

# **The Play of the Miracle of the Holy Ghost**

Translated Nerida Newbigin  
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For a full discussion of this play, and for the Italian text, see  
Nerida Newbigin, *Feste d'Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in  
Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1996).

## **Characters**

THE ANGEL *who speaks the prologue and epilogue*

ST JAMES

ST PETER

THE VIRGIN MARY

MARY MAGDALENE

ST JOHN

ST BARTHOLOMEW

ST MATTHEW

ST SIMON

ST THOMAS

ST PHILIP

OTHER APOSTLES *who do not speak*

AN ANGEL *who appears to the Apostles*



4. to God, because the time has come to send  
the Holy Ghost to us on earth from Heaven.

ST PETER *says tenderly*:

You fill my heart with sweetness with these words  
and your zeal fills me with the flame of passion.  
Let's go to her and ask her to commend  
us to her Son, and through him to the Father,  
to save us from the chill that strikes our hearts.  
Unless this mandate comes, our toil is vain.

THE ANGEL *appears to them to reassure them and says*:

5. Ardent Apostles, righteous and most holy,  
whose thoughts I share and also your desires,  
you've brought your rugged faces here together:  
to tell the truth, you seem a bunch of rogues.  
Apostles, I want you to savour faith  
in God, and set your hearts sincerely there.  
The grace you're asking for will follow soon.  
Now stay in peace: and let these words suffice.

*When the Angel disappears, the Apostles remain fired by the  
love of God. In this moment, MARY MAGDALENE says to the  
Virgin Mary, bowing devoutly before her:*

6. Mary, because it so pleases you Son  
and is his wish that you should be alone,  
there is nobody like you, so I wish  
to take my leave from you with your permission.  
I am not worthy to be your companion  
but in obedience I will be your daughter.  
Give me your blessing, raise your arms on high,  
and find the company that you deserve.

THE VIRGIN MARY *looks her in the face and says*:

7. Is this the trust, and is this the great love  
I always thought you bore me? Now you bring  
a greater pain than ever to my heart.  
I beg you, do not go against my will.

MARY MAGDALENE *says*:

I promise to obey you, greatest Mother,  
if you will love me as you would a servant.

THE VIRGIN MARY *takes her by the hand and says*:  
More like a sister.

THE MAGDALENE:

Ah, but that's not right!

THE VIRGIN MARY:

Indeed it is!

THE MAGDALENE:

But that's not what I ask.

8. I'm happy just to be here like a maid;  
for any other way would not be proper.

THE VIRGIN MARY, *disturbed by these words, says:*  
O Magdalene, agree to my request,  
or else we will encounter greater woe.

MARY MAGDALENE *says:*  
What kind of woe?

THE VIRGIN MARY:  
The kind that's brought about  
by these harsh words.

THE MAGDALENE:  
I could not let that be  
and so I'm glad to do just as you wish.

THE VIRGIN MARY *says happily:*  
Then put into effect what I request.

*The two Marias sit down again, and in this moment the  
Apostles ST JOHN and ST BARTHOLOMEW and ST MATTHEW  
and ST SIMON, coming down from a mountain, raising their  
eyes and hands fervently to heaven, they look at one another  
and they say together:*

*All together on the road we  
zealously set forth to go  
to make our way towards the house  
of God's most holy mother, Mary, Mary.*

1. Let us walk and think good thoughts,  
and make a bundle of our prayers,  
because Jesus willingly will  
love us always and will never  
turn away from us or take his  
holy angels from our presence.  
And now, O pilgrims, let us look for  
for God's most holy mother, Mary, Mary.

*When they have gone a short distance, they find ST PETER and  
ST JAMES. They embrace one another and ST PETER says to  
them:*

9. Where are you going all so fervently?

ST JOHN *says*:  
We're going off to seek the Holy Ghost.

ST BARTHOLOMEW *says*:  
Since we have found you, pray for us as well.

ST MATTHEW *says*:  
Peter, please do! Give all of us this comfort.

ST SIMON *says*:  
Don't leave us here, abandoned without grace.

ST PETER *says*:  
All of you come with me a little while.  
Let's go together with delight and song.  
Our Mother Mary will give us this sign.

*ALL together, in unison, they say as they go:*

*O Mary, you're the one to make us glad,  
we only ask,  
we seek <nothing> more,  
than that you lead us, Empress, to your realm.*

1. We think of you as we approach the end  
of all our years.  
In order that your prayers will be fulfilled  
save us from woe  
and from the toils  
of the devil, the root of every sin.

2. Send down, Jesus, we pray, your Holy Ghost  
upon our fervour  
that we may boast of your glory  
And deign to grant  
to us who kneel  
whatever each of us asks in his prayers.

ST THOMAS *at that moment says to himself*:  
10. I've searched around in every place I know  
to find the Holy Ghost, and still I can't.  
The time has come for it to show itself:  
I have no more ideas for where to look.  
Thomas, it seems to me you're much too soft  
to go out searching, as I must allow.  
I think I'll stop right here up on this road:  
some new idea will come of where to go.

