- We should devise
A plan for his demise,
Shouldn't we?
A man so 'wise' -
We should cut him down to size,
Shouldn't we?
Hear what he said?
We "never should have wed"!
Oh no!,
The man is off his head -
He's gotta go!
- Seems I have to
Be the power behind the throne;
While my husband thinks
He's done it all on his own!
- He's gotta go -
The man's just gotta go
Hasn't he?
He's gotta go -
That's my scenario -
Hasn't he?
Hasn't he?
The throne secure!
It may mean one man fewer!
For John
An ending premature!
It's cheerio!
- (2) He's done it now,
He's really done it now,

Hasn't he?
He's done it now!
Said things we can't allow,
Hasn't he?
The kingdom strong!
My husband right or wrong!
I vow
He'll go
Somehow!

The man's a pain!
He really is a pain,
Isn't he?
He's putting strain
Upon my husband's reign,
Isn't he?
We have to curb
Ideas that might disturb!
Don't want
To hear this preacher's word -
No way! Not now!

 Trouble-makers
 Have no place upon our stage.
 So - you understand? -
 I've got to turn the page!

He's done it now,
He's really done it now
Hasn't he?
He's done it now!
Said things we can't allow,
Hasn't he?
Hasn't he?
The kingdom strong!
My husband right or wrong!
That's all
I've wanted all along!
We'll get him now!

At the end of the song Herodias, determined that this is not the end of the matter, turns on her heel and goes out. Salome follows, looking thoughtful.

Scene Two - Herod's Palace: John's 'guest-room'

John is on his own. He is praying.

John: Lord, I pray for your people. You know what a mess we're in. My prayer is the same as the prayer of my father, before I was born. How long must we wait, Lord?

Things are a bit different now, Lord. My father prayed to you as a priest in the Holy Temple. And here am I in King Herod's headquarters - a strange, wicked, evil place! This palace stands for everything you hate: luxury, wastefulness, cruelty, injustice. Yet I feel I'm in the right place, Lord. Right at the heart of it. Right in the centre of what is wrong. I think you want me here, don't you, Lord? Where I can challenge the king face to face?

Well no, Lord, I suppose I didn't have much choice in the matter! But I wanted to come - you know that! I wanted to get the king to listen to me. Just like Moses challenged the Pharaoh. Just like Elijah confronted King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.

Well, I'm here, Lord. And Herod *has* been listening to me. He says he wants to talk to me again. The royal birthday's coming up soon, and lots of important people will be here. Now I know you don't approve of parties, Lord, but in the circumstances I thought - well - what a marvellous opportunity to talk to all the most important people in the land! If Herod will let me, of course.

When I first got here I was treated like a guest. Now it's beginning to feel more like I'm a prisoner. A hostage. Still, I *am* in the right place, aren't I, Lord? And with your help, who knows? Perhaps I'll be able to talk Herod round. And some other influential people, given half a chance! If only I could! What a change that would make!

I suppose Herod thinks so long as he keeps me here he's preventing me preaching to anyone else! But if he thinks the movement will fall apart without me he's wrong, isn't he? There were lots of really committed-people - and Jesus should be able to keep everyone together for the time being.

Tell you the truth, Lord, I was a bit surprised to hear that he had taken charge of things. He never struck me as being - well - *forceful* enough! I suppose I'm getting a bit anxious, but he seems a bit too easy-going somehow. The message needs to be preached quite uncompromisingly, don't you think so, Lord? A really sharp challenge to people, to shock them, make them turn back to your Law. But Jesus - I can't quite see him taking a firm enough line. And he seems so..... well, *vulnerable*.

What's that, Lord? I'm vulnerable too? Well yes, of course, I know that, Lord. I know that any servant of yours has to be - what does it say in Isaiah? - "acquainted with grief". Good grief! (*chuckles*) You can say that again, Lord! All those arguments I used to have with my mother! But I'm learning, Lord, aren't I? I know, now, how to stand up for what's right. I can handle disputes, disagreements, aggression. (*Pauses*) Well, no, I suppose not *physical* aggression! But you don't think I'm really in *that* sort of danger do you, Lord?

Do you?..... Oh Lord, *do* you?.....

Messenger enters with his report.

Messenger: Sir?

John: Ah, at last!

Messenger: Greetings, sir. I have done as you asked. I managed to get the message to your cousin, the carpenter.

John: Well done! And did you get a reply from him?

Messenger: Yes, sir. As requested. (*Speaks slowly, reciting message committed to memory*) "Off you go and tell John all the things that are happening. People's eyes and ears are being opened; they're not disabled any more; they're no longer trapped by their poverty or their shame. People are coming to life again. I hope you can rejoice with me at all this, and that you don't have any misgivings." (*He pauses - John does not respond immediately*) End of message, sir.

John: (*a bit bewildered by this*) Thank you. Thank you very much ... And what else can you tell me? What have you heard people saying?

Messenger: Well, sir, the movement you started is growing. Large crowds have been gathering to hear Jesus speaking. And there are stories of some astonishing things happening. Many claim to have been healed of their illnesses.

John: And baptism? What about baptism?

