



Were You There?

A Community Lenten Observance
sponsored by Redeemer Lutheran Church
East Falls, Philadelphia, Pa.

March 5, 2008

Opening Music

Greeting

Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting. The abundant grace and mercy of God be with you all.

And also with you.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we meet this evening we ponder the sacrifice you made for us despite our unworthiness. We can only imagine the horror and anguish of those who stood by the cross and can measure it only against the losses we experience in our own lives. As we remember the crucifixion help us to understand your plan for your people and make us one with those who stood on the hillside outside of Jerusalem so many years ago. **Amen**

Hymn: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble,
Tremble, tremble!
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?



ACT ONE-Judas

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Confession

Rock of our salvation,
we confess that we live in opposition to your gracious will for us. We have failed to be a blessing to others by turning our backs on the needs of the poor, and by exploiting your creation without regard for those who come after us. By our sins, we are exiled from your presence; our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. Breathe your Spirit on us, O God that we may live.

God's love is shown to us that while we still were sinners, Christ died for us. Christ died so that we may be forgiven. He freed us so that we might live freely as God's people in God's world.

Hymn: What Wondrous Love Is This

What wondrous love is this,
O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse
For my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

When I was sinking down,
Sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down
Beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside His crown
For my soul, for my soul,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb
I will sing, I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb
Who is the great "I AM,"
While millions join the theme,
I will sing, I will sing,
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

Psalm 27

responsively

The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.

Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

Hear my voice when I call, O LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.

My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"

Your face, LORD, I will seek.

Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Savior.

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.

Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.

I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

Hymn: Were You There?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, Tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?



ACT TWO-Mary

Solo (Celebration Hymnal-341)

Jesus, my Jesus,
Your love means so much to me.
Jesus, my Jesus
Your love is all that I need.

People join.

Jesus, my Jesus,
Your love means so much to me.
Jesus, my Jesus
Your love is all that I need.

Ephesians 5:8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Hymn: Were Your There?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble,
Tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?



ACT THREE-Mary Magdalene

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Hymn: Near the Cross

Jesus, keep me near the cross
There a precious fountain
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calvary's mountain.
**In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever,
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.**

Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and mercy found me,
There the Bright and Morning Star
Sheds its beams around me

Near the cross! O Lamb of God
Bring its scenes before me
Help me walk from day to day
With its shadows o'er me.

Near the cross I'll watch and wait
Hoping, trusting ever,
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river.

John 18:25—19:1

Please stand for the reading of the Gospel
As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled. Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

Hymn: Were Your There?

Were you there when he rose up from the dead?
Were you there when he rose up from the dead?
O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble,
Tremble, tremble.
Were you there when he rose up from the dead?



ACT FOUR-Peter

He's Alive (Sheet Music available on internet. Google: He's Alive Parton)

The gates and doors were barred
And all the windows fastened down
I spent the night in sleeplessness
And rose at every sound
Half in hope of sorrow
And half in fear the day
Would find the soldiers breakin' through
To drag us all away

And just before the sunrise
I heard something at the wall
The gate began to rattle
And a voice began to call
I hurried to the window
Looked down into the street
Expecting swords and torches
And the sound of soldiers' feet

But there was no one there but Mary
So I went down to let her in
John stood there beside me
As she told me where she'd been
She said they've moved Him in the night
And none of us know where
The stone's been rolled away
And now His body isn't there

We both ran towards the garden
Then John ran on ahead
We found the stone and empty tomb
Just the way that Mary said
But the winding sheet they wrapped Him in
Was just an empty shell
And how or where they'd taken Him
Was more than I could tell

Oh something strange had happened there
Just what I did not know
John believed a miracle
But I just turned to go
Circumstance and speculation
Couldn't lift me very high
'Cause I'd seen them crucify Him
Then I saw Him die

Back inside the house again
The guilt and anguish came
Everything I'd promised Him
Just added to my shame
When at last it came to choices
I denied I knew His name
And even if He was alive
It wouldn't be the same

But suddenly the air was filled
With a strange and sweet perfume
Light that came from everywhere
Drove shadows from the room
And Jesus stood before me
With His arms held open wide
And I fell down on my knees
And I just clung to Him and cried

Then He raised me to my feet
And as I looked into His eyes
The love was shining out from Him
Like sunlight from the skies
Guilt in my confusion
Disappeared in sweet release
And every fear I ever had
Just melted into peace

He's alive. Yes, He's alive.
Yes He's alive and I'm forgiven.
Heaven's gates are open wide.
He's alive. Yes, He's alive.
Oh He's alive and I'm forgiven.
Heaven's gates are open wide.
He's alive. He's alive.
Hallelujah. He's alive.
He's alive and I'm forgiven.
Heaven's gates are open wide.
He's alive. He's alive. He's alive.
I believe it. He's alive
Sweet Jesus

Hymn: Were Your There?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble,
Tremble, tremble!
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

ACT FIVE-You and I

Closing Prayer

Hymn: When I Survey

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God.
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood

See, from His head, his hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crowd?

