



The Tragedy of Light

Full Length (Two Acts)

Playwright: Annika Andersson
Dramaturg: Krissy Castellese

Development History:

Virtual Reading - Self Directed (2022); Private Reading - Self Directed (2022)

Synopsis

When a young congregant disappears from the Clarified Church of the Cross, Father Michael must find a way to keep his community from breaking. It's a simple enough task, but everyone around him has their own agendas... and secrets. The Mother of the missing congregant, Katherine, experiences a psychotic break. The younger associative pastor, Father David, struggles to balance his commitment to the priesthood with hidden romantic feelings for another congregant. Father Michael fights to regain control, but visions of his own son haunt his every waking moment. Maybe a lack of control is what this community needs. Only time and confrontation will tell.

Characters

Michael: 62 years old; the lead pastor with a secret; commands respect, but tends to bumble; apparent master of disguise

David: 27 years old; the associate and music pastor; questions the facts; eager to please; driven

Ashley: 25 years old; the companion you always wished you had; sees the potential in others; compassionate

Katherine: 34 years old; tries to advocate for her beliefs; concerned about her family and the world they live in; afflicted

Benjamin*: Appears from ages 6-17; wrestles between his chosen path and desired fate; imbued with confidence; a trickster

**Note: At each appearance, the age at which he appears is notated.*

Saint Isaiah: Appears as a disembodied voice; viewed as the epitome of divinity; a glass vase with a crack; a paradox

Time

The near future

Place

The Clarified Church of the Cross

Notes:

The Tape Recorder

The “tape recorder scenes” shouldn’t be taken literally (with characters pressing “play” and simply listening to the dialogue). Stage the scenes that “take place” on the tape recorder. This can be done with recorded projections, the use of a side stage, the use of a scrim, etc. The idea that the “tape recorder scenes” and the “present day” are separated by some form of barrier can be considered when deciding what staging fits best.

Language

A decent amount of religious jargon is used throughout the play. This can (and at certain times, should be) embraced as heightened language, but don’t fall into the trap of embellishing it all the time. Terms like this are second nature to an intimate religious community, especially for leaders like Michael and David. They don’t necessarily have to think about the terminology; it just flows out of them.

Pronunciation

The N+I translation of the Bible is pronounced “N and I.”

“I wondered why the good man dies, the bad man thrives, and Jesus cries because he loves em’ both.”

-Farther Along (Josh Garrels)

{ACT 1}

Pre-show

Entering the space, we are transported into the Clarified Church of Cross' sanctuary. Boxes of decorations lay around the space. MICHAEL sets up the decorations, including a variety of electrical lights that he hangs on the back wall (lamps, fairy lights, electric candles, etc.). The lights are illuminated. MICHAEL runs out of breath from setting up the space alone.

SCENE 1

When it is time, MICHAEL finds a place to rest. He takes a decorated flask out of his pocket and sips from it (the design doesn't suggest it's alcohol - but it certainly isn't water). The lights grow brighter, and a child cries out. BENJAMIN (6) enters.

BENJAMIN

One more time, Papa, pleaseeee!

MICHAEL

They're arriving any second. Don't you want to greet your brothers and sisters in Christ?

BENJAMIN

Last time! I promise.

MICHAEL places his hands over his eyes.

MICHAEL

1... 2... 3... 4... 5...

BENJAMIN hides behind the altar.

MICHAEL (cont.)

6... 7... 8... 9... 10!

MICHAEL opens his eyes and looks around the space.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Benjaaaaaamin? Where are you? I hope he's not gone for good. What would I ever tell Mama?

BENJAMIN giggles. MICHAEL approaches the laughter. A moment of anticipated silence. MICHAEL leaps at BENJAMIN.

MICHAEL (cont.)
There you are!

BENJAMIN
No!!! How'd you find me?!

MICHAEL
Don't you remember Genesis?

BENJAMIN
Gen-e-sis... "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth and sin... They were formless and empty and"

MICHAEL
But what happened when Adam hid in the garden?

BENJAMIN
The heavenly host came down and STOMPED HIM.

BENJAMIN runs towards MICHAEL with his arms outstretched. MICHAEL raises his voice right before BENJAMIN touches him, as if to stop all physical contact between them.

MICHAEL
NO! God found him. Fathers always know where their sons are hiding.

SAINT ISAIAH (offstage)
That's not true...

BENJAMIN and MICHAEL look to the direction of the voice.

BENJAMIN
Grandpa!

BENJAMIN runs offstage. A gunshot. MICHAEL loses his balance.

BENJAMIN/DAVID (offstage)
Father?

MICHAEL falls to the ground.

DAVID (cont.)
Father Michael!

The lights normalize. DAVID enters and helps MICHAEL stand.

MICHAEL
David? I'm fine, I'm fine.

DAVID
But Father-

MICHAEL
I didn't fall during a service this time. I was spared true embarrassment, and for that, I am grateful.

DAVID
It's because of Mira, isn't it? The stress has been affecting you ever since she-

MICHAEL
This started happening long before that girl abandoned our community. My thoughts, I confess, have always run away from me-

DAVID
Confess the sin.

MICHAEL
-but my body can't keep up in the way it used to. But today isn't about broken bodies or sinful girls.

MICHAEL approaches the boxes of decorations and motions to a large hand-painted portrait of SAINT ISAIAH.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Today, we celebrate a Saint and his community. Nothing can change that.

DAVID
Amen!

MICHAEL
Amen. Come. Let's finish with the lights before the volunteers show up.

DAVID
Just a moment.

DAVID approaches a bowl of water. He holds his rosary to his mouth, whispers a confession, signs the cross, and dips his rosary into the bowl. DAVID joins MICHAEL at the cardboard boxes. They unpack and hang electrical lights. DAVID struggles to unwind a pale mosaic lamp.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Gentle.

DAVID
Yes, Father.

MICHAEL
Do you remember who that belongs to?

DAVID
I have been trying to memorize the family trees. I have. But I confess-

MICHAEL
Confess the sin.

DAVID
-I don't know who the lights belong to. At least, not yet.

MICHAEL
That is Edith Engblom's light.

DAVID
Mother to- Brother Timothy and- Grandmother to Ashley?

MICHAEL
Yes. She was a remarkable person. Spirited, but remarkable. Edith moved her family to the community after leaving her job at the hospital.

DAVID
She was a nurse, right?

MICHAEL
Doctor. Seeing the masses in pain became too much for her. She wanted a better life for her children. So she came here.

DAVID
I'm glad she found us.

MICHAEL holds up a baseball night light.

MICHAEL
This is Tony Garcia's light. He confessed to me that he used to read by its light as a boy. His mother never caught him.

MICHAEL touches two more lights by him. DAVID goes to untangle Edith's light.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Sister Aisha, who loved to sing. Brother Cassius, our first schoolteacher.

MICHAEL pauses at an electric candle. It's different from the others.

MICHAEL (cont.)

And Julie, beloved wife.

DAVID plugs in Edith's light. It lights up.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Knowing their names isn't enough. You need to know their stories, their testimonies. Since we are forbidden from having our own children, this is our family. We must treat them as such.

DAVID

I understand, Father.

MICHAEL

Respecting their stories is the bare minimum. Their past can reveal our future. Hold on to that, I won't always be here to remind you.

DAVID

I am grateful for your continued guidance and patience, Father.

MICHAEL

Don't thank me. This is a part of our scriptures. Thank Saint Isaiah. It was his translation, his teachings. I am simply the torch bearer. Just like you will be one day.

DAVID

But what if I want to express gratitude to you?

MICHAEL

Then do so in prayer. We can't rely on shallow forms of expression. Words lose all meaning against action. And compliments only inflate the ego.

DAVID

But with all the unrest in the community-

MICHAEL

There isn't unrest in the community.

DAVID

Katherine still wants us to go after her daughter. The whole situation has upset the community. Now- I know Mira ran away, but-

MICHAEL

She didn't just run away. She ran from us, God's people, and in doing so, she ran from Christ himself. Besides, a week has already passed. By now, the outside world has certainly claimed her heart.

DAVID

But her mother's heart-

MICHAEL

If Katherine attended the nightly prayer meetings with the other women, she would understand. It's given everyone else closure.

DAVID

She hasn't left her apartment since it happened.

MICHAEL

A week inside the home isn't uncommon.

DAVID

I was thinking, well, that-

MICHAEL

Katherine has always been a devoted believer. She will find her way through this. Be patient.

DAVID

I am patient. But what if-

MICHAEL

There is no "what if"

DAVID

- if I could speak with her- it may be helpful.

MICHAEL

That won't be necessary.

DAVID

But I really think that -

MICHAEL

Why all this questioning? You never push back like this.

DAVID

I just, well... I don't know.

MICHAEL

Have better command of your language. Just say it. I'm giving you permission.

DAVID

Father. I've been training for 8 years. I'm getting older. And my foundation is still growing, but it is strong. I just thought it would be beneficial if I actually started speaking more. After all, I will start preaching soon.

MICHAEL

If you prove yourself.

DAVID

Of course. I want to show you, Father. Let me show you I'm ready.

MICHAEL

You desire more responsibility?

DAVID

Yes. I've started writing down some ideas for sermons-

DAVID pulls a notebook out of his pocket.

DAVID

I think this is a good one. You could change the words, do whatever you want with it, but it has potential. Especially now.

MICHAEL

David-

DAVID

I was reading the story of Esther, and I was struck by her commitment to the Lord. She was a whore. A whore! And yet, God used her for his glory.

MICHAEL takes a sip from his flask. The lights grow brighter. BENJAMIN (6) enters and wanders around the space as if he was playing hide n' seek. MICHAEL notices him. DAVID does not. BENJAMIN ducks behind a lock box and sound system.

