WHEN THEY CRUCIFIED MY LORD

by Myra Shofner
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When They
Crucified My Lord

A Tenebrae service of monologues

by Myra Shofner
CAST OF CHARACTERS

Child
His mother sent him to buy the chalice for Jesus to use in the Upper Room. May be played by either a boy or girl.

Pharisee
He paid Judas thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus.

Woman Who Followed Jesus
She followed Jesus during his ministry.

Secret Disciple
He believed, but was silent.

Roman Slave
He fashioned the thorns into a crown. May be played by a male or female.

Carpenter
He furnished the wood for the cross and the spikes for the Crucifixion.

Wife of the Sign Maker
She and her husband delivered the sign decreed by Pilate.

Grieving Woman
She is the last at the cross and witnesses the burial of Jesus.

Death
Optional nonspeaking role. May be played by a male or female.
PRODUCTION NOTES

**Props:** Candelabrum that holds eight candles, eight candles of varying colors, silver chalice for child, thirty pieces of silver for Pharisee (may be a cloth bag with quarters inside), veil for Woman Who Followed, pitcher and basin for Secret Disciple (a small bird bath was used in the original production), crown of thorns for Roman Slave (may be made of grapevine, available in craft stores), nails for Carpenter, sign in three languages for Sign Maker’s Wife (it reads “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek), and has a hole punched in the top so it may be hung on the cross, and a length of white linen cloth for Grieving Woman.

The wording of the sign is as follows:

- Hebrew — HaYehudim vMelech HaNazarei Yeshua
- Latin — lesus Nazarenus Rex ludaerorum
- Greek — lesous Nazaraios Basileus loudaios

**Costuming:** For a somber effect, we chose to dress each speaker in a black tunic. We made a brightly colored “toga” to drape from the shoulders. Traditional Bible dress may be used if desired.

**Set:** You may use eight cubes in painted bright colors on which each actor sits until it is time for his/her monolog. The candelabrum may hold candles corresponding to the colors of the cubes and togas. Death blows out a candle after each speaker. There should also be a wooden cross with a small nail to hold the sign.

**Cast:** We used Death as a non-speaking character — dressed in black with headdress covering all of his face, except for the eyes — who, after each monolog, moves slowly across the stage, extinguishing a candle, then moving to another position on stage, as the actor leaves the stage. The director might choose for each actor to extinguish a candle before he/she exits instead. The actors do not return, and we included instructions at the beginning that there should be no applause at the end of the performance.

**Music:** We used the song “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” (melody only). We enlisted both voice and instrumental solos. As each actor leaves the stage, soloists sing or play the song to establish a haunting, plaintive sound. The last speaker exits, followed by Death.
(director’s discretion), lights out and silence. When lights come up, pastor stands facing the congregation and Communion is observed or the pastor may close the service by asking the congregation to exit quietly; we requested no applause.

**Scripture:** This service draws from the biblical accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion in the gospels. While certain words or phrases may be the same, overall the quotations are the author’s paraphrase.
(All eight candles are lit. ACTORS are on the stage, seated on the cubes and holding their respective props. CHILD, holding chalice, stands to speak.)

CHILD: My friends and I ran through the streets of Jerusalem. Jesus was coming, and we wanted to see him. There were so many people in the street. They were shouting and singing and waving palm branches. They shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” A man handed branches to us, and we waved them and sang, too. We loved Jesus so much.

Then the streets grew quiet. There he was. Sitting upon a young colt, surrounded by his disciples. Again we shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”

That was last Sunday.

Thursday afternoon my mother sent me on an errand to the silversmith to pick up this chalice (Holds chalice up high). Jesus and his disciples were going to eat the Passover meal in the upper chambers of our house. She wanted the cup for Jesus — her gift to him. While she and the servants prepared the meal and baked the unleavened bread, I ran to the silversmith.

Thursday night, I watched Jesus and his disciples climb the stairs to the room. They closed the door behind them. After a while, Judas, his treasurer, came down the stairs and disappeared into the darkness. “Did my parents forget to buy something?” I wondered. “Is that why Judas is leaving?”

I waited under the steps, hoping to see Jesus when they finished the meal. Judas did not return. I was getting sleepy when Jesus and his other disciples came down the stairs, singing a psalm of David. I decided to follow them. “Maybe I can talk to Jesus,” I thought. They went to the Mount of Olives and entered the Garden of Gethsemane.
Jesus and three of his disciples left the others and disappeared into the darkness to pray. I grew tired and I thought I was going to fall asleep, but I was determined to talk to Jesus.

