

THE VOICES OF LENT

by Jeri Shumate



CHRISTIANPUBLISHERS

Copyright Notice

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Christian Publishers. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Christian Publishers. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Christian Publishers.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Christian Publishers.

The Voices of Lent

by JERI SHUMATE

Biblical monologs for use
with a Wreath of Thorns

All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

THE VOICES OF LENT

Six monologs by biblical characters to accompany the weekly ceremony of extinguishing of candles on a Lenten Wreath of Thorns. Good Friday interlude service. Easter Sunday service to bring the Wreath of Thorns ceremony to culmination.

CAST: Six monologists, three men and three women

PLAYING TIME: About five to seven minutes each for monologs; one minute for Good Friday interlude; five minutes for Easter Sunday reprise.

PRODUCTION NOTES

On each Sunday following the beginning of Lent, a Wreath of Thorns is displayed at the front of the sanctuary. Attached are six candles plus a central, larger Christ candle in the middle. All are lit at the opening of the first service. Each week at some point in the worship convenient to the congregation's particular order of service, one monolog is enacted. At the conclusion, the monologist moves to the wreath and extinguishes one candle. On following Sundays, only the remaining candles are relit until on Good Friday, only the Christ candle is burning. It is extinguished during that service. On Easter Sunday, the monologists together relight the Christ candle. It would be helpful if a candle snuffer is available, lying discreetly beside the wreath so that the actors can extinguish the flame gracefully.

On the second Sunday, a stone well and bench or rock are needed for stage properties. The rock may also be used on the other Sundays leading up to, but not including, Good Friday and Easter. No other stage properties are needed.

All characters wear biblical costumes with slight adjustments to suit their personalities as indicated before each script.

To make the Wreath of Thorns, purchase an unadorned grapevine wreath with a 15-inch outside diameter. These are readily available at craft supply and hobby stores. If you wish, you may twist barbed wire (painted brown) through the wreath to represent thorns. You will need six purple tapers and one large white candle for the Christ candle. Pull the grapevine wreath apart and push the purple tapers through at evenly spaced intervals. Anchor with modeling clay so the candles stand upright. You may want to further secure the candles with a hot glue gun. Another option would be to use a special round, clear plastic candleholder made specifically for wreaths. This type of candleholder has spikes around the circumference, and the candles may be pushed onto the spikes. These are sold at craft supply stores (often on the wedding aisle).

It is best if you can assemble the wreath where it will be placed throughout Lent and Easter as it does not travel well. Set the white Christ candle in the middle of the wreath — perhaps on some wood blocks so that it may readily be seen. You may wind a length of purple fabric around the wreath for a celebrative touch on Easter morning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Simon Peter, the Disciple**
- 2. Dora, the Woman at the Well**
- 3. Marah, the Woman Who Washed Jesus' Feet**
- 4. Nicodemus, the Pharisee**
- 5. Stephanus, the Rich Young Ruler**
- 6. Judith, the Servant Girl at Caiaphas' House**
- 7. An Interlude for Good Friday**
- 8. Easter Sunday Reprise**

The First Sunday of Lent

Simon Peter, The Disciple

(Based on Matthew 14:22-23)

(The service begins with all the candles on the Wreath of Thorns lit. SIMON PETER is a large, robust man with curly hair and a beard. He wears the simple clothes of biblical times — a short tunic belted by a rope and sandals on his feet. He is an active, restless man, and paces about on the stage throughout his monolog.)

My father tells the story that when I was only three years old, I took my mother's dishtowel down to the shore one day and threw it into the water. Then I scooped it out, peered inside the soggy cloth, and threw it back in the lake.

"Simon Peter spent the entire afternoon trying to catch a fish with that old rag," my father would tell his friends. And then they would all laugh at the antics of such a child. It seems I have always been a fisherman.

As I grew up, the Galilean lake became the only place my restless mind could find peace. I could never sit still long enough in school for the rabbis to teach me anything useful. When they were most gentle and persistent with me, I would demand a quick answer to my questions, then pace the room as they refused such a useless approach to the Scriptures.

But at the lake, I could be calm. The wind blew my hair, the waves slapped my legs — nature seemed to know how to match my energy and diffuse it. If I was impulsive and too quick to leap into action, the lake could give it right back, sometimes by tossing me around in its waters until I had subdued my rash impulses. I learned to respect the power of my God through the Galilean lake.