Messenger: (*awkwardly*) I couldn't rightly say, sir. I've not heard that Jesus has been continuing with baptisms.

John: Well surely he's been getting people to repent of their sins? Recalling them to the Law of Moses? Making them realise the error of their ways?

Messenger: I suppose so, yes, sir. But I've heard that he tells people their sins are forgiven.

John: Forgiven? What, you mean small infringements of the Law can be overlooked?

Messenger: Oh no, sir, these are big things. Some notorious sinners - tax-collectors, people like that - have been welcomed into the movement. And they say that Jesus often goes to their houses and has meals with them.

John: But the Law says.....

Messenger: The Law has been completed, he says. We have to go beyond it now. We mustn't even *think* of doing wrong, because that's wrong too. So we have to love everybody, not just our neighbours. We have to love our enemies.

John: (*thoughtful, puzzled, speaking almost to himself*) And what authority does he have to say things like that?

Messenger: (*as if remembering*) Oh yes, sir, people have been asking him that. You know what he said? He said "And what authority did John have?" And they didn't know what to say!

John: (*sighing and turning away*) I wish I could be there. I'm used to intellectual arguments, and I know my theology. But he's led such a sheltered life. Does he realise just how much sin there is in the world? And how powerful it is? He shouldn't be going to parties! He makes it sound like one big celebration - a wedding or something! But surely he knows that the true servant of God is "acquainted with grief"? (*He sighs again, then turns back to Messenger*) Thank you for telling me all that, anyway. If you hear any more, you'll let me know, won't you?

Messenger: Yes, of course, sir. Oh yes, there was one other thing.

John: (*eagerly*) Yes, tell me.

Messenger: (*hesitantly*) People have been saying to him, "Teach us to pray, just like John did".

John: Good, and he's carried on with that?

Messenger: Well yes, sir. But it's not quite the same as when you used to do it.

John: What do you mean?

Messenger: Well, it's difficult to explain, sir, but I think it's the way he begins. He always says "Abba", and somehow it's as if he's just having a conversation with his father - not like a proper prayer at all. And he's been encouraging other people to pray like that; to say "Abba" and to be - well - sort of intimate with God. (*Shakes his head*) Doesn't seem quite right somehow.....

John: I wonder. (*To himself*) He once told me he heard a voice calling him "Son". Is it the same voice that I have heard? It seems different somehow. Could it be that he's hearing something that I *haven't* heard?...

He pauses, shaking his head. Then he nods to the messenger, who withdraws. John now starts to sing to himself.....

16. WHEN SAMUEL WAS WITH ELI (CAN'T YOU SEE? - REPRISE)

When Samuel was with Eli, he was woken up at night.
He heard a voice, and didn't know who spoke.
"It wasn't me", said Eli, "and there's no one else in sight;
I know that this is how God speaks to folk."
So Samuel listens to the voice, attentive to God's word,
And in the morning Eli wants to know:
"Well, spit it out, lad! Tell us all exactly what you heard!"
And Samuel whispers: "It's time for you to go!"

John (still musing to himself): And Eli just took it! It's hard to stand aside and let one of your own disciples take over! (*Pauses*) My dear country cousin. He's so innocent! He seems to me just like a young lamb, frisking about in the field, not realising the danger he's in, of being led to the slaughter!

John sings:

17. LOOK AT HIM – REPRISE

Look at him!
Look at him!
He's a good, good man.
Look at him!
Look at him!
Be like him if you can .

Search the house of Israel:
There's no one better than
This simple, honest carpenter,
This good, good man.

Look at him!
Yes, really look at him!
God's own lamb.
Innocent,
Vulnerable
A really gentle man.
Here you see what's possible,
Here you see God's plan,
In this simple, honest carpenter,
God's own lamb.

John walks slowly off the stage. The scene quickly changes to:

Scene Three – Herod's Palace: The Royal Birthday Party

Servants come on stage to prepare for the party (laying the table, etc.) while singing:

18. HAVE YOU HEARD?

(1) Have you heard about this fellow called John?
Till he came we felt our hope had all gone.
Never thought that anyone
Would challenge what the king had done
But here's a man who has begun
To ask what's going on.
Here is someone critical
With reasons analytical
Prepared to be political
And take the devils on!

What a man he is, this fellow called John!
Showing up the sham we've allowed to go on!
Never thought that anyone
Would challenge what the king had done
But here's a man who has begun
To ask what's going on.
Here is someone critical
With reasons analytical
Prepared to be political
And take the devils on!

Do we dare
Blow fresh air
In dark comers where no light has shone?
On the brink
Stop and think.
What on earth are we embarking on?

Have you heard about this fellow called John ?
Till he came we felt our hope had all gone.
Never thought that anyone
Would challenge what the king had done
But here's a man who has begun

To ask what's going on.
Here is someone critical
With reasons analytical
Prepared to be political
And take the devils on!

- (2) Who's he think he is, this fellow called John?
Doesn't know which side his bread's buttered on!
There's a cosy set-up here.
No sense in getting het-up here,
We never get upset up here
About what's right or wrong.
Interfering does no good;
You tend to be misunderstood.
We would support him if we could,
But doesn't he go on!

