

SYMBOLS OF THE CROSS

by Beth Bronson Troop



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Symbols of the Cross

A sunrise service drama

by Beth Bronson Troop

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Narrator

Reader 1 (Basin and towel)

Reader 2 (Bread and chalice)

Reader 3

(Prayer — extras serve as Prayer Presenters)

Reader 4 (Bag of coins)

Reader 5 (Red strips of cloth)

Reader 6 (Water)

Reader 7 (Crown of thorns)

Reader 8 (Nails)

Reader 9

(Forgiveness — extras serve as Forgiveness Presenters)

Reader 10 (Stone)

Reader 11 (Linen cloth)

Reader 12 (Cross)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Casting

This presentation requires no memorization and allows for a flexible number of participants. With large groups, a different person might serve as Reader for each symbol, while someone else holds up the symbol. For smaller groups, the Reader might hold up the symbol while also reading about it. Another option is for the same person to serve as the Reader throughout while the presenters rotate.

Presentation Time

Approximately 25-30 minutes.

Props

Large cross, basin of water and a towel, loaf of bread and a chalice, a small cloth drawstring bag with coins inside, strips of red cloth, a pitcher containing water, a crown or grapevine wreath resembling the crown of thorns, nails, large stone (to symbolize the stone used to seal the tomb), a white sheet (linen cloth).

Setting

You will need a podium or lectern near the cross. You will also need a table on either side of the podium. The cross stands at the front, with the towel, bag of coins, crown of thorns, white cloth, and the red cloth strips hanging from it. The nails, rock, and basin of water lie at the foot of the cross. The bread and chalice and pitcher of water should sit on an altar or table near the cross. One presenter at a time (or each Reader) will hold one of the symbols as it is mentioned. When the items are presented, the participants should stand to the side so they will not obstruct any of the items. As each item that is on or near the cross is presented, it is removed and placed to the side on a table so that by the end the cross stands empty.

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1 *(The cross has all the symbols arranged on and around it. The*
 2 *NARRATOR enters and stands at the podium.)*

3 Narrator: Here we stand, sinners at the cross that bore the
 4 shame of our transgressions through the sacrifice of our
 5 savior, Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he
 6 gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him
 7 will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his
 8 Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it” (John
 9 3:16-17).

10 God sent his Son to us in a form we could relate to and
 11 understand: as a baby. He grew up and lived a human
 12 existence like us, experiencing trials and temptations,
 13 pain and sorrow, joy and laughter, just as we do. As an
 14 adult he was baptized by John the Baptist, after which
 15 the Spirit of God descended upon him in the form of a
 16 dove, and a voice proclaimed, “This is my beloved Son,
 17 and I am fully pleased with him” (Matthew 3:17).
 18 Afterward, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert,
 19 where he fasted for forty days and forty nights, prevailing
 20 over all the temptations Satan placed before him. “ ‘Get
 21 out of here, Satan,’ Jesus told him. For the scriptures say,
 22 ‘You must worship the Lord your God; serve only him’ ”
 23 (Matthew 4:10).

24 Jesus then began his ministry, with the goal of
 25 carrying out his heavenly Father’s will — his death and
 26 resurrection — by which he would become our Savior.
 27 Knowing what he faced, Jesus allowed himself to be “led
 28 as a lamb to the slaughter,” thus conquering the sins of
 29 all by his endurance upon the cross.

30 On Easter morning, we are reminded of the Son of God
 31 who died in our place and rose victorious over sin and
 32 death so that we might be forgiven and receive the
 33 promise of eternal life. Because of Christ’s death and
 34 resurrection, God’s mercy reaches out to us through his
 35 Son. But what a path our Savior walked, and what a

price he paid as he carried out God's will on our behalf.
 The many symbols of the cross bear witness to his
 tremendous and everlasting love for all humankind.
*(NARRATOR exits. READER 1 enters, retrieves the basin and
 towel from the cross, and stands at podium.)*

READER 1: *(Holding up basin and towel)* Although Jesus knew
 that he would soon be arrested, he spent his final hours
 with the twelve disciples, still teaching and guiding,
 knowing his time for such opportunities was running out.
 Soon after gathering, Jesus surprised his disciples by
 taking part in the lowly job of washing their feet, a task
 relegated to the lowliest of slaves. But since no one
 around the table willingly offered to wash the dry, dusty
 feet of the others, Jesus used the occasion to share his
 love further with his disciples.