It was a hard decision to give it all up and follow Jesus, the Master. There were nights I couldn't sleep because the lake was so far away from us. As we have traveled with him, I've

1 been the restless one, the man of action, the one ready to run
2 ahead and stir up the crowds — mostly, I suppose, just to spend
3 some of this pent-up energy. I wonder sometimes how much of
4 a trial instead of a help I've been to Jesus.

5 There was a time, I think, when we nearly ruined
6 everything for him. He'd been preaching on the mountainside
7 to a huge crowd that day. The mealtime arrived and people
8 were getting hungry, but most of them hadn't brought anything
9 to eat. Jesus directed us to collect the food that was available
10 and bring it to him. He blessed it, then told us to serve the
11 people and bring him the remains.

12 The story of how thousands were fed that day by a few
13 fish and loaves of bread is now known all over the land. We
14 who witnessed the miracle were wild with this manifestation
15 of power. Now we could at last overthrow the Roman tyrants!
16 That afternoon the people begged to be allowed to crown him
17 king.

18 But it wasn't what Jesus wanted. He knew the dangers of
19 such a revolution. As the fervor of the crowd increased, he
20 pulled us aside and told us to go get in the boat. He pushed us,
21 in fact, and said he'd meet us on the other side of the lake after
22 he sent the crowds away.

23 Night had fallen by now, and as we shoved away from
24 shore a wind began to arise. Most of us are experienced enough
25 to handle a storm, but this tempest caught us off guard; I
26 suppose our thoughts were preoccupied by the events of the
27 day. We'd been deeply troubled at Jesus' refusal to claim the
28 people's following.

29 As the storm grew, we were increasingly battered and
30 beaten by the waves. Every one of us was frantic to keep the
31 boat upright and moving toward the opposite shore. Andrew
32 fell overboard once, and we all scrambled to grab his hand and
33 pull him back in.

34 The storm went on for hours and hours with no relief. By
35 about three o'clock in the morning, I wondered whether we

1 would make it through this one. Suddenly someone screamed
 2 out in terror, "It's a ghost!" He pointed across the water, and
 3 we all saw it — an apparition that looked like it was coming
 4 straight for us. The storm had already filled my heart with
 5 terror, but at the vision of this unearthly being, I screamed in
 6 hysteria.

7 And then, just as suddenly, someone else yelled, "No, wait!
 8 It's Jesus! Master!"

9 I looked again, and he was right. It was my Lord, walking
 10 on the water toward us! In a flash my terror dissipated and my
 11 heart filled with ecstasy — we would be saved from the storm!

12 It seemed too unreal to be true, and I cried out, "Lord, if
 13 it is you, bid me come to you on the water!" Jesus simply said,
 14 "Come," and I leaped out of the boat toward him.

15 I have to admit I wasn't giving much thought to the fact
 16 that I was actually trying to walk on the water. My soul simply
 17 responded to the flood of relief at seeing my Lord. But when I
 18 suddenly realized that I'd left the relative protection of our
 19 little boat, I panicked. Oh, did I panic! All the years of swimming
 20 and fishing in that lake did me no good, and I began to sink
 21 without control.

22 And so I screamed again — "Lord, save me!" A hand
 23 grabbed me by the collar, and I felt myself being heaved over
 24 the gunwales and thrown onto the floor of the boat.

25 The storm on the lake, and the storm in our souls, abated
 26 in a moment as we sat together with our Master in that little
 27 boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus looked at me with the tender
 28 compassion of a parent for a foolish but much-loved child, and
 29 he asked, "Peter, why did you doubt?" (*Pause*)

30 Jesus was there. Always he has been there for me. Time
 31 and again I have failed him, and I suppose I will go on failing
 32 him. It seems to be my nature.

33 But if I have learned nothing else from my Master, I have
 34 learned this much: I can never fail Jesus more than he will be
 35 ready to accept me, forgive me, and restore me on the path of

1 his love.

2 And even the Sea of Galilee can't give me that kind of
3 peace. *(Steps to Wreath of Thorns and extinguishes a purple candle.)*

4 May the fires of impatience in my soul be quenched as is
5 this candle, and may we live in the acceptance of Christ Jesus.