*When he has sat down ST PHILIP finds him and says:*

11. God save you, dear companion full of faith!

ST THOMAS *says*:

And in like wise my God save you as well.  
Tell me, O Philip, where you're going now.

ST PHILIP *says*:

To look for something I've long hungered for:  
the Holy Ghost, on which I've set my heart.

ST THOMAS *says*:

That's what I'm seeking too. I'm resting here.  
I put my faith in dreams and in fine words,  
uttered by one who wished to torture me.

ST PHILIP *says sorrowfully*:

12. Alas, O Thomas, don't go on like that.  
Don't you know, all that's needed is true faith?  
Get yourself up and tarry here no more.  
He who trusts in the Lord will be rewarded.  
Don't use such words as these, for is it not  
enough that you get what you ask the Lord?  
Come with me, let us go and find him now.

ST THOMAS *sits down again and says*:

I know I've had enough of all wretched trudging.

*Seeing them overwhelmed, THE ANGEL appears to them and says*:

13. May what you long for and desire be granted.  
Now go, and make your way now along this road.  
Don't you know, Thomas, that the Lord is Just?  
Don't you know that the sword cuts when it will?  
You must stop being so obstinate towards Him.  
Get up and walk, so that you move ahead.  
Just up ahead are several of your group:  
they're off to Mary's in Jerusalem.

ST THOMAS, *standing up, says to himself sorrowfully*:

14. Alas, my anger overwhelmed me there.  
so that I've spoken ill against my God.  
A shilling's all that's left from one whole pound,  
and I am without life the Lord's grace.  
I'm sure today he'll turn his wrath on me.  
O my soul, who will be your comfort now?  
Alas, your Lord has cut himself from you,  
and you are called below to Hell's abyss.

ST PHILIP *comforts him and says*:

15. Take heart, for God will surely pardon you

(didn't you hear the words the angel spoke?)  
and wants to give to you the crown of Heaven.  
We need to find the others up ahead.

ST THOMAS *replies*:  
I'll follow you and take your lead forever.

ST PHILIP *says*:  
Let's go, because the sun is yet still high.  
And if we find the others on the way  
together we can go to visit Mary.

*They meet up with the others and ST PETER embraces them and says:*

16. Welcome, Philip and welcome my good Tomas.

ST THOMAS *says*:  
And greetings to you all, dear friends indeed.

ST PETER *turns to his companions and says*:  
My sons, this looks to me a blessed chance:  
let us rejoice with song and melody.

ST JOHN *says*:  
Flower of virtue, wisdom's purest vessel,  
you are welcome as well, beloved Philip.

ST PETER *says*:  
We'll make our way towards Jerusalem  
where we will find the Mother of our God.

*The Prophecy of MARY MAGDALENE*<sup>1</sup>

*They all set out, singing in unison:*

*Jesus, when we have located  
this most worthy deity,  
every heart will be consoled  
for we'll forsake the Hebrew law.*

1. Each of us will leave the torture  
that has so tormented him,  
and within your holy service  
he will find your warming fire.  
O Lord Jesus, send us now  
this grace that we so desire.  
Every heart will be consoled

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<sup>1</sup> A *Confessione di Santa Maria Maddalena* circulated in verse from at least 1472 (see, for example, MS Ambrosiano C 35 sup., ff. 51v-53v), but I have identified no prophecy of Mary Magdalene.

for we'll forsake the Hebrew law.

*They come before the Virgin Mary, and when they have done reverence to her, ST PETER says:*

17. May he, Madonna, who lay in your womb  
now save you and preserve us for his love  
always in peace: for that was what he wished  
and so he wishes for the future too.  
By that holy mystery born of you  
pray for us that our sorrow now will end.

THE VIRGIN MARY *says:*

It is my bounden duty here to serve you:  
you and all your company are welcome.

18. Therefore let each man freely speak his mind  
it takes no time to ask a grace of me.

ST PETER *says:*

O Mother of the Almighty, listen now  
to what I'm holding here within my breast:  
just one desire, which plagues me far beyond  
all other things that bring unhappiness.  
When your most holy Son went up to Heaven,  
he said he'd send to us the Holy Ghost.

19. That is my prayer, although it is impossible  
that what he promised should not come to pass:  
that would indeed be something truly terrible  
to leave his followers abandoned here,  
forsaken in this world and all too fallible.

MARY *says:*

I'll pray to him, now cast all doubt aside.

ST PETER *says:*

Yes, Mary! I commend myself to you.

MARY *says:*

And everything you wish will be fulfilled.

ST JOHN *says:*

20. Madonna, as you know, we are bereft,  
abandoned, and you're all that we have left;  
have mercy on your poor and humble servants,  
who have no other virtue but desire.  
See how they pray to you like little organs,  
now that your prayer goes winging up to Heaven.  
You are the one who guides and lights our way  
and your will governs over earth and sky.

