DR. LUKE AND THE CASE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

by Heath Cloutier
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Dr. Luke and the Case of the Empty Tomb

A children’s Easter program in rap, rhyme, and song

by Heath Cloutier
CAST OF CHARACTERS

MAJOR ROLES

**Dr. Luke** (Teen or adult) — The author of the third Gospel is brought to life as a cross between Sherlock Holmes and Willy Wonka, with an optional British accent, on a search for clues about Jesus.

**Theo** (Teen or adult) — The biblical Theophilus comes off the page as Luke’s comic Watson-esque sidekick, a gruff, dim, goodhearted British constable with an optional Cockney accent.

CHILDREN’S CHORUS

The scenes are structured to allow seven different Sunday school classes to perform one scene apiece. If you have fewer than seven classes, some classes can take two scenes. Alternatively, you may prefer to have a single children’s chorus do the entire show, which would work just as well.

Each scene has several one-liners or small speaking/pantomiming roles for chorus members, including:

- In Class 2 — adult Angels, an adult Mary, and an infant Jesus*
- In Class 3 — John and Jesus*
- In Class 4 — Devil and Jesus*
- In Class 7 — Soldiers, Women, and Jesus*

*Jesus can be portrayed by a different child in each scene, because the premise is that the children are eyewitnesses simply recounting/reenacting their memories of Jesus to Luke, not the actual biblical figures themselves.

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Length: 30-45 minutes.

Synopsis: Dr. Luke and his sidekick Theo go on a comic caper in search of clues about Jesus’ identity. They interview eyewitnesses to each of the key moments of Christ’s life: his birth, baptism, temptation, miracles, parables, death, burial, and resurrection.

Objective: This script provides a turn-key way to organize all your Sunday school classes, from kindergarten through high school, into a single, seamless Easter pageant. Each of seven short scenes can be assigned to a different class to be rehearsed separately, then brought all together just before opening night.

Performers: Two major speaking roles for adult narrators, ten to thirty minor speaking or pantomiming roles for Children’s Chorus members, a Children’s Chorus of up to seven Sunday school classes aged kindergarten through high school, and a few adult helpers for the little kids.

Audience: Parents, grandparents, parishioners, and friends of the family will love this light-hearted showcase of their congregation’s children.

Prop List:
• A large working flashlight and a large magnifying glass (Luke)
• A British bobby nightstick (Theo)
• Palm branches, tambourines, twirling ribbons, etc. for processional (Cast)
• A piece of blue cloth to simulate a river (Class 3)
• A large stone (Devil)
• A Bible (Class 4, Jesus)
• Sunglasses (Class 5)
• Artificial battery-operated candles (Class 6)
• A white sheet for a burial shroud (Class 7)

Costumes:
• Luke: Sherlock Holmes attire whimsically mixed with biblical dress.
• Theo: British bobby meets first century garb.
• Shepherds (Class 1): Traditional shepherd costumes.
• Angels (Class 2): Traditional angel costumes, emphasizing the kids’ cuteness.
• Bible Folk (Classes 3-7): Generic biblical costumes.
• **Mary:** Traditional blue Mary costume.
• **Baby Jesus:** Simple white swaddling.
• **Devil:** Black suit or tux plus red horns, pitchfork, and devil tail.
• **Soldiers:** Traditional Roman soldier costumes.

*(Note: You might give your young performers some extra pizzazz and make them feel special by putting face paint stars on their cheeks, spray glitter in their hair, etc.)*

**Set Specifications:** This play is designed to be performed in your church sanctuary with minimal set dressing. If you do not have theater-style lighting that can be dimmed and controlled from the back, you might consider renting some, and for the Crucifixion scene you will want to find a way to cast the players in silhouette with sparse backlighting. For the Crucifixion scene, you may rig up an actual wooden cross or else simply allow the performers to pantomime it. Beyond these requirements, you might consider making the occasion festive by decorating your stage area with a painted backdrop, a large banner bearing the play’s title, or even just swaths of bright, colorful cloth.