Keep your head well down and then you'll get on;
Why then stick your neck right out, like a swan?
There's a cosy set-up here.
No sense in getting het-up here,
We never get upset up here
About what's right or wrong.
Interfering does no good;
You tend to be misunderstood:
We would support him if we could,
But doesn't he go on!

Rock the boat?
Cut your throat!
That's our warning to the likes of John!
Be like us,
Make no fuss,
Best to keep in step and soldier on.

Who's he think he is, this fellow called John?
Doesn't know which side his bread's buttered on!
There's a cosy set-up here,
No sense in getting het-up here,
We never get upset up here
About what's right or wrong.
Interfering does no good;
You tend to be misunderstood.
We would support him if we could,
But doesn't he go on!

Herodias, accompanied by Salome, comes in to check on the preparations.....

Salome: (excited) I can't wait for the party to begin. Do you think everyone will like my dancing?

Herodias: Yes, I'm sure they will, dear.

Salome: Just so long as that John person doesn't spoil it all. He's always finding fault with everybody.

Herodias: Oh he won't be here, dear. This party is for *important* people! *(To servants)* Make sure that John is served supper in his room, will you please?

Servant: Actually, Ma'am, I asked His Majesty about that. I said were we to lay a place for John, and he said "Yes of course".

Herodias: What?

Salome: Oh no!

Servant: His Majesty said that John would be quite an attraction for his visitors. He thought they would find him entertaining.

Salome: (sneering) That's good! He's hardly a bundle of laughs!

Herodias: This is ridiculous. The man's being detained here at His Majesty's pleasure. He's not a guest!

Herod enters. Herodias turns to him: You're not serious about this, are you?

Herod: About what, dear?

Herodias: Letting that dangerous man come to the party!

Herod: Who? John?

Herodias: Yes, of course I mean John. He's a prisoner here, isn't he?

Herod: Well, not exactly, dear. Let's just say that I invited him here to keep him 'out of circulation'. But he's a fascinating character, with some unusual ideas. It will be interesting to see whether he's a match for some of our guests. It should be an entertaining evening!

Servant: So are we to lay a place at table for him, Your Majesty?

Herodias: No!

Herod: Yes!

Salome: I agree with Mummy. I don't want him here.

Herod: You keep out of this, my girl. *(To Herodias)* I'm sorry, dear, but for once I'm going to insist. After all, it is *my* birthday party, so I should be able to invite whoever I want!

Herodias: (fuming) Huh! Your mind's made up, is it? Well, don't blame me afterwards, that's all! Come along, Salome. There's no point in arguing with your father when he's in one of his obstinate moods.

Salome: (interjects) He's *not* my father! *(under her breath)* Thank God!

Herodias: (continues to Herod, not listening to Salome) But mark my words, it'll all end in tears. That man means trouble. Big trouble...

Exeunt Herodias and Salome.

The servants sing their song again, with different words this time:

19. HAVE YOU HEARD? - REPRISE

(3) Must admit he's brave, this fellow called John:

Fearless in confronting all that is wrong.

Comes in here, a royal guest -

Tho' really under house arrest -

And says to Herod "I suggest .

The queen should be moved on"!

He has gone right to the top;

Seems unaware of where to stop.

A bull inside a china-shop,

This crazy fellow John!

What are we to do with a fellow so strong?

Set the cat among the pigeons, has John!

Comes in here, a royal guest -

Tho' really under house arrest -

And says to Herod "I suggest

The queen should be moved on"!

He has gone right to the top;

Seems unaware of where to stop.

A bull inside a china-shop,

This crazy fellow John!

Half sing: Here's a Jew
Who speaks true
Gives you principles to build life on!

The rest sing: Here's a man,
If he can,
Means to criticise the court head-on!

All sing: Must admit he's brave, this fellow called John:
Fearless in confronting all that is wrong.
Comes in here, a royal guest -
Tho' really under house arrest -
And says to Herod "I suggest
The queen should be moved on"!
He has gone right to the top;
Seems unaware of where to stop.
A bull inside a china-shop,
This crazy fellow John!

At the end of the song, the party begins. Guests come in and are shown to their seats. Servants stand behind each chair, ready to serve food. (Music continues, to cover this)

Herod: (to assembled guests) Now I've someone here I want you to meet. *(flicks fingers to servants, who go out and escort John in)* His name is John. He's the one they call John the Baptist.

Guests: Oh yes, I've heard of him.

Not the bloke who's been preaching out in the desert?

Let's see what he's got to say for himself.

Isn't this the chap who calls himself a prophet?

This is going to be good.

A new religious movement, eh?

John: No, sir. With respect I make no such claim. I am simply a voice, articulating what needs to be said.

First Guest: And what needs to be said?

John: The truth, sir, the truth. I have no new teaching, nothing to say that is not written in our scriptures. I simply try to draw people back to the old traditions, the old beliefs, the Law of God revealed to Moses, the teaching of the prophets.

Second Guest: Why all the fuss, then? Why can't you preach in the synagogues alongside all our other teachers who have made a study of the Law? Why go off into the desert and start a new movement?