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

The Second Sunday of Lent

Dora, the Woman at the Well

(Based on John 4:5-30)

(The service begins with all the candles lit except for one purple candle. The scene opens on an ancient stone well. It is cylindrical, open at the top, with no cover. To create the well, fashion a cylinder from sheet metal or cardboard and glue "rocks" on the exterior. Make a small hole near the top of the well. Feed a length of rope through the hole and knot it several times on the outside of the well to hold it in place. Tie the other end of the rope — now hanging inside the well — to the handle of a wooden bucket. This creates a crude pulley system that DORA uses to get water. She sets her jug in the bucket, lowers it by slowly letting the rope pass through her hands, then raises it again by pulling on the rope. The bucket should be placed outside the well to start.)

(A bench sits beside the well. It is noon. DORA enters with a pottery cup and a jug balanced on her hip. She is unemotional, perhaps hums a tune; she is going about her day's business. She is tall, in her forties. Her bearing and clothing are dull, indifferent. She sees the audience, sets her jug down beside the well, and approaches.)

I suppose you want a drink too. You look weary and thirsty enough in this heat. Well, come. The rope can pull water up for you as well as for me. *(She walks back to the well, lowers her jug, then raises it and sets it beside the well as she says:)*

We get a lot of travelers through here, and they all carry their cups along — but no jugs. Here, help yourself. I'm Dora. I'll rest and have a drink with you. *(She pours from the jug into her cup and drinks.)*

Mmmm, that's good. You know, a man came through here not long ago without even a cup. He was all alone, too, and he also asked me for a drink. *(She pauses, reflecting.)*

I should tell you about this man; you look like you might

1 understand. Well, first, he was a Jew — you can tell by the way
2 they dress — and I'm a Samaritan, right? I was not in the mood
3 to be abused by one of their pompous priests, so when I saw
4 this man coming, I picked up my jug to head for home.

5 "Wait! Don't go yet," he called out. "Give me a drink."

6 "I beg your pardon?" I said.

7 You know, any other time I would have left right then.
8 But he wasn't being obnoxious; I mean, he'd asked politely.
9 And then he said, "If you knew anything about me, you'd be
10 asking me for a drink instead. And I can give you living water."

11 Oh, so we had a joker on our hands! Living water? In this
12 place? There isn't a river for miles.

13 "You misunderstand," he said. "I don't mean river water.
14 The water of life that I offer is right here."

15 Another riddle. "You must be quite a man!" I said. "Are
16 you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well?"

17 I had to admit it. In spite of his being a Jew, I liked him.
18 I poured some water from my jug into my cup and handed it
19 to him. He drank until it was gone — and then the riddles
20 continued.

21 "When you drink the water from this well, you're soon
22 thirsty again, right?" he said. What could I say? Of course I
23 agreed. "But those who drink the water which I offer will never
24 thirst again. They won't need to draw from any other well."

25 Let me tell you, the way he looked at me when he said
26 that, well, it should have made me suspicious. Why, you ask?

27 Listen, have you ever drawn water from a well? Makes
28 you feel nostalgic, doesn't it? Reminds you of the good ol' days.
29 Wait till you have to do it every day, morning and night, in and
30 out. And this is a common well. It's the focus of all our social
31 activities in town. If you choose to live a little different than
32 everyone else — like I do — you'll have to endure curses and
33 spits from your neighbors every time you visit the well. I don't
34 even come in the cool morning hours anymore — that's when
35 the crowds are here.

1 This strange man, this Jew, had just told me I'd never
2 have to come back again! I laughed and told him I was in.

3 He gently took my hand, and because he was a stranger
4 and didn't know me, I trusted him. Then he asked me to get
5 my husband and he'd share his message with both of us.

6 My trust was gone, just like that. I tried to pull back, but
7 he held on — still gently. Then he said, "I know, my daughter.
8 I know that you have had five husbands, and that the man you
9 live with now is not your husband."

10 Well, all of a sudden, my thoughts were racing a hundred
11 directions at once. How could he know that about me? He'd
12 never been near our town before, I was sure of that.

13 And I couldn't account for why he was still so kind, even
14 knowing what he did about me. He couldn't have been one of
15 their rabbis — I've never known a more judgmental bunch of
16 men. Could he be . . . was he, perhaps . . . a prophet? There
17 couldn't be any other explanation. Oh, to be in the presence of
18 one of the prophets!