**Music Suggestions:** Though *Dr. Luke* is not a musical, it is greatly enhanced by music. Several songs are suggested below that fit with the script. We’ve suggested at least one traditional number in the public domain and one contemporary song for most selections. Choose what works for you. A good pianist who isn’t afraid to improvise is a plus. Please feel free to use your own songs as long as they fit with the script. Prerecorded or live music may be used.

1. Mysterious-sounding music — Improvised minor chords or something like Henry Mancini’s “Pink Panther” theme.
2. An upbeat, joyful song — The old children’s standard “Down in my Heart” or Three Dog Night’s “Joy to the World.”
3. Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.”
4. An angel carol or a contemporary song such as “Angels, from the Realms of Glory” or Sarah McLachlan’s “Angel.”
5. Any song about baptism or a river, such as “Down by the Riverside” or the spiritual “Deep River,” or the contemporary songs “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord” from *Godspell* or “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Krauss.
6. “My Girl” or any hit song by the Temptations.
7. Western showdown music — Improvised or something like the theme from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* by Ennio Morricone.

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8. Triumphant music — Improvised loud major chords, the Rocky theme, Bill Conti’s “Gonna Fly Now.”
10. Dirge-like music, such as Chopin’s “Funeral March.”
12. Any moving creedal anthem with which your congregation is familiar. Marc Nelson’s “I believe in Jesus” (CCLI #61282), “There Is a Redeemer” by Melody Green (CCLI # 11483), “We Believe in God” by Amy Grant and Wes King, or the hymn “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”

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Scene 1 — Introduction

(The lights dim as mysterious-sounding music plays and LUKE enters through the audience, carrying a flashlight and a big magnifying glass, hot on the trail for clues. He does some funny business while interrogating the audience.)

LUKE: (To various audience members) Do you know anything about this Jesus of Nazareth? What can you tell me about the empty tomb? Where were you on the night Jesus was betrayed? (He continues humorously pestering audience members until THEO enters and taps him on the shoulder with his policeman’s baton.)

THEO: Hey, buddy, what do you think you’re doing? (Music fades.)

LUKE: Oh, hello, I’m Luke — Dr. Luke. Who are you?

THEO: The name’s Theophilus, and this here’s my beat.

LUKE: Nice to meet you, Theo! (He extends a hand which THEO does not shake.)

THEO: I can see you’re harassing these people here, and what’s more, you’re loitering on private property. What do you have to say for yourself?

LUKE: Well, it’s elementary, my dear Theo. I’m not harassing these people, I’m interviewing them! Gathering clues! You see, I’m writing a book. It’s about a fellow named Jesus — ever heard of him?

THEO: Hey, isn’t he that bloke that’s supposed to have come back from the dead or something?

LUKE: Indeed, that’s the one.

THEO: You know, I always did wonder about him. That’s a pretty audacious claim, don’t you think? I mean, it’s not every day of the week you see dead people coming back to life. Far as I can tell, it’s a load of rubbish. Otherwise ... well, I mean if it’s true and all, then I suppose I’d have to pay a fair bit of attention to him, wouldn’t I?

LUKE: Ah yes, that’s just the point. Say, Theo, why don’t you
help me out with my clue-collecting? After all, many have
undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have
been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to
us by eyewitnesses. Therefore, since I myself have
carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it
seems good for me to write an orderly account too. In fact,
I think I'll dedicate it to you, most excellent Theophilus!

THEO: (Comically flattered) Me?! Well, then! What are we waiting
for? Let's get to the bottom of this whole “Case of the
Empty Tomb” thing, shall we?

LUKE: Indeed!

THEO: Where do we start?

LUKE: First things first — we start at his birth.

Scene 2 — Processional

(The entire CAST comes parading down the center aisle of the
auditorium and onto the stage in a grand processional, waving
palm branches, shaking tambourines, twirling ribbons, and
singing along to an upbeat, joyful song. Once they've made their
spectacular entrance, CLASSES 2-7 exit.)

