

LISTEN TO EASTER

by Judy Gattis Smith



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AUTHOR'S PRODUCTION NOTES

Suggested ways to use this Participation Reading:

1. This drama can be used in a combined Easter morning program for all children of the Church school. A good narrator who can capture the feeling of the story and direct the group in sounds is essential. A drummer is also needed. If you do not have a drummer, a tambourine can be used. Divide the chairs, if possible, into four groups. The narrator directs each group when it is time for their sound. Perhaps each Church school class could be a group.
2. This reading can be an interesting variation of a traditional Easter church service. If you are using it this way you will want to make use of the four cards included in the packet. Assign parts to the congregation. For example all men and boys could be Group 1; all teenagers, Group 2; all women and girls, Group 3 and the choir, Group 4. You will want to make the division to best suit your congregation. When it is time for a group sound, hold up the correct card. This will take a little juggling on the part of the Narrator, but with practice it can be done smoothly.
3. This participation reading can be used as part of an Easter Sunrise service put on by youth. If you are using it in this manner, use the youth group as a Sound Choir. Divide them into groups and let them create all the sounds. They should rehearse it once or twice for best results.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Visual Staging Ideas: Though this Easter presentation is designed primarily as a unique audio-participation program, it does offer many unusual opportunities for further visual implementation. Many of the events narrated with the group sound effects may also be pantomimed on the altar riser of the church chancel by one or more students or adults. Perhaps, better still the events could be portrayed, in sequence with the narration, by one or more interpretive dancers. These extensions will add a stirring dramatic multi-media effect to the presentation while permitting many others to participate creatively. Remember also that lighting helps to intensify mood.

THE WAIT AT THE SEPULCHRE

CAST: Narrator, Drummer (or tambourine)

NARRATOR: Easter morning is the turning point of history, the moment that climaxes our faith about Jesus. But it did not begin with a sky full of angels singing or golden trumpets blaring. It began in a quiet garden with heartbroken followers, cynical soldiers, and a sealed tomb. Let's travel, in our imaginations, back to that day's beginning. Listen to Easter, as we try to create some of the sounds that might have been heard.

(Divide into four groups and practice sounds.)

GROUP 1: *(Soldiers marching — slow, measured footsteps)*

GROUP 2: *(Sound of a wind blowing mournfully, softly)*

GROUP 3: *(Soft weeping)*

GROUP 4: *(Mob shouting — "Crucify him!" "Crucify him!")*

(Note: Hold up cards cueing GROUP sounds as indicated.)

NARRATOR: As soon as you enter the garden you will hear it — the slow marching tread of the Roman soldiers. *(Sound GROUP 1)* Two guards have been posted there all night. One marches now — back and forth — in measured tread, before a sealed tomb. *(Sound GROUP 1)* A still starry darkness fills the sky. There is a strange silence with the occasional murmur of a soft mournful wind. *(Sound GROUP 2)* If you listen very carefully you can hear another sound — the soft weeping of Jesus' heartbroken followers. *(Sound GROUP 3)* Their hope, their joy is gone and they are left with numb emptiness. Their Lord is dead! *(Sound GROUP 3)*

The older soldier who is not marching now but resting, hears all these sounds — the marching footsteps, *(Sound GROUP 1)* the soft wind, *(Sound GROUP 2)* and the distant weeping. *(Sound GROUP 3)* But these sounds are drowned out by a louder sound that echoes in his memory — the sound of the mob before the crucifixion. *(Sound*

GROUP 4) He cannot shake the memory of this strange day. He listens again to the wind (*Sound GROUP 2*) and remembers the eerie stillness and dark pall of the sun following the crucifixion and the loud crack of thunder that echoed across the valley and died slowly in the distance. He listens to the weeping (*Sound GROUP 3*) and remembers the faces of the few women crowding around the cross and the small handful of men who were followers. He hears again the cries of the mob (*Sound GROUP 4*) and remembers their anger and their excitement. He listens to the footsteps (*Sound GROUP 1*) and wonders why they must guard, for three days, a tomb that is blocked with an unmovable stone that no two men could budge and sealed over tightly with the seal of Caesar.

What do the rulers fear from this man? There is a prophecy that on the third day this man shall rise from the dead. But how can that be? The soldier reminds himself that his life is a life of warring. He has fought for Caesar from one end of the Roman empire to the other. He has seen men slain by the thousands and yet — there is something here that he does not understand.

