

EASTER...THE MYSTERY AND THE PROMISE

by Jani Barbati



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**EASTER...THE MYSTERY
AND THE PROMISE**

By Jani Barbat

CAST

Voice #1
Male Lead

Voice #2
Female Lead

Voice #3
Female

Voice #4
Male

PRODUCTION NOTES

Readers theatre productions are easy to perform because they require little preparation and no memorization. However, the participants should rehearse together to synchronize timing of pauses and projection and emphasis, particularly on speeches read as a group. Directors should pay close attention to the pauses noted in the script; they are important to the drama of the message.

Although written with a sunrise service in mind, this program is suitable for any Easter worship service. It may be presented as the central message, or as part of a total worship service. It can be done by adults or mature teenagers, or a combination of both.

Whether presented in- or out-of-doors, it is important that the congregation be able to hear the performers. Strong voice projection can compensate for a lack of good acoustics. It is suggested that the four "voices" be comprised of two each male and female, with the Number One and Two voices being the strongest of the four. In this case, the readers should stand before the congregation (on a raised chancel or platform, if possible) in the following pattern:

Voice #1	Voice #3	Voice #4	Voice #2
Male Lead	Female	Male	Female Lead

The minimum number of "voices" is four. The parts were arbitrarily divided into what was deemed to be the most uncomplicated, yet effective, presentation. Directors may wish to adapt the presentation according to the skill of the readers, the type of audience, the performance area, and other considerations. Additional readers may be added or the script may be structured as a choral reading by renumbering the speeches, taking care not to alter the Scripture passages. Directors should bear in mind that the more voices used, the more important rehearsals become to ensure a smooth performance.

- 1 VOICE ONE: Easter dawns! Night is no more!
- 2 VOICE TWO: With the rising of the sun, darkness ends . . .
- 3 VOICE THREE: With the rising of God's Son . . .
- 4 VOICE FOUR: New life begins!
- 5 ALL: Christ the Lord is risen! Alleluia!
- 6 VOICE ONE: We come to praise our risen Lord!
- 7 VOICE TWO: We come because we believe . . .
- 8 VOICE THREE: We believe in the Resurrection . . .
- 9 VOICE FOUR: The promise of new life . . .
- 10 ALL: New life in Christ!
- 11 VOICE ONE: "I am the resurrection and the life . . . Everyone
12 who lives and believes in me will never die."¹
- 13 VOICE TWO: The promise of new life . . . the mystery of life
14 eternal. Even as the mystery overwhelms us, we cling to
15 the promise!
- 16 VOICE FOUR: Need to believe . . .
- 17 VOICE THREE: Pray to believe . . .
- 18 VOICE THREE: Pray to believe . . .
- 19 ALL: God, help our unbelief!
- 20 VOICE ONE: The mystery of the empty tomb astounds us,
21 VOICE TWO: Confounds us,
22 VOICE THREE: Surrounds us with wonder.
- 23 VOICE ONE: The mind reels with questions: How can it be
24 true? How can a man die? How can we die and live again?
- 25 VOICE FOUR: The mind can't conceive, can't believe, it's
26 really possible.
- 27 ALL: "For God, *all* things are possible!"²
- 28 VOICE ONE: We put up walls of doubt,
29 VOICE TWO: Walls of fear.
- 30 VOICE THREE: Reason locks God out,
31 VOICE FOUR: But God breaks through . . .
- 32 ALL: Because Christ broke through!
- 33 VOICE ONE: Christ broke through the walls . . .
- 34 VOICE TWO: Walls of sin . . .
- 35 VOICE THREE: Walls of doubt . . .

1 VOICE FOUR: Walls of death!

2 VOICE ONE: And we can lay our doubts, our "hows" and our
3 "whys" . . .

4 ALL: At the foot of the cross.

5 (Pause)

6 VOICE ONE: That first Easter mystified the disciples. From
7 the very beginning, Jesus told them who he was, who had
8 sent him, and why he had come. But the mystery of Im-
9 manuel, God with us—was too much for the disciples to
10 comprehend.

11 VOICE TWO: Jesus called them to follow, and they did. They
12 left everything to go with him, but they did not understand
13 where he was going. They followed, they listened, they
14 obeyed. Some, like Peter, had rare moments of insight:
15 "You have the words of eternal life!"³ But much of what
16 he said to them remained a mystery.

17 VOICE THREE: They believed he was the long-awaited Mes-
18 siah, anointed of God, the promised hope of Israel, spoken
19 of by the prophets. Peter said it first:

20 VOICE ONE: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!"⁴

21 VOICE FOUR: They believed Jesus would lead their people
22 into freedom, and they wanted a place in his kingdom.
23 They could not understand that his kingdom was not of
24 this world.