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Dismissal

In our sorrow and in our joy, we are
witnesses to the sacrifice God made for us in
the life, death and resurrection of his Son,
Jesus Christ. Go tell the Good News.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

Were You There?

An Original Play by Members of
Redeemer Lutheran Church

The Players

Judas	Stanley Meena
Mary	Freda Gowling
Mary Magalene	Leticia Francis
Peter	Natty Leach
You and I	Kevin and Alec Meena

Were You There?

Theme song: Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Judas enters, carrying with him a rope and a bag of coins. (Props optional)

You ask, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

I was not there. Why?

Because I could not bear it.

Was I there *before* the crucifixion? Indeed, I was. And today I cannot help but wonder why I bothered. For 1000 days I followed our Lord. He asked me to follow him, and I did; I left my whole life behind me. But he took little notice. John was by his side. James, too, and Simon. (He will always be Simon to me, though the rest may call him Peter.) Simon was always front and center. I was a mere follower, little more.

I thought Jesus might notice me if I took a special job. I volunteered to watch over the money. It is not an easy job, we live on charity, the generosity of our following. It isn't easy to make ends meet, but I try. Nevertheless I was treated like one of the women followers, little more. There were times, even then, that Jesus clearly thought more of the women than of me. That woman, Mary, wasted a fortune pouring oil on his feet. I tried to stop her. We needed the money that oil could have brought. What good we could have done with that money! But he humiliated me in front of everyone. "You will always have the poor among you," he said. He seemed to be shoving me aside. Have I not been loyal to him all of these years? Where has my loyalty gotten me?

I am disgraced. I can never again be called one of the Twelve. What is happening, even as I speak, is all my fault. The authorities came to me. They offered me money. . . easy money. How could it hurt? Jesus could raise people from the dead. Surely, he could save himself from any threat these people might bring. So I took their gold and I showed them the way to the olive grove. I have walked that path many times before in the dark. It was our Lord's favorite spot. It was easy to show the soldiers the way. When I saw Jesus standing there among the others, I thought I might feel something. I thought I might even change my mind. I half hoped I would change my mind. But I felt nothing. I walked up to him. I paused, waiting for him to greet me. He said nothing; I gave him every chance, but he spoke only to the soldiers as if I were not even there. So I stepped closer to him as if to kiss him. And then he spoke his last words to me. "Are you betraying me with a kiss?" he asked. He couldn't have hurt me deeper had he struck me with a sword. I gave him the kiss he asked for and I ran.

And now everything is out of my control and I am condemned. Condemned! Not by any court. I did nothing wrong. I turned in a wanted man! Yet I am condemned by the world. I have nowhere to go, no friend to hold me. Was this why my mother gave me life? Is this why she once held me close and nourished me? How can this be my legacy? I am nothing and I can never hope to be more. There will be no one to remember me or mourn my death. My name will never be honored. No mother will ever again look upon her newborn son and call him "Judas."

Theme song continues:

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Mary enters.

Was I there when they nailed him to the tree?

I was there. I wailed with horror and grief as the soldiers marched him to Golgotha and drove nails through his wrists and feet. How could this be happening?

Oh, yes! I was there, just as I have been there for all of the last 30 years or so. I was there when the angel came and told me I was to be his mother. I was little more than a girl, betrothed but not yet married. But I rejoiced at the odd news and made the best of my very peculiar circumstances. I was there when he drew his first breath. It could have been so terrible, coming into the world without any of the comforts of a home. He was born in a stable among animals. Was this God's plan? But today, I look back on it with wonder and fond memories. In the end, everyone was so kind to us.

It was never easy for us. Joseph and I had to run away with our newborn. We didn't know when it would be safe to return. Angels watched over us every step of the way. I came to put my trust in them and I looked for their help even as I watched my son die.

I always knew that some great drama lay in store for my son. I've waited. I've prayed. I've watched and I've been obedient. God promised great things were to happen. But the great was made up of the little. He proved himself with miracles —one little miracle after another. I always believed in him and slowly others came to believe in him too. Nevertheless, I stood at the foot of the cross, watching him die. Was this the end?

It has been a long journey. I am getting old now, too old to live like a nomad following Jesus and his friends all over Galilee and Judea. I have often wished he would settle down. But his life, my life have never been our own. I have had to learn acceptance.

But what mother can accept the cruelist of deaths? I am fighting the feelings of anger and hate. John has taken me under his wing. I know I will be cared for. But Jesus is my son. I must do something. But what?

Theme song continues:

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Mary Magdalene enters, carrying a basket of herbs.

Background music C-635 "I Come to the Garden Alone."

Was I there when they laid him in the tomb?

I was there and what a wonder it has all been. My head is still spinning.

I watched him die. It was terrible and for those of us who loved him it was made more horrific by the circus going on around us. The soldiers cared for none of us. They showed no respect, tossing dice for his possessions. They were soldiers carrying out orders. For all they knew our Lord was no better than the thieves hanging on either side of him. I am used to being treated badly. I am Mary Magdalene, a woman once possessed by demons. But this was Jesus hanging on the cross. Surely, they had heard the rumors about his wonderful miracles.