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his
 hour had come to leave this world and return to his
 Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his
 love ... Jesus knew that the Father had given him
 authority over everything and that he had come from
 God and would return to God. So he got up from the
 table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his
 waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to
 wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel
 he had around him" (John 13:1, 3-5). Peter resisted Jesus'
 attempts to wash his feet at first, until he understood that
 Jesus was providing an example to his disciples — as
 well as to all of us today — of humble servitude. When
 we are willing to serve others with humility and treat
 people with respect regardless of their status, we can
 share God's greatest blessings and love with them. If
 even the Son of God is willing to serve others, how much
 more should we? *(READER 1 places towel and basin on
 table, then exits. READER 2 enters, retrieves bread and chalice
 from table near cross, and stands at podium.)*

READER 2: *(Holding bread and chalice)* While at the Passover meal that same evening, Jesus broke the bread and presented the wine, introducing a new covenant between God and humans, decreeing that all who partake should do so in remembrance of Him. “As they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread and asked God’s blessing on it. Then he broke it into pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take it and eat it, for this is my body.’ And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, ‘Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which seals the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many’ ” (Matthew 26: 26-28).

Today, Jesus still calls us to his holy table, to eat of his body and drink of his blood, reminding us that through his sacrifice we are forgiven. As Jesus calls, how will we respond? *(READER 2 places bread and chalice on the table, then exits. READER 3 and PRAYER PRESENTERS enter. PRAYER PRESENTERS kneel at the cross in prayer.)*

READER 3: In the final hours before Jesus’ arrest, he took three of his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane and asked them to wait with him while he prayed. At this critical time in his life and mission, Jesus knew that only through fervent prayer would he find the physical and spiritual strength to withstand the agony awaiting him. He did not give up, but instead sought God’s help in order to complete the mission for which he had been sent to earth.

“And they came to an olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, ‘Sit here while I go and pray’ ... He told them, ‘My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me.’ He went on a little farther and fell face down on the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, that awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for

1 you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet
2 I want your will, not mine' ” (Mark 14:32, 34-36).

3 God remains with us through both serenity and pain,
4 successes and failures, all of which can fulfill his perfect
5 will if we let him. How often do we seek to do *his* will
6 rather than our own? If Jesus was prepared to follow
7 God's plan even to an excruciating death, what is it that
8 holds *us* back from doing God's will? (*READER 3 and*
9 *PRAYER PRESENTERS exit. READER 4 enters, retrieves bag*
10 *of coins from cross, and stands at podium.*)

11 **READER 4:** (*Holding bag of coins high*) A small amount of
12 money resulted in a costly outcome. For a mere thirty
13 pieces of silver, Judas betrayed Jesus. With one man's
14 decision, the fulfillment of Jesus' purpose in this world
15 was set in motion. “Now Jesus was in great anguish of
16 spirit, and he exclaimed, ‘The truth is, one of you will
17 betray me!’ As soon as Judas had eaten the bread, Satan
18 entered into him. Then Jesus told him, ‘Hurry. Do it
19 now’ ... So Judas left at once, going out into the night”
20 (John 13:21, 27, 30).

21 Later that evening, as Jesus finished praying in the
22 Garden of Gethsemane, Judas carried out his final act of
23 betrayal as he “arrived with a mob that was armed with
24 swords and clubs. They had been sent out by the leading
25 priests and other leaders of the people. Judas had given
26 them a prearranged signal: ‘You will know which one to
27 arrest when I go over and give him the kiss of greeting.’
28 So Judas came straight to Jesus. ‘Greetings, Teacher!’ he
29 exclaimed and gave him the kiss. Jesus said, ‘My friend,
30 go ahead and do what you have come for.’ Then the
31 others grabbed Jesus and arrested him” (Matthew 26:47-
32 50).