25 VOICE ONE: The disciples were the first witnesses to his
26 power:

27 VOICE TWO: The power of his words . . .

28 VOICE THREE: The power of his miracles . . .

29 ALL: The power of his incredible love!

30 VOICE FOUR: People followed him everywhere.

31 VOICE ONE: The crowds gave Jesus no rest. He gave them
32 whatever they needed. They brought their sick, their blind,
33 their lame, even their dead.

34 VOICE TWO: The disciples watched as their master healed,
35 bound up, raised up, cast out, reached out and brought

- 1 in, the lonely and lost, dying in sin.
- 2 VOICE THREE: He gave peace to the weary, freedom to the
- 3 slave, hope to the hopeless,
- 4 ALL: And life where there was none.
- 5 VOICE ONE: The Twelve were there when he fed the hungry. . .
- 6 VOICE TWO: Food for the body,
- 7 VOICE THREE: And food for the soul.
- 8 VOICE FOUR: Soul food!
- 9 ALL: The bread of life!
- 10 VOICE ONE: These men knew their Master. They knew his
- 11 gentleness. He calmed the sea.
- 12 VOICE FOUR: And they knew his wrath: "You have made
- 13 my house a den of robbers!"⁵
- 14 VOICE TWO: His courage inspired the disciples. But it was
- 15 dangerous. He stood up to powerful, corrupt men. "Woe
- 16 to you, scribes and Pharisees—hypocrites!"⁶
- 17 VOICE THREE: His friends knew Jesus was in trouble, but
- 18 they were not prepared for the days ahead. They could
- 19 not believe their Messiah had to die.
- 20 VOICE ONE: Three times, Jesus told them what would hap-
- 21 pen. "We are going up to Jerusalem . . . The Son of Man
- 22 will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the
- 23 law. They will condemn him to death. They will hand him
- 24 over to the Gentiles, who will mock him,
- 25 VOICE THREE: Spit on him,
- 26 VOICE FOUR: Flog him,
- 27 VOICE ONE: And kill him. Three days later . . .
- 28 ALL: He will rise again."⁷
- 29 VOICE ONE: Three times, he told them. And three times, they
- 30 did not . . .
- 31 VOICE TWO: Would not . . .
- 32 VOICE ONE: Could not, believe it.
- 33 VOICE TWO: (Pause) Would we have believed?
- 34 VOICE ONE: Jesus celebrated Passover early that year—a
- 35 day early, on Thursday. He knew he would die on Friday.

1 He shared his last supper with his friends. He had much
 2 to tell them. "This is my body given for you. This is the
 3 new covenant in my blood, poured out for many, for the
 4 forgiveness of sins."⁸ He told them one of them would bet-
 5 ray him, another would deny him, and all of them would
 6 desert him.

7 **VOICE FOUR:** Only Judas believed him.

8 **VOICE TWO:** He gave them a new commandment: "Love one
 9 another, as I have loved you."⁹

10 **VOICE THREE:** He told them his time had come, that he was
 11 going to his Father. They didn't understand, but they
 12 wanted to go with him.

13 **VOICE FOUR:** He said they could not go with him, but that
 14 after he had gone, they would see him. Then after awhile,
 15 they would not see him. But he promised he would come
 16 again, to be with them forever.

17 **VOICE THREE:** The disciples were confused . . . he seemed
 18 to be saying goodbye and hello at the same time!

19 **VOICE TWO:** Jesus told them not to worry, that the Father
 20 had promised another would come after him . . .

21 **VOICE ONE:** The Advocate,

22 **VOICE THREE:** The Comforter,

23 **VOICE FOUR:** The Counselor,

24 **ALL:** The Holy Spirit.

25 **VOICE ONE:** Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would come and
 26 lead them into all truth. They would remember all he had
 27 told them, and they would be his witnesses to all the world.

28 **VOICE TWO:** They would be clothed with power: Power to
 29 believe, power to receive understanding.

30 **VOICE ONE:** Truth!

31 **VOICE THREE:** Joy!

32 **VOICE FOUR:** Peace!

33 **VOICE TWO:** Love!

34 **ALL:** Faith!

