The Voyage of Saint Brendan
to “The Land Promised to the Saints”

A Modern Liturgical Drama
For actors, chorus, dancers, and instrumentalists

by
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Adapted from the 9th century Navigatio Sancti Brendani
translated from the Latin by John J. O’Meara

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Introduction

About Saint Brendan

“Saint Brendan was born in Ireland sometime around 489 A.D., probably in or near Tralee in County Kerry. His name is connected with the foundation of monastic settlements in the counties of Kerry, Clare, and Galway, and on the islands on the river Shannon. One of the most famous of these monasteries was Clonfert in East Galway, where the story of the Voyage of Saint Brendan appears to begin. Brendan is reported as having visited Iona, the Orkney and Shetland islands, Britain, and Brittany. He died sometime between 570 and 583.

In due time Brendan became known as the voyager who sailed to and fro in the ocean, not just for exploration, or in search of lonely islands in which to find solitude, but of the ever famous and elusive Land Promised to the Saints. Some scholars have suggested that within a hundred years of his death there already existed a primitive account of Brendan’s quest.” (Notes taken from John J O’Meara, The Voyage of Saint Brendan.)

The full Navigatio Sancti Brendani, from which this play is adapted, was written in Ireland perhaps as early as 800. It soon crossed the English Channel and apparently enjoyed wide popularity throughout the entire Middle Ages, as attested by the survival of many continental manuscript versions.

About the Navigatio

The story of Saint Brendan’s quest is intriguing on a variety of levels. First, it is a fascinating sea adventure. Many have speculated that the journey to “The Land Promised to the Saints” may describe an Irish landfall on North American shores nearly 1000 years before the voyage of Columbus. With a bit of imaginative decoding, the pieces fit surprisingly well. The “crystal palace” which Brendan and his crew discover floating in the ocean becomes an iceberg: the fiery “Isle of Smiths” becomes a volcanic eruption, a common phenomenon in the region around Iceland; the dense cloud surrounding the Land Promised to the Saints becomes the fogbank off Newfoundland; and what emerges is an entirely feasible course to North America along the “stepping stone route”:
Ireland/Faroes/Greenland/Newfoundland. The story’s credibility on this level was strengthened in 1975-6 when explorer Tim Severin built a leather boat to the specifications of the *Navigatio* and successfully sailed it from Ireland to Newfoundland.

But more important, the *Navigatio* is a *Christian* sea adventure, firmly anchored in the liturgical year and steeped in the monastic ambience of Celtic Ireland. The various sea crossings—almost invariably in 40-day increments, the classic duration of a fast—bring Brendan and his crew to landfalls in time to celebrate the major liturgical feasts of the Christian year—Easter, Pentecost, Christmas—often in the company of other monks and always in the steady, unfailing presence of the Divine Office, the chanting of psalms. The Land Promised to the Saints is not merely a geographical place but an allegory for spiritual transformation, and the *Navigatio* is at heart an exploration not just of lands and places, but of the attempt to live, move, and respond to the world out of a transfigured center. It is an adventure into Christian symbolism and worship and a transforming structure.

Finally, the *Navigatio* is a classic search story in the esoteric tradition—i.e., the search for inner transformation—reminiscent of Rene Daumal’s *Mt. Analogue*, or *The Conference of the Birds* from the Sufi tradition. It touches the classic themes: striving, waiting, inner seeing, coming to understand a new line of cause and effect when time is no longer simply linear. What has to change, inwardly, before the Land Promised to the Saints can be recognized and entered? What, as well, is the necessary passage not only through the daylight of our striving, but through the night shadows of the psyche—the terrors, the ambitions, the violence that lurk within, subtly skewing our spirit’s course toward transfiguration? In the process of his journey Brendan must learn to wait—and in the course of his waiting he must gradually see and acknowledge the inner shadows, which have established—from the outset, it would appear—the term of his waiting.
About this play

In transposing the *Navigatio* to dramatic form, I have followed John O’Meara’s translation as my basic text. About two-thirds of the various sea adventures recounted in the *Navigatio* have been preserved, although their order has been slightly rearranged to mold the episodic structure of the original into a more dramatically and thematically coherent whole. Where possible, I have preserved as well the language of O’Meara’s translation—almost entirely in the narrator’s accounts, and in a substantial amount of the dialogue as well. In certain instances new dialogue has had to be invented, to support the rearranged sequence of events or to make more explicit themes and inner motions which are left allusive in the text. I admit that I may be seeing more, in places, than the original intended; I conceive this play as an adaptation rather than a strictly historical reconstruction.

About the music

The play is, necessarily, a “musical.” Throughout the *Navigatio*, the one continuous thread is the monastic practice of the Divine Office—i.e., the daily and nightly chanting of psalms in praise of God. Wherever Brendan and his crew go—be it to islands inhabited by monks, or islands inhabited by birds—the common chanting of the Divine Office provides the “universal language” of recognition and welcome.

For me, this was in fact the original inspiration for the play—a chance to collect and showcase the rich variety of ancient and contemporary liturgical psalm chants that add such beauty and depth to the Christian experience of transformation. Monastic lectio divina—the practice of recognizing and processing the events of one’s life in terms of the images contained in scripture, particularly the psalms—is the driveshaft of Brendan’s journey, and the play gives excellent opportunities for audiences to experience this prayer form and to participate in it.
The music has been culled from a variety of sources—a few snippets of ancient Gregorian chant, a few newly composed psalm settings, mostly from the new psalter of the Camaldolese Benedictine community at Big Sur, California. A few pieces are newly composed, and a hymn, “I feel the winds of God today,” provides the opportunity for congregational participation, as do a few of the psalm antiphons (refrains) throughout the play.

There are three other inviting opportunities for music—that the play is Irish, that it is medieval, and that Saint Brendan was reputed to have been a formidable musician and composer. These three hints have encouraged some leeway for an occasional Irish jig, and the inclusion of the beautiful medieval love song “Bryd on Brere.”

As for instrumentation, all that is really required is a solo harp. Additional forces—percussion and tambourines in the “Exalt and Praise Him,” recorders, etc., are optional. Handbells help in the Gregorian Alleluia (sc. 8), and in the Ailbe scene.

Brendan must be able to sing well, and ideally should be able to accompany himself in a simple open fifths harmony on a small Irish harp.

About the cast

For better or worse, the play requires a fairly large cast. Most of these parts, fortunately, are fairly brief and within the range of amateur actors and musicians. Some roles can be doubled (we doubled Barrind/Ailbe; demons and elders and “man”).


Monks’ crew: 4 men; minor speaking roles, singing. Must be theatrically experienced and able to move well, as much depends on “improv.”
Community of Ailbe: 2 elders, no speaking.

Birds: 6 or more women; singing, dancing.

Demons: 3 or more; two small speaking roles

Brendan and the Bird, in addition to substantial speaking roles, must also be able to sing, and the Bird must be a dancer. A Brendan who can actually accompany himself on an Irish harp or psaltery would be a definite plus. At any rate, for these roles professional actor/musicians are needed. The rest can be handled by experienced amateurs.