DAVID (cont.)

We don't discuss that much. Perhaps it would be a good sermon? We could remind women that even though they- inherently exhibit more sin than men, God can redeem them and bring glory to his people? Or even what it means to be a woman of faith. Are they actually more sinful than men, like Eve? Or do they have the ability to be stronger than their male counterparts, like Marian? It's something we could really explore together. Especially since Mira, well...what do you think?

BENJAMIN taps the lock box, then exits. The lights normalize. MICHAEL keeps his eyes fixed on the lock box.

DAVID (cont.)
Father Michael?

MICHAEL
What?

DAVID
Should we center a sermon around women and sin?

MICHAEL
You're not ready to start preaching, David. But I think you're ready for this.

MICHAEL takes out the lock box and places it on the sound system.

DAVID
Is that-

MICHAEL
The archival tapes. Yes. Only the holiest of hands can touch them.

DAVID
You want me to be in charge of the tapes?

MICHAEL
I want you to start listening to the tapes. Not just the recorded sermons we broadcast on holidays.

DAVID
Saint Isaiah's original sermons? You're telling me there's more?

MICHAEL
Much more. Now, I can't give you access to the entire library right away. There are certain tapes that- I would like to walk through with you. Explain the theology.

DAVID
Of course.

MICHAEL
But for today... I want to teach you how to play the tapes. And how to broadcast the sermon for the Day of Light.

DAVID
It would be my honor, Father.

MICHAEL shows DAVID how to work the technology.

MICHAEL

First, you turn on the sound system and open this. It's called the tape deck. Then, you place a cassette tape in the tape deck. Once you close it, you can control the recording from here. This button is for play, to begin the recording- fast forward, to skip ahead- and rewind, to go back...

DAVID

Fascinating...

MICHAEL

Isn't it?

DAVID

It's so... historical.

MICHAEL

Makes you feel connected to Saint Isaiah himself, doesn't it?

DAVID

Will it ever stop working?

MICHAEL

No, because we will take perfect care of it. We keep the tapes protected and locked in this box here. You can access it with-

MICHAEL searches his pockets but cannot find the key.

DAVID

Is there something wrong, Father?

MICHAEL

The key... I thought I left it... there's a certain place you have to stop the recording, every time, you must stop it, right there, I must've...the key must be in my office. I could go get it after I tell, wait...where are the volunteers?

DAVID

The volunteers?

MICHAEL

They should be here by now.

DAVID

Maybe they're running late?

MICHAEL

They're women, I expected them to be late, but they shouldn't be this late.

MICHAEL starts to lose his balance.

DAVID

Father?

MICHAEL

We- we cannot delay. We can't.

DAVID

You're okay. It's going to be okay.

MICHAEL straightens his back and smiles.

MICHAEL

Yes. I know. We- we shouldn't waste this extra time now, should we? I should... I'll go get the key from my office, and you... you set up the altar.

DAVID

But I don't know which-

MICHAEL exits. DAVID looks at the altar. DAVID looks at the lock box. DAVID approaches the lock box and sound system, examining them closely. He investigates a nearby cardboard box. DAVID sees something MICHAEL did not. He reaches in and takes out the key.

DAVID (cont.)

Father M-

DAVID stops himself.

SCENE 2

DAVID puts the key in the lock box, turns it, and opens it. He sifts through the tapes inside.

DAVID

Which one are you...

DAVID grabs a tape marked in red, places it in the tape deck, and presses play. SAINT ISAIAH's voice can be heard.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Notes on the New and Improved Translation, recorded on May 11, 1984 by Isaiah Martin. In studying the greek word eleos, I've found another discrepancy in the catholic-

DAVID stops the recording and takes out the red tape. He pulls out a yellow tape, places it in the tape deck, and presses play. A choir can be heard singing. David stops the recording and thinks. He looks closer at the labeling of the tapes and pulls out an orange tape. DAVID places it in the tape player, and presses play.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Family. What makes a family? I don't know about you, but I cannot find it in this world. In my youth, I inhaled so much of Satan's fumes, I couldn't breathe. I didn't deserve to breathe.

This is the tape DAVID was looking for. He listens to SAINT ISAIAH.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Do you know what I deserved? Do you know what all of us self-serving, pain-bearing, scheming people deserve? To die gasping, choking on our own human flesh. But do you know where I found comfort? Where I found my family? At the foot of the cross and in the arms of brothers and sisters. Even at the turn of the Millennium, we are safe because we find life in death. Can you say the same? Will you take full advantage of this gift and join me and my family in Christ? We are happy to have you.

There is a pause that suggests the tape has reached its end. DAVID goes to stop it, but SAINT ISAIAH's voice continues.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

That's how you give testimony, Michael. Not the apologetic way you do.

MICHAEL (on tape)
I understand.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
You didn't occasionally indulge in sin. As far as God is concerned, you are sin itself!
People passing you on the street won't care what you're preaching until you get their
attention. If we want this community to grow, we need their attention.

MICHAEL (on tape)
To establish a new Eden.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
Exactly. I want you to listen to this testimony every night until you get it right.

MICHAEL (on tape)
I will. I won't let you down.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
Son, you know what I've sacrificed for this vision. Your Mother... you know. Our whole
family has made sacrifice. Do not be the one who lets it fall apart.

MICHAEL (on tape)
I understand, Father. Really. I do.

SAINT ISIAH
Our blood carries the torch. Run with it.

Static.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
It's still recording.

SAINT ISAIAH hits a nearby surface (either wall, table, his leg, etc.).

MICHAEL (on tape)
I'm sorry.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
End it! I won't always be here to remind you about every little-

The recording ends. DAVID opens the tape deck and takes out the tape. Before he has a chance to put it back, ASHELY enters. She approaches the bowl of water, holds her rosary to her mouth, whispers a confession, signs the cross, and dips her rosary into the bowl.

DAVID
Ashley!

ASHLEY
Father David.

DAVID
You don't have to call me that.

ASHLEY
But I do.

DAVID
Not when we're alone.

DAVID approaches ASHELY. She backs away.

ASHLEY
You're confusing me, David.

DAVID
I'm sorry. You're right.

ASHLEY
We decided that we shouldn't-

DAVID
I know.

ASHLEY
I'm here as a member of your congregation. Nothing else.

DAVID
Of course. I'm sorry. What... what can I help you with?

ASHLEY

Where's Father Michael?

DAVID

He went to put some finishing touches on his sermon.

ASHLEY

I need to speak to him. Or both of you, I guess.

DAVID

Is everything okay?

ASHLEY cannot help it. She moves closer to DAVID and they huddle close together.

ASHLEY

It's Katherine. We all woke up to her screaming. Thank goodness Brother Charles has keys. He immediately got into her apartment. We thought she fell or there was an intruder or something, but- it was just Katherine. For hours, she's been screaming and crying and- the women have been trying to comfort her, get her to stop, and sometimes it helps, but she just starts back up again. We don't know what to do. We don't want to leave her alone. Or leave anyone alone- with her.

DAVID

Could be possession. I've never seen it, but-

ASHLEY

No, her eyes, David. They're hers. No one else is in there. It's just Katherine. I wonder- with Mira running away-

DAVID

Father Michael said she abandoned us.

ASHLEY

Sure, but with her gone, Katherine doesn't have anyone left.

DAVID

She has the community.

ASHLEY

But her real family-

DAVID

- she is technically alone, you're right. When you told me she hasn't left her apartment all week, I told Father Michael, but he-

ASHLEY

-he didn't listen to you.

DAVID

I think he's going to now. I'm trying to speak up, to- take initiative.

ASHLEY

You've been training for 8 years. It's about time you-

DAVID

I know. Maybe- maybe we should perform a purification? For Katherine.

ASHLEY

I'm not sure that's a good idea.

DAVID

Why? If she's experiencing significant- mental problems or intense sin, that's the cure.

ASHLEY

It was a purification that made Mira leave.

DAVID

You don't know that.

ASHLEY

It's the last thing that happened before she ran away. After Mira's purification, we never saw her again.

DAVID

But if Katherine is refusing to tell us what's happening-

ASHLEY

She does keep repeating something, a request, I guess.

DAVID

If it's about going after Mira, we can't. I already asked.

ASHLEY
It's not that.

DAVID touches ASHLEY's arm.

DAVID
What is it?

ASHLEY
I... I think I should tell you with Father Michael present, if that's ok.

DAVID
Oh. Yes, of course. I can- let's go to him.

ASHLEY
Or I can go by myself. It is the Day of Light. You have other things to worry about.

DAVID
If today is for anything, it's the community. The family.

ASHLEY
Which is important when you can't have your own.

Silence.

ASHLEY (cont.)
I'm sorry.

DAVID
It's okay.

ASHLEY
I'm just trying to figure out how to... do this.

DAVID
I mean... I'm okay with going to Father Michael together. Are you okay with that?

ASHLEY
I am.

DAVID

Good. Oh, but wait a second.

DAVID puts the orange tape back in the lock box, locks it, and places the key in his pocket. He closes the tape player.

ASHLEY

You have access to the tapes?

DAVID

I'll tell you more later.

DAVID exits with ASHLEY.

SCENE 3

The lights grow brighter. BENJAMIN (13) enters. MICHAEL enters behind him, holding his sermon and a wrapped box.

MICHAEL

Not so fast, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

It's my birthday. Call me Ben.

MICHAEL

It's also your grandfather's birthday, and he insists on using your Christian name.

BENJAMIN

Why can't I have my own party? I'm old enough now.

MICHAEL

Thirteen is old for some things, but not others.

BENJAMIN

Like going into town "unaccompanied?"

MICHAEL

Yes! And you also have access to the internet now. No one else does. Just you. And me. And Grandfather. You'll learn how unbelievers think!