Scene 3 — Birth

(CLASS 1 is still singing, dancing, and making a ruckus.)

LUKE: (To KIDS) I say, who are you people?

ALL KIDS: (Ad lib) We're the eyewitnesses! We saw it all!

THEO: (Aside) Did you hear that, Doctor? They say they're
eyewitnesses!

LUKE: Well, bless my soul, Theo. It seems we've struck gold
already. Let's interview these people.

THEO: All right. (To KIDS) Say, old chaps, do you know
anything about this fellow named Jesus?

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ALL KIDS: (Ad lib) Yes! Of course we do! Uh-huh!
LUKE: Well, can you tell us anything about his birth?
KID 1: Yes, I can!
KID 2: Me too!
KID 3: Me three!
KID 4: Hey, I want to tell it!
KID 5: No, let me, let, me! (Pandemonium breaks out, then one voice is heard over the rest.)
KID 6: Now, listen! We’ll all tell it together. Come on, then, step lively! To your places! (The KIDS assemble themselves into a formation.) Well, good sirs, it happened like this. (The following poem may be recited together or performed as a “choral speaking” piece, with different lines performed by different voices, at varying tempos and volumes, and accompanied by choreographed facial expressions, hand motions, and oral sound effects.)
ALL KIDS: We were out in the field.
      It was late at night.
      There wasn’t a sound.
      There wasn’t no light.

      We were watching our sheep.
      We were fighting depression.
      That’s ’cuz we’re shepherds,
      That’s our profession.

      When all of a sudden
      Old Bob here starts screaming:
      “Look at that glowing!
      Look at that gleaming!”

      Sure enough, we looked ’round
      And there on the ground
      A terrible light was all
      Shining around.
We started to tremble,
We started to panic.
And once more, old Bob here
Was getting quite frantic.

BOB: AAAAAHHHH!
ALL KIDS: Then a person most peculiar
   Flew down like a bird.
   He looked like an angel,
   And that’s when we heard:

   “Do not be afraid!
   I bring you good news!
   Great joy be to all
   Who stand in your shoes!

   “Today in the town
   Of David was born
   A Savior for you:
   He is Christ the Lord!” (The KIDS cheer)

   And suddenly a great company
   Of the heavenly host
   Appeared with the angel
   And offered a toast

   To God in the highest,
   And his glory abounded
   While the angels sang to us,
   And here’s how they sounded ... (Handel’s “Hallelujah
   Chorus” plays as CLASS 1 exits.)
Scene 4 — Angels

(CLASS 2 enters—the smallest kids dressed as ANGELS. They enter with their ADULT ANGEL helpers, who lead the little ones through their lines and hand motions.)

ANGELS: (They point a finger skyward.) Holy God has sent his Son (Hand over eyes, as if peering into the distance) for all the world to see. (Hands cupped around mouth) We shout out loud and cheer for God (Arms up in praise) and praise him joyfully!

ADULT ANGEL: Some of these little angels want to tell you what they remember about the day Jesus was born. (If desired, the following may be supplemented with enough additional memories of Christ’s birth so that every child has a line.)

ANGEL 1: I remember when he took his first breath.
ANGEL 2: I remember the star above his cradle.
ANGEL 3: I remember the gifts that the three wise men brought.
ANGEL 4: But the best part was when we got to worship baby Jesus for the first time. (An angel song starts to play. An adult mother dressed as MARY enters carrying her infant swaddled like BABY JESUS. The ANGELS all gather round him and bow down to praise him. Then, one at a time, the children get up, give the BABY JESUS a precious kiss, and exit. When the last member of CLASS 2 is gone, MARY also exits and the music fades.)

Scene 5 — Baptism

(LUKE and THEO, who have been observing from the sidelines, return to center as CLASS 3 enters.)

THEO: Jiminy Christmas! That was amazing!
LUKE: Indeed, my good fellow! I got some jolly good notes for
THEO: Well, I should say! What an amazing story about this bloke’s birth. I’d say it’s pretty clear right from the start that this Jesus was something special. I mean, not every baby is announced by a choir of angels and has stars following him around and whatnot. (To KIDS) So, eyewitnesses, what happened next?