33 Only later did Judas truly recognize the enormous
34 consequences of his decision. “When Judas, who had
35 betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned

to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and other leaders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed an innocent man.'

'What do we care?' they retorted. 'That's your problem.'

Then Judas threw the money onto the floor of the temple and went out and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:3-5).

Will we stand with Jesus or betray him for the temptations of this temporal world, as glamorous or well-intentioned as they might appear at first? Are we prepared to accept the consequences of our choices? Are they worth it? (*READER 4 places the bag of coins on table, then exits. READER 5 enters, retrieves red strips of cloth from cross, and stands at podium.*)

READER 5: (*Holding up red strips of cloth*) These red strips of cloth represent the stripes of blood and the physical pain that filled Jesus' body after his arrest, as he was whipped, beaten, and flogged for our sakes. "So Pilate ... ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him" (Matthew 27:26). He endured this agony in silence, knowing that his death would be an eternal sacrifice for all and that all who seek him would find salvation. "He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. From prison and trial they led him away to his death. But who among the people realized that he was dying for their sins — that he was suffering their punishment?" (Isaiah 53:7-8).

Jesus suffered in silence, regardless of the injustice of his treatment, because his love for us was so great. Today, do we truly grasp the tremendous suffering that

1 **Jesus endured on our behalf?** (*READER 5 places red strips*
 2 *of cloth on table, then exits. READER 6 enters, retrieves the*
 3 *pitcher of water from the cross area, and stands at podium.*)

4 **READER 6:** (*Holding up pitcher of water*) **Jesus was taken**
 5 **before Pilate, the Roman governor who oversaw that**
 6 **region of the Roman Empire, but Pilate could find no**
 7 **guilt in him. Try as he might to release Jesus based on**
 8 **insufficient evidence, Pilate feared an uprising among the**
 9 **Jewish people should he do so. Rather than take a solid**
 10 **stand in Jesus' defense, Pilate sought compromise,**
 11 **allowing the crowd to choose one prisoner for**
 12 **release — Jesus or Barabbas, a convicted murderer. The**
 13 **crowd chose Barabbas. As a symbol to the people, Pilate**
 14 **washed his hands in a basin of water and said, "I am**
 15 **innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility"**
 16 *(Matthew 27:24b). Then he sent him away to be flogged*
 17 **and crucified.**

18 Where do we stand for Jesus? Is the fire of the Holy
 19 Spirit burning within us to proclaim the love of Christ,
 20 or are we, like Pilate, lukewarm, washing our hands of
 21 any guilt, living on "Christian cruise control"? (*READER*
 22 *6 places pitcher of water on table, then exits. READER 7 enters*
 23 *and retrieves crown of thorns from cross, then stands at*
 24 *podium.*)

25 **READER 7:** (*Holding crown of thorns*) **After Jesus had already**
 26 **been flogged with a lead-tipped whip, his body torn and**
 27 **bloodied, the Roman soldiers mocked him, beat him, and**
 28 **pushed a crown of sharp thorns upon his head. "Some of**
 29 **the governor's soldiers took Jesus into their**
 30 **headquarters and called out the entire battalion. They**
 31 **stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They made**
 32 **a crown of long, sharp thorns and put it on his head, and**
 33 **they placed a stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then**
 34 **they knelt before him in mockery, yelling, 'Hail! King of**
 35 **the Jews!'** And they spit on him and grabbed the stick

and beat him on the head with it. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him out to be crucified” (Matthew 27:27-31).

