

MEMORIES OF THE RESURRECTION

by Michael Colvin



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Memories of the Resurrection

A sunrise service
monolog program

by
Michael Colvin

CAST OF CHARACTERS

READER

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

PILATE

A RABBI OF THE SANHEDRIN

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JAMES

MARY MAGDALENE

PETER

JOHN

THOMAS

PRODUCTION NOTES

This drama may be adapted to a variety of settings. Originally designed as an outdoor Easter sunrise service, the play may just as easily be performed indoors. The stage requires no set, and no props are used.

The drama is really a series of short monologs and may be done as a Readers Theatre production with a minimum of memorization, blocking, costumes, etc., but adding these elements will greatly increase the impact of the play.

If a Readers Theatre production is desired, script pages for each actor may be inserted into plastic page covers and placed in binders, so that they may be easily turned and remain turned for reading. In order to encourage the actors to use movement, the scripts may be placed on music stands adjusted to reading height.

Only the two Marys actually interact with each other in dialog, and then only minimally. All other actors are speaking only to the audience. A better dramatic effect will be achieved if the actors direct their attention to whomever is speaking, reacting to whatever is said in character.

It is suggested that the actors, except for the two Marys, be spaced at a distance from one another at different levels on the stage or amphitheater. The two Marys should stand together. The Reader should stand at a podium at front stage left.

If the production is done indoors and lighting is available, it is very effective to light the actors separately as each does his or her lines. It is important that the person in charge of lighting be able to attend all rehearsals, and that the lighting be rehearsed as early as possible in the rehearsal schedule. A missed lighting cue will inevitably stand out.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF SERVICE

Call to Worship

Solo: "Morning Has Broken"

Prayer

Matthew 27:51-61

Joseph of Arimathea remembers...

No peace for Pilate...

Joseph of Arimathea gets his wish...

Hymn: "Were You There?"

Matthew 27:62-66

A Rabbi of the Sanhedrin speaks...

Pilate senses trouble...

The Rabbi makes a confession...

Matthew 28:1-8

Mary, the mother of James, and Mary Magdalene remember...

Hymn: "Low in the Grave He Lay"

John 20:2-10

Peter and John learn the truth...

John 20:11-17

Mary doesn't recognize Jesus...

John 20:19-29

Jesus appears to the disciples...

Hymn: "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today"

Benediction

CALL TO WORSHIP

SOLO: "Morning Has Broken"

PRAYER

READER: Matthew 27:51-61 (*The cast members enter and take their positions.*)

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA REMEMBERS...

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA: I am Joseph of Arimathea. I was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council of Seventy. When Jesus was arrested and brought before the council, Nicodemus and I argued in favor of his release. But, when the vote was taken to condemn Jesus to death, I abstained. I am sorry that I didn't speak out more forcefully, but I was afraid that the council would learn of my real feelings toward Jesus and the disciples.

I was crushed when they took him away to Golgotha. I lingered at the edge of the crowd and watched while they raised the cross into position, and I stood silently by in the shadows while the soldiers divided Jesus' garments among themselves. I heard Jesus cry out, and at last I saw him sink heavily on the cross. I knew the end had come.

What could I do now? All the wishing in the world would change nothing. Suddenly I was struck with an idea. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon on Friday. The Sabbath would begin in little more than three hours. If Jesus wasn't buried before then, Jewish law wouldn't allow his body to be removed until Saturday evening.

I had recently acquired a tomb for my family. It was nearby. If I acted quickly, there might yet be a way I could help. I went to Pilate and told him I wanted Jesus' body. I didn't care any longer who knew that I, too, was a disciple.

NO PEACE FOR PILATE...

PILATE: These troublesome Jews! I thought I had washed my hands of this whole affair with Jesus. Will they give me no peace?

For seven long years, the Jews had been giving me nothing but trouble. I took this post with the blessing and commission of the Emperor. Even before I came to Palestine, I knew that the Jews were an irascible and difficult people. My predecessors had learned to treat them with kid gloves, but I felt they should not be subjected to special privileges. After all, the law is the law. All I ever wanted to do was to be an able administrator, to rule according to Roman law, by the book, but these contemptible and fanatical Jews had made my life a shambles. When I marched into Jerusalem on that first day with the Roman eagle and bust of the Emperor atop the standards, (*Mockingly*) the Jews rioted, saying that graven images were an affront to their God! When I built the new aqueduct for Jerusalem to improve its water supply, I took funds from the temple treasury, as any wise administrator would do. After all, religious institutions are among those that benefit from such civic improvements. (*In amazement*) But instead of showing gratitude for my far-reaching wisdom, the Jews threatened to report me to the Emperor.