KID 7: Well, before you knew it, the next thirty years flew by, just like that. All we really remember is that Jesus —

JESUS: Hey, I want to play Jesus!

KID 7: And his cousin John —

JOHN: OK, I’ll be John!

KID 7: Both grew up.

ALL KIDS: (Together) And the more they grew, the stronger they got. (JOHN and JESUS make muscles.) And the stronger they got, the wiser they got. (JOHN and JESUS point toward their brains.) And the wiser they got, the closer to God they got. (JOHN and JESUS fold their hands in prayer.)

KID 7: Until one day, it was time for their public ministry to begin. (Use any song about baptism or a river here. Two KIDS stretch out a long piece of blue cloth to represent the Jordan River. The other KIDS line up and get baptized by JOHN in quick succession, then the music fades.)

KID 8: It turns out that John came to prepare the way for Jesus, to get everybody ready for him.

LUKE: And how did John do that?

KID 9: By baptizing people. It was a way to show they had turned to God and were ready to receive Jesus. But all of a sudden, something amazing happened ...

ALL KIDS: (Together) Jesus himself came to be baptized by John. (JESUS approaches JOHN in the “water” and all the other KIDS evince shock. As JOHN baptizes JESUS, the kids say the following.)

ALL KIDS: (Reciting together) And as he was praying, heaven...
was opened *(Their faces and hands shoot heavenward)* and
the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a
dove. *(They use their hands and gazes to indicate the Spirit's
descent upon JESUS.)* And a voice came from heaven:
*(Loudly)* “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well
pleased” *(Luke 3:21-22).* *(CLASS 3 exits.)*

Scene 6 — Temptation

*(CLASS 4 enters.)*

THEO: Well, I'm starting to get the idea that something pretty
fishy is going on with this Jesus character. First of all
you've got angels showing up at his birth, then you've got
the Holy Spirit descending and God himself making
pronouncements at his baptism. If you ask me, I'd say
you're dealing with a pretty important fellow here.

LUKE: One would certainly think so, wouldn't they? *(Knowing
smile)*

THEO: Sounds like this Jesus was a bigwig who had it made
in the shade. Angels taking care of him, God taking care
of him ... He must not have had a worry in the world.

KID 10: Actually, that's not how it was at all.

THEO: What do you mean?

KID 10: Right after he was baptized, Jesus was led by the Spirit
into the desert. There he encountered none other than ...
the Devil himself! *(Pianist plays loud shock chords. The KIDS
scream in horror and run off to the sides, revealing the DEVIL
at center.)*

DEVIL: Bwa-ha-ha-ha! I'll get that Jesus if it's the last thing I
do! Bwa-ha-ha-ha!

THEO: Oooo, he's a nasty one, isn't he? How's he gonna try to
get Jesus, Doctor? Shoot him with a bazooka? Run him
over with a tank?

LUKE: No, my good chap. Nothing so obvious. You see, the Evil
One is a fair bit sneakier than that.

THEO: Oh, you mean he works for the IRS?

DEVIL: No, you silly man! I'm not going to get Jesus by trying
to blow him up or poison him — he'd never fall for that.
Instead, I am going to tempt Jesus. My greatest weapons
are temptations.

KID 11: (Aside) What are temptations?

KID 12: I think they're one of those old singing groups.

KID 13: Oh yeah, they're real good. They used to sing ... (Song
by the Temptations starts to play, which the KIDS soulfully sing
or lip sync.)

DEVIL: Eeeediots! That's not what I'm talking about!

LUKE: A temptation is when Satan tricks you into wanting to
do something wrong.

KID 14: Oh, I know what you're talking about. Like the time I
really wanted to steal a candy bar ...

KID 15: Or the time I almost cheated on a test ...

KID 16: Or the time I tried to give my brother to Goodwill. (The
other kids do a comedic double-take.) They wouldn't take him.