BENJAMIN

I just want to be called Ben.

MICHAEL

At 15, you'll begin your work study. At 17, you'll be preaching on the street. And before you know it, you'll be a pastor at 20! Preaching to the whole community!

BENJAMIN

But what if when I turn 20... I'm not ready? What if I'm never ready?

MICHAEL

Why would you say that?

BENJAMIN shrugs.

MICHAEL (cont.)

You were born for this.

BENJAMIN

I know, but...I don't know.

MICHAEL

This is your calling. Claim it! Enjoy every moment. Work study was my favorite. At the greenhouse, I learned all about the medicinal properties of plants. Now, I can help our people with my knowledge.

BENJAMIN

You're just experimenting.

MICHAEL

But soon, I'll make something real. And so will you.

BENJAMIN

That's what you say, but Grandfather....

BENJAMIN falls silent.

MICHAEL

What?

BENJAMIN

He doesn't say nice things. About you. And he said that I'm not... I'm trying to be who he needs me to be. I am. But he... I don't know. It hurts.

BENJAMIN rubs his arm and avoids eye contact.

MICHAEL

If it hurts... its only because he cares. I'm sorry if what he said he hurt you, but know this...

MICHAEL reaches out to touch BENJAMIN's shoulder but stops himself.

MICHAEL (cont.)

I am proud of you. I am so proud that I, well...

MICHAEL offers BENJAMIN the wrapped box.

BENJAMIN

An actual present?!

BENJAMIN rips the box open and pauses. He takes out a gun from inside the box.

MICHAEL

Entering this next phase... I want you to be prepared. N everyone is going to like what you have to say when you go into town. Or who you are. You'll need to be ready. You need to protect yourself and others in case things... go wrong.

BENJAMIN

Does anyone else have one?

MICHAEL

Only select men. For emergencies.

BENJAMIN

It's beautiful.

BENJAMIN turns the gun around in his hands. MICHAEL leans down to his level.

MICHAEL

Not everyone will like that I gave you this. They'll say your too young, but I know you are ready. You are not like everyone else. You are special, above the others. God chose you. God chose our family to shepherd his flock, and we must keep the wolves at bay. Protect your sheep. No matter what. After all, with God's love, you can do anything.

BENJAMIN points the gun at MICHAEL.

BENJAMIN

Don't worry. I will.

BENJAMIN walks around the space with the gun.

MICHAEL

I'll teach you well. I'm teaching you right now. Aren't I?

BENJAMIN picks up his pace.

MICHAEL (cont.)
I taught you well. I did!!

BENJAMIN ducks behind the altar like he did in hide n' seek.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Ben?

MICHAEL looks behind the altar, but BENJAMIN has disappeared.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Where did you go?

MICHAEL starts frantically looking around the space.

MICHAEL (cont.)
Ben!! Where are you?! Answer me! Right now. WHERE ARE YOU.

DAVID enters with ASHLEY. The lights normalize. MICHAEL does not notice ASHLEY.

DAVID
I'm here, Father.

MICHAEL
David?

DAVID
Forgive me. I thought you were in your office.

MICHAEL
But- the women- the volunteers?

MICHAEL notices ASHLEY.

MICHAEL
Oh, welcome, my child. Are you the only one?

ASHLEY
Father Michael, something's happened. Happening. We tried take of it, but-

DAVID

Katherine is hysterical.

ASHLEY

She's been screaming, crying- we can't get her to stop.

MICHAEL

She's probably racked with guilt after losing her daughter to sin.

ASHLEY

But she keeps repeating something. A request.

MICHAEL

We can't go after Mira.

DAVID

I know. I already told her that was a ridiculous idea. Leads directly to sin.

ASHLEY is taken aback by DAVID's comment, but choses to move on.

ASHLEY

It's about her husband... she wants him to be a part of the Day of Light. She wants... to hang a light on the wall in his memory.

MICHAEL

That's not possible.

ASHLEY

I know, but-

MICHAEL

Her husband took his own life. A purification can't even heal that.

DAVID

What if we tried to-

ASHLEY

Father Michael. I will confess if this is blasphemy, but I think you should listen to her.

MICHAEL

I cannot change the law for her.

ASHLEY

I'm not saying that. It's just... when people leave the community, and they don't do it often, but when they do... it's their families, Father. I'm reminded of Lazarus. His friends carried him to the feet of Jesus, and he brought him back to life. Can't we do that too?

MICHAEL

Katherine has always been faithful. She will find a way.

ASHLEY

She needs help, please. Just listen. Raise her from the dead.

MICHAEL

Alright. But gather the women and finish setting up. The Day of Light has always been a day of peace. Nothing will make me not lose control of that.

ASHLEY exits. MICHAEL starts clearing empty boxes and setting them aside.

DAVID

You always know what to say. In times like this. How?

MICHAEL

Rely on the written word. It will never fail you.

DAVID

And carry the torch?

MICHAEL

Yes, yes.

DAVID

Our blood carries the torch.

MICHAEL freezes.

MICHAEL

What did you say?

DAVID

I...

MICHAEL

David? What did you say to me?

DAVID

Nothing. It's just... never mind.

MICHAEL

Tell me. How are we addressed in the community?

DAVID

As Father...

MICHAEL

Father Michael. Father David. They look to us to parent them, to tell them how to wash their hands, if you will. That kind of strength does not come from answers like "never mind." Even with the kids, you repeat Saint Isaiah's teachings, but it is just that. Repetition. Do not repeat the past. Raise the future.

DAVID

But how can I "raise" them if I have no experience?

MICHAEL

You will learn from my experience. At least you're calm. To give into anger is not the path to a successful-

DAVID

And what experience do you have? As a father?

MICHAEL

I dedicated my entire life to this community. I have years of experience as their Father.

DAVID

But-

MICHAEL

ENOUGH with the questions. I actually feel myself getting frustrated, and I never- you didn't even set up the altar like I asked.

DAVID

I... I was waiting for your guidance.

MICHAEL approaches a cardboard box and takes out the ring of candles and the original N+I translation. He arranges them on the altar.

MICHAEL

The ring of candles goes to the left, the original N+I transcription to the right.

DAVID

What about Saint Isiah's portrait?

MICHAEL

In the center, but I cannot set this up all on my own, now, can I? Come here.

DAVID joins MICHAEL at the altar and lifts SAINT ISAIAH's portrait. MICHAEL places a picture stand in the center of the altar.

MICHAEL (cont.)

I understand you're eager but be patient. I'm teaching you well.

MICHAEL and DAVID lift SAINT ISAIAH's portrait and mount it on the stand. THEY take a step back and admire it.

DAVID

The portrait has always been my favorite part of the service.

MICHAEL

Really?

DAVID

Yes.

MICHAEL

Mine... mine has always been the choir.

DAVID

Why?

MICHAEL

I suppose a choir is what I imagine God's voice sounds like. It's the closest thing we'll ever get to hearing him speak.

A door slams.

DAVID

Is that-

MICHAEL

Yes, yes. Breathe. Don't lose control.

SCENE 4

ASHLEY enters, guiding KATHERINE, who has trouble focusing on what's immediately in front of her. KATHERINE is carrying a string of Christmas lights.

MICHAEL

Good morning, Katherine. We're so glad to see you on this beautiful day.

KATHERINE doesn't respond.

ASHLEY

The volunteers have arrived. They're in the kitchen.

MICHAEL

Good.

ASHLEY

Katherine, we're here with Father Michael and Father David. Would you like to speak to them now?

KATHERINE doesn't respond.

DAVID

We've heard you've had a- tumultuous morning.

KATHERINE doesn't respond.

MICHAEL

Silence is the devil's weapon. Speak.

KATHERINE holds up the Christmas lights in her hand.

KATHERINE

I- My husband-

MICHAEL

Yes?

KATHERINE lowers the lights. She might be holding back tears.

MICHAEL

We're taking time from the day to speak to you. Please. Say what you need to say.

KATHERINE

My husband- I brought a light. For James. From our Christmas Tree. We would all sit around and- open presents. He'd look at me and-

MICHAEL

Go on.

KATHERINE

Can you hang it? Can you hang it on the wall of light?

MICHAEL

For your husband?

KATHERINE

Yes.

KATHERINE holds the Christmas lights towards MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

I am moved by the love you still have for him. But you know what the wall of light represents. It honors the members of our community who passed while living in Christ. Your husband took his own life.

KATHERINE

I know-

MICHAEL

He is not with Christ.

KATHERINE starts shaking. DAVID and ASHELY wait for MICHAEL to say something more. MICHAEL remains silent.

DAVID

I... I know this week has been very hard for you. Your daughter is still living, but you lost her. To sin. Maybe that's why you're thinking about your husband? Maybe you're just avoiding what's really going on?

KATHERINE

I'm the only one here.

DAVID

And we are grateful for your faithfulness. Maybe -

MICHAEL

- when life's burdens weigh us down, we have tools that alleviate the pain. Have you confessed into your beads?

KATHERINE takes her rosary out of her pocket and stares at them. MICHAEL motions to the water bowl.

MICHAEL

You may wash them clean and start the week anew.

KATHERINE

I have not confessed into them. There's nothing to wash away.

DAVID

Maybe you can confess now? You don't even need to use the beads. I could-

MICHAEL

Attending the Day of Light will alleviate your sorrows.

DAVID

Or you could have a purification!

Silence.

MICHAEL

We don't have time. It takes an entire service to perform a purification.

DAVID

We could make it a part of the Day of Light? What better way to celebrate the community than save one of our own? Like Lazarus?

MICHAEL

Today is for Saint Isiah. Shifting focus would detract from the purpose of the day.

DAVID

Performing one of his rituals would honor him.