If desirable, older children—trained, not cute—could take roles as birds and/or demons.

About the staging

The play has been designed as a liturgical drama—i.e., for staging in a church, making use of the entire building: aisles, crossing, chancel, pulpit, and altar area. I have been thinking specifically of All Saints-by-the-Sea in Saltspring Island, British Columbia, where last fall we staged the medieval cycle play, “The Play of the Creation,” but other adaptations are possible. In any case, the staging has been designed with the following configurations in mind:

The narrator will be in the pulpit throughout.

Brendan’s boat (see below), will be set up in the crossing, at the altar railing (the railings themselves will have been removed).

The various encounters with islands and their inhabitants will mostly play upstage of the boat, in the chancel. Since the chancel area is slightly elevated, sight lines beyond the boat should not be a problem.
The altar area is reserved for two or three particularly "sacred" moments during the play: the Eucharistic celebration at the Island of Sheep on Maundy Thursday, the nocturnal vigil with the Community of Ailbe.

The aisles serve for processional entrances and exits and to vary the staging patterns in a couple of encounters—Brendan and Barrind, Brendan and Judas, etc.

About the boat

The boat should be as long as is feasible to accommodate Brendan and a crew of four to six—18 to 20 feet would be ideal, or taking up about half of the crossing area. It should be designed as a “double-ender,” with a central mast and square sail, so the crew can give the impression of sailing in either direction. Oars and rowing benches should be incorporated in the design; perhaps there could be a tiller at either end.

How to “build” it onstage? I imagine a basic 2x4 “frame” already in place at the start of the play. Over this, could be carried in and mounted small, very light sections—“ribs” covered with “skin,” as the text specifies shaped to interlock and give the impression of the side of a boat. But perhaps the nautical architects on the stage crew will have a better idea.

Bibliography


Scene 1  Barrind’s Story

Narrator:  St. Brendan, son of Findlug, descendant of Alte, was born on the Western shores of Ireland, in the land of the men of Munster, in the year of our Lord 489. He was a man of great abstinence, famous for his mighty works, his brave spirit, and his beautiful singing which many said must be like to King David. He was spiritual father to nearly three thousand monks.

Brendan is alone upstage, kneeling at a prayer desk, during narrator’s speech. Maybe ... softly singing psalmody of “Oh God, my God for you I long.”

Barrind (from back of church)  Brendan! Brendan! Abba Brendan, Holy Father!

Barrind enters, from back, down center aisle. He is an old man, slightly bent, He is dressed as if just ashore from a voyage—boots, cap, cloak, and his clothes should smell slightly of incense. Brendan sets down his harp and comes to meet him, about mid-aisle.

Brendan:  Barrind! Barrind, Son of Niall!

Barrind falls prostrate at Brendan’s feet. Brendan lifts him gently; they embrace.

Brendan:  Father, dear father, please get up. Why such heaviness of heart? Come, show us the word of God and nourish our souls with the wonders you have seen in the ocean.

Barrind:  Well, then, here is my tale—and may the heart be wide enough to receive it to the glory of God! I am here now, straight returned from a visit to my son Mernoc. He has been living, you know, as a hermit on an island called the Island of Delights. Not long ago, I heard that he had many monks with him and that God had shown many wonders through him. So I set out to visit him, and blessed it was, after a long sea journey, to see him there on the shore waiting to greet me. The Lord had revealed to him that I was coming.
The next evening, after a day of prayer and silence, I was brought by my son to the seashore facing west, where there was a boat. He said to me, “Father, embark in the boat and let us sail west to the island which is called the Promised Land of the Saints, which God will give to those who come after us, and at the end of time.”

We embarked and sailed, but a fog so thick covered us that we could scarcely see the prow of the boat. But when we had spent about an hour like this, a great light shone all around us, and there appeared to us a land wide, and full of grass and fruit. The stones of that land—aye, too, they are precious stones. On the fifteenth day we came to a wide river flowing from east to west. As we pondered how to cross it, a man suddenly appeared in great light before us and called us by our own names.

“Well done, good brothers,” he said, “for God has revealed to you the land which he will give to his saints. The river there marks the middle of the island. You may not go beyond that point. So return to the place from which you departed.”

“Who are you?” I said. “Where do you come from?” But he said, “Why do you ask me where I come from or how I am called? Why do you not ask me about the island? As you see it now, so it has been from the beginning of the world. Here it is always day, without blinding darkness. For our Lord Jesus Christ is the light of this island.”

Brendan (aside): Mernoc? This mystery revealed to Mernoc? When last I saw him, he was just a lad!

Barrind (overwhelmed with emotion, he takes Brendan by the arm.

Brendan, Brendan, we are living at the gate of paradise! Only a brief sail away is an island Promised to the Saints, where night does not fall nor day end. Oh, to see it again! But for me, I know, that will not be permitted.
Brendan, scene 1, p. 3

Brendan: I can tell by the fragrance of your clothing that you have been in paradise. I would see that island! Oh, with my own eyes to behold God’s paradise in the wide ocean!

(Calling) Lads! My lads! Who would join me in a voyage to paradise?

From the back of the church, monks respond: “Here, Holy Father!” “Yes!” etc. They come forward, down side aisles. Brendan, inviting Barrind to follow, moves to center stage and raises his hands in prayer. Monks and Barrind kneel around him.

Brendan: My sons, I have resolved in my heart if it is God’s will to go in search of the Promised Land of the Saints of which Father Barrind spoke. How does that seem to you?

Monk 1: Abbot, your will is ours. Have we not already left friends and family behind and given our souls and bodies into your hands? So we are prepared to go along with you unto death or life.

Monk 2: If this be the will of God ...

Brendan: If this be the will of God!

He raises his arm in prayer again, then starts the song, “I feel the wind of God today, to God I raise my sail”

(After he has sung the first verse, song continues instrumentally, background music. Narrator speaks over it, and monks join in assembling the boat. It should be set up downstage, and should be as large as can reasonably be prefabricated. It should be a double-ender, to allow impression of sailing in any direction.

Narrator: Having received the blessing of his monks, Saint Brendan and those with him got iron tools and constructed a light boat ribbed with wood and a wooden frame, as is usual in those parts.
Monks bring in prefabricated wood frame; light lath or balsa hung on already standing 2x4 supports will suffice. Can be in sections.

They covered it with ox-hides tanned with oak bark and smeared all the joints outside with fat.

Monks cover frame with “hide,” and mime the smearing.

They placed a mast in the middle of the boat, and a sail and oars, and a tiller.

Mast, lines, oars are carried in and positioned.

And then Saint Brendan ordered his brothers to enter the boat, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Brendan resumes singing, again the first verse of “I feel the winds of God today”; invites crew and audience to join. Probably one verse only. When all crew have embarked, Brendan hugs Barrind farewell. Barrind exits as he entered, down center aisle. [Or, depending on casting, Brendan sees Barrind standing longingly aside and motions him into the boat.] Brendan climbs into boat and takes his position in stern, just behind tiller well.

