

WEAVING MEMORY

by Lis Valle

CAST

PREACHER: CLERGY WOMAN (CLERGY ROBE)
ELIZABETH: OLD WOMAN, ABOUT SIX MONTHS PREGNANT,
PALESTINIAN, 1ST CENTURY (DARK BLUE HEAD COVERING
ATTACHED TO A GRAY LONG HAIR WIG)
MARY: TEENAGER, PALESTINIAN, 1ST CENTURY (LIGHT BLUE
HEAD COVERING)
HANNAH: OLD WOMAN, HEBREW, 900 BCE APROX. (PINK HEAD
COVERING ATTACHED TO A GRAY LONG HAIR WIG)
MARÍA: WOMAN IN HER LATE 20'S, DOMESTIC WORKER, ABOUT
SIX MONTHS PREGNANT, MEXICAN, 21ST CENTURY (WHITE
RUFFLE HALF APRON)
MRS. SMITH: RICH LADY, EUROAMERICAN, MARÍA'S BOSS (PURPLE
FANCY HAT WITH TULLE FABRIC COMING DOWN OVER HER
FACE)
GABRIEL: THE ANGEL SENT TO MARY (ANGEL HALO AND WHITE
FABRIC LONG ENOUGH TO GO FROM HAND TO HAND WITH
THE ARMS EXTENDED TO SIMULATE WINGS)
ISABEL: IN HER 40'S, MEXICAN, 21ST CENTURY (APRON MADE
WITH FLOWER PATTERNED FABRIC AND BRIGHT COLORS)

The script is conceived for three actresses. The first actress will represent the PREACHER, HANNAH, MRS. SMITH, and GABRIEL.

The second actress will represent ELIZABETH and MARÍA. The third actress will represent MARY/VIRGEN DE LA GUADALUPE and ISABEL.

All actresses will wear a clergy robe of the same color. A headpiece or an accent garment, as specified by their names, will distinguish each character.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

PREACHER

(PREACHER is standing behind the pulpit as any other Sunday worship service. She is wearing a clergy robe.)

PREACHER (CONT.)

Once upon a time there was a woman who couldn't have children. This was a tragedy for a woman in her society and so she prayed to God and God gave her a son. Wait a minute! Whose story is this? You know how many stories like this are in the Bible? Too many. Let me start over. Once upon a time there was an old woman who couldn't have children. Now, that narrows it down. There are two who are most famous, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament: ...

(As he mentions Hannah she places a strip of cloth hanging from the pulpit. She does the same when she mentions Elizabeth.)

... Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

(PREACHER looks at the Bible on the pulpit. Her face shows doubt or trying to understand, like she is pondering something. Then, while making a movement interweaving her hands, she says:)

Hmm... I wonder...

(PREACHER looks at the congregation.)

Let's see how much of these stories you remember. Let's see if this is how you remember them. I'll be Hannah.

(Where she is standing, PREACHER puts on the headpiece for HANNAH. Then she moves to "the Temple," upstage.)

HANNAH

(Kneeling prays)

*O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the low estate of your servant and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.*¹⁰⁴

(Continues to pray silently moving her lips)

¹⁰⁴ 1 Samuel 1:11, NRSV.

MARY

(Suddenly stands up from her seat among the audience.)

*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*¹⁰⁵

(She moves quickly to the aisle of the sanctuary, goes through the other side of the audience, and around the sides of the sanctuary. She walks really fast. When she is approaching the chancel she calls out:)

Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH

(ELIZABETH enters the chancel. MARY and ELIZABETH will be in Zechariah's house, center stage.)

Mary!

MARY

Oh, my God! Congratulations!

ELIZABETH

(Gasps and touches her belly)

Oooh!

(Looking at Mary and holding her by the shoulders)

*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold the moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby in my womb jumped with gladness. Fortunate is she who believed that the Lord's words to her would find fulfillment.*¹⁰⁶

(ELIZABETH and MARY stay still)

HANNAH

*O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the low estate of your servant.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Luke 1:38, NRSV.

¹⁰⁶ Luke 1:42b-45b. Translated by Raymond Brown. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 330.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Samuel 1:11, NRSV

(HANNAH rises; as she gets more excited while praying, she may dance.)