This trial of Jesus that the Sanhedrin wanted me to conduct was clearly fraught with danger. They were waiting for me to make a wrong move. I could find no real reason to condemn Jesus. He had broken no Roman law. I just wanted a way out of this whole sordid affair. Ironically, it was the Jewish Passover Feast that saved me. It was the custom at the time of the Feast to release a prisoner. I merely let the crowd decide between Jesus

1 and Barabbas. It was a dirty business. I washed my
2 hands, an act of cleansing that even the most stubborn
3 Jew would recognize.

4 I was truly surprised when Joseph of Arimathea
5 came to me and asked for his body. He was already
6 dead? Usually it took at least a day, sometimes several,
7 before the condemned would succumb. Often their
8 bodies would just hang there until the birds had picked
9 away their flesh, and the sun had bleached their bones.
10 And yet Rabbi Joseph of the Sanhedrin, the very group
11 that had put Jesus to death, wanted his body for burial.
12 I was more convinced than ever that this Jesus was no
13 ordinary criminal. There were people like Joseph who
14 would risk their reputations, and perhaps even their
15 lives, for this man.

16
17 ***JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA GETS HIS WISH...***
18

19 **JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA:** In an hour or so, we had taken
20 his body down, and Nicodemus and I wrapped it in a
21 new linen sheet and laid it in the tomb. Later the
22 women, Mary Magdalene and the others, came with
23 spices that Nicodemus provided and hurriedly
24 prepared the body before sundown.

25 I wasn't much help to Jesus when he needed me, but
26 at least he would have a proper burial.

27 **HYMN:** "Were You There?"

28 **READER:** Matthew 27:62-66
29

30 ***A RABBI OF THE SANHEDRIN SPEAKS...***
31

32 **THE RABBI:** I tell you, the chief priests and the other
33 Pharisees were worried. Now that Jesus, that rebel and
34 blasphemer, was dead, hopefully this hullabaloo about
35 the Messiah would calm down again. But maybe not! We

knew his disciples were desperate men, willing to go to any lengths to keep the fires of insurrection burning.

One of my colleagues stood up and addressed the assembly. He said, "Didn't Jesus claim that, even if they killed him, he would come back to life after three days? If those meddling disciples were to steal his body to help make that prediction come true, Jesus, though dead, would look like a hero."

Everyone agreed that we just couldn't afford to let that happen. But how could we prevent it? It was the Sabbath and, by law, a Jew couldn't stand guard over the tomb. Ah, but Pilate's men could. They weren't bound by the Jewish law. Maybe Pilate and his soldiers could be used again for the good of the Jews. A delegation of us went to speak to Pilate to ask him for a contingent of guards for the tomb.

PILATE SENSES TROUBLE...

PILATE: No, there would be no peace. There would be no end to the trouble over this Galilean. Once again, a delegation from the Sanhedrin was on my doorstep. And their Sabbath had already begun. I thought, "They must want something pretty important for them to break their own law."

This time they wanted guards to be posted at Jesus' tomb. They told me they were afraid that Jesus' disciples would try to steal his body to make it appear that he had risen from the dead. I sensed their fear at what they could not admit — that Jesus would rise from the dead! I let them have a few guards, and told them they should guard the tomb as best they could. I had the strong feeling that I had not yet heard the end of this Jesus affair. In fact, maybe this was just the beginning.

THE RABBI MAKES A CONFESSION...

THE RABBI: And so Roman guards were placed at the tomb to watch and wait — to be certain that nothing unexpected would happen.

As I think about all that confusion, I believe we were secretly afraid that Jesus would rise from the dead and bring chaos to our fine religious order. Many of us Pharisees were believers in resurrection. We believed that it was possible for the wealthy, law-abiding Jew. But we were certain that the resurrection was not going to happen to a lawless itinerant like Jesus. But we also recognized that we could be wrong. So we decided to take no chances. Can you really blame us for having enlightened self-interest?

READER: Matthew 28:1-8

***MARY, THE MOTHER OF JAMES,
AND MARY MAGDALENE REMEMBER...***

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JAMES: The evening of Jesus' death was so confusing and busy that we didn't have time to prepare his body adequately for burial before the Sabbath. So, early in the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and I went down to the tomb to add more spices to the body. It was such a sad occasion. A dark cloud of gloom and confusion hung over all the disciples on the Sabbath day. No one was very interested in prayers. All of our hopes for Jesus to be the victorious Messiah were destroyed on that barren, awful hill called Golgotha. Mary, I don't remember exactly what happened next. Maybe you have a better recollection.

MARY MAGDALENE: Well, we got to the tomb and were asking the guards to roll the stone back so we could

1 finish. Their orders, they said, were not to let anyone in.
 2 Suddenly, I was thrown to the ground by a violent
 3 shaking of the earth. Stones were falling from the rock
 4 walls. The guards were scattering everywhere, taking
 5 cover. I could hear the stone in front of the tomb rolling
 6 away, and a light shone so brightly that I could see it
 7 with my eyes shut. And then, it was so quiet that not
 8 even the birds were twittering. Do you remember,
 9 Mary?