ST BARTHOLOMEW *says*:

21. Mary, you are the rudder of this ship:  
give us consolation, guide it to port.  
Grant us your sweet and gentle breeze to guide us  
so that each one of us comes safely home.

ST MATTHEW *says*:

Lighten this load that weighs so heavy on us,  
bring back to life, we pray, our thoughts of death,  
and set back on their path those who are lost  
We pray you, Mary, comfort every one.

ST SIMON *says*:

22. You are the dwelling place of lowliness,  
you are the Mother of our might Lord,  
and in you reigns such pity for us all.  
Extinguish now, we pray, this fiery pain.

ST PHILIP *says*:

And I beseech you that in your charity  
you exercise your prayers of mighty worth.

ST JAMES *says*:

Grant the request of everyone who prays:  
I know that God cannot deny you grace.

MAGDALENA *says*:

23. Mary, I ask that it may please you now  
to heed the pleas of those who pray before you.  
You are their strength and you are the great treasure,  
you're the banner that leads them on their way.  
I pray you, Mary, hesitate no more,  
and grant the holy requests they long for so.  
Remember that they were your Son's companions,  
Leave them no more to bathe themselves in tears.

ST THOMAS *says*:

24. We beg you, Mary, rescue from distress  
the travailed and afflicted men before you.  
You see that every one of them has come  
to ask of you your grace so powerful.

MARY:

I'll not stand in the way of what you ask  
because your voice has been heard up in Heaven.  
And in holy obedience as required  
I now will pray with all that I know how.

*She kneels down and continues:*

25. My Son, if ever you accepted any prayer  
of mine, be gracious to your servants here.  
They were the once who went with you in life,  
and now they're waiting for you to keep your promise.  
You prophesied the Holy Ghost would come  
so now lift up their hearts and give them warmth.  
You see how full of yearning here they wait,  
so grant them what they ask and rescue them.

26. I pray to you for love of that most holy  
conception, by which you came to my womb  
(after you sent that perfect angel, Gabriel,  
to bring the tidings that you would be coming),  
for love of all the milk sucked at my breast,  
and all the times I had to swaddle you,  
for love of all the steps the donkey took  
so we could flee from Herod, dearest love.

27. For all joy and all the suffering  
I had for you, dear Son, bear this in mind.  
Your Apostles are here with tenderness:  
see how each seems to struggle to survive.  
Grant to each one of them your holy grace,  
from their affliction bring them now to joy.  
Now everyone, with me and with one voice,  
let us all pray and raise our light to heaven.

*The Apostles begin, and ALL OF THEM TOGETHER WITH OUR  
LADY sing the following lauda to the tune of the Canto de'  
Balestrieri:*<sup>2</sup>

*O Lord Jesus, you have brought us  
here together with Maria.*

*I. Put an end to all our sorrow  
and our weeping full of woe.  
Make our weary spirits bolder  
and bring comfort to the troubled  
men who kneel before you here.  
O Lord Jesus, keep your promise:  
you have given us your word,  
so bring comfort to our weeping.*

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<sup>2</sup> *Canto di Balestrier, inc.* "Balestrier siam saggi, e dotti, | Ma per guerra  
stati rotti"; in *Tutti i trionfi, carri, mascheate* [sic] *ò canti Carnascialeschi  
andati per Firenze, Dal tempo del Magnifico Lorenzo vecchio de Medici;  
quando egli hebbero prima cominciamento, per infino a questo anno  
presente 1559.* In Firenze MDLVIII; available on line at  
[www.archive.org/stream/tvtiitrioficar00graz#page/82/mode/2up](http://www.archive.org/stream/tvtiitrioficar00graz#page/82/mode/2up). See also  
*Canti carnascialeschi del Rinascimento*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Bari:  
Laterza, 1936), pp. 190–191.

*After these words, the Holy Ghost descends from Heaven, and then MARY says:*

28. Now that what you have wished has been fulfilled,  
go and warm yourselves at this holy fire.  
Your most deserving prayers were heard in Heaven  
and Jesus will forever be with you.

ST PETER *says:*

Each one of us must shortly go away.  
O Mother Mary, don't abandon us.

MARY *says:*

Go, all of you, and take with you God's blessing:  
keeping forever in your hearts His passion.

*The Apostles leave, and THE ANGEL bids farewell to the audience and says:*

29. He who would find repose in Heaven's song  
must first ask mercy from Lord Jesus Christ,  
and then he will receive the Holy Ghost  
sent by my Lord almighty Jesus Christ.  
He gave himself for you without reserve,  
and he redeemed you with his very heart.  
Now on behalf of him I give you leave,  
and keep him constantly within your hearts.

*The end of the Play of the Miracle of the Holy Ghost*