35 **VOICE TWO:** But before the Holy Spirit came Calvary. Before

- 1 new life can begin, the old life must end. It ended for time
2 and eternity the day Jesus died.
- 3 VOICE ONE: Make no mistake . . . Jesus really died. On a real
4 cross, on a bloody hill outside a real city. Save the pretty
5 Easter metaphors.
- 6 VOICE TWO: There was no comatose body lying in a tomb,
7 awaiting Sunday's revival . . .
- 8 VOICE THREE: No fallen seed to magically bloom again on
9 a spring morning . . .
- 10 VOICE FOUR: No pretty butterfly, emerging from a dark
11 cocoon.
- 12 VOICE ONE: There was nothing pretty about a Roman
13 crucifixion. It was cruel and inhumane punishment, re-
14 served for the lowest criminal. It was the epitome of dis-
15 grace for a Jewish man. It was brutal,
- 16 VOICE TWO: Bloody,
- 17 VOICE THREE: Agonizing,
- 18 VOICE FOUR: And final.
- 19 VOICE TWO: Jesus was a broken human being on that cross.
20 A lonely, suffering, dying human being, disgraced and tor-
21 tured by his enemies, rejected by his own people, aban-
22 doned by his friends.
- 23 VOICE THREE: Even his Father didn't seem to hear him.
- 24 VOICE ONE: A crown of sharp thorns had been jammed on
25 his head. He had been humiliated and beaten. The flogging
26 alone had killed weaker men. They used a leather whip—
27 strong Roman leather, laced with bits of bone and lead.
28 Before his mother's eyes, they stripped him. Iron spikes
29 impaled him to the crossbeam . . . five-inch, square-cut
30 iron spikes, hammered into his hands . . . gentle hands,
31 that had touched the sick, fed the hungry, blessed the
32 children.
- 33 VOICE THREE: Up . . .
- 34 VOICE FOUR: Up . . .
- 35 VOICE TWO: Up went the crossbeam bearing his weight. Up

1 to the vertical post in the ground.

2 **VOICE THREE:** Pound . . .

3 **VOICE FOUR:** Pound . . .

4 **VOICE ONE:** Pound went the spikes into his feet. The crowd

5 cheered and jeered . . . dared him to come down.

6 **VOICE TWO:** Two thieves that hung with him echoed his

7 agony. Even in death, Jesus reached out to sinners: He

8 prayed for mercy . . . not for himself, but for his murderers.

9 "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are

10 doing."¹⁰

11 **VOICE THREE:** To a dying thief, he gave pardon, and the

12 promise of paradise.

13 **VOICE FOUR:** To a Roman soldier, he gave hope for a new

14 life.

15 **VOICE THREE:** Unlikely believers, in an unlikely place.

16 **VOICE ONE:** When Jesus died, they pierced his side with a

17 sword to make sure he was dead. They laid his broken

18 body in a borrowed tomb.

19 **VOICE TWO:** Everything the Romans did,

20 **VOICE THREE:** Everything the Jews did,

21 **VOICE ONE:** And everything that Jesus did, fulfilled the

22 prophecies of Holy Scripture.

23 **ALL:** The Servant King had bought our freedom!

24 **VOICE TWO:** He died at three o'clock on a spring afternoon.

25 The sun disappeared, and the earth was shrouded in dark-

26 ness. The Light of the world had gone out.

27 **VOICE THREE:** A violent storm raged in the heavens . . .

28 **VOICE FOUR:** The earth shook . . .

29 **VOICE THREE:** Rocks split . . .

30 **VOICE FOUR:** And in the holy city of Jerusalem, the temple

31 curtain was torn in two.

32 **VOICE ONE:** The old traditions died with Jesus of Nazareth

33 . . . the new rose with Jesus Christ. A new high priest was

34 on the throne!

35 (Pause)

1 VOICE TWO: Early Sunday morning, just before dawn, the
2 women hurried to the tomb. Brave women . . . grieving
3 women . . . determined women, carrying spices . . . wor-
4 ried women: Who would move the heavy stone?

5 VOICE THREE: The women had been on the hill Friday. They
6 had seen the place where they laid the body of their Mas-
7 ter. They had watched the soldiers seal the entrance with
8 the large stone.

9 VOICE ONE: The priests had convinced Pilate to take extra
10 precautions. The frightened disciples might find their
11 courage, return to steal the body, and claim Jesus had
12 risen, as he said he would. This resurrection nonsense
13 might spread . . .

14 VOICE FOUR: And some fools would believe anything!

15 VOICE ONE: So the tomb was sealed and a Roman guard
16 posted. Because of the Passover holiday, and the Sabbath,
17 the women had to wait until Sunday to prepare the body.
18 Now, just as the sun broke through the trees, the women
19 approached the tomb. Would the soldiers help them move
20 the stone? Would they be allowed to anoint the body?