19 I had a hundred questions for him. We talked about the
20 differences between Jews and Samaritans, and whether God
21 lives in the mountains or the cities. I do remember him saying
22 that none of that really matters.

23 Then I asked if the Messiah would come to us Samaritans,
24 too, and he said the most amazing thing. I will never forget the
25 words he used or his tone of voice.

26 "Yes, my child," he said. "For I am the Messiah, and I have
27 come to you." I fell on my knees then, and I called him Master.

28 You know, up till that moment, my life had been pretty
29 miserable. And it hasn't been a picnic since then. But something
30 changed that day. He did give me "magic water." He loved me
31 for who I was. Could he be anyone but the Messiah? *(She moves*
32 *to the Wreath of Thorns and snuffs out another purple candle as she*
33 *says the following.)*

34 The anger and misery of my old life is burned out, and I
35 live now in hope.

The Third Sunday of Lent

Marah, the Woman Who Washed Jesus' Feet

(Based on Luke 7:36-50)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and four purple candles lit. MARAH is attractive, in her late thirties, a mature age in biblical times. She was formerly a prostitute, and her costume includes traces of that period in her life. She wears colorful robes and a small vial on a leather thong around her neck. She wears some jewelry — perhaps a gold belt. But she is not dressed seductively — there is a propriety about her clothing. Her hair, if it is long, is bound up; otherwise, her head is covered modestly.)

(As she enters, her attitude is from her old persona — haughty, sure of herself, arrogant. In order to do well in her profession, she developed a thick skin and tough attitude. Her name, Marah, means “bitterness.”)

I'm not ashamed to tell you who I was — not ashamed! Oh, you had your words for me back then, your labels, your looks of contempt. You could not live and let live, could you?

I had the eye of many of Nain's finest citizens. Men from as far as Kfar Nahum came to purchase Marah's favors. Yes, some of your husbands and sons, you women who taunted me. Why did you think I smiled at you, anyway? It was no shame to me.

Some of you think we “sinners” live without conscience. Let me tell you a story. After that, maybe you will realize you are not so high and mighty yourselves.

One of the Pharisees in our community is named Simon. What an arrogant crowd are the Pharisees! So rigidly they follow the letter of the law, so blind to truth and mercy. But Simon is exceptionally pompous and self-righteous. In one instant he would humiliate me with ridicule and even spitting, and in the next breath he would whisper plans to me for our

1 next rendezvous. The man disgusts me.

2 But I needed him. Simon is what I call a collector of
3 celebrities. In any given week he may court one of Herod's
4 puppets, assorted politicians, and various rabbis. It was at
5 Simon's feasts that I met most of my customers.

6 Simon's house is built 'round an open courtyard. There's
7 a garden and a fountain, and in warm weather, Simon's feasts
8 are held outside. When a rabbi is at such a meal, townspeople
9 often come into the courtyard to listen to his pearls of wisdom.
10 I attended these soirees, too, but I didn't enjoy them — business
11 suffers when too many religious leaders are around.

12 When a guest enters a house such as Simon's, three things
13 are always done. The host gives him the kiss of peace, cool
14 water is poured over his feet, and incense is burned, or rose
15 oil is placed on his head. Simon, with his passion for the law,
16 never misses an opportunity to be socially correct.

17 I was surprised when I heard that this Jesus of Nazareth
18 would be dining with Simon. Jesus is not like Simon's usual
19 guests. Oh, he's still a rabbi — I had no illusions. But he's made
20 a reputation for himself by being precisely opposite of the men
21 in Simon's crowd. Surely Simon would not attempt to curry
22 favor with someone so politically dangerous.

23 I admit I was curious. This was a feast I wasn't going to
24 miss. It would be the talk of the town for weeks.

25 I bound my hair in an especially fine coil that evening,
26 smiling to myself as I worked. Seeing if I could tease this
27 mysterious rabbi into my charms was the kind of challenge I
28 hadn't had in a long time. I strung this vial of perfume (*She lifts*
29 *it up to show the audience*) 'round my neck, and made my way to
30 Simon's house.

31 I arrived only a moment before Jesus did. He came into
32 the courtyard flanked by two of his disciples and paused. He
33 was a tall, striking man with deep, beautiful eyes. What a catch
34 he would be! The thought quite took my breath away. Jesus
35 looked over the gathering, and then our eyes met, and I flashed

1 him my most seductive smile.