My heart is strengthened in the Lord; my horn is exalted in my God. I delight in your salvation.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich; reduces to lowliness and lifts up. Lifts the needy from the earth, and from the dung heap raises up the poor to seat them with the mighty, making them inherit a throne of glory.¹⁰⁸

(HANNAH stays still in the same position that ELIZABETH is, right behind her, but still visible, shadowing her - moving with her simultaneously imitating her actions.)

MARY AND HANNAH

(MARY praises, as she gets more excited, she may dance. HANNAH joins MARY in speech but remains still, like ELIZABETH.)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has found gladness in God my savior because [God] has regarded the low estate of [His]¹⁰⁹ servant.¹¹⁰

MARY

...for behold, henceforth all generations will call me fortunate - because [the One] who is mighty has done great things for me. And Holy is [His] name, and [His] mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear [Him].¹¹¹

MARY AND HANNAH

[God] has shown strength with [His] arm; has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted those of low degree. [God] has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich has sent away empty.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ 1 Samuel 2:1-2; 7-8 (Hannah's Hymn). Translated by Raymond Brown. All male pronouns for God has been omitted. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 358-359.

¹⁰⁹ Most pronouns for God have been omitted. Where a pronoun was necessary, the option of the translator was left intact but marked with brackets. The cast is welcome to change the pronouns to fit the theological commitments of the particular congregation.

¹¹⁰ Luke 1:46b-48a (Magnificat). Translated by Raymond Brown. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 358.

¹¹¹ Luke 1:48b-50b. Translated by Raymond Brown. Ibid.

¹¹² Luke 1:51-53. Translated by Raymond Brown. Ibid., 359.

MARY

*[God] has helped [His] servant Israel in remembrance of [His] mercy, as [He] spoke unto our Fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever.*¹¹³

MARY

(MARY takes the hands of ELIZABETH.)

Oh, Elizabeth! May I stay with you for a while?

ELIZABETH

(ELIZABETH turns around to go into the house; MARY walks with her; HANNA is still shadowing ELIZABETH, and leaves with them.)

Of course!

SCENE TWO

(At MARÍA'S workplace, the house of the Smith Family.)

PREACHER

(Enters.)

Centuries later, on the other side of the planet, another life story unfolds in the house of a rich family. Another thread.

(PREACHER places another thread of fabric hanging from the pulpit. Then she exits.)

(MARÍA enters the stage with a radio/CD player and walks to the opposite side of the stage with MARY as MARÍA'S shadow, slightly behind her.)

MARY

(As soon as they enter MARY says:)

*[God] ... has exalted those of low degree... has filled the hungry with good things...*¹¹⁴

MARÍA

(MARÍA sets the CD player it down at the opposite side of the stage. She plays the song "Magnificat," from the Album *Orar con María* by Hermana Glenda. MARÍA sings along

¹¹³ Luke 1:54-55. Translated by Raymond Brown. Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Luke 1:51-53. Translated by Raymond Brown. Ibid.

while she cleans the dining room table. The table of the Smith Family is also the communion table of the congregation.)

MARY

(Stops shadowing MARÍA and observes her.)

MARÍA

(MARÍA starts setting the table with a blanket (which will be used for weaving in Scene 5), and MARY helps her. They set the plates, cups, cutlery, and flowers. All the while MARÍA does not acknowledge the presence of MARY. As they set the table, MARY and MARÍA weave their paths as if drawing with their feet the threads that make the weaving. MARY provides the "vertical" threads moving up and down stage. MARÍA provides the "horizontal" threads by moving side to side. This requires that the props that will be set on the table need to be divided for them in different places, upstage for MARY and one of the sides for MARÍA. MARÍA brings grapes. When the song is at 1:38 - "*A los hambrientos los colma de bienes...*" - she eats a grape looking at the audience playfully.)

(Enters MRS. SMITH. MARY stands behind MARÍA, closer to upstage than MARÍA.)

MRS. SMITH

María.

MARÍA

(Suddenly realizing the presence of MRS. SMITH, responds while running to turn of the CD player. MARY stays still watching the scene.)

Mrs. Smith! I didn't see you! How are you?

MRS. SMITH

I'm fine. Is everything ready?

MARÍA

Yes, Mrs. Smith.

MRS. SMITH

Very well. Your services are no longer required.

(Gives an envelope to MARÍA.)