Suddenly the noise of marching feet and angry voices startled me. Now I was wide awake. I peered into the darkness, made brighter by flaming torches. Soldiers and men from the temple filled the garden.

Then Judas stepped out of the darkness. He went up to Jesus and kissed his cheek, then quickly disappeared into the night. The soldiers grabbed Jesus and took him away, and I ran home to tell my parents what I had seen.

(CHILD leaves chalice on his/her seat. Music up as DEATH blows out CHILD's candle and CHILD exits. PHARISEE, with thirty pieces of silver, stands to speak when music ends.)

PHARISEE: I gave him thirty pieces of silver to point out Jesus of Nazareth, the one who called himself the Christ. I can't speak for the motives of a man who had been a disciple of Jesus for three years — a trusted disciple, keeper of the treasury for the group. Some of the Pharisees said that he was greedy and that he would do anything for money. But others said that Judas had political ambitions and believed that if they forced the hand of Jesus by having him arrested, he would rally the people who followed him, and they would rebel, overthrow us, and declare Jesus the Messianic king.

Some said Judas was angry because Jesus embarrassed him in the home of Mary and Martha of Bethany. Judas had complained that Mary had wasted money when she used priceless ointment to anoint the feet of Jesus. When Jesus disagreed with him and said that Mary had done a good thing, Judas left the house in disgust.

Who can say? The truth is, he took the thirty pieces of silver, led us to the Garden of Gethsemane, planted a
kiss on the cheek of Jesus in the darkness, and stepped
aside as the guards arrested Jesus.

But then, early Friday morning before the sun rose,
while Jesus stood trial before the high priest in the
temple, Judas changed his mind. He came to the temple
and tried to return the money. He said that he had
never intended for Jesus to be harmed, that he was
sorry that he had betrayed innocent blood.

One of the elders said, “What is that to us?” And with
unanimous agreement, we refused to accept the money
or alter the course of events.

Then Judas flung the money into the sanctuary
(PHARISEE dumps the coins from the bag across the stage)
and rushed from our midst. We looked at one another
and at the scattered coins. One of the temple priests
said, “What are we going to do with the money? It’s
against the law for us to return it to our sacred treasury
because it has been used to purchase blood.”

We discussed the matter at length until someone
suggested, “We can use the money to buy burial ground
for the poor — a potter’s field.”

And they pointed at me and said, “You must take care
of this matter.” I nodded and bent down and scooped up
the coins in my hand.

By the time the temple trial had ended, the dawn was
breaking and Jesus had been bound and carried away
to Pilate the governor. I joined the Pharisees and
priests outside the palace. We couldn’t go inside the
Gentile establishment. If we did, according to our law,
we would be defiled and wouldn’t be able to eat the
Passover.

Instead, Pilate came out to us and asked, “What is
your accusation against this man?”

We told him that Jesus was an evildoer, and that he,
as the Roman governor, should hear the case and pass
Oh, Pilate didn’t want to do that. He said, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.”

But we protested, “It is not lawful for us to pass the judgment of death on any man.”

Pilate turned to Jesus and said, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

And Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.”

Pilate asked, “Well, are you a king?”

Jesus answered, “You say I am a king. To this end have I been born and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth.”

Pilate replied, “What is truth?” And he looked at us and said, “I find no crime in him.”

And Pilate dismissed us, telling us to take Jesus to Herod Antipas and let the Jewish King decide his fate. On our way, I learned that Judas Iscariot had hanged himself. (PHARISEE leaves empty bag on his seat. Music up as DEATH blows out PHARISEE’s candle and he exits. WOMAN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS, wearing veil, stands to speak following the music.)

WOMAN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS: I covered my face with my veil because I was afraid that someone would recognize me and arrest me because I was a follower of Jesus. (Lifts veil.) But even though fear pierced my heart, I couldn’t resist following him through the streets as the elders took him first to the high priest and then to Pilate.

Pilate! The temple rulers knew he was weak and afraid of getting in trouble with them. That’s why they dragged Jesus to stand trial before the Roman governor. They knew Pilate could be persuaded to do
their bidding.

So Pilate questioned Jesus. Then he said, “I find no crime in him.”

He wanted to release Jesus, but when his advisors informed him that Jesus was a Galilean, he thought he had found a way out of his predicament. He would send him to Herod, the King of the Jews, and in that way escape any responsibility for what might happen to Jesus — and stay in good graces with the Sanhedrin.

The early morning sun was bright as Herod came out of his palace to meet Jesus. Strangely, he was happy to see him, thinking he could make sport of Jesus for his amusement.

