

LENTEN CHARACTER PRESENTATION OF ROMAN CENTURION

Church is dark

INTRO FROM BALCONY *read as lights are out & I am seated at my table*

NARRATOR: "This presentation is based on the account found in the Gospel of Luke. Some have said that the Roman centurion became a Christian later in life. We don't know. Some say that he called Jesus the Son of God at the foot of the cross.

"A lot has been said. Tonight we hope to share with you what it was like to be in charge of that execution. This is what happened, as Luke portrays it in his Gospel. We invite you to read the selection at home this week."

SETTING THE STAGE

I should be seated at a table, and call out for my dinner. Marcus will bring in a basket with rolls and cheese in it. On the table should be a goblet of wine.

After he brings in the food he asks what else I require. I dismiss him, mentioning that I will call him when I need something more. *(Later I will call him to bring me some more wine.)*

Turn on spot (follow me)

ARREST ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Take a bite and then wipe my face and begin...

We knew something was happening
Reports came in of a mob arresting that Jesus character
He'd been on my list of possible problems to be dealt with
I understand that they nabbed him at his favorite Jerusalem hangout
Mt. of Olives
He's been praying again, I guess he does that a lot
All these Jews do that a lot.
I bet they are praying for a chance to slit our throats!

MOCKERY BY SOLDIERS ON THE NIGHT OF HIS ARREST

They held him all night.
He got some rough treatment from the Jewish soldiers
Funny they should treat one of their own that way
But they do a lot of crazy things

JESUS AND PILATE

Friday morning they brought him to Pilate
I was in charge, as usual

I wish I hadn't been part of that trial
I use the term loosely,
 Pilate really didn't know what to do with this Jesus
He kept saying that this Jesus is innocent
 They kept demanding that he be killed
I never did understand why
 Something about their crazy religion again of that I am sure
They kept trying to pin a charge on him that would get Pilate's attention
 There is no way that that Jesus was a threat to Rome
 Pilate knew it, we all knew it
 All that talk of his telling the people not to pay taxes
 They were just trying to pin a bum rap on him
 Pilate saw right through it
He pronounced him innocent three times!

JESUS TAKEN TO HEROD

At last Pilate pulled one of his more astute political moves.
When he discovered Jesus was from Galilee
 He sent Jesus there
 Neat way to not have to deal with an obviously framed man
 Let the Jewish king deal with this religious squabble
I was put in charge of the detail
 That was quite some meeting. Herod was in town for the Passover, which they had celebrated
the day previously. That would have been Thursday evening. So we didn't have far to go.
 Herod was actually eager to see this Jesus. He wasn't interested in all the charges. He wanted
Jesus to entertain him! He wanted Jesus to do a couple of flashy miracles
 If I would have been Jesus, I would have done a few, (not that I think he really can, mind you)
but he didn't. Or couldn't.
When I pause, the lights will go dim and...

HEROD: "I've heard a lot of good things about you Jesus. Now they tell me you're in trouble with
all the religious hotheads here in Jerusalem. I'd kind of like to decide for myself if you're worth my
risking my throne on. Why don't you show me some of that power they say you have.

 How about changing some of this water into wine? Not your style...OK...How about healing
my sick slave? Not up for that either...Well, what can you do, boy? Don't you realize that I
control your destiny? I can free you or send you back to Pilate.

 So...you won't play ball. This is your last chance. If you are the Christ, then show me. Do
something. Anything..."

Spot on me (pause before lights on)

Anyway, Herod and his men were really upset, and dressed Jesus up and mocked him as a
king. He really was a sorry sight.

 Then they told me to take him back to Pilate.

 However, Herod did tell me to tell Pilate that this Jesus, while no real bonus, was certainly
innocent of all the charges.

