

# GOOD FRIDAY DRAMA 2000

First Act Drama Group of First Lutheran Church

Revised 3-19-00

The Good Friday Drama will portray the Arrest, Trial, Crucifixion, and Burial of Jesus according to the Gospel of John. There are three readers:

**Narrator:** The narrator tells the biblical story, sometimes quoting John, sometimes summarizing the unfolding events.

**Archaeologist:** The archaeologist tells of the places, people, and events of the time and explains some of the specific details in the passion narrative.

**Physician:** The physician gives a medical description of what Jesus experienced in his passion and death.

All other members of **First Act** dramatize the action described by the Narrator. Action only occurs during the narration; when the archaeologist and physician speak, the actors "freeze" in place.

## SCENE 1:

## THE ARREST OF JESUS

**John 18: 1-11**

**Narrator:** After Jesus had eaten the Last Supper with his disciples, he went with them from Jerusalem, across the Kidron valley, to a place where there was a garden. Because Jesus often met there with his disciples, Judas also knew of the garden and brought a detachment of soldiers, along with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They carried lanterns and torches and weapons.

Jesus knew what was about to happen. He stepped forward and asked, "Whom are you looking for?" and they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." They stepped back and fell to the ground,

Again Jesus asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go."

Then Simon Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the slave of the high priest. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" *Actors freeze while the archaeologist speaks.*

**Archaeologist:** My Name is Dr. Yikzhak Feldman. I am a professor of archaeology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Allow me to describe what happened to Jesus.

The Gospel of John says that Jesus and his disciples walked from the city, across the Kidron valley, to a garden. That means Jesus headed east out of Jerusalem, went down a steep slope, and crossed a creek that was at the bottom of a wide ravine known as Kidron. Although John does not mention the name of the garden, the other Gospel writers do—they say that the garden was called Gethsemane, located on the Mount of Olives. This so-called mount, was the hill on the opposite side of the ravine; the slopes were filled with groves of olive trees. The distance Jesus traveled from the city, down into the valley, and up the other side, was likely no

further than one mile.

While at the garden, Judas-the betrayer, arrived with three groups of men:

- A few Roman soldiers who were probably there to keep the peace in case a riot ensued;
- The police of the Chief Priests who were there to arrest Jesus because he claimed to be the Son of God;
- and the Pharisees, a few members of the religious party who studied and interpreted the law-the law Jesus regularly violated.

It was not often that Roman soldiers would be part of the same action as the police of the chief priests, but in this case, the police wanted to make an arrest, and the Romans who came along were afraid that the arrest would cause a fight which would need to be contained. Apparently the disciples were prepared to fight, for Peter sliced off the ear of a chief priest's slave before Jesus was taken away.

## **SCENE 2 THE TRIAL OF JESUS (Jesus Before Annas) John 18:13-14, 19-24**

**Narrator:** So, Jesus was arrested by the soldiers and the Jewish police. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of the high priest, Caiaphas.

Annas questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teachings. Jesus said, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them, they know what I said."

When Jesus finished speaking, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas kept Jesus bound and sent him to Caiaphas the high priest, *Actors freeze...*

Archaeologist: Annas was appointed high priest by Quirinius, the governor of Syria. Annas served in that important position as the leader of the Sanhedrin for nine years. Five of Annas' sons, as well as one grandson, succeeded him as high priest, and at the time of the arrest of Jesus, Annas' son-in-law, Caiaphas was high priest, but Annas also carried the title in an honorary manner. Clearly, Annas was one of the most influential religious leaders of the day, both by way of influence and family connections. It was to him that Jesus was brought and interrogated.

In John's Gospel, we have no record of Caiaphas questioning Jesus, only that Annas sent him to his son-in-law. The other Gospels tell of Jesus before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin the priestly body that condemned Jesus to death. Caiaphas was high priest for 18 years. Two years ago, while building a highway, bulldozers in Jerusalem uncovered a tomb. The inscription on the ossuary, the stone crypt, indicates that it is the tomb for the family of Caiaphas; it even has bones inside.

## **SCENE 3 THE TRIAL OF JESUS (Jesus Before Pilate) (18:28-38a)**

**Narrator:** Then they took Jesus to Pilate's headquarters early in the morning. Because they did not wish to become ritually defiled, the religious leaders did not enter the headquarters themselves.

So Pilate went out to them and asked, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate replied, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death."

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me? Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here. "

Pilate asked him, "So, you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" *Actors freeze...*

**Archaeologist:** The headquarters of Pilate is often referred to as the praetorium. Because it was the Passover and they wished to remain ritually clean, the religious leaders did not enter the Roman headquarters. Pilate was the Roman procurator of Judea for 10 years. He was often a hard, mean-spirited man who despised his Jewish subjects. His interest in Jesus was only that of political expediency.

Part of the story deals with who had jurisdiction over the death of Jesus. Pilate tried to get the religious leaders to take care of the matter themselves. But because there was a Roman ruling that said only Roman authority had jurisdiction over capital cases, the chief priests sought favor with the Romans and deferred to their authority to put Jesus to death.

Therefore, Jesus was condemned to die, not by the Jewish method of stoning, but by the Roman method of crucifixion.

#### **SCENE 4 THE TRIAL OF JESUS (Barabbas is Released) (18:38b-40)**

**Narrator:** After Pilate completed his interrogation of Jesus, he went outside to the Jews and said, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit. *Actors freeze...*

**Archaeologist:** We have no evidence outside of all four Gospels of a Passover tradition in which a criminal was released. But this custom is likely because it would have made political points with people Pilate did not like. The ridicule and disdain could be heard in Pilate's voice when he referred to Jesus as their King.