“I have thought much concerning this man,” he said. “I have heard he does miracles. Perhaps he will do a miracle for me so that I might see for myself.”

But when Herod questioned Jesus, Jesus remained silent.

Then Herod’s men began to threaten Jesus, shouting at him and insisting that he reply to the King. But Jesus refused to speak. After they had wearied of making sport of him, the soldiers dressed Jesus in royal apparel and mockingly called him “King” because they knew that people thought Jesus was the King of the Jews. At first Herod was amused, but he soon grew tired of the game and sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Pilate was upset about this. He scolded the chief priests and the rulers and the people. “You have brought him to me once before. You said that he has distorted the truth and has moved the Jews away from your leadership. Listen, I have questioned him — thoroughly — and I tell you I find this man innocent of your accusations. Likewise, Herod found no reason to accuse him. Now Herod has permitted you to bring him before me again — demanding his death. I tell you, this
man has done nothing worthy of death!”

But the people shouted angrily at Pilate, and Pilate
the coward tried to appease them. He timidly said, “I
will chastise him before I release him.”

Oh, now the people were really angry, and they
shouted louder and raised their fists in the air in
protest. This time Pilate’s voice trembled as he told
them, “There are those among you who have called him
King. It is the time of the Passover, and according to
law I can release a prisoner. Let me release the King of
the Jews.”

The chief priests moved among the people and
stirred up their anger. The shouts of the assembly
increased. “Come on,” Pilate begged. “Permit me to
release the King of the Jews.”

Barabbas, an insurrectionist and a murderer, stood
nearby, also bound and awaiting trial. Pilate pointed at
Barabbas, hoping to intimidate the people and bring
back the voice of reason. He asked scornfully, “Or
would you rather I release to you this evil man — this
murderer — this Barabbas?”

And the chief priests led the shout. “Yes! Barabbas.
Release Barabbas.”

And the crowd joined in. “Give us Barabbas.”

Pilate was plainly frustrated. Things were not going
as he hoped. “And what then shall I do to the one you
call the King of the Jews?” he asked weakly.

Again the chief priests led the way with their shouts,
“Crucify him. Crucify him.”

And the crowd shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

And Pilate himself shouted, trying to be heard above
the noise of the crowd. “What evil has this man done? I
have found no cause that he should be crucified.”

But nobody was listening and their cry grew louder
and louder. “Crucify him! Crucify him!”
My heart was breaking and tears stung my eyes as I realized the awful truth. Jesus, the friend of little children, the man who healed the sick, the friend who taught us about the kingdom of God, was going to die.

I suddenly remembered Mary, the mother of Jesus, and wondered if she had heard of his arrest. I lowered my tear-stained eyes and eased through the shouting mob and went to tell her. (WOMAN replaces veil. Music up as DEATH blows out WOMAN’s candle and she exits. SECRET DISCIPLE, with pitcher and basin, stands to speak when the music ends.)

SECRET DISCIPLE: I was among the Pharisees during his trial before Pilate. I cringed as they incited the crowd to call for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. I remained silent even though I knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong. I was certain he was a teacher commissioned by God. He was able to do great miracles because God lived in him.

Early in his public appearances, I heard that he healed the sick and taught about the kingdom of God, so I went to hear him for myself. But listening to him only filled me with questions. Finally I decided to seek him out and find out for myself what his answers would be. But by that time, the Pharisees hated him bitterly and were convinced that he must be stopped. They said he blasphemed Jehovah by trying to make himself equal with God. I was afraid that if they knew I was interested in talking with him, they might make life difficult for me. I reasoned, “If I go at night, in secret, they will never know.”

So one night I sought him out. “Rabbi,” I said, “you are a teacher come from God. God is with you and has enabled you to work miracles.”

But before I could ask him a question, his words caught me by surprise. “Unless a man is born again, he
cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Perplexed, I questioned, “How is it possible for me to be born again?”

Then he expounded complexities of doctrine that I could not comprehend. He spoke of God’s great love which expressed itself in the birth of his Son who made eternal life possible for all who believed. He likened the Son to the serpent in the wilderness which Moses lifted up for those bitten by the serpent, that they might look upon it and be spared. I listened and promised myself that I would think about the things he had told me, and I went my way.

His words haunted me, and I came to believe that he was the Son that God had sent. I believed, but I was afraid to express that belief. If I did, I would be ostracized by the other Pharisees! Counted as their enemy! And so I kept silent.

After Pilate questioned Jesus that morning, he called for a basin of water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. (SECRET DISCIPLE washes hands in basin.) He told the people, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man.” And the people cried out, “His blood be on us and on our children.”

