

The Easter Season

By Linda M. Goens

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NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT
Linda Goens

This drama includes 10 skits for every Sunday and holy day beginning with Ash Wednesday. Its purpose is to portray the people who surrounded Jesus during his last weeks on earth as real people who struggled with the same problems dealing with Jesus' life and lessons as people today.

In addition to elaborating on a particular incident or lesson of the Bible, the characters reflect certain characteristics of the human condition. Some tend to approach Jesus and his teachings with their intellects, some with their emotions, some a commitment of the soul that is beyond heart and mind.

Most of the Lenten dramas focus on the women in Jesus' life while Holy week, of necessity, begins to focus on the men in his life. The final scripts show the confusion of Maundy Thursday, the horror of Good Friday, and the joy of Easter Sunday.

It is possible for a church to do some and not all of the scripts if so desired. This lends versatility to the productions. Further, the entire production can be done as readers theatre, simplifying things considerably. This is what our church did, and it worked beautifully.

Like our church, you may be surprised how much your actors or readers will learn about scripture as well as about the characters they portray. Our readers were often inspired in ways I did not anticipate, nor did they. This drama was a huge success, surpassing even my dreams. I hope your church will find it as inspiring.

EASTER SEASON

Dramas: There are 10 dramas for all the Holy days and Sundays in Lent, some consisting of more than one scene.

Scripture: At the beginning of each skit is the scripture reference(s) on which the drama is based. The minister or leader may read the scripture as a lead-in to the play.

Settings: Jerusalem, Bethany, and various places in Galilee.

Number of characters: Total 23, however most skits just use four or five people at a time.

Performance time: The dramas take place over a period of eight weeks. Scripts are from 1 to 6 pages and run no longer than 15 minutes, except for Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday which are longer.

Costuming: Biblical. If done as Reader's Theater, costumes are not necessary.

Props: For complete prop list, see back of playbook. If done as Reader's Theater, the only props used are for Holy week and are optional - that is, symbols of the trials and crucifixion of Jesus.

Reader's Theatre advantage: As director, I had each week's readers practice once before the actual performance to allow for more dramatic reading and also to allow readers to become familiar with the characters. There are a number of benefits to approaching the dramas as Reader's Theater, with participants reading from scripts rather than memorizing lines.

First, the performers, themselves, are not so nervous with the worry over forgotten lines, and thus allow themselves to get into the characters they play, concentrating on expression.

Second, considering how many characters this drama requires, a small congregation would find it difficult to come up with that many actors willing to memorize lines; coming up with readers, however, is far less a problem. In fact, some people volunteer who have never before shown an interest in performing, many proving to have talent hidden due to fear of memorizing lines.

Third, an audience such as church congregations may enjoy the readings more because they don't suffer any tension in the fear a fellow worshipper might be embarrassed about forgetting a line. Because there is little danger of a disaster, the congregation can relax, too.

And finally, experience proves that no one seems to be the least bothered by scripts open on the laps of the readers. Apparently, it doesn't detract at all from the message. In addition, there are other more obvious benefits to a Reader's Theater: no costumes to worry about, no scenery, no props.

Production Variety: There is considerable leeway in how the dramas are presented. They may be produced each week or several may be presented at once, separating them with music or scripture. There are many wonderful hymns that elaborate on the theme in any given drama. For example, "Something Beautiful" works well with Rachel's dialogue that Jesus has done something beautiful with her life. And "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" adds touching emphasis to John's Good Friday monologue. A director might do almost anything with these dramas, even to including all of them in one performance and having the characters memorize all the lines, or the holy week dialogues might be used without the earlier Lenten dramas.

While the versatility of the Lenten dramas and the unbelievable ease in producing make them attractive for church use, the result is the most important. The enthusiastic response from audiences proves the dramas reach people in such a way as to enhance their worship experience. That the scripts move people is attested to by the laughter, tears, prayers, and songs of the congregations who see them.

THE DRAMAS

ASH WEDNESDAY
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT
PALM SUNDAY
MAUNDY THURSDAY
GOOD FRIDAY
EASTER SUNDAY

PROPS

Ash Wednesday: Stool for Jesus, water buckets for both women.

1st Sunday: Fruit, towels, work table.

2nd Sunday: Three benches, sewing for Gertrude.

3rd Sunday: Market baskets for 3 women.

4th Sunday: None.

5th Sunday: Two benches, small wooden bird cage for Mary, cup of water for Martha.

Palm Sunday: Flowers, palms, banners.

Maundy Thursday: Table in church parlor set with fruit, crackers, and punch for the congregation; sanctuary table for communion; bowl of water and towel for Jesus. Also, crucifixion symbols such as a pouch and coins, whip, crown of thorns, a robe, large nails, sponge, sword, cross, and a sign that reads ENRI.

Good Friday: Black cloths to cover pulpit area.

Easter: Packs, staffs for Cleopas and Joel; ointments and spices for women at the tomb.

Ash Wednesday

Theme: Finding Jesus.

Scripture: John 4:10.

Setting: A well outside Samaria.

Characters:

RACHEL: the woman at the well in Samaria.

HANNA: who is a pure woman.

JESUS

(In Scene 1 JESUS stands or sits on a stool set considerably back from those of the women. There is no communication among these characters. HANNA, at one side of the stage, speaks to the congregation as if they are together, and she's explaining how things are. RACHEL, at the other side of the stage, talks to herself. Jesus, USC, speaks to a general audience with neither Rachel nor Hanna hearing him. In the second scene when Jesus communicates with Rachel, they are side by side. Both women may carry water buckets.)

Scene 1

JESUS: I am the light of the world, he who believes in me shall never die but have everlasting life.

HANNA: All the women in the village go for water every morning, early, before the sun rises in the sky. We talk then. It is our best chance in a busy day to share troubles, joys and silliness. Yes, sometimes in those early morning hours, we are little girls again, giggling and playing together in the pure cool light of dawn.

RACHEL: I come for water in the heat of the day. Alone.

HANNA: There is one woman who doesn't join us. She is a wicked woman - promiscuous, and impure. We can't associate with her.

RACHEL: I don't like what I have become, but it's too late to change.

JESUS: I have come not to condemn but to save.

End of Freeview

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