John: As I say, sir, there's no new teaching. But there is a new urgency! I believe that the judgement of God - of which the scriptures speak - is very near. We've sinned, all of us, and we need to repent. To make a fresh start before it's too late. *(now dropping his 'preaching' style and speaking to them frankly)* I didn't set out to start a movement. I went out into the desert to be alone, to pray to God, and to put myself right with God. But people came to me and asked what they should do.

First Guest: And so you started giving them advice?

John: Advice? It's too late for that. The days of giving people helpful advice have passed. Now what is needed *(he's 'preaching' at them again)* is a direct challenge to people, a solemn warning about the judgement of God, which is so close. God keeps his promises, but we haven't kept ours! So I try to lead people back to what they *know* is good and true. I call on people to make a commitment and then to stick to it. To turn their lives around while they still have time. To repent, and to be baptised.

First Guest: Nothing wrong with a bit of repentance, eh? *(laughs)* But why baptism?

Second Guest: Yes, who needs *more* washings? Aren't there enough ritual purifications already?

John: What I mean by baptism is quite different from the ritual cleansing that most of us are used to. It involves stripping yourself naked, and plunging right in. Letting the waters close over your head. And then - emerging from the water ready to start all over again, to turn over a new leaf, begin a new life.

First Guest: Sounds more like what we do if someone who isn't a child of Abraham wants to be admitted to the Jewish faith! It's like you're treating our own Jewish people as if they were *Gentiles!* Don't you believe we're God's chosen people, then?

Second Guest: I thought you said you were sticking by the scriptures? Well, the Bible makes that *quite* clear!

John: You can't just rely on being descendants of Abraham! That isn't enough to save you. We've *all* gone astray. And we *all* stand under the judgement of God. So yes, I *do* believe that the people of Israel need to make a new start. I urge you, now to repent of your sins, and by baptism to pledge yourselves to a new beginning.

First Guest: (*smirking*) And what happens if we don't?

John: Don't joke about it, my friend. It is far too serious for that. My baptism is simply a baptism of water. But another baptism will soon be here - a baptism of fire! I'm just a voice, trying to remind you of what you *know*, really. You can't go on like this. Sooner or later. your world will collapse. And I say it will be soon, very soon.

There is an awkward silence.

Herodias: (*clears her throat and says*) Well, that was very interesting, thank you very much. And now let's get on with the party. There's plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and we've also got a surprise entertainment for you.....

Herod: (*breaking in*) Not so fast, my love. John's already given us some interesting things to think about. Let's give him a little longer to explain his ideas.....

John sings:

20. CAN'T YOU SEE? - REPRISE

- (1) Can't you see?
I haven't any choice!
It isn't me -
I'm just prompted by a voice!
I'll try to explain
'Cos to me it's very plain
And I know I'm not insane!
No, no! (No, no! Oh no!) (x 2)

Anyone who hears this voice must shout,
Criticising all that's wrong.
Offering a chance of life without
Dragging all that guilt along.

Can't you see?..... etc.

- [4] When Hezekiah was Judah's king and ruled the people there,
A young man named Isaiah received his call.
At worship in the temple he was suddenly aware
How God upon his throne rules over all.
'Oh woe is me!' Isaiah cried, 'My lips are so unclean!'
'I'm putting all that right' said God, 'You'll see!'
And then the Lord asked 'Who will go and speak of what you've seen?'
Isaiah answered, 'Here am I, send me'.

- (2) Don't you know
I'm saying nothing new?
Long time ago
Lots of others said it too.
I tell you straight

You are leaving it too late,
And the judgement will not wait,
No, no! (No, no! Oh no!) (x 2)

Come to me and wash your sins away,
Join me in the life I've found.
Time is very short, so start today,
Let your lives be turned around.

Don't you know..... etc.

- [5] Now Jeremiah's father was a priest (a bit like me!);
The call came to him when he still was young.
And Jeremiah responded, 'I'm not old enough to be
A prophet: I lack skilfulness of tongue'.
The Lord stretched out his hand and touched his mouth and said to him,
'I'm putting words into your mouth to say'.
And next we hear how Jeremiah is risking life and limb
By saying that Mount Zion's had its day!

- (3) Are you sure
You've done all that you should?
And kept the Law
And in ev'ry way been good?
Now hear my song
For you haven't very long
To repent of all that's wrong,
No, no! (No, no! No, no!) (x 2)

Suddenly we find new life begin
Once we've got our sins to go.
Wonderful new worlds come breaking in,
(*slower*) Threatening the status quo.....

Are you sure.....etc.

- [6] Another prophet found a way to give the people hope
When exiled in a strange and distant land:
'We must fill in all the valleys, we must level every slope
So God will come and rescue us as planned' .
A voice is crying 'Clear the road for God to come at last,
And in the wilderness prepare his way'.
That voice is crying loudly still, just as in ages past.
Its message is more urgent still today.

- (4) Won't you hear
What I have got to say?
Have you no fear?
Is your God so far away?
Beware, my friends,
Think of when the counting ends
And you haven't made amends,
No, no! (No, no! No, no!) (x 2)

You are all supposed to know the Law
And the Prophets God has sent.
Now that heaven's kingdom's at the door,
Don't you see? You must repent!

Won't you hear..... etc.