KID 17: Is that what you meant, mister?

LUKE: Well ... basically, yes.

THEO: So what happened when the devil tried to tempt Jesus?

Did he win? (Western showdown music plays. The DEVIL and
JESUS square off, walking slowly toward each other.)

JESUS: This universe ain't big enough for the both of us,
pardner.

DEVIL: (Holding rock) Hey, Jesus. You haven't eaten since you
came to this desert, have you? You must be preeetty
hungry. Well, if you really are something special like
you're supposed to be, why don't you just turn this here
rock into a nice fresh plate of homemade biscuits and
gravy? Or can't you do it? What's the matter — too hard
for you, Jesus? I bet you're nothing but a big fake. Come
on — if you're the Son of God, prove it. Turn this stone to
bread!
KID 18: Oh no, what's gonna happen? Is he gonna make it?
KID 19: I dunno ... he looks pretty hungry.
KID 18: Come on, Jesus, you can do it! Resist him!
KID 20: Yeah, but out in this desert, what is he supposed to use
to defend himself?
KID 21: I know! (Pianist plays triumphant chords.) He can use the
Bible! (The kid runs to give JESUS a Bible.) Here, Jesus. Use
your sword.
JESUS: (Opening the Bible and reading from it) It says in the
Bible, “Man does not live on bread alone,” (Matthew 4:4)
you snake.
DEVIL: What?! No fair! Who said this was an open book test?
JESUS: (Snapping the book shut and looking up) The word’s in my
heart, not just in my hand, Devil.
DEVIL: Look, Jesus, let’s call a truce. Tell you what. You put
down that there weapon and just worship me, and I’ll give
you everything! Money! Power! You name it! Whaddaya
say?
JESUS: (Holding the Bible like a gun toward the DEVIL) The Bible
also says, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him
only” (Matthew 4:10).
DEVIL: (Pantomimes being shot in the chest, falls to ground.)
Uhhhh! You got me! (Dying gasp) You ain’t seen the last of
me, Jesus! (He expires.)
ALL KIDS: Hooray! (Triumphant music plays while the KIDS cheer.
They crowd around JESUS, hold up his arms like a champion,
and usher him Off-stage. The last few members of CLASS 4
pick up the DEVIL and carry him off.)

Scene Seven — Miracles and Parables

(CLASS 5, all wearing cool sunglasses, enters marching in time
and chanting a military cadence.)
HALF OF THE KIDS: (Singing) Jesus did some miracles,
OTHER HALF OF KIDS: (Echoing) Jesus did some miracles,
HALF OF THE KIDS: Jesus taught some parables.
OTHER HALF OF KIDS: (Echoing) Jesus taught some parables.
HALF OF THE KIDS: Jesus did them every one,
OTHER HALF OF KIDS: (Echoing) Jesus did them every one,
HALF OF THE KIDS: To prove to us he was God’s Son.
OTHER HALF OF KIDS: (Echoing) To prove to us he was God’s Son.

HALF OF THE KIDS: Sound off!
OTHER HALF OF KIDS: (Shouting) Miracles!
HALF OF THE KIDS: Sound off!
OTHER HALF OF KIDS: (Shouting) Parables!

ALL KIDS: (Singing together) Jesus proved that he was God’s Son!

LUKE: Look, Theo, here are some more eyewitnesses. Let’s see if they can give us any more clues as to the identity of Jesus. (To the KIDS) I say, good fellows, have you any interesting tidbits about Jesus for me to put in my book?

KID 22: Well, sir, if you want to know how Jesus spent his time, it pretty much came down to two things ...

ALL KIDS: (Together) Miracles and parables!

KID 23: In fact, it just so happens that we remember exactly twenty-two of each: twenty-two miracles and twenty-two parables.

LUKE: You’re kidding!

KID 23: Nope. And I have a feeling your book will end up with twenty-two of each as well. Check it out … (The KIDS break into a well-choreographed sequence of body percussion and found sound, à la Stomp. Once they’ve established the beat, their rap begins.)