MICHAEL

The Purification was not invented by Saint Isiah.

ASHLEY

What do you think, Katherine?

KATHERINE

I want... I want this pain to go away.

DAVID

A purification will do that.

MICHAEL

Then- then do a shortened version. Right now. Before the ceremony begins.

ASHLEY

But Father-

MICHAEL

Her emotions are already activated. It should be enough to confront her sins and emerge purified and whole. Katherine, please approach the altar with your rosary.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Ashley, stay. You will represent the congregation. David, fetch the ceremonial goblet, vial, and water.

DAVID

Are you sure it isn't better to just-

MICHAEL

I'll do it myself! Prepare the written word. These are the quick decisions that we must make, David. Don't let it fall apart.

MICHAEL exits. KATHERINE starts praying rapidly under her breath.

ASHLEY

Shhh. It's okay, you're okay. Here...

*ASHLEY gently takes the Christmas lights from KATHERINE and helps her kneel.
DAVID grabs the N+I translation from the altar.*

ASHLEY

She isn't stable enough, David. She needs comfort.

DAVID

You've been comforting her all morning. Did that work?

ASHLEY

It might've felt different coming from you or Father Michael.

ASHLEY places the Christmas lights by a cardboard box of electrical lights.

DAVID (cont.)

I think I heard something. Something I wasn't supposed to hear.

ASHLEY

What do you mean?

DAVID

The tapes. Father Michael was going to show me, but he couldn't find the key. Then I found it, took it, and-

ASHLEY

You stole the key?

DAVID

No. Yes. That's not the point.

ASHLEY

Did you put it back? You should put it back.

DAVID

Ashley, listen-

ASHLEY

But if he finds out, and he will find out, then he could-

DAVID

I think Father Michael is Saint Isiah's son.

ASHLEY

What?

DAVID

On a recording, Saint Isaiah called Father Michael "son" and said "our bloodline carries the torch" or something.

ASHLEY

Father Michael calls you "my son." He calls everyone "his children."

DAVID

But Saint Isaiah talked about Father Michael's mother, and it sounded, I don't know... I'm studying bloodlines, Ashley, and I haven't seen anything about Father Michael.

ASHLEY

Pastors aren't allowed to have children.

DAVID

That is the law.

ASHLEY

I mean... laws have to be created. Did he ever tell you why you can't have children?

DAVID

I don't always learn the origin of things. I just do it.

ASHLEY

So, maybe, it wasn't always the case.

DAVID

But why change the rules? If Saint Isaiah had a family, did Father Michael?

ASHLEY

And why can't we?

A door slams.

ASHLEY (cont.)

Put the key back. If he finds you with it- I don't know. He might not trust you anymore. He'll stop training you.

DAVID takes the key out of his pocket and puts it back in the cardboard box where he found it. ASHLEY goes to KATHERINE. DAVID flips through the N+I translation until he finds the page he's looking for. MICHAEL enters, carrying a decorated pitcher, goblet, and vial.

MICHAEL

Are we ready?

DAVID/ASHLEY

Yes.

MICHAEL

Then Begin.

MICHAEL pours water from the decorated pitcher into the goblet. DAVID reads from the N+I translation.

DAVID

My child, state your name for all God's people to hear.

KATHERINE doesn't respond.

ASHLEY

Katherine? Your name?

KATHERINE

Katherine... Katherine Vale.

DAVID

And why do you stand before us today? In- with a blackened heart?

KATHERINE

I have sinned.

MICHAEL

Skip to the statement of purpose.

DAVID scans the page until he finds the correct spot.

DAVID

Do you wish to confess now? In your mind's most vulnerable state to ensure your repentance?

KATHERINE

I am ready to confess, Father.

DAVID

Katherine's family, please state your- I'll skip ahead to the congregation since she doesn't have any family present.

MICHAEL nods. DAVID scans the page until he finds the spot.

DAVID

Katherine Vale. As God knit you in your mother's womb, we created a home for you in this world.

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

We love you, Katherine.

DAVID

As God guided your feet to walk, your hands to write, and your eyes to see, we have taught you how to connect with the world.

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

We love you, Katherine.

DAVID

We embrace your life and all that we've contributed to it.

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

We love you, Katherine.

DAVID lowers the goblet and holds it in front of KATHERINE.

DAVID

But now, we sever you from this world in the hope that you will find your way back to the light.

FATHER DAVID slowly pours the contents of the vial inside the goblet.

DAVID

As God left Jesus in isolation to be tempted by the devil-

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

-We leave you, Katherine.

DAVID

As God left Jesus into the garden, alone, to pray upon his burdens-

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

-We leave you, Katherine.

DAVID

As God left Jesus in death, the ultimate separation, to transform sin itself-

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

-We leave you, Katherine.

DAVID

Lord, we hate the sin that has rooted itself in Katherine's heart. Separate the wheat from the chaff and make her whole again.

MICHAEL/ASHLEY

We love you Lord.

MICHAEL

And when your mind is purified and clear, we will love you, Katherine.

MICHAEL kneels and offers the cup to KATHERINE. She drinks from it.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Return to your community, purified and whole.

KATHERINE's body begins to go limp. MICHAEL supports her body.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Confess. Repent. Let it all go.

KATHERINE loses consciousness. They all stand around her.

MICHAEL (cont.)

We need to prepare for the service. Move her.

DAVID, ASHLEY, and MICHAEL move KATHERINE's body behind the pulpit.

ASHLEY

The congregation usually prays while they're under. Would you like me to-

MICHAEL

You're very kind, but that won't be necessary. Her love for God is strong. Just rejoin the women and set up the rest of the chapel.

DAVID wanders towards the lock box.

DAVID

I can clean up here, if you need to go with her, Father.

MICHAEL

Why would I go with her?

DAVID

To supervise... see if they're doing anything wrong...

MICHAEL glances at the ceremonial elements.

MICHAEL

Why don't you go? Test your leadership. I'll stay here.

DAVID

But-

MICHAEL

Go.

DAVID and ASHLEY exit.

SCENE 5

MICHAEL approaches the ceremonial elements. He picks up the vial, pours one drop into the decorated pitcher, and swirls it around (mixing the contents). MICHAEL takes his flask and pours the mixture inside. The lights grow brighter as MICHAEL takes a sip from the flask and BENJAMIN (15) appears from behind the altar.

BENJAMIN

Experimenting again?

MICHAEL

Benjamin...

BENJAMIN

Is this gonna be long? Cause I'm running late to talk about-

MICHAEL

-your work study. I know.

BENJAMIN

I thought you already found the perfect mixture.

MICHAEL

I did.

BENJAMIN

I wonder what would've happened if your work study wasn't at the greenhouse. Would you have created this? This hallucinogenic-

MICHAEL

It's not just a hallucinogen.

BENJAMIN

Grandfather calls it "drugs."

MICHAEL

It's a plant-based natural hallucinogen, yes, but it conjures images from the past. When mixed with a sleep aid, someone can confront these images in a controlled and comforting state. Like a dream. With this, people can heal their own minds.

BENJAMIN

In a hallucinogenic coma, I know.

MICHAEL

A purification. By looking to the past... we can see the future.

BENJAMIN

So why are you looking at me?

BENJAMIN walks towards MICHAEL. The lights flicker.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

We've re-lived enough memories for tonight, Dad. It's time to talk.

MICHAEL

Stop. Don't touch me!

BENJAMIN

What? I'm just... I'm not going to hurt you.

MICHAEL

Just don't- we can't-

BENJAMIN

What? Tell me.

MICHAEL

There's someone like you. Young. Smart. But he questions. He doesn't trust tradition.

BENJAMIN

Sounds fun.

MICHAEL

And he wants to take initiation, but- that passion. It's like you.

BENJAMIN

And what, that scares you?

MICHAEL

I don't... I don't want him to end up like...

BENJAMIN

Ah. I see.

MICHAEL

How did he stop you? From going too far?

BENJAMIN

Grandfather couldn't stop me. Not in the end.

MICHAEL

Then what went wrong? On that day... you discussed your work study. It wasn't approved. What happened?

BENJAMIN

I told you what happened. Back then. You didn't listen.

MICHAEL

Tell me again.

BENJAMIN

No. You listen.

BENJAMIN taps the lock box.

MICHAEL

I can't. I can't find the key.

BENJAMIN

Did you really look for it? Or just get angry and stop?

MICHAEL looks at the area around the lock box and finds the key in the cardboard box.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

You never used your eyes. Mom hated that.

MICHAEL unlocks the lock box and sifts through the tapes.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

It happened 23 years ago, red tape, October 7... if that helps.

MICHAEL takes out a red tape, puts it in the tape player, and presses “play.” SAINT ISAIAH and BENJAMIN’s voices can be heard.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
You’re upsetting me, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN (on tape)
I want to do this.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
Your work study is an opportunity to learn and bring more people into the community. You can’t work at a campaign office! They have their own agenda, and you will bring it into our holy place, our community! I created this space to escape from outside world, remember? Or have you already been seduced? People are a poison.

MICHAEL (on tape)
Then let me share the cure! I have a powerful message. They will listen to me.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
So now you’re going to save the world? Are you Christ himself?

MICHAEL (on tape)
I am God’s chosen. I can do this.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
And who told you that? Your Father?

MICHAEL (on tape)
You’re the one who raised him-

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
And I am still raising him! Neither of you listen, trust, or follow me. You always question. Me! Who was actually chosen by God.

MICHAEL (on tape)
Grandfather-

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I am Saint Isaiah! Your insubordination- I told him, this attitude, this encouraged connection to the outside world, going online- that's where it's coming from, isn't it? The secular media is corrupting you!