(slower) The message of my song
Is you haven't very long
To repent of all that's wrong,
Oh no!

The song is followed by polite applause.

John: (coming to front of stage, talking to himself) This is terrible. They're not taking me seriously at all.
They're treating me as if I was part of the entertainment!

Salome: (overhearing) There's nothing wrong with entertaining people. I'm on next. Dancing. *(She does one or two practice steps, showing off, looking for approval).*

John: I know. I've seen you practising.

Salome: I have a gift for it, you know. So I've been told. My dancing teacher says I have "a natural grace".
What do you think? *(Shows off one or two steps again, quite clumsily).*

John: (trying to be diplomatic) Look, it's no good asking my opinion. I don't approve of dancing. It seems such a waste of time, when there are so many more important things to be done.

Salome: (offended) No, you've got to tell me what you think. I'm a princess and you have to do what I say.
(Pauses. and adds quite soberly) I know people flatter me because of who I am. But you're supposed to be honest, aren't you? They say you always speak the truth. Well, tell me then: am I any good?

John: (shaking his head) No. People shouldn't flatter you by telling you lies. You may be good at other things, but not dancing.

Salome: (furious, stamps foot) How dare you talk to me like that? Everybody knows I'm the best dancer here.
That's why I've been asked to do the solo tonight. *(Scornfully)* You know nothing about it. *(Bursts into tears, and goes across to Herodias)* Mummy, he says I'm no good. He doesn't know anything about it, does he? *(Suddenly turns back to John)* I'll get you for this, you see if I don't!

Herodias comforts Salome. Herod stands and addresses everybody.

Herod: Now, my friends, it's time for a surprise entertainment. I'm not quite sure what it is, but I know some of the palace staff have been practising something special for my birthday.....

The servants come forward to perform. After a little while, Salome joins in.

21. HELLO! HELLO! - REPRISE

(1) Hello! Hello!
We're putting on a show
We hope you will enjoy.
We must aim to entertain
Each honoured guest;
You'll be impressed
'Cos we're the best!

A show, a show,
To make the party go.
It's no use acting coy.
A splash!
A bash -
With loads of panache
For birthday boy!

This is his way
To say
You're all welcome here;
He counts you all his friends.
And at this feast
At least

There's nothing to fear,
For nothing here offends!

A show, a show,
To make the party go.
It's no use acting coy.
A splash!
A bash -
With loads of panache -
For birthday boy!

- (2) Your host can boast
He really has the most
Amazing in-house raves!
With these kings you'll do such things
You wouldn't dare -
Let down your hair
And devil-may-care!

Who knows what goes
In private party shows?
Who minds who misbehaves?
Don't get
Upset;
Drink up and forget!
Who cares who pays?

We say the law
Is for
Encouraging love,
Not just a line to toe.
Besides what need
To heed
The good Lord above
When you've a good lord below?

Who knows what goes
In private party shows?
Who minds who misbehaves?
Don't get
Upset;
Drink up and forget!
Who cares who pays?

The guests applaud, then Salome comes centre-stage.

Salome: Now it's my turn. *(Turning to guests)* You've got to tell me whether I'm any good or not, right?

Salome sings:

22. STAR QUALITY

Beginning rather uncertainly, she is nonetheless determined to do well. She puts everything she's got into her performance, occasionally glaring defiantly at John. After a bit, John slips away.

- (1) D'you think I'll ever make it as a dancer?
D'you think it's true I have "a natural grace"?
When I've finished this I want to hear your answer;
I'd like you all to tell me to my face.

It's possible I haven't any talent!
As for aptitude, perhaps I've none at all!

But which of you dare tell me that I haven't
Got the most important quality of all?

Have I got Star Quality?
Star Quality!
With Star Quality they can't keep you down!
If you've got Star Quality,
Star Quality;
With Star Quality you're the best show in town!

- (2) I do ballroom, tap and ballet with my teacher;
I'm developing a wider repertoire.
Elocution and performance also feature;
I'm determined that I'll one day be a star!

Last year I did my bronze and then my silver,
And this year I am going in for gold.
My teacher says the strain has nearly killed 'er,
But I defy you to say my perform - ance - leaves - you - cold!

'Cos I've got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
With Star Quality you're sure to succeed!
Yes, I've got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
And Star Quality's all you need!

(ad lib.) Perhaps you'd like to see me pirouette? *(demonstrates)*
Or pose to show my sylphlike silhouette? *(demonstrates)*
My attempts at arabesque *(demonstrates)*
Can border on burlesque,
But I *can* do a nifty minuet..... *(demonstrates)*
It is rather difficult to gauge
What's a good performance on the stage.
The audience will judge it, as they should,
And if they enjoy it they will say it's very good,

Servants join in: 'Cos it's got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
With Star Quality you're sure to succeed!
If you've got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
Then Star Quality's all you need.

Salome (ad lib.): At first I thought the step called 'pas de brisé' *(demonstrates)*
Was going to be relatively easy!
You may choose to disregard
My unusual 'glissade'! *(demonstrates)*
But watch my steps to this well-known tune by Bizet..... *(demonstrates)*
No, you won't see somersaults done here!
You may well see little faults appear!
Technique is only part of it, you know;
What matters is the entertainment value of the show!