ALL KIDS: (Together) Twenty-two miracles, twenty-two parables!

Twenty-two miracles, twenty-two parables!

The miracles of Jesus —
Hey, man, they really seize us.
We'll tell you all about 'em,
'Cuz his wonders really please us.

RAPPER 1: He made a storm stop
When he told the wind, “Be still.”
He fed five thousand people,
And they all ate their fill.

He caught so many fish
Our boats started to spill.
Then he transfigured before us
On the top of a hill.

RAPPER 2: He cured the fever
Of my man Peter's mother-in-law.
He cured a woman on the Sabbath,
Though it was against the law.

He healed cripples, paralytics,
And the lepers who passed by,
And a man with a hand
That was withered and dry.

RAPPER 3: He saved a man’s servant
Without even going near.
He gave Bartimaeus sight,
And Malchus, a new ear.

He drove out lots of demons,
And made their captives clean.
In fact, he got seven
Outta Mary Magdalene.

RAPPER 4: But the most amazing thing
That Jesus ever did
Was when he brought back to life
A widow’s dead kid.

And then he did it again
For Jairus’ girl.
What a sight to behold!
You know, it really shook my world.

ALL KIDS: (Together) Twenty-two miracles, twenty-two parables!

Twenty-two miracles, twenty-two parables!
The parables of Jesus —
Hey, man, they really seize us
We’ll tell you all about ’em
’Cuz his stories really please us!

(Throughout the following, the numbers are shouted by ALL KIDS while the parable titles are performed by individuals or small groups Allow sufficient time between the titles for the enactments.)

ALL KIDS: (Together) One! The Two Debtors. (Two KIDS pull their pockets out while another KID waves them off and gives the “OK” sign.)

Two! The Four Soils. (Four KIDS step up — one is flat on the floor, the other, kneeling, the next, standing but crouched, and the last, standing on tiptoe with arms up high.)

Three! The Barren Fig Tree. (One KID holds arms out limply, looks sad.)

Four! The Budding Fig Tree. (Another KID holds curved arms on either side of head to form a circle.)

Five! The Persistent Widow. (GIRL tugs on another KID’s arm while he/she rolls eyes.)

Six! The Good Samaritan. (One KID puts arm around another KID and helps him or her walk.)

Seven! The Faithful Servant. (One KID stands at attention and salutes.)
Eight! The Prodigal Son. (Taller boy — “Father” — hugs shorter boy, “Son.”)

(Clap) Nine! The Unjust Steward. (One KID sneaks around stealthily.)

(Clap) Ten! The Friend at Night. (Two KIDS — one is yawning and sleepy, the other pulls insistently on the sleepy one’s arm.)

Eleven is The Leaven! (GIRL puts tiny pinch in “dough” and kneads — “dough” grows.)

The Pharisee and Publican. (Two KIDS — one is proud with nose up in air, the other is ashamed and covers face.)

The Rich Man and Lazarus. (Two KIDS — one takes a kingly stance with arms folded, the other kneels and begs, arms outstretched.)

The Master and His Servant. (Two KIDS — one serves the other some food, which he pantomimes eating.)

The Wedding Guests! The Great Banquet! (All KIDS pretend to eat and drink.)

The Lost Sheep! (One KID finds another KID “sheep” on all fours.)

The Lost Coin! (A KID pretends to find a coin on the floor.)

Ten Talents! (Three KIDS. One holds up ten fingers and smiles, the other holds up 4 fingers with a deadpan expression, and the last holds up one finger and looks frustrated.)

Wicked Tenants! (Four KIDS. “Master” pantomimes shoving or mistreating three “servants.”)

Rich Fool! (One KID pantomimes counting money, then keels over.)

Mustard Seed! (One KID curls up in a ball on the floor, then grows tall with arms out.)

Twenty-two miracles, twenty-two parables!

Twenty-two miracles, twenty-two parables! (The Stomp-type percussion crescendos and ends with bang. CLASS 5 struts off, cool as ice.)