2 And he smiled back at me — but not like other men smile
3 at me. In an instant, I was stunned, paralyzed. This Jesus saw
4 me . . . he saw *into* me . . . he *knew* me . . . and his eyes said
5 something I couldn't understand, something that completely
6 shattered me.

7 Yet that smile, in all of its gentle intensity, lasted only a
8 moment, then Jesus' attention was called elsewhere. I caught
9 my breath, and in a panic looked around to see if anyone had
10 noticed.

11 Jesus was ushered to his place at Simon's table, and
12 suddenly the crowd grew unusually quiet. Murmurs began to
13 arise. Where was Simon? He should be tending to his guest.

14 After several awkward minutes, Simon sauntered into the
15 courtyard, then sat down at the opposite end of the table.

16 What was he doing? Where was the kiss of peace, the cool
17 water, the incense and oil? It was unbelievable that Simon
18 would ignore the rules of hosting for any rabbi. Then I
19 understood — I knew Simon's angle.

20 Simon was patronizing Jesus. In contempt and ridicule,
21 he had invited this rabbi, this Jesus, to dinner.

22 I am not a woman given over to violent emotions — one
23 develops a thick skin in my line of work — but the events of
24 the preceding moments had left me completely defenseless, and
25 I found myself crying for this gentle man. Jesus reclined on his
26 couch, and without thinking, I walked to him and knelt down.

27 Hardly aware of what I was doing, I removed Jesus'
28 sandals and began to caress and soothe his feet. My hot tears
29 fell rapidly and became the water with which I cleansed them.
30 I took the alabaster from around my neck and poured it as well
31 on those gentle feet. I had no towel . . . so I unbound my hair.
32 With it, I wiped away the grime, the oil, my tears and my shame.

33 Some commotion was going on around me, but in my
34 anguish, I knew only those feet. The first thing to penetrate my
35 grief was a gentle voice whispering in my ear, "Daughter, your

1 **sins are forgiven.”**

2 **Forgiven. My sins are forgiven. What simple, perfect**
 3 **words, words I never dreamed I would hear. I lifted my face**
 4 **in disbelief at this amazing man, and he smiled — that same**
 5 **mystical smile — and said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in**
 6 **peace.”**

7 **Jesus was the first man who ever really loved me, and**
 8 **because he loved me, I am no longer Marah of bitterness, but**
 9 **Marah of joy! (*She steps to the Wreath of Thorns and snuffs out the***
 10 ***third purple candle as she says the following.*)**

11 **The sorrow of my sins is snuffed out, and I live now in love.**

12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

Nicodemus, the Pharisee

(Based on John 3:1-21, 7:45-52, 19:38-42)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and three purple candles lit. NICODEMUS is an older man for the time, in his middle to late fifties. He is an aristocrat and wears expensive robes. He is also a member of the Pharisees, a people who were known by their distinctive garb, and he is a member of the Sanhedrin and wears the official emblems of that council. Because of his age and experience, NICODEMUS is a thoughtful, watchful man. He enters slowly, stops and scans the audience as if to size them up, and then, after a good, long pause, begins to talk.)

There was a time when I knew that being a member of the Sanhedrin was the deepest calling of my life, that by serving on that council of law I could honor God more than any other way.

These days, I am not so sure. Much has changed since the day that I, Nicodemus, was ordained to serve on the Sanhedrin. That which I once knew as truth no longer seems so certain.

You have been led to believe that we Pharisees are a wicked people. Sometimes your Bible does not tell the whole story! I would be the first to admit that our interpretations of the law are often very harsh. And yes, there are Pharisees who are quite hypocritical. It is no simple thing to live by the rigid code we follow.

But it is our sect more than any other in the history of Judaism which gives strength and focus to our religion. Perhaps that is why we are the most popular sect of Judaism. People know where they stand when they come to follow the Pharisaic traditions. These traditions have kept the Jewish people close to God during centuries of slavery, dispersion, and persecution.

1 In the Sanhedrin, it is the Pharisees who interpret the law
2 that guides the judgments and decisions of the council. So you
3 see, I must understand the subtleties of the Jewish code better
4 than most Pharisees. I must be open to truth at all costs. And
5 as I said, lately that has proven most difficult.