Servants join in: 'Cos it's got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
With Star Quality you're sure to succeed!
If you've got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
Then Star Quality's all you need.

Salome (ad lib.): My dancing teacher swore by all that's holy.
She'd help me learn to do the 'paso doble' (*demonstrates*)
I'm not a girl who quits
When asked to do the splits; (*demonstrates*)
Tho' I've been told I should do it rather slowly.

Who cares exactly where I put my feet?
Or if I sometimes don't quite keep the beat?
The main thing is to do it heart-and soul!
'Cos people will be judging your performance as a whole:

Servants join in: Has she got Star Quality?
Star Quality?
With Star Quality you're sure to succeed!
If you've got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
Then Star Quality's all you need.

Herod is by now a little drunk and has been waving his hands in time with the music, evidently enjoying himself. Salome now goes over to Herod and curtsseys formally.

Salome: Your Majesty!

Herod beams at her, delightedly, entering into the game: Your Royal Highness!

He gets up and the two of them waltz around together. The servants and guests at first hum the tune and then start singing:

Dance with Daddy - lovely to see!
Simple fun, just as it should be.
Dad and daughter in harmony;
God bless this happy family!

All join in singing: Yes, she's got Star Quality!
Star Quality!
With Star Quality you're bound to go far!
Yes, she's got Star Quality!
Star Quality!
And Star Quality's what makes you a star!

Salome: Yes, it would be nice if I could dance like Fonteyn,
Someone universally admired!
But never mind technique so long as you entertain!
Give it all you've got; act like you've been inspired,

All: And you'll have Star Quality!
Star Quality!
With Star Quality you're bound to go far!
Yes, she's got Star Quality,
Star Quality!
And Star Quality's what makes you a star!

The rhythm of the music now changes so that Salome can briefly demonstrate a couple of dances (tango and rumba?); and then the singing starts again:

All join in singing: Yes. She's got Star Quality.
Star Quality!
With Star Quality you're bound to go far!
Yes. She's got Star Quality!
Star Quality!
And Star Quality's what makes you a star!

Salome: Yes, it would be nice if I could dance like Fonteyn.
Someone universally admired!

But never mind technique so long as you entertain!
Give it all you've got; act like you've been inspired,

All: And you'll have Star Quality!
 Star Quality!
 With Star Quality you're bound to go far!
 Yes, she's got Star Quality,
 Star Quality!
 And Star Quality's what makes you a star!

Salome's performance ends, to much applause and she returns to her place at table.

Herod: (coming forward, rather unsteadily, to speak very sentimentally to Salome)
My dear, you are absolutely amazing! I'm so proud of you.

Guests: First-rate, that!

What an accomplished young lady!

She's got what it takes alright!

Runs in the family, doesn't it?

She'll go far, this girl!

Your Majesty, I really must compliment you on your most talented daughter.....

Salome, for once, does not insist on being 'step-daughter', but basks in the general adulation, beaming triumphantly.

Herod: And now, my dear, you must let me give you something as a reward. You can have anything you like.
Just say the word, and I'll get the cook to bring it in on a plate for you.

Salome: (seeing her chance) Did you say I could have anything I wanted?

Herod: Yes, dear. *(Indulgently)* After that remarkable performance, how could I refuse you anything?

Salome: Absolutely anything? Anything at all? *(Glances at Herodias)* Do you promise?

Herod: (cheerfully) Cross my heart and hope to die!

Salome goes across to Herodias and whispers to her for a moment. Everyone else except Herod freezes.

Herod: (looking at her fondly) Well, what is it to be?

Salome: I want the head of John the Baptist!

Herod: (roaring with laughter) Oh my goodness, you are a cheeky little monkey! Oh yes, that's a good one..... *Then he realises that he can't laugh it off. Everyone is looking at him, waiting to see what he will do.*

Salome : You promised!

Herodias: (grimly) She's right, dear. You've got to give it to her.

First Guest: After all it was John himself who said we had to keep our promises.

Second Guest: Yes, that's right. Earlier this evening.

Herod: (now quite sober, taking charge of the situation) Yes, of course. That's right; *(turns to two servants)* see to it, will you?

The two servants go out.

Herod now comes to the front of the stage and sings again:

23. DO YOU THINK IT IS EASY? - REPRISE

Just once through the chorus, slowly, and with new words.

Do you think it is easy to make judgements?
To have the last word on ev'rything?
When it's got to be resolved,

And you know the man involved,
It's an awful job being king..... (2 bars interlude)

Do you think it is easier with hindsight
To judge the rights and wrongs of ev'rything?
But when you don't know what to do,
And they all turn to look at you.....
It's an awful job being king.....

The song breaks off and Herod returns to the table. A covered plate is solemnly brought in and presented to Herod, in silence. He lifts the cover off briefly, and all gasp in horror. He takes the covered plate across to Salome and presents her with it.

Salome: (reluctantly taking the plate) I feel sick.

Salome quickly gives the plate to Herodias and hurries out, followed more slowly by Herod and his guests.