Barabbas is said to have been a "bandit. " Other written sources of the time use the Greek word for "bandit" to describe political criminals. The description of Barabbas in the other Gospels seems to support this view. Therefore, it is likely that Barabbas was a Jewish zealot who sought the overthrow of Roman rule. How ironic, that a real political criminal would be released over Jesus, whom the religious leaders had portrayed as a political criminal against Rome, even though Pilate said they didn't have a case.

#### **SCENE 5 THE TRIAL OF JESUS (Pilate Orders that Jesus be Flogged) (19:1-16)**

**Narrator-** Then Pilate had Jesus flogged. The soldiers wove together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. Then they dressed him in purple. They kept coming up to him and taunting him: "Hail, King of the Jews!" and they struck him on the face.

Pilate again appeared to the crowd and said, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him."

So Jesus came out, wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Pilate said, "Here is the man!"

When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted ... (*Plants in the congregation -- "Crucify him! Crucify him!"*). Pilate became afraid and after questioning Jesus again, tried to release him. But the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

So about noon, Pilate said, "Here is your king!" (*Plants in the congregation -- "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!"*) Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then Pilate handed him over to be crucified. *Actors freeze...*

**Physician:** My name is Dr. Darrell O'Conner. I have been a medical examiner and pathologist for twenty-four years. As one who was spent years researching causes of death, I have studied the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus from a medical perspective.

The pain of Jesus began even before he was nailed to a cross. When the soldiers flogged him, they likely used a whip with metal pieces attached at the end of each strip of leather. When struck on the back, the metal would have served as small knives that filleted the flesh and left it in bloody strips. When the robe was placed on Jesus, the blood would have coagulated and dried against the fabric. Every time Jesus moved, the wounds would have reopened and torn.

The damage to the head of Jesus would depend upon how hard the crown of thorns was pressed into his skull. He also took repeated blows to the face as the soldiers mocked him.

## **SCENE 6: THE CRUCIFIXION 02 JESUS (Jesus is Crucified with Two Criminals) (John 19:16b-22; 25b-30)**

Narrator: Jesus carried his own cross and was made to walk to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified Jesus along with two others, one on either side of him.

Pilate had an inscription affixed to the cross that was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, the inscription was read by many. It said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." *Actors freeze...*

**Archaeologist:** It was customary for the Romans to crucify people next to roads so that those passing could see what could happen if Rome was defied. In John's Gospel, Jesus is made to carry his own cross. We cannot know if he carried all of the cross or just the beam to which his arms would be nailed. Nor do we know the location of Golgotha despite what tourists to the Holy Land are told. Apparently, Golgotha was a dome shaped hill that resembled a skull.

In 1968, building contractors working in a suburb north of Jerusalem accidentally uncovered a Jewish tomb dated to the first century. Inside were the skeletal remains of a man in his twenties who had been crucified. The heel bone had been pierced by an iron nail 11.5 cm in length. Research on the remains indicate that each foot was nailed separately, but no evidence was found of traumatic injury to the forearms. This indicates that sometimes the arms were tied to the horizontal bar of the cross; but written accounts of Roman crucifixion indicate that the hands were more typically nailed as well as the feet.

**Physician:** Jesus would have been exhausted from blood loss from his back and from the exertion of carrying the cross to the outskirts of the city. His body would have been thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire would have felt for the depression at the front of the wrist and nailed in that area. Then the other wrist. The knees would have been bent slightly before nailing the feet into place. With the toes pointing away from the body, the nails would have been punched through the arch or the heel.

At that point, the cross would have been lifted into place. As he slowly sagged from the weight of his body, with more and more pressure on the nail entry points, he would have felt an excruciating, fiery pain shoot along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain-the nails in the wrists were putting pressure on the median nerves. As he tried to push himself up to avoid this stretching torment, he would have placed the full weight on the nail through his feet. Again, he felt the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of his feet.

#### **SCENE 7: THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (Jesus Entrusts his Mother to another Disciple) (19:25b-27)**

**Narrator:** Standing near the cross were the mother of Jesus and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved standing beside her. He said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." And to the disciple he said, "Here is your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home. *Actors freeze...*

**Physician:** It would have been difficult for Jesus to speak from the cross at all. As his arms became fatigued, cramps swept through the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps would have come the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air could be drawn into the lungs but not exhaled because the two muscles needed for exhaling, the diaphragm and the intercostalis muscles between the ribs, were impeded. Jesus would have had to fight to raise himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally, carbon dioxide would build up in the lungs and in the blood stream, and the cramps would partially subside. Spasmodically, he was able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen.

#### **SCENE 8: THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (Jesus is Thirsty and Dies) (19:28-30)**

**Narrator:** After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. *Actors freeze...*

**Physician:** Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue was torn from his lacerated back as he moved up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony began a deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly filled with serum and began to compress the heart. It was then almost over - the loss of tissue fluids had reached a critical level - the compressed heart struggling to pump heavy, sluggish blood into the tissues - the tortured lungs making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. He could feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues. Finally, he could allow his body to die.

#### **SCENE 9**

#### **THE BURIAL OF JESUS**

**John 19-38-42**

**Narrator:** Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus-although he followed Jesus in secret because he was afraid of the religious leaders- asked Pilate to let him take the body of Jesus away. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed the body of Jesus from the cross. *(Pause, Joseph carries Jesus - down aisle).*

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Lights dim completely...

Solo done a capella: "What Wondrous Love" (No. 385, verse 1)