6 The attitude on the council toward this man Jesus has
7 been negative from the start. Time and again we heard rumors
8 that he'd broken the Sabbath by performing healings and
9 exorcisms, and he spared no opportunity to chastise and
10 denigrate the Pharisaic principles.

11 I have never passed immediate judgment on another man
12 without first giving him a hearing. Jesus was no different in
13 this regard. But my tolerance for him was abruptly treated with
14 suspicion by my comrades. Still, I felt I must give this man his
15 just hearing, so I went to this rabbi to quiz him and learn
16 whether there was cause to condemn him.

17 Perhaps I must confess to a level of self-preservation as
18 well, for I sought him out quietly, in the dark of night. I even
19 covered my official garments with a cloak. He did not seem
20 surprised by this — in fact, he welcomed me and my questions
21 with no sense of condemnation for who I was or for my secrecy.

22 He knew his law well, this teacher did. He spoke with the
23 metaphors of our Judaic heritage, telling me that no one could
24 truly know the kingdom of God without being born anew.

25 “But how?” I asked. “Can one enter a second time into the
26 mother’s womb and be born?”

27 “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the
28 Spirit is spirit,” he answered.

29 I did not understand this talk of the birth of a spirit. He
30 went on to say that God had sent his only Son to bring eternal
31 life to the world. I would not repeat that to the council, for he
32 would be condemned on the spot for blasphemy. He said that
33 light had come into the world, but that people preferred to
34 remain in the dark.

35 Then he said, “Those who do what is true come to the

1 light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been
2 done in God.”

3 I understood that, because he spoke of truth, and truth
4 has been my lifelong quest. I left him that night with a new
5 resolve in my heart: to live and act my truth in the light so the
6 people who see me will better know their God.

7 I have learned over the years to study the other members
8 of the Sanhedrin, and I can discern when one is in silent
9 agreement with me. It should not have surprised me that my
10 good friend, Joseph of Arimathea, has also quietly removed
11 himself from the vehemence of outcry against Jesus. He and I
12 spoke privately last week of our new convictions about this
13 man. We have agreed that we will refuse to participate in any
14 councils that may be called to pronounce judgment upon Jesus.
15 It is a dirty business, this arbitration over another man’s good
16 works, and I’ll have no part in it.

17 This man, this rabbi, this Jesus taught me something else,
18 too. I see now that truth continually unfolds upon itself and
19 can never reach a position of absolute completeness. It has
20 been an unsettling and frightening awareness, but somehow,
21 there is new vitality in my life because the doors to
22 understanding are open again. What a potent gift this man has
23 given me! *(He moves to the Wreath of Thorns and extinguishes the*
24 *fourth purple candle, saying the following.)*

25 In extinguishing this candle of certainty, may I open the
26 doors to new truths yet unrevealed!

27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Stephanus, the Rich Young Ruler

(Based on Mark 10:17-22)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and two purple candles lit. STEPHANUS enters confidently and struts to Center Stage. He is in his mid-twenties, beyond the “immaturity” of youth, as he sees it. But he has not attained the wisdom of maturity, a fact which he does not see. He is self-assured to the point of cockiness. This will soften somewhat as he tells his story. He is dressed in expensive, fine robes.)

God has smiled on me since the day I was born. My name, Stephanus, even means “crown,” and there are times when I truly feel like a king. I have a wonderful wife, two bright young sons, a fine home, and a seat on the local council. As I said, God has truly blessed me. I have everything I want.

I do not mean to brag; indeed, I know that my great fortune has resulted only because I constantly strive to follow the laws of the Talmud in all that I do. No youth ever came more earnestly to his bar mitzvah than did I. I have made a commitment to learning and obeying the teachings of our ancestors. *(He pauses, struggling to find words.)*

But — and this is not easy to say — something has always been missing. Does that seem strange? How can I lack for anything? I wish I could explain it, wish I could even understand it. I don’t understand! I look at everything I have, and I wonder why I feel so restless.

When I have questions that baffle me, I always seek the rabbis. I usually learn something useful. But none have been able to quell this impatience in me.

There was a rabbi once who nearly came close. I’d heard about this man, Jesus — certainly no ordinary rabbi! He was young, for one thing, not much older than I. But people were saying the most extraordinary things about his interpretations

1 of the law, that his understandings went far beyond
2 conventional wisdom. When I learned that Jesus was in my
3 village, I was determined to meet him.