At conclusion of “I feel the winds of God” song, monks take their place in the boat—one at tiller, a couple to unfurl the mainsail, the rest positioning the oars.
Scene 2  Wonders in the Sea

Narrator: The sail was spread, and they began to sail westward into the summer solstice. But after fifteen days the wind dropped. They set themselves to the oars until their strength failed and their spirits faltered.

Monks are rowing, exhaustedly, listlessly.

Brendan: Lads, do not fear. God is our helper, sailor, and helmsman, and he guides us. Ship all the oars and the rudder. Just leave the sail spread, and God will do as he wishes.

For a moment or so they sit, hands elevated as in prayer, harp plays a few listless chords of underneath. Then ...

Monk 1: A breeze!

Monk 2: Freshening from the south!

Brendan: Let the sail full out! God sends us north.

Crew assume sailing positions, on tiller, mainsheet, etc., while narrator tells the next bit.

Narrator: And so they sailed and sailed under a fair breeze, far to the north of any land known to them before. One morning, when they had finished singing Lauds, there appeared to them a pillar in the sea. It seemed just a short distance off, but it took them three days to approach it. The man of God tried to see the top of it, but he could not; it was so high. A wide-meshed net was wrapped around it, so wide the boat could pass through its openings into a vast inner chamber.

As the following sequence plays out, stage is dark, or dimly lit. We hear rather than see the interaction with the narrator.

Brendan: Look! The sea in here is as clear as glass. The pillar keeps going down and down …
Monk 1: ... and up and up!

Monk 2: What’s it made of? It looks like bright crystal ...

Monk 3: (breaks off piece of "mesh" and chews) ... It’s ice!!

Narrator: They sailed that whole day under one side of the pillar, and at dawn the next day, they passed through an opening in the mesh out again into the sea. A favoring wind began to blow, and the boat was borne along another eight days to the north. But by this time, provisions were running low, and courage again began to falter.

Instrumentalist cover music: “I feel the winds of God to day.” Perhaps modulates to minor key, slows down. As stage light comes up on boat, monks are slumped and lurching around, as if half seasick on the swells, sails slatting.

Monk 1: How long, Oh Lord, how long ...?

Monk 1: How long since we set foot on solid ground?

Monk 2: Or stretched our arms?

Monk 3: Or still the rocking of our legs?

Monk 4: Oh to be ashore! To cook a meal and warm ourselves by a fire!

Monk 3: If a meal we could muster ... We’re down to three carrots and some moldy scraps of bread.

Monk 1: And this is the last of our drinking water! (He holds up a nearly empty water skin.)

Monk 2: Look!! God be praised! An island!
Brendan Voyage, scene 3, p. 3

Monks (ad libidum): Where? Where?

Monk 2: Just ahead, off the starboard bow. See, it’s low—no trouble putting ashore!

Brendan sits stolidly in the stern as the rest excitedly pull on the oars, amidst general cries of “Let’s ashore!” and “Blessed be God!” One monk leaps ashore. They toss him an anchor line and he pulls it taut, as if beaching the boat. Another leaps out and joins him; they make the line fast. One by one the monks emerge, kiss the ground, dance a jig, stretch, flop down, explore, etc. The scene should be played with slightly comical exaggeration.

Monk 1: Pretty bare here! Not so much as a blade of grass... or a scrap of firewood.

Monk 3: We’ve still got some firewood aboard!

Monk 4: Here! Pass the kettle!

Fire-brigade style, the monks pass ashore the large cookpot, a few scraps of firewood, the water skin, and the meager provisions. Brendan is still in the stern, non-interactive. The monks pile up the wood and strike a match (this can be mimed, of course). They huddle around the fire.

Monk 2: Ahh! Blessed warmth. I’m cold all the way to the bones. (He takes off his tunic and holds it close to the fire to dry.)

Monk 1: Mmmmm! Smells good!!

Monk 3: What? What’s THAT??

The cooking pot starts to jiggle. One monk tries to grab it but only succeeds in knocking it, and it rolls. All begin to mime as if losing their balance, being knocked over.
Brendan Voyage, scene 3, p.4

Monk 1: An earthquake!

Monk 2: The whole island is shaking!

Monks (in unison): JUMP!!!

The monks jump, some making it onto the boat, some as if thrown into the water, gasping, swimming for the boat, grabbing the gunwales. Brendan helps them all back aboard. Those who have gone into the water shake themselves off like dogs.

Monk 1: Why … the island’s disappeared!

Brendan: My sons, do not be afraid. In a dream last night God revealed to me the secret of this affair. Where you were was not an island but a fish, the foremost of those that swim in the sea. His name is Jasconius, the whale.

But what you have done is foolish. God does not yet wish to show us a place to land, and you want to take the matter in your own hands. The Lord Jesus Christ after three days will show his servants a landing-place a place to land..

Monk 1: Aye, or a watery grave ...

Stage lights go down. Silhouette of men sleeping through the night, huddled next to each other, obviously cold, frightened, miserable. One or two awake, praying. Brendan takes his harp and sings to them, solo, Psalm 63: “Oh God, my God for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting; my body pines for you, like a dry, weary land without water...” He almost, but not quite finishes when the voice of Steward is heard, offstage, at first faint, barely audible over the singing.

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**Brendan Voyage, scene 3, p. 5**

**Steward:**  Abba Brendan! Abba Brendan! This way ...

_The sleeping monks come awake, one or two at a time as steward’s call persists. Lights slowly come up stage left, in direction of voice. General sleepy questioning: “What’s that? Where are we?”_

**Monk 1:**  Look! An island!

**Monk 2:**  A real one this time—with cliffs!

**Monk 3:**  And a waterfall! *(He grabs the empty waterskin). We’re saved!*

**Brendan:**  Has God not sent us a good messenger? Come; let’s follow him in.

*Steward appears from upstage, stage left. He is clearly a youth, but his being conveys great poise and presence. He carries a basket full of bread and a jar of water.*

**Steward**  Receive a blessing from the hand of your steward. A long journey lies ahead of you until you find consolation. Nevertheless, neither bread nor water will fail you again.

*He passes the loaves of bread and water into the boat. The monks eat and drink gratefully, then hand back the basket and jug ... With sudden inspiration, Brendan holds up his loaf.*

**Brendan:**  Let us carry out the divine service here. Let us celebrate the Last Supper, for today is Maundy Thursday.

**Steward:**  Yes, it is appointed that you came here, for God himself has prepared the spotless lamb for the paschal feast. Look around you! *(He gestures)*

**Monk 1:**  Sheep!
Monk 2: The hills are covered with them!

Monk 3: They’re huge! Larger than cattle …

Monk 4: And pure white!

Steward: They call this place The Island of Sheep. Take what you need from the flock.

Monk 2: God be praised! Let’s go!

Monks scurry out of the boat and offstage, as if on a sheep roundup. Steward calls after them, wryly,

Steward: No need to hasten, for they are tame.

He gestures to Brendan, and they move together toward the altar, upstage, center. Brendan carries the bread; the Steward takes chalice and paten from the credence table and places them on the altar.

Brendan: How good it is that our Lord Jesus Christ chooses a place for us where we can celebrate his holy resurrection!