Herodias: (holding the plate for a moment, and sighing with relief) He had to go, didn't he? Look, nobody likes this sort of thing. But there was no alternative, was there? (she passes the plate to a servant who takes it out) At least now I shall be able to sleep a bit more soundly at night; one more danger averted, one less trouble-maker. The man just had to go!

Herodias sings:

24. HE HAD TO GO (HE'S GOTTA GO - REPRISE)

He had to go -
The man just had to go -
Didn't he?
He had to go,
This awkward so-and-so,
Didn't he?
It serves him right,
What's happened here tonight!
To show
That I was in the right
He had to go!

Herodias leaves, as the servants echo her song with very different words:

We could have said
We didn't want his head,
Couldn't we?
The one who led
Where angels fear to tread,
Couldn't we?
Couldn't we?
Goodbye to dreams,
This is the end, it seems,
For John
And all his message means
Is now quite (*spoken*) DEAD!

Total blackout. The scene changes to:

Scene Four - Somewhere in Galilee

Two of John's disciples enter.

Second Disciple: I still can't make any sense out of it. John kept saying we had to be ready; that there wasn't much time left. It seemed as if we were on the brink of something wonderful happening. And now this! I wasn't prepared for anything like this!

First Disciple: I just feel so angry! Angry with myself for being so stupid. I believed what John said, that things were going to change; that God's kingdom was just round the corner. He seemed so wise, so confident. I suppose I thought he could do anything. Work miracles. Now – it's back to earth with a bump.

Second Disciple: John never said it would be easy. But we can go on being true to what he said, can't we?

First Disciple: No, we've got to wake up from that dream now. Speak out and get snuffed out; that seems to be how the real world works. It looks like nothing's changed after all. And (*bitterly disappointed*) nothing's going to change.

Second Disciple: Nothing's changed 'out there'. But something's changed 'in here'. I know *I'll* never be the same again.

Jesus enters, overhearing the end of this conversation. They see him and pause.

Second Disciple: (awkwardly) We were just talking over - er – what's happened. He was your cousin, wasn't he?..... You must be feeling wretched - and the rest of the family..... I'm so sorry...

First Disciple: (mumbles, embarrassed) Me too.

Second Disciple: (stumbling on) We hadn't expected anything as awful as this. We were thinking, can we really go on with the movement now? It all seems a bit pointless really.....

First Disciple: Hopeless.

Jesus: (looking at each of them sharply) Listen. What was it that made you want to go out into the desert to listen to John preaching? It wasn't because you wanted to look at the scenery, was it? It wasn't because you wanted to see him all dressed up in fancy clothes, was it? What drew you to him? I'll tell you. It was his preaching! It was what he said! John spoke *truly* - and you *knew* he spoke truly. *That's* why you went to hear him speak.

First Disciple : You mean he was a prophet?

Jesus: Of course he was! And God's prophets *always* suffer for their faith.

First Disciple: But John always said that God would make a big bonfire of all that's wrong!

Jesus: Yes, I know. But God doesn't actually deal with sin like that. Patient suffering and pain bravely borne - that's God's way; not to *destroy* all that's wrong, but to redeem it!

First Disciple: And now his voice is silenced!

Jesus: You can't silence the voice of God by killing those who speak for him! It goes on speaking - and singing - wherever there are people to give voice to it. Can't you hear it now? (*He pauses, then sings.....* .)

25. DON'T YOU SEE? (CAN'T YOU SEE? - REPRISE)

Don't you see?
He hadn't any choice!
It had to be!
He really was God's voice!
At last it's plain:
A true prophet has been slain,
And it hasn't been in vain!
Oh no!

Second Disciple: (shaking his head) A prophet!

Jesus: Yes, and more!

Second Disciple: (impressed) Like Elijah, you mean?

Jesus: Not just *like* Elijah! He *was* Elijah - for us, for our time. He was God's herald, announcing God's arrival!

First Disciple: (*doubtfully*) He certainly was a great man. We recognised that.

Jesus: A great man? I tell you, he was as great a man as has ever been born!

Second Disciple: (*sincerely*) You're right there!

Jesus: But I'll tell you something else. The scene is now set. What John announced is now going to start. A new regime is beginning, under God. A new world. And in this new world *everyone* will be important! Even John's greatness will be eclipsed by what comes next.

First Disciple: What do you mean?

Second Disciple: What *is* going to happen next?

Jesus: Don't you see? We shall always remember John, standing in the River Jordan, dipping us in, one by one. That's the picture we shall have of him - up to his waist in water. He was in his element there, wasn't he? Water! But that baptising with water was a *preparation*. John wanted to wash out all that's bad, to get rid of all the rubbish that gets in the way. But now? Now we've got to move on! What comes next is inside us. Not so much a washing, more like a drinking! Now it's not a baptism of *water* we need, more like a new *spirit*, *inside* us. *God's* spirit, available to us all! It'll be like..... (*he pauses as he thinks of a suitable metaphor*)..... like changing all that water into wine.....

He pauses and they stare at him. He is smiling.

Second Disciple: (*awed*) Can this really be true?

First Disciple: (*cautiously*) How do you know all this? Isn't it just another dream?