And Pilate released Barabbas and commanded his soldiers to scourge Jesus, and then he delivered him to be taken to Calvary and crucified. All the time I believed him to be all he said he was, but I did not speak out in his defense. I am ashamed to say that I was nothing more than a secret disciple — a coward. I watched as the soldiers pushed Jesus into the street and toward Calvary. The noisy crowd followed, but I stood paralyzed until they disappeared from view. Alone. Afraid. Ashamed. Then someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned to face Joseph, a Jew from Arimathea, whom I knew was also a secret believer. He
was a very wealthy man and had great influence with
the Roman governor. He motioned for me to follow him.
“I have an audience with Pilate,” he said. (SECRET
DISCIPLE leaves pitcher and basin on seat. Music up as
DEATH blows out SECRET DISCIPLE’s candle and he exits.
ROMAN SLAVE, holding crown of thorns, stands to speak
when the music stops.)

ROMAN SLAVE: One of the soldiers threw the thorny
branches in front of my feet and commanded, “Here,
slave, a king must have a crown. Fashion these into a
crown befitting the King of the Jews!” And he began to
laugh harshly and mock Jesus, calling him “King” and
telling him to work a miracle so that they could see for
themselves his great power. The other soldiers joined in
the humiliation of the man.

While I plaited the crown of thorns, they stripped
him and put a scarlet robe on him. Then they hit him
with a reed and spit on him, and bowed their knees in
pretense of worship. They grabbed the crown from my
hands and thrust it upon his head (ROMAN SLAVE
extends crown and simulates placing it on Jesus’ head),
pushing it into his flesh, and the blood trickled down
his head. They put the reed in his hand as a scepter and
bowed down again and said, “Hail, King of the Jews.”

When they tired of their game, they took off the robe
and clothed him with his own garments. Then they
strapped the crossbeam to his back and led him
through the streets of Jerusalem to Calvary, which is
called “The Place of the Skull.”

I followed to see what would happen to him, but the
crowd kept pushing me back until all I could see was
the top of his head, on which rested the crown of thorns
that I had made. (ROMAN SLAVE places crown on seat.
Music up as DEATH blows out ROMAN SLAVE’s candle and
he exits. CARPENTER, holding nails, stands to speak when

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CARPENTER: The soldiers came to my carpenter shop for wood and spikes. I was busy filling orders — you know, tables, chairs, and such, but the soldier commanded me to stop what I was doing and get him the items he asked for.

“What’s the rush?” I asked. “And why do you need wood and spikes?”

He laughed and said, “Oh, today Pilate has ordered the crucifixion of some Jew. The wood is for his cross, and we need the spikes to nail him to the cross.”

Now the thought of someone being crucified was no big deal to me. The Romans were always hanging murderers and thieves and, well, anyone they had no particular use for. But he said they were crucifying a Jew! This didn’t happen often. I thought to myself that whoever he was must have done something to really make them mad. He must have refused to show them respect or failed to pay his taxes. I was curious so I asked, “Why are you crucifying a Jew? Did he offend some rich Roman?”

The soldier laughed again and spit on the ground. “No,” he replied. “He has offended no Roman. It’s the Jews themselves who are demanding his death. They say he is guilty of blasphemy. Now hurry up, will you?”

But I wanted to know more. “Who is he?”

“Some Galilean. Jesus is his name. Calls himself the King of the Jews, which has made him the enemy of the temple leaders. They think that his ragged little band of followers are going to put him on the throne and start an uprising and cause trouble for them.”

“Jesus,” I whispered. My sister had followed him since the day she heard him speak on the Mount of Olives. She’d told me about him. He seemed harmless. But now they were going to kill him? What about his
followers? What about my sister? Where was she now? Was she with him? Was she, too, in danger?

I was anxious for the soldiers to be on their way so that I could go and find her. I pointed out the wood to them and gave them a handful of spikes. *(Holds out nails).* They tried to pay me, but I shook my head and refused their money. I wanted no part in the death of this man. When they departed, I closed my shop and headed to Pilate’s palace to search for my sister. If she was there, I was going to beg her to come home with me where she would be safe.

When I arrived at the palace, the guards had placed the beam of wood from my shop upon his shoulders and were hustling him toward the street. The people were yelling and screaming their hatred for the man. I fell in behind them. I craned my neck, searching for my sister among the multitude of people. Then I saw a young woman with her back to me who looked like she might be my sister. I moved toward her, but the crowd pressed forward, moving her along with them. I pushed men and women aside and fell in step with the crowd as we followed Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem. *(CARPENTER places nails on seat. Music up as DEATH blows out CARPENTER’s candle and he exits. WIFE OF THE SIGN MAKER, holding sign, stands to speak when music is finished.)*

**WIFE OF THE SIGN MAKER:** My family had eaten breakfast that Friday, and I was cleaning up when the envoy from Pilate arrived. They stood in the doorway, the morning sun against their backs, casting long shadows on the floor.