Steward: Father, you will stay here tonight, and for Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Then God has ordained that you celebrate the Feast of his Resurrection on the island you see nearby. You will stay there through midday on Easter Sunday. Afterwards you will sail to another island which is not far from this one, toward the west, and called the Paradise of the Birds. You will remain there until the octave of Pentecost.

Brendan: And when do we reach the Promised Land of the Saints?

Steward: When the voyage is over.
Brendan Voyage, scene 3, p. 7

Brendan (slightly impatient): And when …?

Steward (interrupting him): That will be revealed in the fullness of time. Now come; let us begin the preparations for our Lord’s last supper.

Lights darken on stage and come up on narrator. Steward exits. Brendan and crew return silently to their places on the boat, a few monks carrying sacks of provisions. Perhaps “Lamb of God” travel music here?
**Brendan Voyage, scene 4, p. 1**

**Scene 4**  
**The Paradise of the Birds**

**Narrator:** By Holy Saturday all was in readiness. The Paschal feast had been celebrated, the boat re-provisioned and Saint Brendan and his crew prepared once again to entrust themselves to the wonders of God in the sea.

It was as their steward told them. As they cleared the western edge of the island, they saw another island almost joining it, separated by only a narrow channel. There was plenty of grass on it; it had a grove of trees and was full of flowers. They started circling it, looking for a place to land. As they were sailing along its southern side, they found a stream flowing out into the sea, and there they put the boat in to land. As they disembarked, Saint Brendan ordered them to draw the boat with ropes up along the riverbed. The width of the river was about the width of the boat. They carried on for about a mile, until they came to the source of the stream.

*As the narrator speaks, lights come up gradually on stage, as crew mimes the dragging operation described. When narration is finished, crew begins a simple chant tone. From very back of church birds join in the same chant, but adding florid, beautiful harmony in women’s voices. (Chant: “Kyrie Christe et Sanncta Maria,” interspersed with instrumental tratto for the entry dance). Monks, one by one as the sound comes to their ears, look up in amazement.*

*Birds enter, down center aisle, singing, swooping, powerful and spontaneous, but controlled—the impression should be that of sacred dance. As they reach the stage area, surrounding and “flying” past the boat, their song/dance does become truly sacred dance. They are all in white “plumage.”*

*As the dance proceeds, Brendan is more and more visibly moved. His eyes return particularly to one bird, the leader of the flock. As the rest of the monks watch the dance, enchanted and rapt, Brendan moves apart, to the prow of the boat and begins to weep, covering his face with his hands.*
When the dance ends, the birds draw in their wings in an enfolded position, crossed over their hearts, as in a sacred gesture of prayer.

**Brendan:** Oh God, who know the unknown and reveals all that is secret/you know the distress of my heart. Why so many beautiful birds gathered in one place? I implore you to have pity on me and reveal to me, a sinner, through your great mercy, your secret that I now behold with my eyes.

The lead bird, the one Brendan has been watching, unfolds her wings, moves silently over, and perches on the prow of the boat, just behind Brendan. She stretches out her wings as a “sign of joy” (says the text); she wears finger cymbals on both hands.

**Brendan:** If you are God’s messenger, tell me where these birds come from, or why you are gathered here.

**Bird:** We survive from the great destruction of the ancient enemy. When we were created, Lucifer’s fall and that of his followers brought about our destruction as well. But our God is just and true. In his great judgment he sent us here. We endure no sufferings. Here we can see God’s presence. But God has separated us from sharing the lot of others who were faithful. We wander through various regions of the air and the firmament and the earth, just like the other spirits that travel on their missions. But on holy days and Sundays we are given bodies such as you now see so that we may stay here and praise our Creator.

Free, spirited, she tinkles her cymbals and starts to flutter off.

**Brendan (moved):** Wait! Who are you?

Impetuous, she tinkles her cymbals again. The other birds come awake, unfurl their wings.
Bird: We chant Vespers each night, to the glory of God. You may join if you like.

What follows is to be a slowly building festal dance on “The Canticle of the Three Young Men,” and particularly its chorus—“Exalt and praise him above all forever”—orchestrated as follows:

(bird, solo) All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord; angels of the Lord, bless the Lord; all you hosts of the Lord, bless the Lord;

(all birds) Exalt and praise him above all forever!

(all birds) You heavens, bless the Lord; Sun and moon, bless the Lord; Stars in the sky, bless the Lord;

(birds and monks) Exalt and praise him above all forever!

(monks) Night and days, bless the Lord; light and darkness, bless the Lord; lightning and storm-clouds, bless the Lord;

(monks; birds in organum) Exalt and praise him above all forever!

(cymbals are already going; add tambourine, bells. Next verse, "Let the earth bless the Lord, should feature men and birds, perhaps antiphonal on verse; refrain again in organum, instruments. Narrator invites audience to join in refrain. After this (verse 4), there is instrumental riff, with Brendan on harp. Birds dance.

monks, birds Let the earth bless the Lord
Brendan Voyage, scene 4, p. 4

mountains and hills, bless the Lord;  
all that grows from the earth, bless the Lord;

with audience  

Exalt and praise him above all forever!

On verse 5 (“You springs bless the lord”), birds and monks sing together, with audience again joining in refrain. Brendan, at lead bird’s beckoning, steps into circle and enters the bird dance.

You springs, bless the Lord; seas and rivers, bless the Lord; you whales and all swimming creatures, bless the Lord;

Exalt and praise him above all forever!

Brendan (solo)  
All you birds of the air, bless the Lord;  
all beasts wild and tame, bless the Lord;  
and all Adam’s children, bless the Lord;

(all hands)  
Exalt and praise him above all forever!

Bird (solo) (to Brendan) (to crew and birds)  
Let Israel bless the Lord; You priests of the Lord, bless the Lord; all you, the Lord’s servants, bless the Lord!

(all hands)  
Exalt and praise him above all forever!

There follows a second instrumental riff, which develops into full circle dance, monks and birds dancing together, Brendan always with lead bird. At end, the two of them step through the circle to face the audience:
(Brendan and bird): Just spirits and souls, bless the Lord; you just and humble of heart bless the Lord; bless the Father, the Son, and the Spirit!

(All hands) Exalt and praise him above all forever!

As all join in final refrain, and instrumental riff trails off, Brendan and bird face each other. They extend their arms, as if to embrace, but at the last moment, simultaneously, draw back—bird to enfolded position described earlier, Brendan to a deep bow.

Bird (to monks): You have a long journey ahead of you. Now sleep. May God grant you a peaceful night and a perfect end.

As stage lights dim, the birds cluster and draw in, as if roosting. Monks start to stretch out on ground. Brendan returns to his usual station on the boat, looks back toward bird. She, too, is looking at him; flies a little closer. Spotlight catches them.

Bird (wistfully): Next year, too, you will celebrate with us the holy season of Eastertide.

Brendan: And until then?

Bird: Like us—you will wander through various regions seeking God’s paradise in the wide sea.

Brendan: And achieve what we seek?