Though we were not among the Roman soldiers who beat and mocked Jesus, we must be careful not to tolerate the mocking of Jesus’ name or the Christian church for which he serves as the cornerstone. Such sins of omission are serious spiritual blows to Jesus, just as the beatings and the crown of thorns were to him physically. (*READER 7 places crown of thorns on table, then exits. READER 8 enters, retrieves nails from the cross area, then stands at podium.*)

READER 8: (*Holding nails up high*) After carrying the cross upon his bloody and nearly broken body, Jesus endured still more suffering as nails were driven into his hands and feet to hold him to the cross, with human transgressions serving as the mallet with each strike. Were it not for the sins of humankind, Jesus would not have had to die on the cross, bearing unimaginable pain that crushed his physical body and experiencing spiritual separation from the Father because of our guilt that he carried with him.

“Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed. All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the guilt and sins of us all” (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Jesus remained steadfast in his love for us, even to his last breath. Let us show our love for *him* by sharing *his* love with others. (*READER 8 places nails on table, then exits. READER 9 and FORGIVENESS PRESENTERS enter.*)

1 *FORGIVENESS PRESENTERS encircle the cross, looking*
 2 *upward).*

3 **READER 9:** Even as Jesus suffered on the cross, his tortured
 4 body near death, he prayed for those who persecuted
 5 him: “Father, forgive these people, because they don’t
 6 know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34a). That prayer is
 7 as relevant to us today as it was to those who stood
 8 around the cross the day he died. How often, by our
 9 choices, do we follow paths similar to those who
 10 persecuted Jesus on the cross? Instead, may we seek his
 11 forgiveness for our ever sinful nature and be as forgiving
 12 toward others as Jesus was — *and continues to be* —
 13 toward us. (*READER 9 and FORGIVENESS PRESENTERS*
 14 *exit. READER 10 enters, retrieves stone from cross area, and*
 15 *stands at podium.)*

16 **READER 10:** (*Holding up stone*) A large stone was rolled across
 17 the front of the tomb in which Jesus was laid after he
 18 died. The next day, the chief priests and Pharisees asked
 19 Pilate to post guards at the tomb to prevent Jesus’
 20 followers from rolling aside the stone and stealing Jesus’
 21 body. However, no large stone or man-made plan could
 22 stop God’s purpose from being fulfilled, which was for
 23 Jesus to rise from the dead and become our Savior.

24 “Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was
 25 dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out
 26 to see the tomb. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake,
 27 because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven
 28 and rolled aside the stone and sat on it. His face shone
 29 like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The
 30 guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell
 31 into a dead faint.

32 “Then the angel spoke to the women. ‘Don’t be afraid!’
 33 he said. ‘I know you are looking for Jesus, who was
 34 crucified. He isn’t here! He has been raised from the
 35 dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his

body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples he has been raised from the dead ... ’ ” (Matthew 28:1-7). *(READER 10 places stone on table, then exits. READER 11 enters, retrieves white cloth from cross, then stands at podium.)*

READER 11: *(Holding up white cloth)* After Jesus died, two members of the Jewish high council, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, removed Jesus from the cross and wrapped his body in a linen cloth for burial before the Sabbath arrived. “Together they wrapped Jesus’ body in a long linen cloth with the (embalming) spices, as is the Jewish custom of burial. The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. And so, because it was the day of preparation before the Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there” (John 19:38-42).

But when the disciples arrived at Jesus’ tomb on the third day, they saw not his body but the empty linen cloth in which Jesus had been buried. Jesus’ body was not there! “(John) stooped and looked in and saw the linen cloth lying there, but he didn’t go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying to the side.

Then the other disciple also went in, and he saw and believed — for until then they hadn’t realized that the Scriptures said he would rise from the dead” (John 20:5-10).

Though we have not seen the physical evidence of the resurrected Savior as his disciples did, by faith we know he defeated death and came back to life. He continues to share his love with us and will live within our hearts through the Holy Spirit if we just ask him. *(READER 11 places white cloth on table, then exits. READER 12 enters.)*

READER 12: Jesus bore the weight of our sins upon his



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