

Anno Domini

(In The Year of Our Lord)

THE ORIGINAL STAGEPLAY



Cleveland O. McLeish

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Characters

Voice (Male)
Mary – Mother of Jesus (Female)
Mary Magdalene (Female)
John (Male)
Young Woman (Female)
Peter (Male)
Matthew (Male)
Scribe (Male)
Pharisee (Male)
Young Man (Male)
Thomas (Male)
David (Male)
Jesus (Male)

Setting

A big, blank stage is needed, with spotlight coming up on different areas, suggesting different locations and timeline. Each area will require its own props and additional items to compliment the scene.

The Story

This play examines the death and resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of the frightened, disappointed, doubting and fearful Disciples who had deserted Jesus during the trial and execution, and also from the perspective of the Scribe and Pharisee, who are trying to come to grips with their decision to have Jesus killed.

There is one particular Scripture that I especially wanted to highlight that I have never heard anyone talk about, and I have not seen it in any of the movies that were produced about this historical event.

The tombs broke open, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After Jesus' resurrection, when they had come out of the tombs, they entered the holy city and appeared to many people. (Matthew 27:52-53).

The play ends with a now resurrected Jesus reminding His disciples about the importance of partaking in the communion.

Play Details

Length: 20-40 Minutes

Cast: 3 Females | 10 Males | Extras (non-speaking)

Audience: Teens & Adults

Genre: Biblical Drama

The Script



SCENE 1

LIGHT UP

Setting: Empty stage, expandable spotlight.

There is a line of people, standing DS (Down Stage): some are mourning, some throwing insults; others are grouped together, apparently having a silent discussion on what is taking place.

A MAN, broken, wounded and bleeding is slowly led across the stage by two soldiers carrying whips. Occasionally, they whip the MAN to try and get him to move a little quickly, but He is very weak, and faint, and falls under the weight of the cross at times. This MAN is JESUS.

VOICE: My servant will act wisely; He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him - his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.

Jesus falls to his knees under the weight of the cross. The soldiers immediately start whipping him, He squirms in pain. With a strong will and determination, he manages to pull himself back to his feet.

VOICE: So will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

A Pharisee and a Scribe appears behind the soldiers, engaged in a silent but satisfying conversation.

VOICE: Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

The crowd is closing the path behind the Soldiers. The Soldiers struggle to keep the crowd at bay, as they throw silent insults and jeers at the Man carrying the cross.

Pharisee and Scribe step aside, to allow room for the crowd.

VOICE: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Jesus again falls under the weight of the cross but this time he is unable to get back up. The soldiers beat him until they are satisfied he can go no further. They pull a man from the crowd and force him to carry the cross. His name is Simon.

VOICE: Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.

Tears flow from Jesus' eyes as the pain seeps through his mortal body.

VOICE: He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds we are healed.

MARY, mother of Jesus, MARY MAGDALENE, and JOHN, watches as the cross, Jesus, crowd and Soldiers exit the stage.

MARY: My son.

VOICE: We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

LIGHT OUT

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

A wood fire burns at center stage. PETER sits by the fire, trying to get warm, while momentarily glancing offstage.

A YOUNG WOMAN sees him, and walks over, pointing at him.

WOMAN: I know you. I have seen you in his company. You are one of Jesus' disciples.

PETER: I don't know what you are talking about.

VOICE: He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

The Young Woman can't keep her eyes off Peter.

WOMAN: You are one of His. I know you are. Sometimes you were with the twelve, and other times with the three.

PETER: Will you leave me alone, woman. I told you, I am not who you say I am.

VOICE: By oppression and judgement he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

WOMAN: You are lying. I know you are. You are a disciple of Jesus. *(calling offstage)* Hey, everybody, get over here. This man is one of them.

PETER: (*firmly*) Woman, I said I don't know the man.

The roster begins to crow. Peter hears...and remembers. He buries his hand in his face, exits quickly. The WOMAN and a few others follow after him.