“We come with a demand from Pilate,” one of them said to my husband. “You are to make a sign which reads ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ Write it in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek!”

My husband looked confused and confessed, “I do not
know the Latin language."

"Here," one of the men said as he thrust a piece of paper into my husband's hand. Pilate has written what he wants the sign to say. Copy it."

"When do you want it?" my husband asked, the paper trembling in his hand.

"Immediately!" The man replied.

"It will take time for the paint to dry," my husband protested.

"Then bring it to us. Bring it to Golgotha as soon as you can." And with that command, the men turned and left our house.

It was an hour before noon when the sign was finished. I decided to accompany my husband to Golgotha, to see what Pilate wanted with such a sign. And I wondered who this Jew was that Pilate would make a sign which declared him king in three languages.

"It must be some joke," I told myself. Some perverted joke Pilate was carrying out at the terrible place where thieves and murderers were executed.

As we drew near to Golgotha, an unusual darkness had descended upon the land so that we could scarcely see the large crowd gathered on the hill or the three crosses which had been placed there. My heart beat rapidly, and I wished that I had not come. This joke of Pilate's was a deadly one, and I could sense the evil all around me.

A soldier spotted us and came toward us. "Ah, the man with the sign. Give it to me!" And he grabbed the sign, climbed up, and nailed it to the center cross. (SIGN MAKER's WIFE hangs sign on cross). Then he yelled from his perch, "Behold the King of the Jews. Bow down and worship the King of the Jews." And he laughed as he made his descent.
Chaos ruled at Golgotha. People shouted angrily while others cried and screamed in agony. Old men shook their fists and hurled insults at the men on the crosses. The priests mockered him. “He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe!”

Some of the soldiers engaged in a frenzied game of gambling at the foot of the center cross, and when the game ended, one of them held up the garment he had won as though it were a great trophy. He draped it around his shoulders and did a victory dance, yelling up at the man on the cross, “Doesn’t your robe fit me well?”

My husband and I looked at each other and I saw flight in his eyes, but neither of us could move. The cross was so close that I could see the blood from the man’s wounds running down his legs, and there was sweat mingled with blood on his forehead.

Then the criminal on his left asked bitterly, “Are you the Christ? If so, why don’t you save yourself and us?”

But the man on his right scolded him, “Don’t you fear God, seeing as you are condemned to die as I am? And justly so. But this man has done nothing wrong!” And he turned his face toward Jesus and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

And the one whom Pilate had deemed King of the Jews spoke for the first time. “I will tell you the truth. Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

And then Jesus cast his eyes downward, and for the first time I noticed the woman standing next to me, clinging to the arm of a young man. Jesus spoke directly to her. “Woman,” he said, “Behold your son.” And then he looked at the young man and said, “Behold your mother!”
“It’s his mother,” I breathed, and stepped closer to my husband. “How awful it must be for her to see her son put to death in such a horrible manner.”

The young man placed a comforting arm about the woman, and the two of them lowered their heads and slipped away as I lay my head upon my husband’s shoulder and wept. (Music up as DEATH blows out WIFE OF THE SIGN MAKER’s candle and she exits. GRIEVING WOMAN, with white linen cloth, stands to speak when music stops.)

GRIEVING WOMAN: The shouts had ceased, and all around me I heard the muffled sounds of sobbing. My eyes were red and swollen from shedding so many tears as I knelt beneath the cross and witnessed the suffering of my Lord.

At noon the sky suddenly darkened and most of the crowd rushed away from the scene, but I couldn’t move. I bowed my head and remembered how good and kind Jesus was. How could anyone want to crucify such a righteous man? I searched my mind for reasons.

I knew the religious leaders were jealous of him. They thought the people were paying more attention to his teachings than to theirs. They feared they would lose their power over them if the people followed Jesus.

Some of them were angry because he had condemned their actions on more than one occasion. As recently as last Sunday, he had entered the temple in Jerusalem where he drove out the money-changers who were taking advantage of their fellow Jews who had come from all over Israel to worship at the temple.

“But most of all,” I told myself, “They are afraid of him because of his teachings about the kingdom of God and what a person must do to enter that kingdom. He said that unless one humbles himself and becomes as a little child, he cannot go to heaven. They are too