MARÍA

Thank you, Mrs. Smith. I'll see you Monday then.

(Takes the CD player and begins to leave.)

MRS. SMITH

No, María. It seems you didn't understand. Your services are no longer required.

MARÍA

What do you mean?

(MARY gets closer to MARÍA, behind her.)

MRS. SMITH

Exactly that. Mr. Smith and I have decided that is better for you to move on. We have already secured someone else to help us.

MARÍA

(Hearing the explanation MARÍA begins to collapse back. MARY "catches" her back and provides support with her hands. MARÍA is then able to stand straight.)

But why? Have I done something wrong? Is this for the music? Because I can't stop listening to it if that's the problem.

(MRS. SMITH shakes her head almost imperceptible.)

Is this for eating the grapes? I'm really sorry, Mrs. Smith!

MRS. SMITH

No, María. Please, don't make this more difficult. It's not like we have a contract or anything. We pay you week to week in cash, which works well for both of us. But it also means that we have no obligation to continue using your services.

MARÍA

Please, Mrs. Smith, give me another chance. I really need this job.

MRS. SMITH

The decision has been made. It's better for you to focus on what's ahead of you...

(Looks at her pregnant belly. MARY places her hand on MARÍAS's shoulder with compassion.)

... to move on. Please, leave.

(MARÍA leaves in silence. MARY embraces her walking by her side. MRS. SMITH remains in the same position looking down. After MARÍA and MARY are offstage, she takes her headpiece off and turns into the PREACHER.)

PREACHER

Perhaps our laws don't state that we have to stone young women when they are pregnant out of wedlock. But, are we stoning María with exclusion and social stigma? And where could she go for help?

Where could all the Mariás in the world find support? How are we condemning them?

And what about all the people that are underpaid, or that work in sub-human conditions and have no way of defending their rights because they don't exist in the system or because they are so desperate that they have to accept jobs that pay in cash and have no records and don't provide any guarantees? Where do they go for help and support?

(PREACHER exits.)

SCENE THREE

(MARÍA'S room, center stage.)

MARÍA

(Kneels before her home altar in a similar position to Hannah at the beginning of the play. MARÍA lights a candle and prays to the Virgin of Guadalupe. MARY enters and stands

behind the Virgin of Guadalupe, looking straight at MARÍA.)

Ay, Virgencita! Hear me out. Give me the strength to keep struggling. What am I gonna do now?

(MARÍA touches her belly.)

Virgen de la Guadalupe, help us!

(Continues to pray silently moving her lips, in the same way that HANNAH did in the first scene. MARÍA will seem to not be aware of the presence of MARY.)

MARY

(Talks with a sweet voice full of compassion like a mother soothing her baby.)

Ay, María! I was also very scared of being pregnant while betrothed. I thought I would be stoned or that Joseph and my family would abandon me or send me away. But the words of the angel gave me strength.

(GABRIEL enters and stands behind MARY/the Virgin of Guadalupe and says with her:)

MARY and GABRIEL

*Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ... The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*¹¹⁵

MARY

Every time I felt scared, every time fear about the uncertainty of the future overwhelmed me, I would remember the angel and repeat the words.

(This time GABRIEL moves around MARY, closer to MARÍA and looks directly at MARÍA.)

*Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ... The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Luke 1:30b, 35b. NRSV.

¹¹⁶ Luke 1:30b, 35b. NRSV.

MARY (Cont.)

*Remember the words of the Psalm: The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear [God], and he delivers them. ... Those who fear the Lord lack nothing.*¹¹⁷

(While MARY speaks these words, GABRIEL moves around MARÍA embodying the words of the psalm, marking a protective circle around MARÍA.)

MARÍA

(MARÍA gasps. Her face shows that she just remembered something. She looks for her Bible and opens it up to Luke 1.)

Here. She knows? She knows how I feel! She was pregnant and scared too. She got the power of the Holy Spirit. I can have that power too because *the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear [God], and [He] delivers them. ... Those who fear the Lord lack nothing.*¹¹⁸

MARY

María, when the angel told me, I didn't know what to do next. So, I decided to go and confirm the sign he gave me. I went to the house of my cousin Elizabeth. There I found people who were willing to be with me in the difficult journey of following God's call. And we praised together. We praised and we proclaimed all the things that God was doing in our lives.
Who do you have, María? Where can you go?