Bird (cryptically): No achieving in the lands here below...only Becoming …

Brendan looks confused, distraught. As if to comfort, she adds:


*Brendan Voyage, scene 4, p. 6*

**Bird:** After eight months you will find the island of the community of Ailbe. There you will celebrate Christmas Day.

**Brendan:** Why? … How is all this ordained? … And when…?

**Bird:** Shhh! Wait …

*Bird draws up her wings to enfold herself. Light slowly fades. Maybe instrumental reprise of “Exalt and praise him” as birds exit. Monks remain aboard.*
Scene Five       The Community of Ailbe

Narrator:        So the boat once again put out to sea, and this time
                was driven far to the south, through vast empty
                reaches where even seabirds did not fly, and then through a sea of
                grass, where their oars could barely propel them forward. Then the
                breezes started to blow warm—a miracle to these men from northern
                lands—and finally an island appeared in sight, the island foretold at
                Pentecost, eight months before. But a fierce contrary wind sprang up,
                and try as they could, the Holy Father and his brothers could make no
                way against it.

                As stagelights come up, Brendan and the crew are
                working together battling a fierce wind, obviously exhausted.

Monk 1 (on tiller): I can’t hold ’er any longer. We’ll be blown
                    right over!

Brendan:         Ease the sail!

Monk 1:          No use! We’re being pushed back—AGAIN!

Monk 2:          That’s forty days we’ve been circling this island,
                 and still no landing place. Our strength is at an
                 end.

Monk 3:          Our supplies, too! This is all for the water (*holds up a
                 crumpled waterskin*). And the last bread was gone two
                 days ago.

Brendan:         My sons, persevere a while longer. Did not God himself
                 appoint that we should spend Christmas on this island?
                 Here! With one breath let us draw in the sail and hold the
                 heading toward the landing place God will appoint.
(breathes in and out deeply once, then breathing in . . .)
Lord Jesus Christ . . .

**Monks (unison):** Have mercy on us!

On the next “Lord Jesus Christ,” they draw in a single breath, trim the sail, and point. On the “Have mercy on us,” they hang on against overwhelming pressure, some hiking out on upper gunwale as if to counterbalance straining boat. This continues for three breaths; then—

**Monk 1:** Look! A landing!

**Monk 2:** How could we have missed it before?

**Monk 1:** It’s so narrow you can hardly see it.

**Brendan:** Wide enough is wide enough. Come, let’s draw in.

They approach, disembark. A few stagger and stumble, at the end of their strength.

**Monk 1:** A well! Quickly!

One of the monks still on the boat tosses him the waterskin but Brendan intercepts it, flings it away.

**Brendan:** My sons, do not do a forbidden thing. The elders of this island will freely give you the water you now want to take in stealth.

While Brendan is speaking, an elder appears from stage left, upstage. He comes forward and silently prostrates himself on the ground before embracing Saint Brendan. The monks crowd around him in a clamorous chorus. Ad libidum, all talking at once, they fire off their questions: “Who are you?” “Where are we?” “Can we take the water?” “Is there any food?” etc. The elder, extricating himself meekly, indicates with a repeated hand gesture that they should be silent.
Brendan: *(holding up his own hand to call off the monks):*
Forgive me, father. I see silence is the rule of this place, *(to the monks).* Keep your mouths from speaking lest these elders be defiled by your noisy talk.

The elder motions them, and they follow, exiting stage left. At the same time, from upstage, stage right, elders bring on a long table and benches, and rough mugs; Father Ailbe, abbot of the community, follows. Brendan and company, who have exited stage left, now re-enter, stage right; Ailbe motions for them to take a seat, Brendan next to himself. When all are seated, Ailbe gives a hand signal. One of the elders gets up and places loaves of bread on the table, one loaf for every two monks. At a second signal another brings a water pitcher and fills the mugs.

Ailbe: In joy and fear of the Lord drink now in love the water from the well which you wanted to drink in stealth!

We have no idea where the loaves that you see are baked, or who carries them to our larder. What we do know is that they are given to his servants from the great charity of God. There are twenty-four of us brothers here. Every day we have twelve loaves for our food, a loaf between every two. On feast-days and Sundays God increases our supply to one full loaf for each brother, so that they can have supper from what is left over. Thus Christ has fed us, from the time of Saint Patrick, for eighty years until now. Yet no sign of old age or weakness spreads in our limbs.

On this island we eat nothing that is prepared by fire. Neither cold nor heat ever overcomes us. And when the time comes for masses or vigils, we light in our church lights that we brought with us from our homeland under divine predestination. They burn till this day, and still none of them is diminished.

*Ailbe signals again. The elders cross themselves and rise, gesturing to Brendan’s monks to follow. They exit stage left, removing benches and tables as they go; it should have the gracefulness of a liturgical act. Brendan starts to leave; Ailbe takes his arm, gestures for him to stay.*
Brendan Voyage, scene five, p. 4

Ailbe: They will go now to sing Vespers, and then each one will have his cell. But let us stay here together, you and I, and keep vigil for the coming of the light.

From offstage (in sacristy) comes sound of Advent chant; perhaps “Veni Emmanuel.” Should be familiar enough to an audience that they will recognize it as an Advent chant. Brendan and Ailbe move to seats near the altar to wait. Brendan is markedly less composed than Ailbe, as if reflecting deeply on what he has just experienced.

Brendan: Father Ailbe, how long can human flesh endure such a life?

Ailbe: Abbot, I confess before my Christ. It is eighty years since we came to this island. We have heard no human voice except when singing praise to God. Among the twenty-four of us no voice is raised, except by way of a signal given by the hand or the eyes, and that only by the elders. Since the time we came here, none of us has suffered ill in the flesh or from the spirits that infest the human race.

Brendan: May we stay here?

Ailbe: You may not, because it is not the will of God. why do you ask me, Father? Has not God himself revealed to you what you must do? You must return to your own place with your brothers. There God has prepared your burial place.

Silence for a lengthy pause. Then ...

Brendan: Father … May I ask a question?
Brendan Voyage, scene five, p. 5

Ailbe: Certainly, my son …

Brendan: For nearly two years now we have sailed in search of the Land Promised to the Saints—through vast reaches of the sea; through islands magical and terrifying. And still we do not find it. Yet Mernoc. Mernoc. He was there in the space of an hour. Why, Father? Why?

Ailbe: You would judge your brother’s readiness? (Long pause, then looking directly at Brendan)

The Promised Land of the Saints is entered by one path, and by many. Each path is a human heart; it has its own time. Like a rose, it opens when it is ripe.

Brendan (with mounting frustration): But what more can I do?

Suddenly an arrow “shoots” through, and the sanctuary lights on the altar are illuminated.

Brendan: How’s that? The sanctuary lights!

Ailbe: Yes, they will burn through the vigil of the night—as they have from that first night.

Brendan: Why are they not exhausted by now?

Ailbe: Go and see the secret of it. (He motions; Brendan goes over to inspect) You can see the tapers burning in the center of the bowls. Nothing of them actually burns away. The light is spiritual.

Brendan: How can incorporeal light burn in a corporeal creature?

Ailbe: Do you not know the story of the burning bush at Mount Sinai? The bush burned but was not consumed. (He pauses) … Even so it is for one who enters the Land Promised to the Saints.
They resume their vigil. Brendan is still agitated. Finally he bolts up.

**Brendan:** I’ve got to go get some rest. Tomorrow, early, we set out.

**Ailbe:** No, Father, it is appointed that you must celebrate Christmas with us, until the octave of Epiphany.

*Brendan sighs heavily, returns to his bench, sits.*

**Brendan:** *Eighty* years you’ve been here?

**Ailbe:** The heart is restless until it rests in God.

*Stage lights darken; spotlight comes up on narrator.*
Scene 6: The Isle of Smiths/ Unhappy Judas

**Narrator:** When the feast-days were over, the blessed Brendan and his followers brought provisions into the boat and received a blessing from the holy elders. He then sailed out into the ocean as fast as he could. Then the holy father, with his group/was driven here and there for three months over the space of the ocean. They could see nothing but sea and sky. They ate always every second or third day.

One day, when provisions were again running low, they caught sight of an island not very far away, very rough, rocky, and full of slag, without grass or trees.

*(During narration, crew has taken up positions in the boat.)*

**Monk 1:** An island! God be praised!

**Monk 2:** Shall we set a course for her, holy Father?

**Brendan:** I am troubled by this island. I do not want to put ashore on it, or even come near it. Closer to the wind! Harden course till we sail clear of it!

*The monks try to haul in, but the sail luffs.*

**Monk 1:** No use! The wind’s blowing us directly there!

*The monks keep trying to tighten sail, head up. As they do, a noise is heard offstage, left: the banging and howling of blacksmith forges, which becomes mixed with human howling.*

**Brendan:** My sons, raise the sail still higher and row as fast as you can. Let us flee this island!
Suddenly a lump of slag is pitched through the air, hurtling above the deck and into the water. Another lands on deck, followed by spears. From stage left two savages appear, hurling slag, screaming.

**Brendan:** Faster! Faster!

*(More slag ... spears ... howls; then attenuating slightly.)*

**Monk 1:** We’re gaining ground …

**Brendan:** Keep at it, my sons!

*(A bit more rowing motion)*

**Monk 1:** Whew!

**Monk 2:** Look back. The whole island is ablaze!

**Monk 3:** It stinks!

**Monk 4:** Are those men, or demons?

**Brendan:** Soldiers of Christ, be strengthened in faith and in spiritual weapons. We are in the confines of hell, so be on the watch and be brave.

_They resume rowing, starting new chant tone. Suggest humming “Some went down to the sea in ships/My God” After this has gone on for a few versicles ..._

**Monk 1:** Now what?

**Monk 2:** Where?

**Monk 1:** There—on that ledge way off…

**Monk 2:** Looks like … a boat … being bashed on the rocks.
Monk 1: What would a boat be doing way out here? It must be a bird!

Monk 3: Trapped, or injured, poor thing.

Monk 2: No! It’s too big for a bird... Listen; it’s moaning... It’s … a human voice!

Monk 1: Impossible!

Monks, freeform, enter the argument with various opinions. During this time Judas, entering from the rear, has positioned himself on a “rock outcrop” placed in center aisle, toward front, during intermission.

Brendan: Cease arguing! Draw the boat to the spot. (As they approach)... Why, it’s a man!

Monk 1: Shipwrecked! How long can he have survived here? Look! When a wave breaks, he disappears!

Monk 2: He’s drowned …

Monk 3: No, there he is again …

Brendan: God spare his soul. Steer close; I’m going to him!

Monks (ad libidum): Holy Father, no! You’ll drown!

But, carrying a rescue line and the waterskin, Brendan leaps and makes it. The man waves him away, moaning.

Judas: Stay back! Stay back!

Brendan: Who are you, my friend? For what fault were you sent here; what sin, to justify such a terrible penance?
Brendan Voyage, scene 6, p. 4

Judas: I am unhappy Judas, the most evil trader ever. I am not here in accordance with my deserts, but because of the boundless mercy of Jesus Christ. This place is not reckoned as a punishment but as an indulgence of the Saviour to honor the day of the Lord’s Resurrection.

Brendan: It’s Sunday, then? I had lost count.

Judas: To be sure, it’s Sunday, for here I am. When I sit here, I am in a paradise of delights compared with the torments that lie ahead of me this evening. For I burn, like a lump of molten lead in a pot, day and night in the center of that island you have just seen. Leviathan and his attendants are there. But here I have a place of refreshment every Sunday from sundown to sundown; from Christmas to Epiphany, in Eastertide, and on the feast-days of the Mother of God. At all other times I am tortured in the depths of hell with Herod and Pilate and Caiphas and Annas.

Brendan (deeply moved): Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!

Silence; they look at each other for a long pause...

Judas: Holy father …

Brendan: (slowly): … My brother …

Judas: I beseech you, through the Saviour of the world, to intercede with the Lord Jesus Christ that I be allowed to remain here until sunrise tomorrow, so that the demons may not torture me on your account.

Brendan: May the Lord’s will be done! Tonight until tomorrow morning you will not be eaten by demons.

Brendan returns to the boat, taciturn.

Brendan: Prepare yourselves, lads. Come sundown there will be a fracas such as human ear has not heard.

This next bit is pure choreography. Stage lights fade, turn reddish; a lurid glow. Demons appear in semi-circle,
Brendan Voyage, scene 6, p. 5

upstage, screaming “Away!” “Away!” Accompanied, perhaps, by demon instrumental music: percussion, perhaps a bagpipe drone if one can be found. The semi-circle steadily tightens around Brendan’s boat.

Monk 1: They’re coming closer!

Monk 2: They’ll snatch us to hell!

Brendan: Silence, fool! It’s not us they want!

Demon 1: Away! Away, man of God, from us! We cannot come near our companion until you go away from him.

Demon 2: You have snatched our mouthful from us. Do not protect him this night!

Brendan: I do not protect him. The Lord Jesus Christ protects him.

Demon 1: How can you invoke the Lord’s name over him when he is himself the betrayer of the Lord?

Brendan: I order you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to do him no evil until morning.

The demons move in, rushing by the boat, bow and stern, as if planning to seize Judas, but as they draw near him, they are thrown back, as though he is protected by an invisible shield. Try as they like, they cannot break through it. After repeated attempts, with screaming mounting, they depart toward the back of the church.

Demon 1: Man of God, we curse you! We curse you! We curse, you! Unhappy Judas will suffer double punishment for the next six days because you protected him!

Brendan: You have no power over that, nor does your chief. God will have the power. (He pauses, then adds with a strength not heard in his voice before, as if emanating from a power beyond his own), I order you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ not to increase his torment!
Demon 1: Are you Lord of All, so that we obey your words?

Brendan: I am his servant, and whatever I order, I order in his name. Now … DEPART!

Demons (in unison): Man of God, we curse you! Man of God, we curse you! Man of God, we curse you!

They exit, howling and screaming, from the rear. When quiet returns, Brendan buckles slightly, as if drained.