VOICE: With His arms stretched out on a cross, He absorbed the sins of the whole world. It was God's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

Matthew enters, inching closer to the other side of the stage, glancing around nervously, mindful of his environment.

VOICE: Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

JOHN: (*O.S.*) Matthew.

John and Mary, mother of Jesus, emerges from a dark corner of the stage.

MATTHEW: How could this happen?

MARY: He said it would.

MATTHEW: That he would die, murdered like a common animal...like a thief. This is no death for a King.

JOHN: His kingdom is not of this world, Matthew.

MATTHEW: (*gestures offstage*) Look at Him. Our teacher, our master. We left everything to follow Him, and now He does nothing to save Himself from such cruelty.

MARY: His path was chosen for Him, as are ours.

MATTHEW: I am confused.

JOHN: Where are the others?

MATTHEW: Hiding. Running. Like common criminals. We were not expecting this.

There is a SOUND OF THUNDER and CRACK OF LIGHTNING.

JOHN: It's getting dark.

MATTHEW: It's only the fourth watch of the day.

JOHN: We need to go.

MARY: I will not leave my son.

MATTHEW: He is dead, Mary. There is nothing more we can do.

They make their way to the exit.

VOICE: For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. He gave His life a ransom for the world. Time before Christ will be no more. Now begins the year of our Lord -- Anno Domini.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP

SCRIBE sits by a small table, writing on a scroll.

PHARISEE stands Downstage Center (DSC), hands folded behind him, looking out over the audience.

SCRIBE: What troubles you now?

PHARISEE: The sky is still dark, like midnight.

SCRIBE: The sky gets dark all the time. That's nothing new.

PHARISEE: But why now? This very moment.

SCRIBE: It is done. The man is dead.

PHARISEE: Is He?

A beat.

PHARISEE: What of His claim...that He would rise from the dead in three days.

SCRIBE: The laws of nature does not support such a claim.

PHARISEE: You believe it is impossible?

SCRIBE: I believe the laws of nature.

PHARISEE: We are talking about a man who rose someone from the dead, after he had been dead for four days.

SCRIBE: He healed the blind, open deaf ears, cause the lame to walk, fed thousands with a morsel of bread. I know all the stories.

PHARISEE: Then you know we cannot take His claim lightly.

SCRIBE: I choose to, because, the fact is, He is nailed to a cross that He could not save Himself from. If His claim to be the Son of God is true, how is He dead? Can God's Son die?

PHARISEE: Not against his own will.

SCRIBE: What are you saying?

A beat.

PHARISEE: He said He “gave His life.” That no man could take it from Him.

SCRIBE: So, the God who made the universe, and all that we know and don’t know to be reality, is hanging dead, bloodied and wounded on a tree in Jerusalem..like a common man?

PHARISEE: When you say it like that, it doesn’t make any sense.

SCRIBE: Exactly. If we had allowed this man to continue his revolt, He would have destroyed everything our father’s established.

PHARISEE: I know.

A beat.

PHARISEE: The whole thing just has this strange feel about it. Look how peaceful the city is, almost like the calm before the storm.

SCRIBE: What are you trying to say?

PHARISEE: I want to believe you, that this is the end. But it feels like it is only the beginning.

A YOUNG MAN rushes in, completely out of breath.

SCRIBE: Young man, what is it?

YOUNG MAN: Sirs, Shalom. You are both needed at the temple this very minute.

PHARISEE: What happened?

YOUNG MAN: The veil that separated the holy of holies was ripped from top to bottom. It is no more.

PHARISEE: That’s impossible.

SCRIBE: That veil is at least 30 feet high. Who could do such a thing?

YOUNG MAN: No one was there at the time.

PHARISEE: Someone must have been there. Otherwise, who would have torn the veil?

YOUNG MAN: No one was there that the eye could see.

A beat.