4 I sought him out the first day he was in town, and for
5 several days following. Most rabbis attract clusters of students
6 when they go out, but the crowd around Jesus was made up
7 of a different sort of people. There were women in his group,
8 for one thing. My wife was impressed with that, but it caused
9 me to hesitate. Among the others were fishermen and tax
10 collectors — I saw few eager students. So I held back. These
11 were not my type of people.

12 Then one day my wife said Jesus was leaving town. I
13 hurried to him, running, suddenly afraid that this rabbi had
14 the answers I sought and that I might miss my chance to
15 question him. He stopped when he saw me approach and smiled
16 in welcome.

17 “Good Teacher,” I said, “what must I do to inherit eternal
18 life?”

19 He could tell I was a man committed to the law, and at
20 first he answered very properly. “You know the command-
21 ments,” he said. “Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not
22 steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your
23 father and mother.”

24 And I said, “Teacher, all these I have observed from my
25 youth.”

26 He took a long pause — nobody spoke, in fact, for several
27 moments. At first I thought, “Can he have no other answer than
28 this?”

29 Then I realized he was just standing there, smiling at me.
30 I would almost say he . . . loved me, somehow, but how could
31 that be? He’d never met me before. Still . . . I felt something.

32 I think that’s why his answer has troubled me ever since.
33 If his eyes hadn’t pierced my heart like they did, I would have
34 dismissed his words as lunacy, because they make no sense.

35 “You lack one thing,” he said. “Go, sell what you have,

1 and give to the poor; and come, follow me.”

2 Sell everything? I was shocked! What earthly good would
3 that do for my eternal salvation? This answer was unlike any
4 I'd heard before. The law says nothing about living in abject
5 poverty.

6 And so I went away. I told no one of this encounter except
7 my wife. But her response was strange, too. She had that same
8 curious smile, almost like Jesus' — that smile that made me feel
9 very, very warm. She didn't say anything.

10 I continue to seek the rabbis for an answer to my question.
11 But that one answer still haunts me. Sometimes I think I
12 understand for a moment, then it blurs and is gone.

13 I will not judge this Jesus too harshly, for, as strange as
14 his answer was, no one has caused me to struggle more deeply
15 with my question.

16 And the last part of the wisdom he spoke to me? (*Walks to*
17 *Wreath of Thorns and extinguishes flame on fifth purple candle.*)

18 May my doubts be quenched as this fire is quenched; may
19 I know what it is to come and follow him.

20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

The Sixth Sunday of Lent (Palm Sunday)

Judith, the Servant Girl at Caiaphas' House

(Based on John 18:12-28)

(The service begins with the Christ candle and one purple candle lit. JUDITH is fourteen years old. She is a Jewish girl and has been a servant at the high priest Caiaphas' house since she was ten years old. She has recently been made responsible for answering the door when guests or dignitaries come to the house. She has a sense of self worth because of her position. Her dress is youthful — a knee-length tunic in a bright, cheerful color. Her hair is uncovered and unbound.)

Did you hear? I got to meet that Jesus man last night! He was here at Caiaphas' house, and he walked right by me! Twice!

We all knew he was coming. They try to keep things from the servants, but we hear everything that goes on, one way or another. An officer came here around dinnertime last night. He told Caiaphas they were going to arrest Jesus later and to be ready to hold a trial right on the spot. Then I heard Caiaphas say, "Put Judith on the door, and tell her no one else gets in without my permission."

So I knew I was going to get to see this Jesus. That's my job — I guard the front door.

There have been a lot of late-night meetings recently about this Jesus. He's really caused a lot of trouble. I heard that one man lost his whole herd of pigs because Jesus made them run into the river and drown themselves. My friend Sarah said he made a man come back to life three days after he'd died! Can you imagine such a thing? They say he thinks he's the Messiah.

I'm a good Jewish girl. I believe in the Messiah, and I know he will come and deliver us from the hateful Romans. But how could someone who causes so much trouble possibly be our long-awaited Messiah? It doesn't make any sense to me.

One of the cooks said she actually saw Jesus riding a



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

VOICES OF LENT

by Jeri Shumate.

*For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script,
please contact us at:*

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-844-841-6387 - Fax (319) 368-8011

customerservice@christianpub.com