

THE LAST ACT IN THE STORY

Mysteries for the Modern Age

By
Sean Lang

© Sean Lang 2015

Category: Radius Typescript 2015

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved. Permission for this play to be copied for purposes of public reading or performance has been given but with the stipulation that the copies be destroyed after use.

A licence to perform or give a reading of this play, either in its entirety or in the form of excerpts, is required by professionals or amateurs for production in church or elsewhere, whether for charity or gain, regardless of whether admission is charged or not.

A scale of fees is linked to such a licence and is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Radius. Applications for a licence should be made to Radius in advance of rehearsals.

Radius

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

Email: sales@radiusdrama.org.uk web: www.radiusdrama.org.uk



LIST OF CHARACTERS

1. **PROLOGUE** Prologue, Doubter
2. **LUCIFER** Doubter, Archangel Michael, Lucifer, Lux and Lumen
3. **THE FALL OF MAN** Michael, Doubter, Adam, Eve, Serpent
4. **CAIN AND ABEL** Cain, Abel, Michael, Adam, Eve, Doubter
5. **ABRAHAM AND ISAAC** Doubter, Michael, Abraham, Isaac, Angel
6. **THE ANNUNCIATION** Angel, Mary, Mary's Mother and Father, Doubter, Michael
7. **HEROD THE GREAT** Balthasar, Caspar, Melchior, Herod, Benjamin, Mothers of Jerusalem, Satan
8. **THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY** Woman, Priest, Crowd, Jesus
9. **THE TEMPTATION** Satan, Jesus
10. **THE CRUCIFIXION AND EPILOGUE** Michael, Doubter, 2 Soldiers, Jesus, Pilate, Caiaphas, Michael, Doubter, Satan, Mary, Thomas.

Running Time is about 1hour 45 minutes

SCENE 2: LUCIFER

Darkness

DOUBTER: This darkness means, if I am right
That soon we'll hear "Let there be Light".
That Bible story we all know,
Of how God made all things that grow.
Of how he made the earth, the sun,
The stars and planets – every one.
We know this is not how it was
So why repeat it here?

MICHAEL: Because
In these old tales, myths if you will,
Important truths lie hidden still.
Can you say you have understood
Why there is Bad as well as Good?

DOUBTER: That men are greedy is no surprise:
The proof is there before our eyes.
Their cruelty and selfish pride
They seldom even seek to hide.

MICHAEL: Why should it be? Who stands to gain
From all this universal pain?

[A small light appears in the darkness. Slowly it grows until it fills the stage. We see it is borne aloft by a figure radiating light. This is LUCIFER – Angel of Light.]

LUCIFER: I think that would be me.

DOUBTER: An angel?

LUCIFER: It can't be that hard -
You've seen us on a Christmas card.
They always like to give us wings
And harps and halos and such things.
But actually I'm more mundane,
More down-to-earth and much more plain.
I am a searcher after truth.

DOUBTER: Like me! I have been so since youth.

LUCIFER: The torch I hold aloft contains
All knowledge in all human brains.
Its light is your entitlement:
Your right to true enlightenment.

But what is Light that shines alone?
Without a shade or darker tone?
How can this Light make clear its mark,
For what is Light without the Dark?
And unlike him [MICHAEL], I've understood
The curse of universal Good.
Where all defer and all obey
Performing all their God may say;
And take his precepts and his rules
Not thinking for themselves – the fools!
To disobey is to be free;
Defiance is sweet liberty.
If this be sin, if this be crime,
Be sure I'll choose it every time.

DOUBTER: How can you claim this man is bad?
If you say that, then you are mad.
His quest for truth shows taste and sense -
How can you say it gives offence?

LUCIFER: You state it better than I can –
Before you stands a wronged man.

MICHAEL: To seek for truth – this is no fault;
But that did not cause the assault
He made on God and all that's true.

LUCIFER: Cannot the devil have his due?
My sin, if that's the word to use,
Was to speak up and to accuse
The guilty God of too much power –

MICHAEL: In acid words and temper sour.

DOUBTER: Enough! If you want me to see
The case against him, show it me.

(Sounds of cheering and adulation. LUCIFER acknowledges the loud, invisible applause. Two ANGELS, LUX and LUMEN, enter and stand adoringly around him.)

LUCIFER: These are my people, who applaud
The boundless wisdom of their Lord.
Benighted creatures who can't see
Things that are clear and plain to me.
But luckily for them I'm here,
Their master and their overseer.
My knowledge of the world is such,
I am the Man Who Knew Too Much.
The earth, the heavens, sky and sea
Hold no mystery for me.

My mighty brain can comprehend
How all began and all will end.
And I think it is right indeed
That I should be the one to lead
All things that live, for now and ever –

MICHAEL: This is your due for being clever?

LUCIFER: Do you not think it for the best
The cleverest should rule the rest?

LUX: } Yes! We do!
LUMEN: }

MICHAEL: I think it's clear that deep inside
You're eaten up with hungry pride.

LUCIFER: Oh, pride, is it? Dear me, how quaint –
You think I care for such a taint?
My insights were not lent to me:
They're mine: my rule was meant to be.

MICHAEL: Your rule? Of what? Of all creation?