Judas (from rock, ever so softly): Bless you, Father …

Brendan: Farewell …

Light fades, and church is dark and silent for a moment. Brendan returns to boat; Judas exits to rear. Light comes up again on narrator.
Scene 7 The Paradise of the Birds again

Narrator: After three days and three nights the wind dropped out, and the sea turned to glass. The holy father said, “Ship the oars and loosen sail. Wherever God wants to direct the boat, let him direct it!”

The boat drifted for twenty days. Then God raised a wind favorable to them again, from the west. They set sail and sped on, eating always every third day.

Then one day an island appeared on the horizon, so far off it looked almost like a cloud.

(Monks are straining and peering—no binoculars back in those days).

Monk 1: No, it is an island! It really is!

Monk 2: God be praised! We’re saved!

Brendan: My sons, do you recognize that island?

Monks: No, not at all.

Brendan: I recognize it. That’s the island where we were last Maundy Thursday. That is where our good steward lives.

Monks, ad libidum, exclaim “Right!” “Yes!” “God be praised!”

Monk 1: The oars! Let’s row for it!

Brendan: Lads, do not tire your limbs foolishly. Is not all-powerful God the pilot of our boat? Leave it to him. He himself guides our journey as he wills.

As they draw close, the steward enters, stage left, and receives the lines. All come ashore. They embrace warmly.
Steward:  Blessed be God, who brings all things to pass according to his word. For here you have returned, on Maundy Thursday, to celebrate the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord as he has appointed. Be welcome!

\[As \text{ they are greeting one another, the bird song “Kyrie”—as before is heard, and birds swoop in as before, up center aisle.}\]

Monk 1:  Listen!

Brendan (aside):  Truly, is this not paradise?

\[The \text{ birds enter en flock, as before, singing their theme song. Last in is the lead bird, who comes immediately and perches on the prow of the boat, her accustomed place. Brendan looks at her in joy, and she at him. She beckons, as if to request attention. The song ends; she speaks.}\]

Bird:  Blessed be God, fount of all wisdom!
Holy Father Brendan, our Lord God has ordained for you four points of call for the four periods of the year, until the seven years of your pilgrimage are over;

Brendan (aside, barely audible):  Seven?

Bird:  namely, on Maundy Thursday with your steward who is present every year; Easter you will celebrate on the back of the whale; the Easter feast until the octave of Pentecost with us; Christmas you will celebrate with the community of Ailbe. Then after seven years and varied trials you will find the Promised Land of the Saints that you seek. There you will live for forty days, and afterwards God will bring you back to the land of your birth.

Brendan:  Praise be to our wise and all-merciful God!

\[Brendan \text{ prostrates himself on the ground as the other monks kneel. Birds then burst into “Song of Songs”:}\]
Birds (singing): My beloved answered, he said to me,  
Rise up, my darling  
My fairest, come away;  
for now the winter is past,  
the rains are over and gone,  
the flowers appear in the countryside,  
the time is coming when the birds will sing,  
and the turtledove’s cooing  
will be heard in the land.  
Rise up, my darling;  
my fairest, come away.

As song progresses, stage lights fade. By refrain, Brendan moves to prow of boat, deeply sad. Melody continues instrumentally. Bird watches, then flies toward him. Spotlight tightens.

Bird: Why so downcast? Why such heaviness within you,  
on this holy night of our Lord’s last supper?

Brendan: I was thinking of another—a brother—who sits  
on a wretched rock in the ocean. What must this night be like for him, this anniversary of his treachery? Do the demons doubly torture him?

Bird: Unhappy Judas, yes; I have seen him on his rock as we fly overhead. … (pauses, watches) Brendan … it is appointed.

Brendan (explodes): All, all is appointed! Everything appointed!  
Judas on his rock; you in your homeless flight; I in my pilgrimage that is to last seven years—seven!—Mernoc’s but an hour...All played out in some vast heavenly time that has nothing to do with you or me—your hopes, your effort, your striving. Judas—was it his wish to play the role of betrayer, or was that appointed? And you—was it your wish to fall with Lucifer; to become a bird, a ghost … you who were once with the angels in heaven?
Bird (stung): You think that which is appointed has no heart? Brendan … Brendan you must learn to trust …

Brendan (a bit mechanically): … in God’s power …

Bird: No!!—in his love.

*She begins the song again, picking up the instrumental melody which has continued softly through the foregoing …*

Bird: My beloved answered, he said to me
Rise up, my darling; my
fairest, come away...

*Brendan breaks in suddenly, impassionedly, with “Bryd on Brere,” his opening song in scene I.*

Bryd on brere,
bryd, bryd on brere.
kynd is come, of love to crave;
blitheful bird
on me thu rewe,
or greyeth lef,
greyeth thu me my grave

(bird on briar; bird, bird on briar;
your kindred spirit has come, of love to crave;
blitheful bird, take pity on me; else, as
the leaf turns grey, so shall you herald
the greyness of my grave)

*The two songs should fit together in poignant harmony, two kinds of love. As they sing, the passion of the music and the poignancy of the moment closes around them. The song ends; they look, step forward as if to touch—as before. Bird starts to draw back, but Brendan impulsively lunges forward and grabs her.*

Brendan: No! Don’t leave!
Brendan Voyage, scene 7, p. 5

Bird lets out a deep, grief-stricken wail, pulls in her right wing, now crumpled by Brendan’s force. Using her one good wing, she flutters a safe distance off, in despair and fury.

Bird: You don’t see! You don’t see! You yourself are the veil that hides the paradise you seek ...

She flutters offstage, anxiously fanning her good wing.
All lights off.
Scene 8  The Land Promised to the Saints

The stage is dark. Brendan sinks back, sits alone on the prow of the boat. We hear, in the darkness, the plunked, hesitant chords of the bird song, “Rise up, my darling.” Then a tight spot comes up on Brendan, who puts his harp aside, buries his head in his hands, and weeps ... words breaking through the tears: “Oh Oh God, Lord God, I just can’t do it ... I can’t go on ... it’s useless. ...”

Judas (in darkness; only his voice is heard)

Holy Father, please do not despair.

Brendan (looks around, startled out of his despair):

What?

(Tight spotlight comes up on Judas, on his rock)

Judas (continuing his train of thought):

All else can be redeemed. Learn the lesson of unhappy Judas.

Brendan: Judas! My brother! Where are you? I can’t see you.

Judas: You can hear me in your heart.

Brendan: What am I doing wrong? What does she mean, ‘I myself am the veil that hides the paradise I seek’?

No response. Judas? (More silence) Judas???

Please, brother, I know I am a rash and stupid fool; this voyage has surely proved that. But please, tell me what I keep missing. Why can’t we get there? Why do we never arrive?

Judas: It’s not why; it’s how ...
Brendan Voyage, scene 8, p. 2

Brendan: What?

Judas: How you get there is where you’ll arrive.

Brendan: How I get there is where I’ll arrive? … I don’t understand.

Judas: You seek according to the ways of men: adventure and drama, love and passion, and your own restless heart. You want to conquer this Land promised to the Saints—just like your rival, Mernoc—and then spread wide the tale of God’s wonders in the sea in fabulous songs and ballads.

Brendan: But what’s wrong with that?

