

# Beneath the Upper Room

## Character Notes

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*[The fact that I feel inclined to write these character notes makes me wonder if I've done a good enough job in writing the script. By definition, I should, as a playwright, be able to convey every possible nuance of the characters' personalities through the body of the script by what they say and what they choose not to say, what they do and what they choose not to do.... HOWEVER, that said, I also realize that this show will be primarily produced by actors who are amateurs at best. I imagine any help, any hints I can give them as to the motivation behind their lines would be welcome— by them and their director.*

*When I chose the characters to be in this play I firstly looked to see which ones we KNEW were around (Mary, Magdelene, Peter, etc), then I did some research to find others who were touched by Jesus during his ministry (Lydia, Widow, etc), then I added the others to “round out” the mix (kids, etc). It reminds me of an old wine commercial with Orsen Wells in which he said he casts his parties as he would cast a play. That's what I did. I chose personalities that I thought would make interesting conversations, insights, and conflicts. What you have left is the result of my imagination brainstorming]*

**ELIZABETH** - The Grandma of the group. Highly respected, highly revered— and she deserves it. She is very frail and everyone protects her— by word and deed as well as making sure a convenient chair is always ready for her. She has taught the women of her group well because she rarely has to get her hands dirty— though she would not hesitate doing so. She's perfectly content to quietly chop vegetables and let others tend to the all-important lamb, bread and wine. She's an older cousin of Mary, Jesus' mother.

**BETHANY** - Mary of Bethany. A fireball. She's probably the social planner of the group. She would be the first to let you know that you're doing something wrong— but the first one to come to your defense if you were being wronged. She's been compared to her older sister her whole life. She's used to that— but can't help wishing it were different.

**MARTHA** - She's probably just as annoyed by everyone comparing Mary, her sister, to her. She endures it with a smile. She's been an older sister her whole life and wears that uniform well. She's Elizabeth's second-in-command. She's very graceful— not so much in a physical sense as in her demeanor, the way she treats others and reacts to the events around her.

**YOUNGER** - Mary, mother of James the Younger. Probably the quickest with her tongue— especially when it comes to the behavior of men. She can be counted on to point out the disparity between the sexes. She realizes— and accepts— that men are the head of the house, the church and society, but she doesn't have to agree with it. She may very well enjoy knocking men down from their pedestals— but she nevertheless does it with- and out of love.

**LYDIA** - The Sumerian lady Jesus met at the well. She was living with a man she wasn't married to and Jesus called her on it, pointing out that she wasn't living the best life she could. That confrontation turned her life around and she's followed Jesus ever since. Perhaps she felt compelled to do whatever she could to help him turn others' lives around. She's a very thoughtful person. She's not inclined to relish the spotlight, she's rather private about her thoughts and opinions. She's there to serve any way she can. She very much enjoys the comradery between the women of Jesus' group. Ref: John 4:1-42.

**SALOME** - (pronounced: SAH' - la - may) Perhaps the newest member of the group. She's the mother of two of the Disciples but perhaps she just now began traveling with them. She's seen the changes in her boys and wants to witness Jesus for herself. She's "learning the ropes" from the other ladies.

**MARY** - Mother of Jesus. Patient, kind, caring— but not afraid to apply “tough love” when appropriate. She is extremely proud of Jesus— but absolutely no less proud of her other children in their own rights. Does she know more than anyone else? Is she privy to “inside information” – being the mother of Jesus? I don't know, that is very possible— but I do imagine that she's learned to be a better listener than talker. Her motherly love for her son creates a bond of understanding that no one else can tap into. In all that, she is Every-Mom.

**MARY MAGDALENE** - By all accounts that I've seen, she was the woman closest to Jesus (other than his mother). Was the relationship more than that? Not in the scope of this play: She wasn't his lover, she wasn't an ex-prostitute— she's just a woman who followed him, loved him, was loved in return. The Bible says Jesus drove demons from her and she followed him the rest of her life. She was most likely an educated, wealthy woman who regularly donated to the group— but she didn't just write checks, she gave of her time, too. The fact that she was there through his Passion, death, and resurrection shows her character, love and devotion to Jesus. She is the strongest character in the play (other than perhaps Jesus' mother). By that I don't mean overpowering— I mean in regards to confidence, moral strength and vision.

**WIDOW** - She isn't there because of what Jesus did for her— He didn't heal her or any of her family (that we know of). She displayed uncommon faith by giving 2 coins when she was so poor. That quiet Faith is what draws her to Jesus. She's happy just to be of help. She doesn't say much, but when she does— we listen.

**ANNA** - Another example of a woman who benefitted from one of Jesus' miracles and devoted the rest of her life to serving him. She was a Greek Syrian Phoenecian whose daughter was healed by Jesus. The Bible says the girl was plagued by demons. I tend to think that was their way of explaining medical ailments of which they had no understanding. Normally, if it was an adult described as such, I'd think it was mental disorder of some kind. But a child.... Could be she had Rubella, or Multiple Sclerosis, or born with a hole in her heart valve.... Who knows? The important thing is that Jesus healed her of whatever she had. For this reason, Anna chose to join his group and help any way she could. Her son, Timothy is here— what about her husband and her daughter that was healed? Husbands die— or perhaps he's just at work, daughters grow up and start their own families— or perhaps she's still young but having a play date with another friend today. She could well have been very wealthy and found much joy in providing periodical “refreshening” of the group's finances (though, as you would expect, was given— nor expected— no more favor than the rest of the women who had particular duties in the group). Ref: Mark 7:24-30.