MARÍA

(Still looking at her Bible, MARÍA's face changes - she has an idea that gives her peace.)

MARÍA

My cousin Isabel.

(MARÍA sings a praise song based on Psalm 34 as she leaves her room. MARY and GABRIEL follow her off stage as if they were her bodyguards.)

¹¹⁷ Psalm 34:7, 9b.

¹¹⁸ Psalm 34:7, 9b.

MARY (Cont.)

Jamás me siento sola, sola, sola.
Jamás me siento sola
porque conmigo va
el ángel del Señor
que acampa alrededor
y todo el que le teme,
él lo defenderá.
I am never alone, alone, alone.
I am never alone.
The angel of the Lord
encamps around of those
who fear the Lord
and God delivers them.
In God we nothing lack.

SCENE FOUR

(ISABEL'S dinning room, down stage. The
communion table serves now as
ISABEL'S.)

MARÍA

(MARÍA continues to sing throughout her
journey to ISABEL's house. She moves quickly
to the aisle of the sanctuary, goes through
the other side of the audience, and around
the sides of the sanctuary, following the
same path that MARY did in the first scene.
She walks really fast. When she is
approaching the chancel she calls out:)

Isabel! Isabel!

ISABEL

(Enters the chancel)

María? Oh, my God! Congratulations!

MARÍA

¡Isabel! ¡Qué gusto verte!

(They hug each other.)

ISABEL

Sit down! Tell me, how have you been?

MARÍA

You know. In the struggle but moving forward. I'm sorry I have been out of touch. As you can see a lot has happened.

(Makes a reference to her pregnant belly.)

Isabel, I came to see you today because I was praying to the Virgen of Guadalupe and something told me to come and see you. The thing is that I lost my job today and I can't pay my rent now and I don't have a place to go.

ISABEL

(Looking at Mary and holding her by the shoulders)

María, you are so blessed! You have us. You can always come here. And your baby is a blessing too. Thank God for the gift of life!

MARY AND HANNAH

(MARÍA praises, as she gets more excited, she may dance. Her movements should mirror the movements MARY did while she was reciting the MAGNIFICAT.)

I praise the Lord! I am bursting with joy in God my Savior. God looked at me in my poverty and I'm the most fortunate woman on earth. *Holy is [God's] name, and [God's] mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear [Him].*¹¹⁹

ISABEL

Wow! You sound so much like the Magnificat!

MARÍA

It **IS** the Magnificat! I was reading it earlier today. I think that all these stories that are in scripture and in our memories are such a source of strength. As I read, it was like MARY was with me in the room, and the angel too. They were speaking to me.

ISABEL

Yes! That makes sense. What else do you remember?

¹¹⁹ Luke 1:48b-50b. Translated by Raymond Brown. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 358.

MARÍA AND MARY

*[God] has shown strength with [His] arm; has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted those of low degree. [God] has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich has sent away empty.*¹²⁰

ISABEL

Did you know that when Mary was saying those words she was also remembering the words from scripture?

MARY

No? I didn't know that! That's amazing!

ISABEL

Yes. Mostly she was alluding to Hannah's song, you know? Hannah was an old woman who couldn't have children and she prayed and asked God to give her one, and she vowed to dedicate him to the Lord. And God answered her prayers and so, when she went to the Temple to give her son, Samuel, to the service of the Lord under the care of the priest Eli, she sang a song. Mary was remembering that song when she said the Magnificat, and many other Psalms and passages of the Old Testament. The whole Magnificat is like a weaving work of art. Hey! That's an idea! We can weave a blanket for your baby joining all those passages from scripture.

MARY

Yes! I have some time now in my hands, but I do need to look for a job.

ISABEL

I understand. But you can stay here for as long as you need. We are here to support you. And we have many friends too. As a matter of fact, I feel like celebrating.

(ISABEL stands up.)

Let's throw a party right now to celebrate your baby and the presence of God in your life providing you what you need to survive and to keep struggling.

(ISABEL steps out of the entrance door and yells looking at the congregation.)

¹²⁰ Luke 1:51-53. Translated by Raymond Brown. Ibid., 359.

ISABEL (Cont.)

Hey, neighbors! Come! Come over! We have to celebrate!
María is having a baby and we want to give thanks together!