BENJAMIN (on tape)

It has shown me just how desperately the world needs God! Young people are hurting. They want answers. They crave a community. They have some online. We can offer them something better.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

So now you want to move the mission online? Mix with their politics? You want to abandon the community and join the unbelievers? Because that is what will happen if you do this. If you lose sight for one moment, if you change just one thing, everything will fall apart.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

You're being paranoid.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I am not paranoid.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

You record every conversation you have. You don't think that's paranoid?

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

It needs to be documented.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Why?

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Because-

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Why do you need to document this?

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Because when I- when I die, you'll still need to hear me. You'll still need my guidance.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

If we still need you after you die, then you've failed. The second you're dead, the community is ours.

SAINT ISAIAH grabs BENJAMIN by the chin. It is strong and aggressive. It hurts.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

What did you say?

BENJAMIN (on tape)

I'm sorry.

SAINT ISAIAH tightens his grip.

BENJAMIN (cont. on tape)

Please. It hurts.

SAINT ISAIAH lets go of BENJAMIN's chin, but he grabs BENJAMIN's arm and pulls him closer.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I am this community. You will grow older, but I will remain. My body will fail, and Michael will become lead pastor, but I will remain. I will die, and you will bury me in the ground, but I will remain. How? With my voice. You'll have my voice. You'll need my voice, even if you don't realize it until I'm gone. And you will play this tape and you will listen. And you will hear me. And you will regret everything. And you will play it over and over and over until you understand. Do you understand?

BENJAMIN doesn't respond.

SAINT ISAIAH (cont. on tape)

Answer me!

The voices on the tape recorder begin to distort.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Do you understand? Dad. Answer me.

SAINT ISAIAH/BENJAMIN

Do you understand?

KATHERINE suddenly wakes up and grabs at the furniture around her. This catches MICHAEL's attention.

BENJAMIN (cont. on tape)
Dad?

KATHERINE struggles to stand. MICHAEL reaches for the tape player's power switch.

BENJAMIN (cont. on tape)
Listen, please, don't-

MICHAEL turns the tape player off. MICHAEL approaches KATHERINE.

MICHAEL
Katherine? Breathe. I need you to breathe.

MICHAEL helps KATHERINE stand.

MICHAEL (cont.)
I've never seen anyone wake up this soon. How are you feeling? Were you able to cleanse your sin?

KATHERINE screams and pushes MICHAEL away.

MICHAEL
Katherine, it's me. It's Father Michael.

BENJAMIN
Father...

BENJAMIN appears.

KATHERINE
You- you did this!

MICHAEL
It's okay, Katherine. Everything is under control. You were having a Purification. But you're not anymore. You're safe. You're in the sanctuary of the Clarified Church of the Cross. Remember?

BENJAMIN

Don't you understand?

KATHERINE

You, you made me, they're gone, they're gone, they're gone...

BENJAMIN

ANSWER ME.

KATHERINE

... they're gone, STOP, they're gone, STOP, you made me, you made me, you...

BENJAMIN

You wouldn't listen to me then.

KATHERINE

STOP.

BENJAMIN

Why aren't you listening now?

BENJAMIN reaches out to touch MICHAEL, but MICHAEL approaches the ceremonial elements before he can.

MICHAEL

Katherine, I'm putting you back under. I must've not made it strong enough.

KATHERINE screams, grabs MICHAEL, and pulls him to the ground. They struggle.

MICHAEL

Katherine!

BENJAMIN

What are you going to do?

KATHERINE

STOP.

BENJAMIN pulls out the gun and turns it around in his hands.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

What do the chosen ones do...

MICHAEL

David!

BENJAMIN

...when we lose control...

MICHAEL

DAVID!

BENJAMIN

What are we going to do?

MICHAEL

SOMEONE PLEASE-

KATHERINE/BENJAMIN

STOP.

BENJAMIN fires his gun as KATHERINE shoves MICHAEL into the ground. The bang of the gun and MICHAEL's head hitting the floor occur simultaneously. Blackout.

{ACT 2}

SCENE 6

In darkness, SAINT ISAIAH's voice can be heard.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Family. What makes a family? I don't know about you, but I cannot find it in this world. But do you know where I found comfort? Where I found my family? At the foot of the cross and in the arms of brothers and sisters. We find life in death. Can you say the same?

Lights up on DAVID in the sanctuary of the Clarified Church of the Cross. The wall of light is dark. DAVID stops the recording, takes out an orange tape, and turns it around in his hands. A colorful collection of tapes lay around him. ASHLEY enters, holding a cardboard box. She starts putting away the decorations on the altar.

DAVID

Who knew everything would fall apart in my hands?

ASHLEY

It's not your fault.

DAVID

I'm the one who wanted a Purification. Father Michael told me- you told me not to- I should have listened. I'm sorry.

ASHLEY

I know you only wanted to help.

DAVID

Thank you. I did.

ASHLEY smirks.

ASHLEY

Just trust me next time. I know what I'm doing...

DAVID

You know, I suggested that our next sermon be about- how women might be more sinful than men. But maybe it should be how Ashley is always right.

DAVID laughs. ASHLEY does not.

DAVID (cont.)

How's Father Michael doing?

ASHLEY

He's resting. Brother Charles is with him.

DAVID

And... Katherine?

ASHLEY

She's with Sister Leila. Once she calms down, I can talk to her. And she will calm down. I can't imagine she has enough energy to keep this up.

DAVID

I should talk to her.

ASHLEY

You should be here for Father Michael when he wakes up.

DAVID

I want to be the one who talks to Katherine. How are the others? The community?

ASHLEY

All sent home. Just like you asked.

DAVID nods.

DAVID

I listened to more tapes.

ASHLEY

You did?

DAVID

I got the key back and- there's a lot Father Michael isn't telling us.

ASHLEY

Maybe... maybe you shouldn't tell me.

DAVID

I thought you wanted to know more.

ASHLEY

I do, really, it's just- you'll be the head of the community one day. You should know what happened. Should I?

DAVID

But through everything, no matter what, you know what to do. And maybe I'll need to hear what you have to say. I want to hear what you have to say.

ASHLEY

Okay... show me.

DAVID approaches the sound system and puts in a green tape.

DAVID

It looks like the green ones are memories of some sort. Very casual, not very useful, except for this one...

DAVID plays the tape.

MICHAEL (on tape)

Thank you all for being here on this glorious day. Every birthday is a celebration, of course, but they don't all belong to Benjamin and Saint Isaiah...

A crowd applauds on tape.

ASHLEY

Is that Father Michael?

DAVID

Yes.

MICHAEL (on tape)

And so... a toast! Benjamin, I am not only proud of the progress during your 15th year as a mentor, but as a father.

DAVID

Did you hear that?

MICHAEL (on tape)

Your choice to work at a shelter is commendable. We support you as you share your gift of charity.

A crowd applauds on tape.

DAVID

He has a son! He was training him for my position.

MICHAEL (on tape)

And Saint Isaiah... I thank you not only for the home you provided me as a child, but for the home you created for all of us. Our own little community.

ASHLEY

Saint Isaiah really is his father?

DAVID nods.

MICHAEL (on tape)

I hope that, one day, we can all repay you for all you've done.

A crowd applauds on the tape.

MICHAEL (on tape)

Now, let us bow our heads and-

DAVID stops the recording and takes out the green tape. He picks up a red tape and places it in the tape player.

DAVID

They just pray and the recording stops.

ASHLEY

Maybe Father Michael didn't want people to see him differently? If they found out he was Saint Isaiah's son? But-

DAVID

-he has his own son, which means he has a wife. Or had one.

ASHLEY

Right. Did you find out anything about her?

DAVID

No. She hasn't appeared on any of the tapes I've listened to. I'm still looking.

ASHLEY

That's good. What was his son's name?

DAVID

Benjamin. He's on here quite a lot and- something definitely happened. With him.

DAVID plays the next tape.

MICHAEL (on tape)

If you could just give me a space to work-

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I will not tolerate any more experimentation, Michael.

DAVID

Give it a minute.

MICHAEL (on tape)

Plants are natural! God's gift. And I believe that by decreasing the potency, watering it down, one would be able to still see images from the past, but in a present waking state.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

So instead of a hallucinogenic coma, people will hallucinate like any other drug?

MICHAEL (on tape)

When you phrase it like that-

DAVID fast forwards the tape.

DAVID

Sorry, I thought it would... hang on...

DAVID plays the tape.

MICHAEL (on tape)

He made a mistake. He will learn.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

The people he works with are not of God's own mind. By engaging with them socially-

MICHAEL (on tape)

Only for an hour.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

At a bar! He's only 17, he shouldn't have even been let in.

MICHAEL (on tape)

He didn't drink.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Oh, is that what he told you? Don't you question his honesty, his judgement?

MICHAEL (on tape)

Why? God chose our family for this position. You. Me. Benjamin. That's what you've always said. Why can't you just trust us?

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

People change.

MICHAEL (on tape)

Excuse me?

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

People can change. And the way Benjamin is behaving... there might be a better option.

MICHAEL (on tape)
He was raised for this.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
No. If you raised him the way I wanted, we wouldn't be in this position.

MICHAEL (on tape)
I'm not the only one who's raised him. You did too.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
Not how I wanted.

MICHAEL (on tape)
I see his bruises. They aren't always there, but I see them. You're raising him like me.

SAINT ISAIAH gets uncomfortably close to MICHAEL.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)
Then why are you both still so weak?

Static. DAVID stops the recording and takes out the red tape.

ASHLEY
What... what did that mean?

DAVID
At first, I thought he ran away.

ASHLEY
What?

DAVID
Benjamin. That would explain why no one's ever heard of him. Or why Father Michael never talks about him.