**RACHEL** - The little woman of the group. She is learning how to be a woman by the best teachers in the world. She has had the opportunity to view Jesus from the perspective of a little child. I have no doubt that she has had many private moments with Jesus, full of tenderness, silliness, and lots of tickling! Through her love for Jesus, we better understand the significance of the “suffer the little children to come unto me” parts of the Bible. There is no love as pure, as true, as unconditional as that of a child— and Jesus deserves it. My heart melts when I hear a child say s/he loves Jesus. I doubt a child can fully comprehend these character notes, but a director should help her (and the other kids) think about what it would have been like to actually be around Jesus. It would be like Santa, God, their best friend, and their favorite funny actor all rolled into one. He was AWESOME!

**JAMES** - Younger brother of Jesus. The Bible describes him that way, so I tend to believe it. I don't ascribe to the Catholic church's belief that Mary remained a virgin her whole life. I don't understand the importance of that point of view, but I don't care if others believe it— it's not a salvation issue. That being said, The purpose of James being in the play is to show what a great mother Mary is, that she deserves being the mother of Jesus. He also provides much comic relief, showing the situation from the perspective of a child. Because we know so little about Jesus' childhood, I doubt many have thought about Jesus being somebody's big brother. What an experience that would have been! James is a typical boy: mischievous, adventurous, and always testing his boundaries. He is devoted to his mom.

**TIMOTHY** - A foil and playmate to James. His sister was healed by Jesus. He remembers that, and sees his mother's devotion to Jesus. As with the other kids, Timothy is blessed to have Jesus as one of his biggest influences while growing up. He is perhaps a bit older than James which may explain his reaction to doing "women's work," but it doesn't really matter for the sake of this play. What does matter is that he shows us his relationship with James and the women of the group. They are almost as responsible for his upbringing as his mother is— and he respects that. He shows his respect by helping with the chores and being respectful to the women.

**EZEKIEL** - A man's man, a good ol' boy. He's a servant to the man who owns the building in which the Upper Room is located. His job is to see to his Master's interests: keeping the room clean and in working order and making arrangements for its use. He's done this for years and years. I imagine a kindly school custodian character who knows the school building inside and out. He knows his place (he's paid to maintain the building, not to offer his advise on the state of education), yet he enjoys talking to people when he gets a chance. He has a polite, subtle sense of humor— his jokes are more often followed by a wink than a drum roll and cymbal crash. The original production used a kindly older gentleman. He was PERFECT. His age isn't as important as the fact that he's wise. I've known plenty of similar characters who were much, much younger. He is very respectful to the ladies in Jesus' group. In his society's hierarchy, he is barely above them in social status. They notice his respect and, in return, respect him. He is most likely a follower of Jesus— not so much that he follows Jesus around the countryside, but that he keeps up with what he's said (and it makes sense to him).

**PETER** - All business— but very careful not to take the women for granted. He is Jesus' right-hand man. He is Jesus' favorite for a reason. He's taking charge of the event, making sure everything is in order. He wants the evening to go perfectly— partly because he's a bit of a perfectionist (that's not really a compliment), partly because it's his job to make such arrangements, but mostly because he wants to lighten Jesus' load. He knows Jesus' burden doesn't need to have any minor complications. Like the other Disciples, he has no idea what Judas is up to. To him, Judas is just "one of the Twelve."

**JUDAS** - I won't go into details about my personal viewpoint of the whole Judas/Jesus saga. You will note that I put in more than a few vagaries pertaining to his character. Needles to say, I don't think it's such a cut and dried case of him being the villainous traitor he's been made out to be. I also think it doesn't matter. That being said: For the sake of this play, Judas was the treasurer of the Disciples and was the man who led the guards to Jesus. I'm hoping the script is written with enough skill that the audience can make their own inferences as to his motivations without being brow-beaten by me. Remember that none of the group traveling with Jesus knew what he was up to, so any opinions anyone had about Judas was based on what they had witnessed him do as part of the group. Thus, the penny-pinching jokes and the assumptions made about his being late and leaving early to pay for something. I find it hard to believe that they would have kept him around if he was obviously evil. No mention is made that the Disciples petitioned Jesus to remove Judas from the Twelve. I do think it's important for the benefit of this play that we assume Judas was

respectful to the women. He, like the other Disciples, realizes the value of the women to the group's work with Jesus. By the time he makes his final speech of the play, he has become so confused, so "under the gun," that he can do nothing but watch the course of events unfold. He had no idea what he was a part of.

OTHERS - Feel free to add additional women and children to the mix. It's not uncommon for someone to want to be in a play, but not have to say any lines. I prefer the additional characters not have any lines— but you may give them a line or two from other characters lines to give them something to do/say. It would be best if you go ahead and give them a name as well— just try to keep it to "period" names (names that were common back then). You may add an additional Disciple or two— if you really must find something for additional men to do in your production. But please don't give them any significance. This play is about the women. You **MAY NOT** add additional dialogue that is not in the present script. That is a direct violation of my copyright. Just don't do it— there are all kinds of unpleasant legal things that will happen. If you absolutely need something changed, contact me at the address on the website and I'll see what I can do.

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