SCENE FIVE

NEIGHBORS

(Before the performance, the PREACHER asked a number of volunteers to be the first ones to respond to ISABEL's invitation. The number of volunteers will depend on the size of the congregation. All or some of the following scripture verses, all alluded in the Magnificat, may be assigned to the volunteers, even more than one verse per person. The verses are written on strips of cloth that the volunteers will weave into the pre-cut blanket prepared for this purpose. Each volunteer/NEIGHBOR should come to ISABEL's house, read his/her verse and add it to the weaving. They should remain around the table. Since the play will transition into the celebration of the Eucharist, these volunteers may be the people who usually serve communion in the PREACHER's tradition.)

1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 25:5; 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 113:5-6;
Deuteronomy 10:21; Psalm 111:9; Psalm 103:17; Psalm 89:11;
1 Samuel 2:4-7; Psalm 107:9; 1 Samuel 2:5; Job 22:9; Isaiah
41:8-9; Psalm 98:3; Micah 7:20; Psalm 35:9; Habakkuk 3:18;
Genesis 29:32; IV Ezra 9:45; Genesis 30:13; Zephaniah 3:17;
Psalms of Solomon 13:11; Sirach 10:14; Job 12:19; Ezekiel
21:31.

ISABEL

Just like Mary weaved these verses into the beautiful canticle that we know as the Magnificat, we can weave her words to ours and her story to ours as we pray for strength to keep struggling each day.

(PREACHER gets closer to the table bringing the three strips of fabric she had hanging from the pulpit. She stands between ISABEL and MARÍA. She gives each one a strip of fabric and weaves her arms with theirs.)

MARÍA

Just like MARY was called to be the mother of Jesus and to utter the prophetic words of the Magnificat, we are all called to do something as part of the body of Christ.

ISABEL

Mary was called to do something extraordinary and, what did she do next? She went and confirmed the sign. She found her network of support. She praised God and proclaimed God's work.

PREACHER

So, you have been called too? Go confirm the sign. Go find your people. Go praise and proclaim. We invite you to think about these questions: What have you been called to do? Who is part of your network of support? How may you praise and proclaim? If you feel so moved, write some of your answers on a piece of fabric and weave it into this blanket.

(Strips of fabric and fabric markers are made available to the congregation. As people respond in silence, in writing, or in movement, a recording of the Magnificat may be played or the musicians may play and sing an appropriate hymn or praise song. The three actresses use their strips of fabric to be the first ones to write and weave. After a few minutes to allow participation from the congregation, or when the selected song ends, the PREACHER will continue leading the ritual. PREACHER leads a prayer of intercession or prayer for the people presenting all the thoughts and words weaved into the blanket. PREACHER finishes the intercessory prayer with these words:)

... God, who calls us to distinct vocations, lead us to find the fulfillment of your signs, help us find people to share this journey, and let our praise and proclamation be acceptable to you, Great Weaver of our lives and stories. Amen.

(At this point bread and wine or grape juice is brought to the table.)

PREACHER

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*¹²¹

*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."*¹²²

Come to the table of our Savior. While the Gospel of Luke announces vindication of the poor and divine judgment upon the rich, it is also very clear that salvation is for all alike. Luke is concerned about our attitudes toward poverty and wealth and calls us to share our resources and perceive how the poor are not those rejected by God, but rather those blessed by God. Today we share the table. Everyone is welcome to this table:

(PREACHER points to MARÍA and ISABEL respectively as she says:)

...the single mother and the loving cousin;

(PREACHER puts on the headpiece for Hannah.)

...old women who couldn't have children, people who can have children, people who can't, and people who do not want to have children;

(PREACHER takes off the headpiece for Hannah and puts on the headpiece for Mrs. Smith.)

...rich people and poor people; employed people and unemployed people;

(PREACHER takes off the headpiece for Mrs. Smith.)

...married, and single; from all around the world, regardless of the country of origin of our ancestors, we are all welcome to this table.

(PREACHER continues to the Eucharist liturgy according to her tradition. In the alternative, all participants partake of the grapes and drinks that are already on the table and the PREACHER closes the play/sermon with a prayer.)

THE END

¹²¹ John 6:35. NRSV.

¹²² Luke 6:20b-21. NRSV.