ASHLEY
But... it does sounds like Benjamin's whole purpose was tied to the community. Like you, but-

DAVID

- more. It was in his blood.

ASHLEY

Right. I mean, he wouldn't necessarily leave everything behind just because his friends are nonbelievers. Unless- with the other thing they said- maybe he-

DAVID

I did keep digging and found this.

DAVID picks up another red tape and puts it in the tape player.

DAVID (cont.)

Most of the red tapes are between Saint Isaiah and Father Michael. But this one is between Saint Isaiah and... Benjamin.

DAVID plays the tape.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Please don't record this.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I have to. You will twist the story to them. I need it clear and documented and heard.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Then say it. TELL THEM.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Benjamin Martin, I declare you unfit for spiritual leadership. I strip you from your right to preach, terminate you from training, and instruct you to assimilate into the community as another congregant. Nothing more.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Just banish me. I know you want to. Kick me out from your oh so holy "Eden", but don't do this. Don't turn me into nothing.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I could never do that. Don't you understand? I love you. This is coming from love.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

You don't love me.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

The fact you even said that proves that I'm making the right decision.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

This isn't your decision! God chose me, ME, to shepherd his flock, and you- you are stopping his will.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

God's will can change.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

No, YOUR will can change! You're scared. You're threatened. By me! By everyone.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I see people for who they really are.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

And who am I?

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Our downfall. You're telling people that Jesus is not the way to salvation.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

I said Jesus reveals himself in more ways than one. I'm preaching what I believe is right, isn't that what I'm supposed to do? There may be other ways to salvation and- we cannot reduce Jesus to one definition.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

You mean, the definition in the N+I Translation. The sacred text.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

Yes, YOUR sacred text! You should listen to what others believe, "Saint" because it makes more sense than your words ever have.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Careful...

BENJAMIN (on tape)

The way they treat people, how they treat me-

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Be careful...

BENJAMIN (on tape)

You said that unbelievers cause the most pain, but you have hurt me more than anyone! I mean, I don't think I've ever seen God when I've looked in your eyes.

SAINT ISAIAH tries to grab BENJAMIN, but BENJAMIN fights back. He hasn't done this before. BENJAMIN and SAINT ISAIAH struggle. BENJAMIN gains the upper hand and shoves SAINT ISAIAH to the ground.

BENJAMIN (cont. on tape)

I AM THIS COMMUNITY. God chose me to shepherd his flock. I am the one who keeps the wolves at bay, no matter what, no matter who the wolves are. You are standing in way of the divine's will, and I will do something about it. I have the tool. You are a man without God, and God is on my side, so I will do it. I will. With his love, I can do anything.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

Ben-

BENJAMIN stops the tape player from recording. Static. DAVID takes the red tape out of the tape deck.

ASHLEY

What happened next?

DAVID

All the tapes are dated. Every single one. I looked through the entire collection and there aren't any recordings after this. This is the last one.

A moment of silence.

ASHLEY

Why do they sound like that?

BENJAMIN

What do you mean?

ASHLEY

They just... those are the men who started this community. Saint Isaiah was our founder and Benjamin... what were they even doing? All that noise, the mention of bruises... is that really who they were?

BENJAMIN

I don't know if we can-

ASHLEY

Does Father Michael act like that?

BENJAMIN

He's intense. I've told you that. But... no. Never.

ASHLEY

He's never... hurt you? Physically?

BENJAMIN

Of course not.

ASHELY

I was just asking.

BENJAMIN

I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation to why they acted the way they did. I mean, it was years ago, things were different, and well, the responsibility of it all, divine leadership... you wouldn't understand.

ASHLEY takes a deep breath.

ASHLEY

What am I to you?

DAVID

What?

ASHLEY

One second, you need me. The next, I'm nothing more than a sinful woman from the congregation. And do you really think that? That women are more sinful than men?

DAVID

I said they might-

ASHLEY

You put me in charge of the Day of Light while you just listened to the tapes. But you say I'm not a divine leader. You want to be with me, but break things off-

DAVID

That was a mutual decision.

ASHLEY

That's not the point.

DAVID

I'm in a very difficult position.

ASHLEY

Did you listen to the people who created your position? The way they speak, the way they treat each other- I don't know David. Doesn't it concern you?

DAVID

Saint Isaiah also created the N+I translation. You follow that! It's not just on me.

ASHLEY

I know, but maybe this, all of this, maybe... it isn't what we thought. Maybe it isn't... all good.

DAVID

But there's still good, isn't there? This community, this place... it isn't like anything else. It's a haven for so many people. For you, for me... do you really want to question that? You know more than anyone that I had nothing before I came here. My Dad was off doing God knows what while my mom relied on anything and anyone to get her through the day. But Father Michael found us. He invited us here. And that first day, it was the Day of Light and... I saw this portrait. Saint Isaiah's portrait. You don't see paintings like this anymore. Everything's printed or photographed. This was real. And when I saw it, I thought, "whatever's going on here, it's something special." And my Mom was smiling.

DAVID (cont.)

She hadn't smiled in years. Are we really going to throw that all away? Cause that's what it sounds like you're doing.

ASHLEY

I hear you. I do. It's just... it kinda sounds like we're just people talking about people talking about people. Even now... you only talked about others. Where is God in all of this? What have we done, what have we committed our lives to, without taking a step back and... listening? Listening for his voice?

DAVID

What do you mean?

ASHLEY

When you look at me, really, what do you hear? What do you believe to be true? Does anything change?

DAVID looks at ASHLEY. He really looks at her.

DAVID

I know that... I love you.

ASHLEY

You do?

DAVID

Yes.

ASHLEY

Sometimes... I think I love you. Like when we're talking and, it sounds silly, but... I forget who I am. I do because... I don't even have to think about it. I just am. And you see that. But other times, you look right through me... and... I don't know.

ASHLEY looks at DAVID. She really looks at him.

ASHLEY (cont.)

It doesn't matter. Even if I knew, we can't be together. Not if nothing changes.

A moment of stillness.

KATHERINE (offstage)
Father? Father Michael?

DAVID
Is that-

ASHLEY
I'll check.

ASHLEY exits. DAVID returns to the tapes and puts them back in the lock box. He pauses with the final red tape in his hand, thinks, and places it in his pocket along with the key.

SCENE 7

ASHLEY reenters with KATHERINE. KATHERINE can focus on what's in front of her, but she's not fully back to "normal" (like she's in an emotional hangover).

KATHERINE

I want to see Father Michael.

ASHLEY

You can't right now, but don't worry. Father David wanted to speak with you.

DAVID looks at KATHERINE and ASHLEY. He really looks at them.

DAVID

Actually... could you speak with Ashley? She... she's the better person right now. She listens. Not all of us know how. Besides, I've got to... I should....I have to pray.

DAVID begins to exit.

ASHLEY

Thank you.

DAVID nods and exits.

ASHLEY

Would you... is it alright that you talk with me?

KATHERINE

I want Father Michael. But... I think I need to just... talk.

ASHLEY

We can do that. Do you want to stay standing? Or should we sit?

KATHERINE

I want to sit. By the altar.

ASHLEY

Alright. To the altar, then.

ASHLEY and KATHERINE sit at the base of the altar.

ASHLEY

So... how are you feeling?

Silence.

KATHERINE

Sorry, I've never been good at that.

ASHLEY

That's okay. I can ask questions and you can answer? If you think that would be helpful?

KATHERINE

Sure.

ASHLEY

Do you remember what happened?

KATHERINE

Father Michael- I pushed him to the ground. Hard. Is that why I can't see him?

ASHLEY

Yes. Do you remember why you pushed him?

Silence.

ASHLEY (cont.)

What was the purification like?

KATHERINE

The purification? I... I saw things.

ASHLEY

Okay.

KATHERINE

They were hard to focus on. My husband- he had a purification once- a couple of times, actually- and he said it helped to focus on a shape- to ground yourself to?

ASHLEY

Sure.

KATHERINE

And I tried. I really did. But- I couldn't. Or I could, but all the shapes kept blending together, like when you spill paints all over a canvas or create a bunch of clay people and smash them all together?

ASHLEY

That must've been really scary.

KATHERINE

It was. Then I saw him. My husband. He kept- the words we had said to each other kept repeating, but they weren't very nice. I couldn't remember any of nice things we said.

ASHLEY

I'm sorry.

KATHERINE

And she was there. My daughter. Mira.

ASHLEY

What was it like seeing her again?

KATHERINE

Father Michael was there too.

ASHLEY

Was he?

KATHERINE

But he was different. Taller. The size of a giant. And- it sounds ridiculous- It's childish-

ASHLEY

It's okay.

KATHERINE

He had all these arms. Tentacles. He was reaching everywhere and grabbing everything that started to form an actual shape. I couldn't pick something to focus on because- he kept taking them away. Just when I started to see someone, hear

KATHERINE (cont.)

something, feel something, it would fall apart in his hands like- sand. I didn't even realize I had woken up. I just saw him and- I grabbed him. By the time I put together what was happening- it was too late.

ASHLEY

Brother Charles said he's going to be okay. And he would know. He was a doctor before he came here.

KATHERINE

But... why did I do that? Why am I so... angry with him?

ASHLEY

You have lost two family members, and... he was close to you when it happened? Maybe there's something there?

KATHERINE

No, no, whenever I've gone to him, despite my sin, despite the sins of my family- he's helped me. Been kind to me. Always.

ASHLEY

Even today? With your husband's light?

KATHERINE

What about it?

ASHLEY

He wouldn't let you hang it on the wall of light.

KATHERINE

But he was right to do so. Wasn't he?

ASHLEY

Maybe if we have to ask... I don't know. I don't know.