At the far end of the garden some of Jesus' followers crouch in sorrow. They are afraid to come closer yet are unable to leave their Lord completely. One of them is also remembering the sounds of the crucifixion. (*Sound GROUP 4*) Just a week ago the people had shouted "Hosanna" and waved palm branches. But Jesus' follower is remembering when Pilate led Christ onto a balcony above a courtyard full of people. Jesus had been beaten with whips and Pilate had called out to the crowd. "What shall be done with this man?" and the answering cry of the mob came "Crucify him!" (*Sound GROUP 4*)

He remembered the strange way Jesus was dressed. On his head was a crown. It had been made by plaiting a

1 branch of thorns so that it fit around his head. Someone
 2 had pressed the crown down causing his forehead to
 3 bleed. About him was draped a scarlet piece of cloth and
 4 in his bound hands was a stick — a make-believe scepter.
 5 And the mob had looked at this King and shouted again,
 6 “Crucify him!” (*Sound GROUP 4*)

7 The follower looks around at his friends and listens
 8 to their weeping. (*Sound GROUP 3*) There is strong guilt
 9 along with their grief. They had not been brave enough
 10 or loyal enough at the time of Jesus' great danger. (*Sound*
 11 *GROUP 3*) He listens to the wind (*Sound GROUP 2*) and
 12 marvels at the peacefulness of nature when hearts are
 13 breaking and lives are shattered. For the danger is not
 14 over. The High Priest and the Romans might try to wipe
 15 out not only all traces of Jesus but of his followers as
 16 well. Yet the wind seems to give a calm assurance that
 17 weeping shall end and sorrow will turn to joy. (*Sound*
 18 *GROUP 2*)

19 He listens to the soldiers marching. (*Sound GROUP 1*)
 20 This was a sound that did not belong in a hallowed burial
 21 place. The clang of Roman armor and the sound of
 22 marching footsteps were out of place. He remembered
 23 Jesus and how he shunned force and killing. Why must
 24 there be soldiers and weapons here? (*Sound GROUP 1*)

25 Now, when the first streaks of dawn appear, an air of
 26 anticipation is felt in the garden. The gentle wind blows
 27 (*Sound GROUP 2*) and then — silence! The soft weeping is
 28 heard. (*Sound GROUP 3*) Then it stops and tear-stained
 29 faces look up. The soldiers march, (*Sound GROUP 1*) and
 30 then stop dead in their tracks. Suddenly a crack of
 31 thunder booms and the ground begins to shake. (*Drum*
 32 *roll starts.*) The sound of the thunder rolls away in the
 33 distance and the earth continues to tremble. (*Drum roll*
 34 *continues.*) Out of the skies like a lightning shaft comes
 35 an angel in white raiment to the sepulchre where Jesus

Christ lays buried. The soldiers fall terrified to the ground. (*Drum roll louder*)

Now a new sound is heard. A sound of heavy rock grinding upon the earth. (*Drum roll continues ending in a loud drum beat.*) **The rock—the heavy, sealed rock guarding the tomb is rolled away! The garden is silent. Not even the sound of birds or insects is heard. And then a voice: “He is not here — He is risen!”**

(*Participants and/or audience together sing: Hymn no. 444, The Methodist Hymnal, “Low in the Grave He Lay.”*)

AFTER THE RESURRECTION

NARRATOR: After this event the world turned around. Feelings changed. History changed. In our story it is still that first Easter morning. You will remain in the same groups but your sounds will change. (*Practice sounds.*)

GROUP 1: (*Our soldiers whose marching symbolized power and force, will this time make a sound of uncertainty and fear. Tremble! Tremble!*)

GROUP 2: (*Our nature sound will speak the word that nature seems to be speaking in spring. “Arise”*)

GROUP 3: (*Our followers who had been weeping will now shout “He’s alive!” “He’s alive!”*)

GROUP 4: (*Our mob will be running footsteps.*)

NARRATOR: As the ribbons of dawn spread across the sky we find the soldiers lying crouched to the earth. On their faces is enormous fear and great unbelief. (*Sound GROUP 1*) Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany and other women are approaching the tomb to weep again over their departed Master, perhaps to spread more spices over his body if the stone can be moved. They are astonished when they see the stone has been rolled away and the seal broken. They look at the frightened soldiers (*Sound GROUP 1*) and wonder what it can mean. Could his body

1 have been stolen away in the night?

