

# Were You There?

## A Simple Play for Holy Week/Easter

This play is very easy for a small church to produce. Each actor speaks soliloquy-style, so rehearsal time is minimal. Music and staging can be as simple or elaborate as you like.

Five actors (last segment can be a family group), simple costumes optional.

Judas, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Peter and a modern-day Christian or family

Music: Simple hymns/some of your choice

Theme song: Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? one verse per scene and background music

*Theme song: Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? (first verse) soloist, choir, or congregation*

**Judas** enters, carrying with him a rope and a bag of coins.

You ask, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" I was not there. Why? Because I could not bear it. Was I there *before* the crucifixion? Indeed, I was. And today I cannot help but wonder why I bothered. For 1000 days I followed our Lord. He asked me to follow him, and I did; I left my whole life behind me. But he took little notice.

John was by his side. James, too, and Simon. (He will always be Simon to me, though the rest may call him Peter.) Simon was always front and center. I was a mere follower, little more.

I thought Jesus might notice me if I took a special job. I volunteered to watch over the money. It is not an easy job, we live on charity, the generosity of our following. It isn't easy to make ends meet, but I try. Nevertheless I was treated like one of the women followers, little more.

There were times, even then, that Jesus clearly thought more of the women than of me. That woman, Mary, wasted a fortune pouring oil on his feet. I tried to stop her. We needed the money that oil could have brought in. What good we could have done with that money! But he humiliated me in front of everyone. "You will always have the poor among you," he said. He seemed to be shoving me aside.

Have I not been loyal to him all of these years? Where has my loyalty gotten me? I am disgraced. I can never again be called one of the Twelve. What is happening, even as I speak, is all my fault. The authorities came to me. They offered me money. . . easy money. How could it hurt? Jesus could raise people from the dead. Surely, he could save himself from any threat these people might bring.

So I took their gold and I showed them the way to the olive grove. I have walked that path many times before in the dark. It was our Lord's favorite spot. It was easy to show the soldiers the way. When I saw Jesus standing there among the others, I thought I might feel something. I thought I might even change my mind. I half hoped I *would* change my mind. But I felt nothing. I walked up to him. I paused, waiting for him to greet me. He said nothing; I gave him every chance, but he spoke only to the soldiers as if I were not even there. So I stepped closer to him as if to kiss him. And then he spoke his last words to me. "Are you betraying me with a kiss?" he asked. He couldn't have hurt me deeper had he struck me with a sword. I gave him the kiss he asked for and I ran.

Now everything is out of my control and I am condemned. Condemned! Not by any court. I am condemned by the world. I have nowhere to turn, no friends. Was this why my mother gave me life? Is this why she once held me close and nourished me? How can this be my legacy? I am nothing and I can never hope to be more. There will be no one to remember me or mourn my death. My name will never be honored. No mother will ever again look upon her newborn son and call him "Judas."

Choir song: Why Should He Love Me So?

*Theme song: Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?*

**Mary** enters, veiled in sorrow.

Was I there when they nailed him to the tree?

I was there. I wailed with horror and grief as the soldiers marched him to Golgotha and drove nails through his wrists and feet. How could this be happening?

Oh, yes! I was there, just as I have been there for all of the last 30 years or so. I was there when the angel called to me, "Mary, you will soon have a child." That is how I learned I was to be his mother. I was little more than a girl, betrothed but not yet married. But I rejoiced at the odd news and made the best of my very peculiar circumstances.

I was there when he drew his first breath. It could have been so terrible, coming into the world without any of the comforts of a home. He was born in a stable. Was this God's plan? But today, I look back on it with wonder and fond memories. Everyone was so kind to us.

It was never easy for us. Joseph and I had to run away with our newborn. Neither of us had ever been farther than Jerusalem. Now we were forced to marry in a foreign land, away from our families and friends.

We didn't know when it would be safe to return. Angels watched over us every step of the way. I came to put my trust in them and I looked for their help even as I watched my son die.

I always knew that some great drama lay in store for Jesus. (It hurts to say his name.)

I've waited. I've prayed. I've watched and I've been obedient. God promised great things were to happen. But the great was made up of the little. He proved himself with miracles —one little miracle after another. I always believed in him and slowly others came to believe in him too. Nevertheless, I stood at the foot of the cross, watching him die. Was this the end?

It has been a long journey. I am getting old now, too old to live like a nomad following my son and his friends all over Galilee and Judea. I have often wished he would settle down. But his life, my life have never been our own. I have had to learn acceptance. But what mother can accept the cruelest of deaths for her child?

I am fighting the feelings of anger and hate. John has taken me under his wing. I know I will be cared for. But Jesus is my son. I must do something.

But what?

Congregational Hymn  
The Old Rugged Cross or hymn of your choice

*Theme song continues:  
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?*

**Mary Magdalene** enters, carrying a basket of herbs. Background music "I Come to the Garden Alone"

Was I there when they laid him in the tomb?

I was there and what a wonder it has all been. My head is still spinning.

I watched him die. It was terrible and for those of us who loved him it was made more horrific by the circus going on around us.

The soldiers cared for none of us. They showed no respect, tossing dice for his possessions. But they were soldiers carrying out orders. For all they knew he was no better than the thieves hanging on either side of him. But surely, they had heard the rumors about his wonderful miracles.

I loved Jesus. His miracles had turned my life around. Who was I, Mary Magdalene, that he should care about me? And yet he allowed me -- no, he encouraged me -- to be with him.