KATHERINE

We can't question it. Can we? I don't know. I can't keep anything straight since she left. I feel... has it only been one day? Since you found me? I was in my apartment today, and yesterday, but the day before that, I mean before, before- she was there, wasn't she, I swear she was, but she left, she left, she left...

ASHLEY

Katherine, it's okay. Stay with me.

KATHERINE

I'm so angry with her.

ASHLEY

Mira?

KATHERINE nods.

ASHLEY (cont.)

She always looked like she was thinking. Even when she was little, I remember, she memorized all these animal facts. She would tell them to me. It was sweet. You raised a good girl.

KATHERINE

But she's not. She left. And if she was kind, she would've said something. Left a note. At least her Dad did that.

ASHLEY

But she's not dead.

KATHERINE

No. She's not.

ASHLEY

Why do you think she left?

KATHERINE

No. I can't think about that.

ASHLEY

Trying to understand why someone did what they did... it doesn't excuse their behavior, but it can make it easier? To forgive them? If we don't have forgiveness, then- well- I'm doomed.

KATHERINE

You will easily be forgiven.

ASHLEY

You don't know what I've done.

KATHERINE

But I do.

ASHLEY

What?

KATHERINE

I need forgiveness.

ASHLEY

We all do.

KATHERINE

But she- she left me. Alone. To answer all these questions and if I keep looking- I go too far and I think- maybe she left because of me? I left home because of my mother. I thought I was better, but- look at me. I'm the only one left. I did everything right, but I'm alone. It can't all be my fault, but- I don't know. Maybe it is.

ASHLEY waits to see if KATHERINE finished speaking. She has.

ASHLEY

My brother yelled at me a lot growing up. He made me feel so small. And I hated him. I did. Then one day, I walked in on him crying. And he was really crying. And I couldn't believe how... human he looked. I built him up to be this big powerful being, like a God, but when I saw that... it made it easier to let go of what he said to me. Cause he wasn't God. He was deeply human. And I got to grow up. Both of us could.

KATHERINE

But I won't get to see Mira grow up. She's gone.

ASHLEY

What if you found her?

KATHERINE

I can't- Father Michael said-

ASHLEY

But do you want to find her?

KATHERINE

You can't just- there's a reason we believe what we believe.

ASHLEY

And what do you believe?

KATHERINE

That I still love her. I hate how much I love her. But Father Michael...do you think I could tell him that?

ASHLEY

You said talking to him always helped. Just if you do... remember that he's human.

There's suddenly shouting in the distance. DAVID enters.

DAVID

He's awake. He's coming.

KATHERINE

Could I-

DAVID

No! I'm sorry but trust me.

A door slams.

DAVID (cont.)

Go. Out the side.

ASHLEY

Are you okay?

DAVID

I will be. Go!

KATHERINE and ASHLEY exit out a side door.

SCENE 8

MICHAEL bursts into the sanctuary.

MICHAEL

How dare you run off like-

DAVID

The sanctuary! I wanted to make sure it was in order. For you.

MICHAEL

If that was true, you would've gone through with the Day of Light without me. Look at this! You cannot let these go dark. Not today. You cannot- they must stay on.

MICHAEL plugs in the wall of light. The lights are illuminated.

DAVID

We never finished training. I didn't know what to do.

MICHAEL

I taught you where to put everything.

DAVID

I'm not authorized to preach yet.

MICHAEL

You could've found another solution.

DAVID

I was worried about you. We were all worried about you.

MICHAEL

Well you could've done better! You should've- known better.

DAVID

I know more than you realize.

MICHAEL

What is that supposed to mean?

DAVID

I know Saint Isaiah is your father. And you have a son. Benjamin.

MICHAEL falls silent.

DAVID (cont.)

Do you deny it?

MICHAEL

You... you can't know that for sure... you're mistaken.

DAVID takes the red tape out of his pocket, puts it in the tape deck, and plays it.

MICHAEL

How did you-

BENJAMIN (on tape)

God chose me, ME, to shepherd his flock, and you- you are stopping his will.

MICHAEL

Stop.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

God's will can change.

MICHAEL

Stop it.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

No, YOUR will can change! You're scared. You're threatened. By me! By everyone.

SAINT ISAIAH (on tape)

I see people for who they really are.

BENJAMIN (on tape)

And who am I?

MICHAEL

STOP!

DAVID stops the recording.

DAVID

Were you ever going to tell me about this?

MICHAEL

The key- you took it when-

DAVID

Why didn't you tell me?

MICHAEL

You weren't ready.

DAVID

How? I've done everything you have asked of me.

MICHAEL

You had to understand the community before you understood its structure. You weren't done with the family trees!

DAVID

So you kept your family a secret?

MICHAEL

Don't you dare pass judgment on to me. You don't know what I- what the community has sacrificed for the glory of God.

DAVID

I've sacrificed too.

MICHAEL

What? What could you have possibly given up to be here?

DAVID

Everyone has a family, a real family, except me. Even you! You changed the rules, and it's not fair.

MICHAEL

Are we not enough? Is the community, unified with a common purpose and love, not enough for you?

DAVID

But to go home to my own wife and children-

MICHAEL

They would be distractions from your real purpose here. The divine love that we pursue- it holds you accountable, grounds you in joy- it is the only love that lasts.

DAVID

You learned that from experience! I haven't. You have denied me the opportunity to live.

MICHAEL

No, because you have been tempted by a woman.

DAVID takes a step back.

MICHAEL (cont.)

You confess your sins to me. I remember them all.

DAVID

I've confessed to romantic thoughts, but never action.

MICHAEL

Temptation is experience within itself.

DAVID takes a step forward.

DAVID

I've done more.

MICHAEL

What?

DAVID

I've been with her.

MICHAEL

You slept with-

DAVID

No! But we spend time together and I love her. I love her in my own incomplete way.

MICHAEL

She reciprocates your feelings?

DAVID

She's giving up a very real future so I can be here. So am I.

MICHAEL

It's Ashley, isn't it?

DAVID

You wouldn't need to ask if you actually paid attention. You're always shutting down, not listening to me-

MICHAEL

This side of you, the accusing, the questioning, the pushing- it wasn't always there. She has corrupted you.

DAVID

No, I think it's always been there, I just haven't been listening. And you know what? I can't help but feel like its God speaking to me. And I cannot ignore him any longer.

MICHAEL

No, that is the human side of you, and it will fail you both.

DAVID takes a moment to look at MICHAEL. He really looks at him.

DAVID

What happened that make you feel this way? Tell me. I want to understand.

MICHAEL takes a sip from his flask. The lights grow brighter, and BENJAMIN (17) appears.

MICHAEL

Ben... he was training to be our next pastor. Like you. But... he was always rebellious.

BENJAMIN

I was the chosen one.

MICHAEL

He was tempted by the outside world and its ideas.

BENJAMIN

You told me I was the chosen one.

MICHAEL

Saint Isaiah tried to remind him of his place.

BENJAMIN

He kept me small.

DAVID

And he took away his title?

MICHAEL

Yes.

BENJAMIN

He did more than that.

MICHAEL

I tried to reason with Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

You let it happen.

MICHAEL

I tried to stop him.

BENJAMIN

You let him hurt me like he hurt you.

MICHAEL

I didn't think he was capable of- I had no way of knowing.

BENJAMIN

You told me to protect the flock. You gave me the tool.

BENJAMIN takes out the gun.

MICHAEL

I really did try to stop him.

BENJAMIN

Anger is the family tradition, right?

MICHAEL

And he snapped.

BENJAMIN fires the gun three times at SAINT ISAIAH's portrait.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Benjamin shot Saint Isaiah in the chest three times. He killed him.

BENJAMIN lowers the gun.

MICHAEL (cont.)

When the police found him, he fought back. They- they took care of it. He was 17.

BENJAMIN exits.

DAVID

How does no one else know about this?

MICHAEL

A lot can happen in 23 years. People leave, the media finds a new tragedy to follow, people join, and those who stayed... they didn't want to give up the mission. All you can do after something like that is rebuild. So I did. I restructured the Clarified Cross of the Church from the ground up, like with...training new pastors, not keeping it in the family.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Our mission is more important than family. And now, we have the Purification. By cleansing impure thoughts immediately, they cannot grow into action. Never again.

DAVID

So the Day of Light didn't exist before all this?

MICHAEL

Today was the day Saint Isaiah died. It was also his birthday.

DAVID

But... the entire foundation of the community, all of this, wasn't built for God, but for the needs of your family?

MICHAEL

What?

DAVID

Everyone here has committed their lives to the community because we were told it was God's new Eden.

MICHAEL

It is.

DAVID

Is it? You were just attacked, an 18-year-old ran away last week, others have run before, and there are so many other things we don't talk about.

MICHAEL holds up his vial.

MICHAEL

I confront my sins every single day! I look them in the eyes. I do not let him overwhelm me. Can you say the same?

DAVID

I've told children that they deserve to die for their sins. Children! Did I do that because God wanted me to? Or because you wanted to say that to your son?

MICHAEL

That's enough.

DAVID

I taught Mira in confirmation, now, she's gone. No one has run when I've been in training. What did I do that pushed her to leave?

MICHAEL

You don't have that much power.

DAVID

But I do! We tell people that we speak on the behalf of God. That is power.

MICHAEL

But if you're relying on the written word-

DAVID

You mean, your father's translation! Do we follow him or God?

MICHAEL

Saint Isaiah's words were translated directly from God!

DAVID

But what if anyone can hear from God, no matter who they are, in places other than scripture? Like my inner voice? Or- the choir! You told me it's like hearing God's voice.

MICHAEL

That's just something I like to tell myself.

DAVID

But why? That impulse might mean something.

MICHAEL

You're very passionate, I'll give you that... I remember the first time I saw it in you.