I loved Jesus. His miracles had turned my life around. There was nothing I wouldn't do for him. And yet I stood by his cross, at his feet, and felt totally helpless. He was dying and I could not stop what was happening. The least I could do and the most I could do was stay by his side. As he hung there, dying, a part of me was dying, too.

We would have liked to have buried Jesus properly but the Sabbath was upon us and we could not break Sabbath law. We had to hurry. Fortunately, Joseph and Nicodemus were able to find a place to lay his body. I must remember to thank them.

After the Sabbath, I and the other women rushed to his grave. We had gathered the burial spices and planned to put our Lord to proper rest properly. I wasn't sure how we would do this. We heard that soldiers were guarding the grave. We hoped they would help us move the stone. But when we got there, the grave was not sealed. We were frightened. What had happened to the soldiers? Were we in danger? What would happen to us? I turned to run back to place where the others were staying. I wanted to find help. But the men would not believe me, all except John and Peter. They rushed to the grave and I followed them, a bit less frightened for having them with me. They saw that what I had told them was true and they left. But I couldn't leave. Something held me to that spot. And then, in the quiet, a man appeared. He just stood there. I thought, "This must be the gardener. He will know what is going on." So I asked him. But then. . . Could it be?! It was my Jesus. "Teacher," I exclaimed. And he spoke to me. He was alive! And suddenly, I felt alive again.

Theme song continues:

Were you there when He rose up from the dead?

Peter enters

I wasn't there, but I was always near.

I had been with him on the night we last dined together. What a wonderful night! We were all together. The women prepared a marvelous meal. Yet somehow it was strangely ominous. We could feel that something was about to happen. In fact, Jesus was telling us something was about to happen. We knew there could be danger, but things had been going so well lately! We had just been received into the city like princes. We were wildly popular.

Things had never looked so good! I was with Jesus barely a week ago, when I saw him raise our friend Lazarus from the dead. I stood with the crowd of people and watched Lazarus walk out of his tomb, smelling none the better for having been dead for four days, but there he was, walking on his own two feet and scratching at the burial clothes wrapped around his face. Jesus was a power to be reckoned with. What had we to fear?

Yet Jesus insisted that "the hour" was at hand. What could this mean? All I could do was promise to stand with him. I gave him my word. But he didn't believe me. How could he doubt me? Had I not been with him through every crisis of the last three years. In good times and bad, I, Peter, was by his side. He gave me my name. I was his Rock. He had said so. How could he think I wouldn't stay with him through whatever unpleasantness lay in store. He said I would deny him. After three years of loyalty, he thought so little of me!

I set out to keep my word. When danger came I stepped forward to defend him. The soldiers came to the garden to take him away and I tried to stop them. I was brave. I drew first blood! I chopped off a soldier's ear. It was I, Peter, against the Roman army. I did my best but Jesus would have nothing of it. He gave the soldiers the upper hand. I was trying to do my part. And now that they had Jesus, I was nothing. I wasn't about to look for more trouble. And so when the woman asked if I was one of his followers, I feigned ignorance. I pretended that I didn't know him. She was of no significance. How could a little lie hurt. But then I heard a rooster crow. It was just as Jesus had said it would be. Jesus knew me better than I knew myself. He was right to doubt me. I am so ashamed I can barely show my face. But still, even in my humiliation, the others look to me for strength.

When the women came to my door this morning and told us of the empty tomb, the others stood around in disbelief. But I had to see for myself. John came with me. John is still young. He easily outran me. I caught up to him and found him peering into the doorway of the tomb. I pushed him aside and crawled inside. The tomb was empty! . . . just as the women had said. There, lying on the stone slab, were the burial linens, folded neatly as if they had never been used.

All the pain I had been feeling was lifted. He was alive. I was alive. I knew not what lay in store. But Jesus, my Lord and Savior, was alive.

Theme song continues:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Child or Family, taking turns paragraph by paragraph. One carries a large cross

Was I there? How could I be there? I was not yet born. Centuries would pass before I would be born. No, I was not there.

Yet somehow, I feel as if I were there. Had I been there could I have changed anything? No! The prophets foretold what was to happen and there was no stopping Jesus' destiny. Judas could not stop himself. His mother, Mary, could not stop it. Peter, the heart and soul of the disciples, could do nothing to stop Jesus from dying and his devoted friend, Mary Magadene, could not stop it. God sent Jesus to save us and nothing could stop God's plan.

But all of their stories live on today. We can find bits of each of their testimonies in our own faith journeys. We are part of the story and in that sense, we too were standing on the hill, looking helplessly upon the cross. But we were also present in the garden to experience renewed life. Whenever we tell the story, we are fulfilling God's plan. The Good News cannot be stopped. It is for each of us living and breathing today. It is for our children yet unborn.

God so loved the world that he sent his only son, that whosoever might believe in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

Jesus lives! In his death and resurrection, we have been given the gift of new life. Let us cherish God's gift and use his gift of renewed life to tell his story and share God's love and compassion to a hungry and thirsty world.

The cross is ours. We look upon it today with reverence, remembering God's sacrifice. Yet the branches of this tree are now empty. Jesus no longer hangs on the cross. He lives.