*Call for Marcus again
When he brings the wine, tell him to leave it.*

JESUS BACK TO PILATE

In an attempt to appease the people
Pilate decides to whip Jesus and release him
But the people shouted out to release Barabbas and kill Jesus

BARABBAS IS SELECTED

I couldn't believe Pilate would agree to that
Barabbas was a revolutionary
He'd already given me enough trouble and I was glad he was in jail

THE VERDICT IS REACHED

After the third time Pilate said Jesus was innocent, he gave in
He passed sentence on Jesus, who I knew was innocent
So did Pilate!

ROMAN CRUCIFIXION PRACTICE

As was our custom, we took Jesus and the cross arms out to the hill
outside the city gates
the vertical posts were imbedded there permanently
To me it seemed that it was unfair to make this Jesus carry his cross
after all he was innocent according to Pilate
So I grabbed some unlucky Jew named Simon to carry it

ON THE WAY TO THE CROSS THE PEOPLE SHOW UP

You wouldn't believe the people that followed us
Normally it was just the families and friends that hung around
they were all weeping and wailing
But this Jesus, who should have been worried about himself
was worried about them

Luke 23:28-31 read by Jesus (Sweep people slowly with spot)

JESUS: "Women of Jerusalem! Don't cry for me, but for yourselves and your children.

"For the days are coming when people will say, 'How lucky are the women who never had children, who never bore babies, who never nursed them!'

"That will be the time when people will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Hide us!'

"For if such things as these are done when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

I wonder what he meant by that?

CROSS SCENE *bring spot back to me*

When we got to the place they call the Skull
We crucified Jesus and two other criminals, who had it coming to them

JESUS FORGIVES US ALL
HAPPENS RIGHT AFTER WE NAIL HIM UP!

Would you believe it?
He asked that we be forgiven
Or was he saying that to the Jewish crowd that had gathered

Jesus' words from the cross in Luke 23:34 (highlight the cross for this line)
JESUS: "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."

Spot back to me

MOCKERY OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

While we divvied up the clothes, as was our right by law
the Jewish leaders couldn't stop mocking him
They wanted him to save himself, since he was intent on saving the world
Most of my soldiers thought that was funny and joined in
They got some cheap wine and tried to get him to drink it
He didn't look much like a King of anybody, not even the Jews

JESUS FORGIVES THE ONE ROBBER

One of the criminals also joined in the ridicule
But one didn't
He asked to be part of Jesus' kingdom when he set it up

Spot off

CRIMINAL (*from balcony*): "Don't you fear God? You received the same sentence he did. Ours, however, is only right, because we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong. Remember me, Jesus, when you come as king!"

And JESUS answered him: "I promise that today you will be in paradise with me."

Spot back on; follow me

JESUS' WHOLE DEMEANOR ON THE CROSS

About 3 p.m., Jesus finally died.
Actually that was a rather quick death.
In fact, he sort of decided it was time to die.

I remember he cried out: *(I freeze)*

JESUS: "Father! In your hands I place my spirit!"

APOCALYPTIC SIGNS AT HIS DEATH

Later I learned that the veil of the temple had been torn just before that time. I wonder how that happened.

As strange as it may sound, it seemed as if the sun was blocked, too.

From about noon until he died.

MY OPINION OF JESUS' INNOCENCE

I tell you now, having seen it all, I still think he was innocent.

I'm just a soldier, doing my job.

But that was one job that should never have been done.

Pilate should have been more firm.

FINAL SCENE FOR MARCUS

Call Marcus and have him clear off my table.

CONCLUSION FROM BALCONY *spot off & stays off*

Narrator: "Our centurion wasn't the only one who felt like that. The crowds who witnessed the scene, returned home, repenting of the deed they had been part of. They too realized that Jesus had been innocent.

They wondered what would happen now. Was the only hope for the people gone? Only time would tell.

They spent the next few days wondering. We invite you to reflect on the reasons for Jesus' death as well, in the days remaining before Easter."

All church lights back on for hymn

Submitted by Pastor Greg Kaufmann, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin