

THE EASTER PUZZLE

by Amy Ridgeway



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The Easter Puzzle

A children's presentation
for Easter

by Amy Ridgeway

CAST OF CHARACTERS

READERS 1–15

NARRATOR (*adult*)

The Readers may be any combination of children, youth, and adults. Readers 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 are designated to remove the puzzle pieces. These Readers' short lines were specifically written for very young children (ages 4 to 6), allowing a wide range of participation. Parts are flexible, allowing more than one participant to read each section as individual need arises.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

What exactly is going on here? What happened to the Messiah? Where is Jesus, and just who was he after all? Can't you hear the disciples, struggling through the pain and grief of Good Friday and mourning through the Sabbath to Sunday morning, not at all sure of anything anymore, only sure that they are now alone? Yet in the midst of their grief, there is Jesus, with all of the answers to all of their questions, before they even ask. He's there to solve the puzzle of who he is, and to point us on to who we can become.

This Easter or Lenten presentation was written from the viewpoint of the first people to see Jesus that long-ago morning, and to explore in part how their reactions mirror our own and reflect the great and powerful love that compelled God to send his Son to earth for each of us.

This program is flexible in the number of participants and their ages. It is ideal for churches with a small membership, but could be presented in churches of varying sizes. The only prop that is needed is a poster-sized picture of Jesus to display on an easel, with puzzle pieces cut out of poster board to hide the picture. Throughout the course of the presentation, puzzle pieces are removed until the last piece reveals Jesus' face.

Rehearsals may easily be accomplished with a minimum of sessions if participants work independently on memorizing their assigned pieces (or parts may be read). No costumes are required.

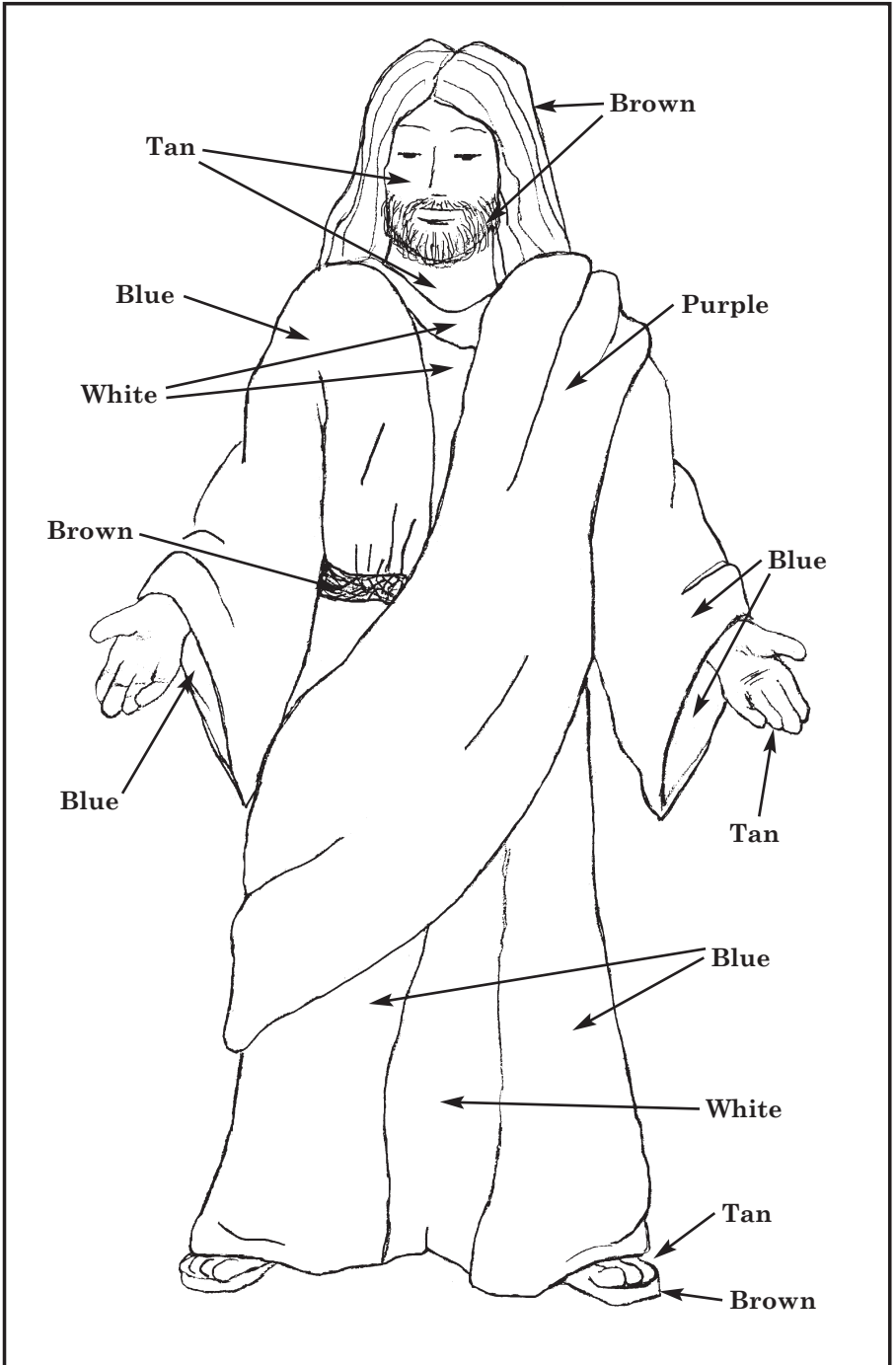
Following are the instructions for making the puzzle. You may enlarge the illustration of Jesus on page iv to a size that will be visible to the congregation (aim for poster-sized). This should be mounted on a piece of Fome-Cor for presentation. Next, you may add color with paint, markers, colored pencils, pastels, etc., using the color guide on page v, or by substituting your own color choices. Obtain a piece of poster board the same size as the enlarged portrait of Jesus and, using an overhead, trace the jigsaw puzzle pattern on page vi onto the poster board. Cut out the five pieces, and then position them over the portrait of Jesus

so it is completely covered. You may use long-headed pins to keep the puzzle pieces in place. Your puzzle poster is now ready for the performance.

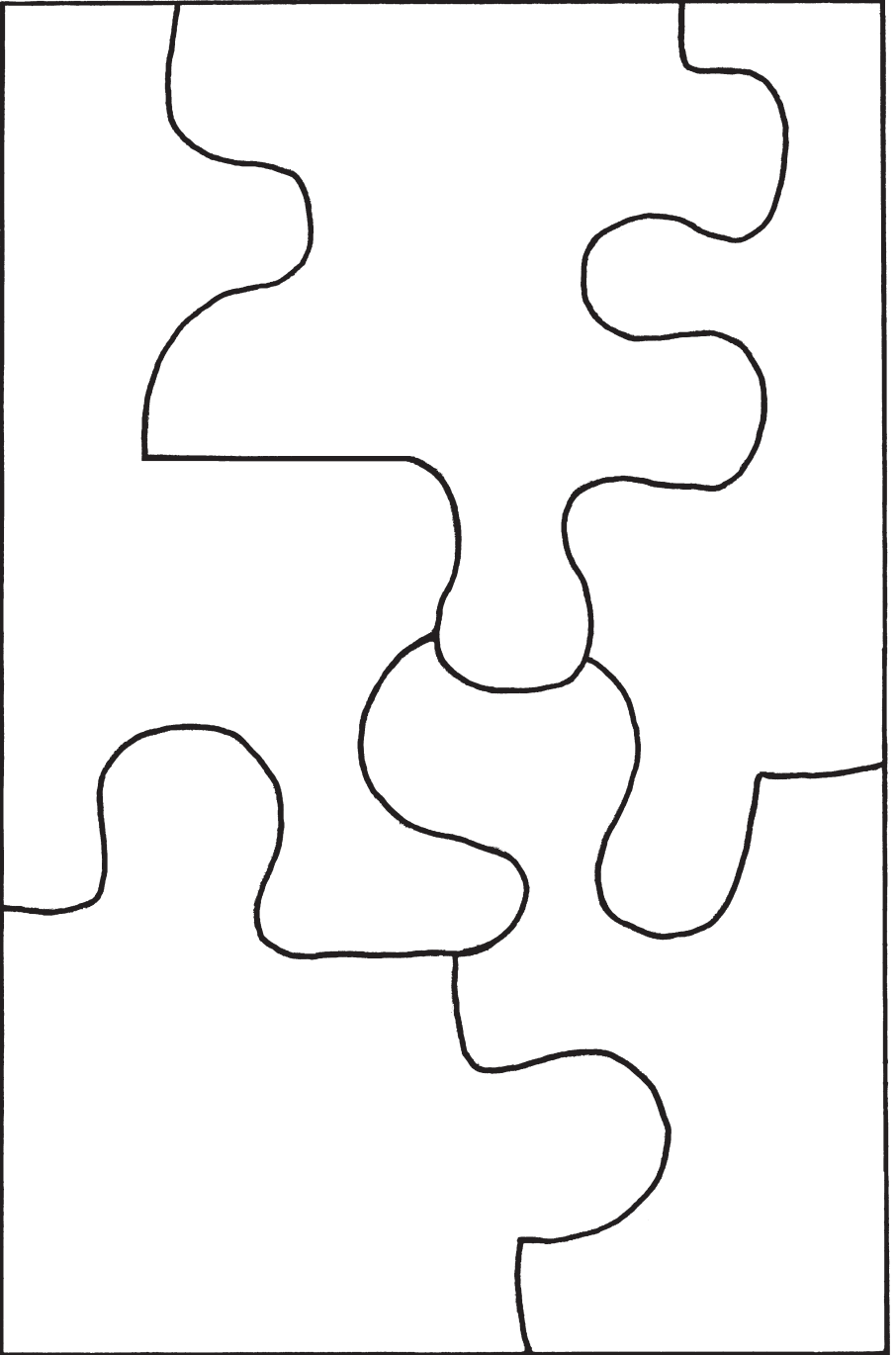
Display the poster on an easel during the presentation. The pieces will be removed one by one during the course of the program by the youngest participants. Ask the other Readers to assist them as necessary. It is important to practice removing the puzzle pieces during rehearsals. Assign specific pieces to be removed by a particular child. Reserve one piece at the center of the picture to be removed last. This should be the identifying part of the picture that shows Jesus' face. (If you use different artwork that only depicts Jesus' face, save the piece that shows his eyes for last.)



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(NARRATOR is in place at lectern positioned to one side of the stage. The READERS may be seated in the front rows.)

NARRATOR: A puzzle, wrapped in a mystery, clothed in an enigma. ... Maybe we're looking much too hard to find the meaning of life. Maybe it's been here all along, and we only need to be asking the right questions, fitting all the pieces together, finding the truth that we so desperately need. What is truth? What is love? Where is Jesus? Maybe long ago those who loved Jesus, who watched him die, who turned away from him, who betrayed him — all those folks who were just like us, maybe they, too, were asking all those questions, trying with all the strength of their minds to figure out who Jesus was and where he was. Let's join them this morning. Let's look for Jesus. Let's try to solve the puzzle, fit the pieces together, and discover just where Jesus is. *(READERS 1, 2, and 3 enter and cross to microphone at Center Stage.)*

READER 1: Matthew 28:1,9–10.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

READER 2: Mary Magdalene climbed out of bed, accustomed to the task of early rising to get the day in motion. Today she had a sad job — and maybe she wiped away a tear as she remembered that Jesus, her beloved teacher, had died just a few days ago. Still, she gathered her supplies and friends and set off to take care of Jesus' body. The darkness in her soul was in stark contrast to the dawning of the day.

Imagine, then, as Mary sees Jesus, and in a moment

her grief, confusion, and fear are washed away as the shadows of the night are dispelled by the light of day. Jesus simply said, “Hello. Here I am, just like I told you I would be. Now go and tell.” Wouldn’t it have been more obvious to hear a trumpet blare and an angel chorus sing, “He is risen, alleluia!”? All doubts could have been removed with one note echoing out from heaven: “Here’s my Son! I am well-pleased!” (Author’s paraphrase of Luke 3:22). Yet God arranged for Jesus’ gentle voice to say quietly, “Yes, it’s me. Don’t be afraid. Go and tell the others.”

READER 3: We must go quickly, to tell the world that Jesus is risen. Soon we will see him. *(READER 3 removes one puzzle piece, then READERS 1, 2, and 3 may be seated. READERS 4, 5, and 6 enter and cross to microphone at Center Stage.)*

READER 4: Matthew 29:16–20.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

READER 5: Look around you. Do you see Jesus? He’s right here beside you. His is the quiet voice that called you to church this morning. His is the warm hug you feel welcoming you home. His is the gentle spirit you feel nudging you to smile at the person sitting beside you. He’s the one calling you to mend that fight, end that disagreement, and give up that long-held grudge. He’s the one holding out his hand, waiting for you to grab on

1 to the love he's offering so he can pull you into the light
2 that your life can be.

3 He might seem far away right now. You might still be
4 seeing him in bits and pieces. Even some of his disciples
5 doubted for a few moments until they, too, grabbed on
6 to his hand and gave up themselves to become more
7 than they'd ever imagined they could be. We're here
8 today because they chose to see Jesus and chose to tell
9 someone else. Someone else will be here one day if we
10 choose the same. Look closely. Don't you see him? Keep
11 looking. Keep telling.

12 **READER 6:** He's still here, waiting, even to the end of the
13 age. He's waiting for you. *(READER 6 removes puzzle piece,*
14 *then READERS 4, 5, and 6 may be seated. READERS 7, 8,*
15 *and 9 enter and cross to microphone at Center Stage.)*

16 **READER 7:** Luke 24:13-16, 28-31.

17 Now that same day two of them were going to a
18 village called Emmaus, about seven miles from
19 Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about
20 everything that had happened. As they talked and
21 discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself
22 came up and walked along with them; but they were
23 kept from recognizing him.

24 As they approached the village to which they were
25 going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they
26 urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly
27 evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay
28 with them.

29 When he was at the table with them, he took bread,
30 gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then
31 their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and
32 he disappeared from their sight.

33 **READER 8:** Lots of questions, answers that lead to more
34 questions, endless discussion and debate, and where
35 does that get us? Aren't we good at asking questions?

Haven't we tried for countless ages to craft God in our own image? Do we even know what Jesus looks like?

Maybe he's been here all along, simply waiting for one of us to say, "Hey, don't I know you? Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" And maybe in our haste to find the answers, we have been looking at Jesus all this time and still haven't seen him. These disciples finally got the picture when Jesus shared a meal with them. All of their discussion and debate and questions melted away when Jesus simply handed them a piece of bread. Maybe our questions can be as easily answered. Maybe it's bread we're looking for.

READER 9: Maybe when we find Jesus he'll be right next to us, offering the bread of life we need and patiently waiting for us to notice who he is. *(READER 9 removes a puzzle piece. READERS 7, 8, and 9 may be seated. READERS 10, 11, and 12 enter and cross to microphone at Center Stage.)*

READER 10: John 20:24–29.

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

READER 11: If we could just see Jesus, wouldn't life be a lot

easier? If we just knew that he was really there, if he would just show up this morning and we could touch him, see him, know for sure that he's there for us. If he'd just say to us, "Peace be with you," wouldn't we feel that peace, and wouldn't it be lovely? Right now our doors aren't locked, but even if they were, Jesus could walk right in regardless.

Are you so very sure that he hasn't walked in? Someone, somewhere, believed that Jesus was here, and then made this building into a haven for those seeking to share that faith. Do you need to look more closely, feel more deeply?

READER 12: Jesus is saying to you, "Stop doubting and believe. It's really me. Know this and be blessed." Can you see him more clearly now? *(READER 12 removes a puzzle piece, then READERS 10, 11, and 12 may be seated. READERS 13, 14, and 15 enter and cross to microphone at Center Stage.)*

READER 13: John 21:4-7.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him and jumped into the water.

READER 14: Why was it so hard for these disciples to believe that the tomb was empty? Had they not heard, seen, felt, and eaten with Jesus? Yet once again, here they are with a miracle right in front of them, and they



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