They all EXIT quickly.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP

The Disciples are sitting around, hopelessness and confusion permeates their facial expression and body posture.

THOMAS: I can't believe He is dead.

PETER: This is not how I envisioned that His ministry would end.

JOHN: We should pray.

THOMAS: Why? How do we even know that any of this is real?

JOHN: We saw all the things He did, all the miracles, all the signs. We have never seen anything like it. We declared Him the Son of God, just as He said He was.

THOMAS: Yet, He is dead. Three days now. We have no life, nowhere to go. It's all gone.

JOHN: What did He say about the kingdom?

THOMAS: Don't you get it. None of that matters now. Now we must find a way to survive. If the Romans find us, they will do to us what they did to Jesus or maybe something even worse.

Mary barges in, out of breath. The Disciples are startled, some about to run before seeing who it is.

JOHN: Mary!

MARY: *(breathless)* He's alive!

A beat.

THOMAS: Who?

MARY: Jesus. He's alive. The tomb is empty.

Peter and John races off towards the exit.

THOMAS: Where are you going ---

Peter and John are gone.

Matthew sits Mary down.

MATTHEW: Tell us what happened?

MARY: We went to the tomb this morning, to carry out the anointing ritual. His body was gone.

THOMAS: Someone stole His body?

MARY: That was our first thought. But then, two angels greeted us, asked us why we were searching for the living among the dead.

THOMAS: Are you sure those were angels?

MARY: It gets better. I saw Him. I didn't recognize Him at first...He looked so different, so glorious, but when He said my name, I knew it was Him.

A beat.

THOMAS: You must have been dreaming.

MARY: It wasn't a dream, Thomas. He's alive. Jesus is alive.

THOMAS: Jesus is dead. We all saw Him die. We all saw when they buried Him.

JOHN: If He is who He said He is, then wouldn't this be possible for Him?

THOMAS: If He was, not is.

MATTHEW: Mary, are you sure? I mean, this is difficult for all of us.

MARY: I know what I saw, what I heard.

THOMAS: They probably moved His body.

JOHN: Why would they do that?

THOMAS: It's been three days. Nobody comes back from the dead after three days.

MARY: Lazarus came back after four. We all saw it.

THOMAS: Your mind is playing tricks on you, Mary. Maybe this is a part of your grieving process.

MATTHEW: Maybe we should all go see for ourselves.

THOMAS: And risk being caught. You must be crazy. People know us, Matthew. They know we have been with Jesus all this time. If they did that to Him, imagine what they will do to us.

MARY: Where is your faith, Thomas?

THOMAS: If Peter and John want to risk being caught on the word of a --- woman like you, then Godspeed.

MARY: I am not the woman I used to be.

JOHN: None of us have been the same since Jesus.

MATTHEW: Thomas, Jesus taught us better than to judge one another. He expects us to be better people.

THOMAS: (*embarrassed*) I'm sorry, Mary. I am angry and disappointed at the recent turn of events.

MARY: I forgive you.

THOMAS: But I say we stay here. There is no point in giving away our lives on a hunch.

MARY: What will it take to convince you that I am telling the truth?

THOMAS: Until I put my hands into his wounds, I will not believe that Jesus is alive. Not after what I saw them do to Him. No man could come back from that.

JOHN: Jesus was not just a man.

A beat.

LIGHTS OUT

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP

Peter and John have returned. They sit with the other disciples, all in shock, Thomas, still looking skeptical, stands to the side.

PETER: I would really have a hard time believing it, if I did not see it for myself.

THOMAS: But how are you sure His body wasn't moved?

PETER: We all know Hebrew tradition, right?

THOMAS: What does that have to do with anything?

PETER: When a servant sets the dinner table for his master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it. The table was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating, and the servant would not dare touch that table, until the master was finished. Now if the master were done eating, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and clean his beard, and would wad up that napkin and toss it onto the table. The servant would then know to clear the table. The wadded napkin meant, 'I'm done.' But if the master got up from the table, and folded his napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not dare touch the table, because...the folded napkin meant, 'I'm coming back!'