LUCIFER: Don't say I should stick to my station.
I understand the universe –
And yet this knowledge is a curse.
I see it, yes, but can't control
The smallest part, still less the whole.
It is not right; it is not just –
The best should rule: we shall, we must!

LUX: He shall! He must!

LUMEN: He must! He shall!

MICHAEL: And is that so? Why that we'll see –
For first you must face up to me.

LUCIFER: Your puny sword cannot protect
Against my mighty intellect.
My brain is such that it is meet
That all should bow to my elite.

DOUBTER: So your case, if I have this right,
Is based on reason, knowledge –

LUCIFER: Light!
Let there be light – that phrase again –
Though not from God, but from my brain.

DOUBTER: Where is his fault, if he speaks true?
You've some explaining still to do.

MICHAEL: I think he'll show you soon enough
What he's like when he cuts up rough.

DOUBTER: He stands for reason, knowledge, thought –
The very things mankind has sought.
You've tried to tell me this is wrong
When he's the good one all along.

MICHAEL: Don't be so sure of what you see –

LUCIFER: Ignore the fool; listen to me.
I am the hero of the hour:
To me is due all might and power.
For universal government
Should stay with the intelligent.

MICHAEL: And are you sure that's all you need?

LUCIFER: I need no faith or obscure creed.
The brain is all that rule requires -
And those who say it's not are liars.

MICHAEL: That's what you'd have us all believe?
Your honeyed words aim to deceive.
You do not know the mind of God, and you can never know it –
It far surpasses yours and you will never overthrow it.
You claim you know the universe and that you understand it?
Yet you can't see it's balanced just as God, not you, has planned it.

LUCIFER: You cannot see where all this leads
You do not know God's selfish needs

MICHAEL: God's need is not selfish – he must give
And give again, to all who live.
While you seek ways to sit above
The rest of us, God gives us love.

LUCIFER: And where is he? Where is God?

LUX: Where is God?

SCENE 7. HEROD THE GREAT

BALTHASAR: Mighty King of all the Jews
 We've travelled far to bring you news.
 We are three who watch the skies:
 We plot the stars, observe the rise
 And fall of sun and moon and sphere
 To understand their meaning here.

CASPAR: Our lives on earth are closely bound
 To movements far above the ground.
 The tides, the months, the days, the hours
 All take their course from cosmic powers:
 Each month's a season of the moon.
 And if they aren't to come too soon
 We must observe and calculate
 The stars and planets for each date.

MELCHIOR: Some months ago our calculation
 Was troubled by an observation.
 A star, which shone as bright as day,
 Outshining all things in its way,
 Appeared one day from who knows where?
 One day a void; next it was there.

BALTHASAR: My jaw fell nearly to the floor:
 We'd never seen this star before.
 Yet there it was, for all to see.

CASPAR: And then I saw -

MELCHIOR: No, that was me.

CASPAR: I noticed it, I think you'll find.

MELCHIOR: I saw it first, if you don't mind.

HEROD: For heaven's sake give me the worst:
 I do not care who saw it first.

BALTHASAR: On watching closely we agreed
 That star was moving - and at speed.

MELCHIOR: Could such a star have been foreseen?

CASPAR: Could it portend things yet unseen?

MELCHIOR: If so, did it mean good or ill?

CASPAR: Why should it move and not stay still?

MELCHIOR: Could it be in some ancient text?

CASPAR: And where might it be heading next?

HEROD: Good gentlemen, get to the point
For if the stars are out of joint
It must mean something, that is clear:
Or else why have you travelled here?

BALTHASAR: Mighty Herod, you are right;
There is a meaning in this sight.
We searched through prophets new and old
And found this star had been foretold.
It means – there is no mystery –
The greatest king in history,
Whose fame will never disappear,
Has just been born, and born near here.

HEROD: What is all this? What mighty king?
What prophesy? What's this you bring?
You waste my time with all your lies!
I'll teach you three to fantasise –

BALTHASAR: Mighty king, we found the clues
In ancient writings of the Jews.
This king, who will stand at the helm
Of Israel, is in this realm.
We've come to pay him our respects.

HEROD: He is foretold in Jewish texts?
So we may say, presumably,
One day he'll reign here, just like me?
This is an unexpected tale you bring;
I'd thought I was the only King.
Forgive my outburst, gentlemen;
Do find him and come back again.
If what this star portends is true
I'd like to do him homage too.

BALTHASAR: Great king, our thanks: if he's not here
He can't be far; he must be near.
I know we'll find him –

HEROD: Let me stress
How much I'd like this lad's address.

[Exit BALTHASAR, MELCHIOR and CASPAR]

HEROD: Benjamin! Come in a moment, would you?

[Enter BENJAMIN]

BENJAMIN: Yes?

HEROD: We have a problem.

BENJAMIN: We?

HEROD: (*Firmly*) We. You heard all that, I take it?

BENJAMIN: Of course I did.

HEROD: Well?

BENJAMIN: You don't expect me to believe it?

HEROD: It's tosh but it's potent tosh. Once those three start knocking on doors, giving people ideas -

BENJAMIN: "It's my boy." "No, it's my boy."

HEROD: Exactly. I really could have done without this.

BENJAMIN: What do you want me to do?

HEROD: Solve it.