21 *(Slight pause)*

22 ALL: What body?!

23 VOICE THREE: The tomb was empty!

24 VOICE FOUR: The stone had been rolled away!

25 VOICE ONE: The soldiers lay dazed on the ground.

26 VOICE TWO: Two dazzling creatures in white spoke to the
27 terrified women: "Why do you look for the living among
28 the dead?"

29 ALL: "He is not here . . . He has risen!"¹¹

30 VOICE ONE: Jesus himself appeared to Mary Magdalene.
31 Run, Mary, run! Tell Peter and the others. Surely now they
32 would believe!

33 VOICE THREE: Mary ran. She told the disciples.

34 VOICE FOUR: Were they amazed?

35 VOICE THREE: Yes!

- 1 VOICE FOUR: Did they believe?
- 2 VOICE THREE: No! They thought it was nonsense. Foolish
3 women's talk.
- 4 VOICE TWO: Even after they had gone to the tomb and had
5 seen for themselves . . .
- 6 VOICE THREE: Even after they recalled what Jesus had told
7 them and knew it all to be true . . .
- 8 VOICE TWO: Even after Jesus himself appeared to them, they
9 could not grasp the mystery of Easter.
- 10 VOICE FOUR: Before his ascension, Jesus appeared to the
11 eleven disciples many times. He walked and talked with
12 them. He ate bread and fish with them. Still, some doubted.
- 13 VOICE ONE: Thomas did not believe his own eyes! He needed
14 further proof. Jesus loved him anyway. "Here, Thomas,"
15 he said. "Feel my wounded side. Touch my hands and
16 feet." Thomas touched; Thomas felt and knelt before the
17 living Christ, saying, "My Lord and my God!"¹²
- 18 VOICE FOUR: Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not
19 seen and yet believe!"¹³ The disciples saw what we cannot
20 see; yet, they doubted.
- 21 VOICE THREE: How did they come to believe?
- 22 VOICE FOUR: How do we, not seeing, come to believe?
- 23 VOICE THREE: By our own power, we cannot . . .
- 24 ALL: We believe by faith.
- 25 VOICE TWO: Faith given to us by God's power . . .
- 26 ALL: The power of the Holy Spirit!
- 27 VOICE FOUR: Before the day of Pentecost, the day of the
28 promised Holy Spirit, the disciples kept quiet about what
29 had happened. But on that day . . .
- 30 ALL: All heaven broke loose!
- 31 VOICE TWO: And that small band of men—the very men who
32 had run away, deserted, denied, abandoned, and doubted
33 their Lord—those same frightened men, now empowered
34 by the Holy Spirit, turned the world upside down with
35 power.

- 1 **ALL:** The power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 2 **VOICE ONE:** By faith, given by the grace of God, through the
- 3 power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to believe.
- 4 By the same gift of faith, we are able to believe!
- 5 **VOICE TWO:** Believe in Jesus Christ for our salvation.
- 6 **VOICE THREE:** Believe his promises . . .
- 7 **VOICE FOUR:** And accept the mysteries of God.
- 8 **VOICE TWO:** The greatest mystery of Easter is love: God's
- 9 incredible love for us.
- 10 **VOICE THREE:** For you . . .
- 11 **VOICE FOUR:** For me . . .
- 12 **ALL:** For the world!
- 13 **VOICE TWO:** So great is God's love, we can hardly grasp it!
- 14 So great his desire to be with us that he came to earth and
- 15 lived among us.
- 16 **VOICE FOUR:** He took our sin upon himself, and died for us,
- 17 and rose again to live forever with us!
- 18 **VOICE ONE:** Sin had separated us from God, but through the
- 19 sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrec-
- 20 tion, God has brought us back to himself through our Lord,
- 21 Jesus Christ.
- 22 **ALL:** We are forever united with God!
- 23 **VOICE TWO:** And nothing—no wall of doubt or fear or ap-
- 24 prehension . . .
- 25 **VOICE THREE:** Absolutely nothing! Neither powers above
- 26 nor powers below . . .
- 27 **VOICE FOUR:** "Neither death nor life . . . nor things present,
- 28 nor things to come . . .
- 29 **VOICE ONE:** Nor anything else in all creation will be able to
- 30 separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our
- 31 Lord!"¹⁴
- 32 **ALL:** Praise his name!
- 33 **VOICE THREE:** Because he lives, we live.
- 34 **VOICE TWO:** "We are given new birth . . . a living
- 35 hope . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. An



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