JOHN: That's what we saw. The cloth wrapping his head was neatly folded and put to the side.

PETER: He's back, Thomas.

THOMAS: No, there has to be some other explanation.

MATTHEW: Feel free to share your own theories.

MARY: Why is it so hard for us to believe. We saw the miracles. We know nothing is impossible for Him.

THOMAS: We also saw Him die. Those are the images I can't get out of my mind. We all watched Him die. Just maybe He could have called angels to come and rescue Him, but He didn't. He took the beatings, the jeering, the ridicule...they

spat in His face, beat Him in His head with a stick, and He allowed Himself to be murdered like a criminal.

JOHN: There is a purpose for everything He does.

MARY: He died for us. To give us access to His Father's house.

THOMAS: No one asked Him to. He abandoned us in our time of need. What are we supposed to do now? All of us left our careers, our families for Him and He has abandoned us.

Other Disciples are beginning to agree.

The room is quickly divided with bickering between those who believe and those who doubt.

Then a hush falls over the room. Some are looking at a particular place offstage. The others turn to look too.

JESUS enters.

No one speaks. No one moves, except Thomas, who approaches Jesus.

JESUS: Thomas, reach your finger and touch my hands, my side. Remove all doubt, and only believe.

Thomas touches the wounds in his hand, and feels his side, then embraces Him.

THOMAS: My Lord, and my God.

JESUS: You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen, but believe.

The disciples fall to their knees in worship.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP

Scribe and Pharisee waits at Center Stage, while a man is escorted in and put to stand before them. The man's name is DAVID.

SCRIBE: *(to Pharisee)* Do you recognize him now that he is standing before you?

Pharisee walks around the man, looking him down from head to foot.

PHARISEE: Who is he?

SCRIBE: Eight months ago, we were at Herod's daughter's birthday party.

PHARISEE: The day they beheaded that lunatic John.

SCRIBE: Yes, that day. The room was packed in an almost chaotic fashion. There were Indian women with exposed navels dancing.

PHARISEE: I remember that.

SCRIBE: People drinking, gouging themselves on food and drinks. They were celebrating a young woman in her prime years. A young man came up to us, to serve us grapes on a platter.

PHARISEE: Oh, yes. He was a waiter at the party.

SCRIBE: This is he.

PHARISEE: He doesn't look the same.

SCRIBE: Maybe because he should be dead.

PHARISEE: I don't get it.

SCRIBE: He was attacked the very next day by a wild animal. Torn almost beyond recognition. A family member identified him by a ring he was wearing.

PHARISEE: Your story is not making any sense, if that young man you speak about is the same young man standing before us now.

SCRIBE: This man is he.

PHARISEE: But he doesn't look dead.

SCRIBE: No he does not.

A beat.

PHARISEE: Is this a game?

SCRIBE: No game. Something is happening in this city. This is not the only report of a dead man seen walking in Jerusalem.

PHARISEE: I don't understand.

SCRIBE: It's all linked somehow to the mysterious disappearance of the body of Jesus. The same day His body vanished from the tomb, dead people have been seen walking around, going home to their families, and return to living as if they did not die. It's as if the very graves gave up their bodies.

PHARISEE: That's impossible.

SCRIBE: So is a man rising from the grave after three and four days.

A beat.

PHARISEE: This can't be happening.

SCRIBE: The proof that it is, is standing in our midst.

Pharisee looks at David intently.

PHARISEE: What is your name?

DAVID: David, sir.

PHARISEE: David. You have heard the words of this Scribe. Have you anything to say on this matter?

DAVID: No, sir.

PHARISEE: What have you been doing these past few days?

DAVID: I think I was sleeping --- for a long time. I remember being somewhere much different from earth --- seeing people, but not as I am seeing you now.