Judas: These things belong to the ways of men, and they draw you inescapably to the lands of men. The world is wide enough for you. It contains your heart. Why seek further? (He pauses; then continues in a calmer, deeper tone)

Brendan (despairing again):

So it is all in vain, then, this search—my men, my music, my heart. I am a flawed instrument; that’s what you’re saying.

Judas: No, not in vain. Your search has brought you this far, and that is most the distance. Only the last passage remains.

Brendan: What?

Judas: To let go of what has carried you to where you are now.
**Brendan Voyage, scene 8, p. 3**

**Brendan:** My boat? It can’t be done. I have my men to think about. *(He begins to pluck studiously on his harp, “I Feel the Winds of God Today”)*

**Judas:** The harp, Brendan. Not the boat, the harp. Perhaps you would hear the celestial music if you didn’t prefer your own.

**Brendan (leaps up in sudden rage)**

What are you saying? That’s a lie! I’ve followed God all my life, with all my heart’s desire.

**Judas:** It lies beyond your heart’s desire.

**Brendan:** Then it lies beyond death.

**Judas:** For most men this is true. *(Pause)*

It can be borne in the flesh. But not the usual flesh.

**Brendan:** What do you know? You’re an outcast, a murderer, betrayer of Christ. Why should I trust you?

**Judas (letting out deep groan)**

The waters are rising around me … The demons drag me down. I return to my place of torment.

Farewell, Holy Father. God bless …

**Brendan:** No, wait … Forgive me, brother … forgive …

*As light darkens on Judas, slowly, from organ loft, and then filling in from all sides, is music; Easter Alleluia (Gregorian) … bells; candles, sung by high female voices. The effect should be pellucid, celestial.*

*As celestial song starts to fill in, Brendan throws his harp overboard and falls to his knees, arms elevated about halfway, toward heaven.*

*Toward end of song, stage lights come up just enough to reveal silhouettes of crewmembers silently entering the boat.*

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They are joined by the Steward, who takes his place on the opposite end of the boat from Brendan, and with his words breaks Brendan’s deep meditational prayer.

**Steward** *(to Brendan, softly, as celestial song fades out)*:

Yes, I will join you this time, to show you the way. *(To monks)*: Set a course due east! We will be sailing for forty days.

As monks lift sail, instrumental rendition of “I feel the winds of God today.” Crew mime actions of navigating well, holding the lines, hiking out on the gunwales, as Steward holds the helm. Brendan sits, still quiet, on the prow. As the second verse begins, one crew member exclaims “Look!” A few of the birds soar by, upstage, including lead bird, who is flying well again, her wing healed. She sweeps around, solo, for one last fly by, gestures farewell to Brendan, who emerges from his stillness to wave farewell back to her. This should be timed to end as music comes to the end of the verse, trails off under new dialogue.

*As the song nears its end, visibility should drop, as in fog—perhaps smoke powder.*

**Monk 1**: Where did this fog come from, all of a sudden?

**Monk 2**: Out of nowhere—and dark as a dungeon …

**Monks (in bow)**: Abba Brendan …

**Brendan**: Right here!

**Monk 1**: Can’t see you. Even the length of the boat …

**Monk 2**: Never has it been so thick!

**Steward**: Do you know what fog this is?
Brendan Voyage, scene 8, p. 5

Brendan: What?

Steward: This fog encircles the island for which you have been searching these seven years.

A look of wonder on all faces. The fog gets really dense; then gradually intense light, as from a flood lamp, begins to shine through it, along with the sweet smell of incense.

Narrator: After the space of an hour, a mighty light shone all around them again, and the boat rested on the shore.

During the course of the ensuing narrative—silently—the crew disembark, led by Steward. Each crewmember falls prostrate on the ground. The last to disembark is Brendan; bird remains on prow. The steward gestures for the monks to rise; informally they form two files and start to circle the stage, “reconnoitering,” then exit left and right. Brendan and steward remain on stage, center.

On disembarking from the boat, they saw a wide land full of trees bearing fruit as in autumn time. When they had gone in a circle around that land, night had still not come on them. They took what fruit they wanted and drank from the wells. And so for the space of forty days they reconnoitered the whole island and could not find the end of it. But one day they came upon a great river flowing through the middle of the island. Then Saint Brendan said to his brothers, “We cannot cross the river, and we do not know the size of this land.” They were pondering these thoughts when a man met them and embraced them, and, calling each by his name said:

(Man appears on stage. Might be the same actor as has played Ailbe).

Man: Happy are those who dwell in your house! They shall praise you from generation to generation.

Brendan (kneels): Who are you? Where have you come from?
Brendan Voyage, scene 8, p. 6

**Man:** Why do you ask me where I come from or how I am called? There before you lies the land you have sought for a long time. You could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you his varied secrets in the great ocean. Return now to the land of your birth, bringing with you some of the fruit of this land and as many of the precious stones as your boat can carry. The final day of your pilgrimage draws near, so that you may sleep with your fathers. After the passage of many times, this land will become known to your successors, when persecution of the Christians shall have come. The river that you now see divides the island. Just as this land appears to you ripe with fruit, so shall it remain always without shadow of night. For Christ is its light.

*Light fades from the stage. In the dark, Brendan, steward, and the man exit.*

**Narrator:** Saint Brendan and his brothers, having taken samples of the fruits of the land and of all its varieties of precious stones, took his leave of the blessard steward and the man. He began to sail through the middle of the fog. When they had passed through it to the island called the Island of Delights, they availed themselves of three days’ hospitality with the holy Mernoc and his community. Then, receiving a blessing, Saint Brendan returned home directly.
Scene 9 Epilogue: The Homecoming

During the last narration, Brendan and the crew have moved, by outside route, to the back of the church. Barrind enters, stage left, with a few of the home-crew monks (these can be same actors as in Ailbe’s community, or even a few audience “plants.”

Barrind: Blessed be God! They’re back!

Brendan and his crew make their way up the center aisle. Home crew rush down to greet them. There is embracing and general merry hullabaloo. Brendan looks tired but at peace—a definitely different set to his being. Barrind prostrates himself before Brendan, as before; Brendan lifts him to his feet and they embrace.

Barrind: I can tell by the fragrance of your clothes that you have been in paradise.

Home-monk 1: Ah, holy father, play your harp for us again. We’ve so missed your angel’s voice and holy hymns.

Home-monk 2: Sing us one of the songs of paradise!

Brendan smiles, a bit wistfully, shakes his head, and gives the same hand gesture as elder gave on Ailbe’s island for silence.

Crew monk: He threw away his harp …

Brendan: Having heard the music of paradise, I have vowed—in fact, I can do not other—to renounce all human song. It brings too great a yearning ...

But you—all of you here—now lift your voices in thanksgiving to God for the wonders of his creation. And for each you, I leave you a blessing, and a wish:
Ask, and the gift will come; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened. Voyage boldly, for in voyaging you will find the path to your heart, and there you will find the Land Promised to the Saints.

Instrumentalists (perhaps organ) playover, “I feel the winds of God today.” Brendan conducts entrance; monks, audience join in. On second verse others in cast appear—birds, demons, Ailbe’s elders, Judas, steward—so that everyone is on stage for finale and final bow.