MICHAEL takes a sip from his flask. The lights grow brighter. BENJAMIN (at all ages) appears and slowly approaches DAVID.

MICHAEL (cont.)

It was actually on the Day of Light. Your family had just moved into the community. It was your first service, and you had this wonder, a connection that seemed to grow as the sermon went on. It's something- I hadn't seen in a long time.

BENJAMIN stands directly behind DAVID. MICHAEL looks at them both.

MICHAEL

Seeing your passion... I always knew you this was your calling.

DAVID

You never told me that before.

MICHAEL

Do you really want to throw it all away? What would be the point? What would have been the purpose of all our suffering if we cannot use it? We have to do something with the life we were given.

DAVID

I just... I don't know if what we're doing is... all good... anymore. I'm sorry.

DAVID begins to leave.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Son, please-

DAVID

I'm not your son.

MICHAEL

Father David. Please. Don't tell anyone.

DAVID

God's love is a very powerful thing. I cannot take advantage of that.

DAVID exits.

SCENE 9

BENJAMIN remains. MICHAEL looks at him then at the lock box. He runs to it, picks it up, and throws it across the chapel. Upon hitting the ground, the lock box bursts open and the tapes spill everywhere. MICHAEL runs over, picks up each tape, and tenderly puts them back in the lock box. He tries to fix the mess he created.

BENJAMIN
Jesus, Dad...

MICHAEL pauses on a particular yellow tape. He takes the yellow tape to the sound system, puts it in the tape deck, and presses play. A choir singing in dissonant harmony can be heard. MICHAEL listens for a few moments but cannot keep still. He takes out his flask and prepares to take a sip.

BENJAMIN
Did that ever really help? Has any of this helped?

MICHAEL
All I ever wanted was to help.

BENJAMIN
You didn't even tell him about Mom.

BENJAMIN
He doesn't need to know.

BENJAMIN (cont.)
Dad... why am I here? You don't really want me here.

MICHAEL
You had a purpose. You do.

BENJAMIN
What is it?

MICHAEL
You're a reminder. You stop me from going too far.

BENJAMIN
What else?

MICHAEL

You're Benjamin Martin. You killed him.

BENJAMIN

What else?

MICHAEL

You're... you're my son.

BENJAMIN

Am I here for those other things? Or do you just miss your son?

MICHAEL looks at BENJAMIN. He really looks at him.

MICHAEL

But I'm still- so angry- with you.

BENJAMIN approaches MICHAEL.

BENJAMIN

And I'm angry with you. It doesn't have to make sense.

MICHAEL

Don't-

BENJAMIN

What?

MICHAEL

We can't- there's a reason we can't.

BENJAMIN

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

I've never touched you. I didn't hurt you like that. But that didn't stop you from... don't make me change. I don't know if I can stop myself if you... we just can't.

BENJAMIN takes a breath and becomes BENJAMIN at age 6.

BENJAMIN

But what about one more game, Papa? Please?

MICHAEL looks at BENJAMIN. He really looks at him.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

It will be the last one. I promise.

BENJAMIN extends his hand, but doesn't touch MICHAEL. MICHAEL just stares at him. BENJAMIN makes a motion like "come on." MICHAEL extends his own hand to mirror BENJAMIN. The sound of the choir seems to clarify (as if they are singing live). BENJAMIN touches his own forehead. MICHAEL touches his own forehead. BENJAMIN takes a step back. MICHAEL takes a step back. BENJAMIN leads MICHAEL through a mirroring game. Then, at a turning point, BENJAMIN pauses.

BENJAMIN

Now you.

MICHAEL initiates the moves with BENJAMIN mirroring. The choir continues to accompany them as they move through the space together. At its "ending", MICHAEL extends his hand towards BENJAMIN to touch him, but freezes.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

Come on. It's okay.

BENJAMIN initiates and touches MICHAEL's face. MICHAEL slaps BENJAMIN in return.

MICHAEL

You... I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I told you, I did, I... you shouldn't have done that. I told you, if you change anything, if one thing is out of place... it falls apart. I cannot let it fall apart.

BENJAMIN doesn't look at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Say something!

BENJAMIN

Not me. Him. You need to speak to him. I should've known. You only ever wanted to hear his voice. You're listening to it now.

MICHAEL

What?

BENJAMIN

It is God-like. And you need to listen.

Someone knocks three times at the side door.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

He's here.

Three more knocks.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

Aren't you going to answer?

Three more knocks. Louder.

BENJAMIN (cont.)

Let him in.

MICHAEL

I can't.

BENJAMIN

Yes, you can. Open it!

MICHAEL

No.

BENJAMIN

OPEN IT.

The knocks grow in number. BENJAMIN runs to the door and MICHAEL rushes after him. They both put their hand on the doorknob and struggle to gain control.

MICHAEL

Please!!

BENJAMIN

Open!!!

BENJAMIN tugs particularly hard and the door opens. Light pours out of the doorway with such an intensity, we only see the outline of the figure standing there. The choir grows in volume. It is heavenly and beautiful and terrifying. SAINT ISAIAH's voice booms with more power than we've ever heard before (as if God himself was speaking).

SAINT ISAIAH

Michael-

MICHAEL

Stay back!

SAINT ISAIAH

Listen to me. I just want you to listen.

MICHAEL starts to lose his balance. The voice begins to distort.

SAINT ISAIAH / KATHERINE

I'm not here to hurt you.

MICHAEL

Stay back! I'm- please don't-

SAINT ISAIAH / KATHERINE

Just let me speak.

MICHAEL

I did what I had to. Please!

SAINT ISAIAH / KATHERINE

I know. You've done so much.

MICHAEL

NO.

KATHERINE

Father Michael-

SCENE 10

MICHAEL loses his balance and falls to the ground. The figure, which turns out to be KATHERINE, steps out of the light and runs to MICHAEL. At this reveal, the light in the doorway fades and the choir returns to its original tape tonality.

KATHERINE

Father!

KATHERINE sits at MICHAEL's side. MICHAEL tries to catch his breath.

BENJAMIN

I know you want to listen. So do it. He can speak through anyone.

BENJAMIN exits. MICHAEL watches him go.

KATHERINE

Father Michael, are you- can you see me? Look here. Right here.

MICHAEL looks at KATHERINE. He doesn't say anything.

KATHERINE (cont.)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Father. Just by looking at me, you- I'm not going to do anything, I'm not going to hurt you, I promise. Do you believe me?

MICHAEL

Yes.

KATHERINE

Here, let me...

KATHERINE helps MICHAEL sit up.

KATHERINE (cont.)

I came to talk with you. They told me to wait, but- I have to.

KATHERINE waits for MICHAEL to say something. He does not.

KATHERINE

My daughter- Mira- she left. Which means- she is out of the reaches of God. Which is what you've told me about my husband. When he left in a different way.

KATHERINE waits for MICHAEL to say something. He does not.

KATHERINE (cont.)

My whole family- if I am to believe what I believe- they're lost. And it might be my fault. No, it has to be because- the sins of the family reflect the sins of one. If my family has fallen from the graces of God, isn't it punishment for my sins? But at the same time- it's not. Until today, I confessed all of my sins, I did exactly what I was told, I did everything right, you said I was clean- but- I'm the only one left. And I don't think I loved them. I mean, I did love them, but not in the way they needed me to love them. They tried to tell me in their own ways I think, but, maybe I wasn't listening?

KATHERINE waits for MICHAEL to say something. He does not.

KATHERINE (cont.)

I guess what I'm trying to ask- what I want to tell you is- I love God. I love the community. But I love my family. And I think I let them down.

MICHAEL

I understand.

KATHERINE

You do?

MICHAEL nods.

KATHERINE (cont.)

Am I beyond forgiveness?

MICHAEL

I think I need to ask myself the same thing.

KATHERINE

So... what... what do we do now?

MICHAEL

What we've always done... we keep going.

KATHERINE

But shouldn't we-

MICHAEL

It is all too fragile, don't you understand? If you change something, anything, it all falls apart. We'd have to start over, and we can't do that. We can't change what's happened, so keep moving. You can't change who you are.

KATHERINE

But- I wasn't born a believer.

MICHAEL

But still-

KATHERINE

I was changed.

MICHAEL

But- you-

KATHERINE

You don't think people can change?

MICHAEL

You can't change what's happened to you! You can't. It's done. But if you change as a person... maybe it's a choice. Not destiny. Every day, you get to choose how life changes you. And maybe that's what makes this all so hard.

KATHERINE

What?

MICHAEL

Being human.

MICHAEL takes the flask out of his pocket.

MICHAEL (cont.)

And I will not be the one who lets it fall apart. I'm sorry.

KATHERINE

But what do I do now?

MICHAEL exits. KATHERINE is alone.

KATHERINE (cont.)

Hello?

KATHERINE looks up to the heavens.

KATHERINE (cont.)

Do you hear me? TELL ME WHAT TO DO. I'm here. I'M TRYING. Please. I WANT-

Katherine's gaze wanders around the space.

KATHERINE (cont.)

I want...

KATHERINE's gaze lands on her husband's Christmas lights that were left resting by a cardboard box. KATHERINE makes a choice, and the sound of the choir seems to clarify once more (as if they are singing live). KATHERINE picks up the Christmas lights and approaches the wall of light. She plugs them into the wall. The Christmas lights illuminate with the rest of the wall. A faint ringing can be heard. KATHERINE takes a step back to see what she's created. For a moment, it's peaceful. Good, even. Then, the ringing increases in volume and the entire wall grows brighter and brighter. The wall of light blinds us with the brilliance of a power surge, and KATHERINE backs up at the sight of it. All at once, the choir exclaims, the bulbs shatter, and the Clarified Cross of the Church is plunged into darkness.

End of Play.