There was nothing I wouldn't do for him. And yet I stood by his cross, at his feet, and was totally helpless. He was dying and I could not stop what was happening. The least I could do and the most I could do was stay by his side. As he hung there, dying, a part of me was dying, too.

We would have liked to have buried him properly but the Sabbath was upon us and we could not break Sabbath law. Fortunately, Joseph and Nicodemus were able to find a place to lay his body. I must remember to thank them. The Sabbath was about to begin. We had to hurry.

After the Sabbath, I and the other women rushed to his grave. We had gathered the spices used for burial and planned to put our Lord to proper rest. I wasn't sure how we would do this. We heard that soldiers were guarding the grave. We hoped they would help us move the stone. But when we got there, the grave was not sealed.

We were frightened. What had happened to the soldiers? Were we in danger? What would happen to us? I turned to run back to place where the others were staying. I wanted to find help. But the others would not believe me, all except John and Peter. They rushed to the grave and I followed them. They saw that what I had told them was true and they left. But I couldn't leave. Something held me to that spot. And then, in the quiet, a man appeared. He just stood there. I thought, "This must be the gardener. He will know what is going on. So I asked him. But then. . . Could it be?! It was my Jesus." "Teacher," I exclaimed. And he spoke to me. He was alive!

And suddenly, I felt alive again.

*Congregational Hymn*  
*Beneath the Cross of Jesus or a hymn of your choice*

*Theme Song: Were you there when they rolled the stone away.*

**Peter enters**

I wasn't there, but I was always near.

I was with him on the night we last dined together. What a wonderful night! We were all together. The women prepared a marvelous meal. Yet somehow it was strangely ominous. We could feel that something was about to happen. In fact, Jesus was telling us something was about to happen. What danger could there be? We had just been received into the city like princes. We were wildly popular. Things had never looked so good!

I was with Jesus barely a week ago, when I saw him raise our friend Lazarus from the dead. I stood with the crowd of people and watched Lazarus walk out of his tomb, smelling none the better for having been dead for four days, but there he was, walking on his own two feet and scratching at the burial clothes wrapped around his face. Jesus was a power to be reckoned with. What had we to fear?

Yet Jesus insisted that "the hour" was at hand. What could this mean? All I could do was promise to stand with him. I gave him my word. But he didn't believe me. How could he doubt me? Had I not been with him through every crisis of the last three years. In good times and bad, I, Peter, was by his side. He gave me my name. I was his Rock. He had said so. How could he think I wouldn't stay with him through whatever unpleasantness lay in store. He said I would deny him. After three years of loyalty, he thought so little of me!

I set out to keep my word. When danger came I stepped forward to defend him, but Jesus stopped me. The soldiers came to the garden to take him away and I tried to stop them. I was brave. I drew first blood! I chopped off a soldier's ear. It was I, Peter, against the Roman army. I did my best but Jesus would have nothing of it. He gave the soldiers the upper hand. I was trying to do my part. And now that they had Jesus, I was nothing.

I wasn't about to look for more trouble. So when the woman asked if I was one of his followers, I feigned ignorance. I pretended that I didn't know him. She was of no significance. How could a little lie hurt. But then I heard a rooster crow. It was just as Jesus had said it would be. Jesus knew me better than I knew myself. He was right to doubt me. I am so ashamed. I can barely show my face. But still, even in my humiliation, the others look to me for strength. I do not deserve their trust!

When the women came to my door this morning and told us of the empty tomb, the others stood around in disbelief. But I had to see for myself. John came with me. John is still young. He easily outran me. I caught up to him and found him peering into the doorway of the tomb. I pushed him aside and crawled into the tomb. It was empty! . . . just as the women had said. There, lying on the stone slab, were the burial linens, folded neatly as if they had never been used. All the pain I had been feeling was lifted. He was alive. I was alive. I knew not what lay in store. But Jesus, my Lord and Savior, was alive.

*Theme song continues:*

*Were you there when He rose up from the dead?*

One person can speak this part or a family taking turns paragraph by paragraph. One carries a large Bible. One might carry the congregations's processional cross. Another option is for the four previous actors to reappear out of costume in normal clothing, becoming modern people.

Together if a group is used: Were we there? How could we be there? We were not yet born.

Single voice from here on: Centuries would pass before we would be born. No, we were not there. Yet somehow, we feel like we were there. Had we been there could we have changed anything? No!

The prophets foretold what was to happen and there was no stopping Jesus' destiny. Judas could not stop himself. His mother, Mary, could not stop it. Peter, the heart and soul of the disciples, could do nothing to stop Jesus from dying and his devoted friend, Mary Magdalene, could not stop it. God sent Jesus to save us and nothing could stop God's plan.

But all of their stories live on today. We can find bits of each of their testimonies in our own faith journeys. We are part of the story and in that sense, we too were standing on the hill, looking helplessly upon the cross. But we were also present in the garden to experience renewed life. Whenever we tell the story, we are fulfilling God's plan. The Good News cannot be stopped. It is for each of us living and breathing today. It is for our children yet unborn. God so loved the world that he sent his only son, that whosoever might believe in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

Jesus lives! In his death and resurrection, we have been given the gift of new life. Let us cherish God's gift and use his gift of renewed life to tell his story and share God's love and compassion to a hungry and thirsty world.

*All eyes on the cross:* The cross is ours. We look upon it today with reverence, remembering God's sacrifice. Yet the branches of this tree are now empty. Jesus no longer hangs on the cross. He lives.

He lives in the pages of Scripture. He walks with us. He talks with us. He lives.

*Song: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

Dolly Parton's Song, "He's Alive" Goes Well Here  
Lyrics and Sheet Music Available online

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