10 **MARY, THE MOTHER OF JAMES:** Yes, I remember. I
 11 looked and saw a-a-an angel (*as if she's not sure what else*
 12 *to call it*) sitting on the stone surrounded by a bright
 13 light. The guards ran in fear.

14 The angel told us not to be afraid — that Jesus wasn't
 15 in the tomb anymore — that he had been raised from
 16 the dead. He showed us where he had lain. The linen
 17 cloth he was wrapped in was lying in a heap on the floor
 18 of the tomb. He told us to tell the disciples that Jesus
 19 was going back to Galilee and would meet them there.

20 **MARY MAGDALENE:** You know, Mary, the funny thing is, I
 21 wasn't afraid until after the angel left. But then, even
 22 though I was overwhelmed with joy to think that Jesus
 23 might be alive, I shook like a leaf. I stumbled and
 24 staggered down the path in my haste to get back to the
 25 disciples. All I knew for sure was that something had
 26 happened. Jesus was gone. What did it mean? Could I
 27 really believe my ears?

28 **HYMN:** "Low in the Grave He Lay"

29 **READER:** John 20:2-10

31 **PETER AND JOHN LEARN THE TRUTH...**

32
 33 **PETER:** John and I were sitting down to our morning meal
 34 when Mary Magdalene burst through the door like a
 35 mad woman. I looked at John and said, "Under the

1 strain of the last few days she's finally cracked." We all
2 knew how close she was to Jesus.

3 She was out of breath and crying. John sat her down
4 and tried to calm her. She was rambling on about how
5 they had taken Jesus from the tomb and put him
6 somewhere. Who were "they"? Were Pilate and his men
7 going to deny us even the body of our fallen Lord? Not
8 if I could help it. John and I left Mary, and I grabbed my
9 dagger on the way out of the door. I couldn't let them
10 get away with anything else. I had denied my Lord for
11 the last time.

12 We ran all the way to the tomb.

13 **JOHN:** Because I'm smaller and more agile than Peter, I got
14 there first. From the doorway I peered into the
15 darkness of the rock chamber, but Peter pushed on past
16 me into the tomb. There were the linen cloths lying
17 there as if the body was still in them. But they were
18 empty, lying flat on the stone slab. The cloth that was
19 used to hold Jesus' jaw shut in death had been removed
20 and was lying neatly rolled up to one side. I couldn't
21 understand why they just didn't unwrap the body and
22 throw the cloth to one side.

23 I stood there with my mouth wide open. "It's
24 happened," I stammered. "Jesus has been raised from
25 the dead."

26 **READER:** John 20:11-17

27
28 *MARY DOESN'T RECOGNIZE JESUS...*
29

30 **MARY MAGDALENE:** I followed Peter and John back to
31 the tomb, and I stood outside crying while they went in
32 to look. A while later they came back out, talking
33 excitedly. They didn't even notice me as they walked
34 away.

35 All I could do was stand there staring at the tomb,

1 thinking, "What have they done with my Lord?" When I
2 bent over to peer into the doorway for another look,
3 through my tears I saw two men dressed in white,
4 sitting where Jesus had lain. They asked me why I was
5 crying. I answered, "They have taken Jesus away, and I
6 don't know where they have put him."

7 *(Slowly, as if overwhelmed by the memory)* Then I turned
8 around, and through my veil of tears I saw a man I
9 thought was the gardener. He, too, asked, "Woman, why
10 are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

11 Looking at the tomb, I said to him, "If you've taken
12 him away, please tell me where he is, sir, so that I can be
13 with him."

14 And then that voice, that unmistakable voice, said so
15 tenderly, "Mary!" I turned and fell on his shoulder. "Oh,
16 Rabbi," I said. And he replied, "There is no need to hold
17 on to me. I'm here now and will be for a while, until I
18 must go to the Father. There will be plenty of time to see
19 me. Go and tell the others the good news so that none of
20 the time we have together is wasted."

21 And so, reluctantly but with joy, I did as my Lord
22 asked.

23 **READER:** John 20:19-29

24
25 ***JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES...***

26
27 **THOMAS:** Some people call me a pessimist, but I prefer to
28 look at things the way they are, not the way we want
29 them to be. I had realized for some time that my Lord's
30 ministry would come to a bad end, and that we disciples
31 would probably also die at the hands of the Roman or
32 Jewish authorities. I thought I was prepared to follow
33 Jesus all the way to the cross, but when the inevitable
34 finally happened, I was so devastated that I had to get
35 away by myself. For three days I was in hiding — not



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