PHARISEE: Do you remember anything before being in that...different place?

DAVID: I was asked to serve at a party. That's the last normal memory I have. Things got really weird. They killed a good man that day. Cut off his head and I had to take his head on a platter to the king's daughter. It was a terrible day, but a day that changed my life.

PHARISEE: How so?

DAVID: I talked to that man, before they killed him. His name was John. He told me things out of this world, and I believed him.

PHARISEE: What kind of things?

DAVID: He told me of a better world, a better way of life. He told me of the one called Jesus. He said there had to be less of him, John, for there to be more of Jesus. That I must decrease for Jesus to increase.

SCRIBE: We are not interested in your religious ramblings with a dead man. Do you remember the day after the party?

DAVID: I remember dying, but it didn't quite feel like what I thought it would.

SCRIBE: What do you mean?

DAVID: After dying, I still felt like me, but I was outside of my body.

PHARISEE: If you died, David, then how is it that you are standing here talking to us, unless everyone in this room is also dead and we are all ghosts?

DAVID: Sir, I don't know. I just remember my name being called, and I woke up from what felt like a long dream.

PHARISEE: Where did you wake up?

DAVID: Inside a tomb, in a cemetery. Strange thing is, there was a tombstone with my name on it and I wasn't the only one. I even saw Him --- it felt like He had come for us.

PHARISEE: Who?

DAVID: The one called Jesus.

SCRIBE: This is insane.

Pharisee pulls Scribe to the side.

PHARISEE: What does all this mean?

SCRIBE: As I feared, the death of this man Jesus was never a solution to our problem. It is starting to feel like it was supposed to happen, and we were just pawns in a story that is much bigger than us.

Pharisee glances over at David.

PHARISEE: What do we do with him?

SCRIBE: Set him free. Killing people obviously don't solve our problems.

Pharisee signals for David to leave. He is escorted out.

PHARISEE: We need to get word to Pilate.

SCRIBE: Haven't you heard?

PHARISEE: Heard what?

SCRIBE: Pilate killed himself in Rome. He fell on his own knife.

PHARISEE: Suicide?

SCRIBE: Looks that way.

Pause.

PHARISEE: It's all falling apart.

SCRIBE: And we have no power to stop it.

A beat.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP

Jesus sits amid His disciples.

He prays for a tray of fish and bread and a jar of juice, then turns his attention to them.

JESUS: I don't want any of you to leave Jerusalem. You should stay here for the Gift my Father promised. John baptized you with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and Fire.

PETER: We will do as you say, my Lord.

JOHN: Rabbi, will you now restore the Kingdom to Israel?

JESUS: It is not for you to know the times and seasons the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses, not just here in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth.

PETER: Will you not stay with us?

JESUS: And who would go and prepare that place for you? I pray that where I am, there you will be also.

JOHN: But can we do this without you?

JESUS: I will be with you every step of the way. The Holy Spirit will give you power to trample on snakes and scorpions in my name. The world will hate you as they hated me, but you must not be afraid. As the Father has sent me, now I am sending you. Do what I did, and you will be empowered to do even greater things.

Jesus begins to break bread and pass the pieces among them.

JESUS: Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they are dead. This bread is my body. Remember my teachings. Anyone who partakes of this bread will ever die. Eat this, eat often, and teach this to those who you disciple so it can be passed down for many generations.

They eat the bread.

Jesus takes the cup and pours some juice in it. He passes it around to them.

JESUS: This is my blood, shed for the remission of all your sins. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, so proclaim my death until I return.

They all drink from the cup.

JESUS: I have taught you everything you need to know about the kingdom. The Holy Spirit will teach you even greater things. Follow my example, and you will do even greater things than I have done. Do not divert to the left or to the right from my teachings, my works, or my ways, and your way will be prosperous. Freely you have received, now freely you should give.

A beat.

LIGHTS OUT

VOICE: He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.