2 Suddenly, the sun bursts over the horizon. The early
3 morning gloom vanishes. The dew glistens white and
4 pearly. Nature seems to speak. (*Sound GROUP 2*) The
5 women creep closer and dare to enter. A voice echoes
6 through the shadowy tomb. "Be not afraid. He is not here.
7 He is risen!" In disbelief the women look at each other.
8 They speak softly — then louder and louder. (*Sound*
9 *GROUP 3*) "We must go and tell the other disciples." They
10 look at the soldiers but they are departing to tell the
11 officials. (*Sound GROUP 1*) As if from a fearful event, they
12 run, looking back over their shoulders. (*Sound GROUP 4*)

13 The women hurry away to tell Peter and the other
14 disciples. In their excitement they also run. (*Sound*
15 *GROUP 4*) Mary Magdalene remains behind. Still stunned
16 and in shock she cannot fully understand what is happening.
17 She wanders aimlessly about the garden. Around her,
18 nature is responding to this great event. Grass shoots of
19 spring-green and swelling buds of trees seem to be
20 responding to nature's command "Arise." (*Sound GROUP*
21 *2*) Birds are stirring and chirping in their nests. Insects
22 are humming as if conducted by one word. (*Sound GROUP*
23 *2*) Ferns unroll their tight curls. Violets lift shy faces.
24 Flowers push up from the ground. (*Sound GROUP 2*) All
25 nature strains toward the light. (*Sound GROUP 2*) And
26 Mary stands in the midst of it all, unseeing in her sorrow.

27 Jesus is nearby but she does not know him. Mary
28 thinks he is the gardener who tends the burial garden.
29 Surely he must know what happened she thinks, and
30 says: "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you
31 have laid him and I will take him away." And Jesus says
32 to her: "Mary." Suddenly she knows his voice. She
33 recognizes his face. She is filled with radiance and deep
34 joy and joins the other believers who declare "He's alive."
35 (*Sound GROUP 3*)

1 **Meanwhile the dazed guards are reporting to Pilate**
 2 **and to Caiphas and the other high priests and scribes.**
 3 **They are so frightened their speech is jumbled. (*Sound***
 4 ***GROUP 1*) In hurried counsel it is decided to give the**
 5 **guards a large sum of money and have them say the**
 6 **disciples stole the body away while they slept. The guards**
 7 **take the money but their fear and bewilderment remains.**
 8 **(*Sound GROUP 1*) And the old soldier remembers the**
 9 **prophecy he had heard.**

10 **All the earth bore proof that Christ had risen. Fields**
 11 **and forests, brown and dead, showed life. Even as Christ**
 12 **rose they responded to the call. (*Sound GROUP 2*) Sleeping**
 13 **butterflies burst from their narrow cocoon. (*Sound***
 14 ***GROUP 2*) The sun flashed forth to warm the earth. (*Sound***
 15 ***GROUP 2*) All nature cried "Resurrection and Life."**
 16 **(*Sound GROUP 2*)**

17 **Peter and John are running, running, running to**
 18 **the tomb to check out Mary's story. (*Sound GROUP 4*)**
 19 **John arrives first but he lingers at the mouth of the tomb.**
 20 **He peers inside. He comes so close he can feel the cool,**
 21 **moist air on his face. He sees the linen cloths on the**
 22 **ground but he is fearful of entering.**

23 **Finally Peter comes running up, panting for breath.**
 24 **Listen, you can hear the pounding of his footsteps on the**
 25 **earth. (*Sound GROUP 4*) Without pausing, he bursts into**
 26 **the tomb. John follows. "Here is the cloth that covered**
 27 **his head." "Here is the linen that was wrapped around**
 28 **his body." They look at each other and proclaim "He's**
 29 **alive!" (*Sound GROUP 3*) They know that the other**
 30 **disheartened disciples are waiting in Jerusalem and they**
 31 **run to tell them the news. (*Sound GROUP 4*) Mary tells it.**
 32 **(*Sound GROUP 3*) Peter tells it. (*Sound GROUP 3*) John**
 33 **tells it. (*Sound GROUP 3*) Soon all the disciples are telling**
 34 **the news. (*Sound GROUP 3*)**

35 **That first Easter day was long ago but the message**

1 **and excitement is just as real today. Look out around**
 2 **you. Winter, frost and cold are gone. Spring wakes the**
 3 **earth. (Sound GROUP 2) And as the earth brings forth**
 4 **new life we praise our God who brings resurrection to**
 5 **all. (Sound GROUP 2) We, too, should run (Sound GROUP**
 6 **4) to tell the dark, weary world the wonderful news.**
 7 *(Sound GROUP 3)*
 8 *(Participants and/or audience together sing: Hymn No. 439, The*
 9 *Methodist Hymnal, "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today.")*

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 30 *NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the left margin*
 31 *of each page are for the convenience of the director. With these,*
 32 *he/she may easily direct attention to a specific passage.*
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