Jesus: Look, my friends. The promises of God are not set aside *that* easily! (*emphatically, quoting*) "God will raise up, a powerful saviour who will set his people free!"

Jesus goes off.

Second Disciple: Those words sound familiar..... I know, it's from that song that John's old father used to sing. Do you remember?

First Disciple: Yes, I heard Zacharias singing it many times. How did it go? "Blessed be God, the God of Israel....."

Second Disciple: "With his people to set them free....."

Both together: "Raising up a powerful saviour..."

Second Disciple: "Born from David's family tree!"

He begins to sing:

26. BLESSED BE GOD - REPRISE

Verse 1 only: Blessed be God, the God of Israel,
With his people to set them free,
Raising, up a powerful saviour
Born from David's fam'ly tree.

Second Disciple starts, First Disciple joins in.....

Elizabeth enters. She has been crying, but smiles as she recognises the song. The two disciples embrace her in turn.

Second Disciple: (*embarrassed*) We were just singing the song that Zacharias used to sing.

Elizabeth: (*smiling*) Yes, I heard you. Perhaps it's all going to come true after all?

They both look at her.

When I first heard the news I had this awful sense of - futility. (*Second disciple nods in agreement*). It seemed such a waste. Meaningless. Not leading anywhere. But now... Somehow I feel I am at last beginning to understand.

First Disciple: What do you mean?

Elizabeth: Oh, he told me often enough! He kept saying he was a voice, preparing the way, but I couldn't quite see what he thought he was *preparing for*. Perhaps he didn't quite know himself. But I think I know now - and I'm so proud of him! And his father would have been too!

First Disciple: But his death was such a shame.....

Elizabeth: (speaking carefully, controlled) The shame is Herod's. John had nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing at all. And who knows what will happen next?

Second Disciple: What do you think *is* going to happen?

Elizabeth: I don't know exactly. But I keep thinking of the look on Jesus' face, as if this is the moment he's been waiting for.

Second Disciple: Yes, we felt the same. He made us feel we're just at the beginning of something, not the end at all.

Elizabeth: John and Jesus turned out to be so different – you'd hardly know they were cousins! Even when they were babies, we knew they were special, each in his own way. Mary and I used to talk about it (*remembering*) - even before they were born, in fact! When Mary came and told me she was pregnant, she was a bit upset at first, not being married and everything. And then my baby gave a great kick! And I said, he's trying to tell me something about your baby! That was the first thing John did! We laughed about it. And then we both started singing to each other about how our babies were going to change the world! (*pauses*) I wonder. Now that John's paved the way for him, he really looks as if he might.....

First Disciple: That's what Zacharias' song says, isn't it? "This little child will one day witness, and will help to prepare the way..."

Second Disciple: (carrying on) "...Showing people how to escape from all that's leading us astray."

Elizabeth: Yes, that song says it all!

They sing again:

27. BLESSED BE GOD - REPRISE

Second Disciple: (turning to audience) Perhaps you remember it too?.....

All gradually join in: just verse 1 again.

The rest of the cast return and the song turns into a round. Finally, some of the cast sing the hymn-tune 'Easter Song' on top of the round, to these words:

Now let us all in gladness sing
With music round us echoing.
Alleluya (x2)
Sing out the story of Saint John;
Show how his spirit still lives on.
Alleluya (x5)

If required, the whole cast can sing a further chorus as follows:

28. OUR SHOW, YOU KNOW (HELLO! HELLO! - REPRISE)

Our show, you know,
Is over now and so
We send you on your way.
We have aimed to entertain
You for a night
And shed some light
On wrong and right!

Our show's hero
Lived many years ago
But still we want to say

It's true
For you
For all of us too,
He lives today!

So now although
We'll go
Our separate ways
And maybe lose the thread,

Yet still a song
Goes on:
A word or a phrase
Can echo in your head.

Our show's hero
Lived many years ago
But still we want to say
It's true
For you,
For all of us too,
He lives today!

END OF ACT TWO

An alternative (and much shorter) ending to the show could go like this.....

Scene Four

Elizabeth comes on stage (front of curtain?)

Elizabeth: (to herself) They say you never really get over it - and I don't suppose I ever will. It seemed like the end of everything. But it wasn't the end. In fact, it turned out to be just the beginning.

(Then continuing with her final speech at top of page 68..... Some disciples gradually come back on stage and gather round her, listening).

John and Jesus turned out to be so different - you'd hardly know they were cousins! Even when they were babies, we knew they were special, each in his own way. Mary and I used to talk about it *(remembering)* - even before they were born, in fact! When Mary came and told me she was pregnant, she was a bit upset at first, not being married and everything. And then my baby gave a great kick! And I said, he's trying to tell me something about your baby! That was the first thing John did! We laughed about it. And then we both started singing to each other about how our babies were going to change the world! *(pauses)*.....I wonder. Now that John's paved the way for him, he really looks as if he might.....

First Disciple: That's what Zacharias' song says, isn't it? "This little child will one day witness..."

Elizabeth: "And will help to prepare the way....."

Second Disciple: "..... Showing people how to escape from all that's leading us astray."

Then straight into

27. BLESSED BE GOD - REPRISE

sung (as a round) by all. Others come back on stage and join in.