

Scene 6: The crucifixion

Bible

Matthew 26:47-27:65; Mark 14:43-15:41; Luke 22:47-23:49; John 18:1-19:37

Aim

To familiarise pupils with the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. To help the children understand the effect that this had on those who loved him and followed him. What sort of king is Jesus? A king who had to die.

Setting the scene

Following the scene in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest Caiaphas. Together with the priests and leaders, Caiaphas tried to find evidence of Jesus' blasphemy. Eventually, after some dubious plotting, they decided that Jesus should be put to death. He was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, to sanction this. Meanwhile, Peter told those who recognised him that he had not been with Jesus. Pilate could find no case against Jesus and tried to persuade the Jewish people to let him go, using the tradition at Passover time of setting free a prisoner. However, the leaders convinced the crowd to turn against Jesus and, in spite of his misgivings, Pilate agreed with the sentence. The scene was set for the ultimate penalty: a painful death on a wooden cross.

Character(s)

Narrator (pre-recorded on to the DVD)

Mary, mother of Jesus

Peter

Costumes

Mary is dressed in traditional eastern dress very much in the style seen in nativity pictures.

Peter wears a simple white T-shirt and jeans, or similar.

Scenery

A plain unadorned space, adjacent to the garden of Gethsemane scene.

Props

A screen with good visibility for the children.

A DVD of images, sounds and readings telling the story of the crucifixion (see suggested script below). Some ideas for reflections about the crucifixion are also available from sources, such as Lifewords.

DVD or video projector and compatible computer (for the presentation).

Lighting

The area needs to be dark for most of the time. A spotlight should be trained on the place where Mary and Peter speak. A domestic spotlight with a dimmer switch would be suitable. However, if a professional follow spot can be obtained, this adds atmosphere to the drama of the scene. Professional spots can often be borrowed from a local high school or hired from a theatrical lighting company.

The children are asked to move from the bushes and sit in a space near the screen. Gaffer or masking tape can be used to define the sitting area so that children do not encroach on the actors. Once the children are settled, the DVD is started.

The DVD comprises the following narration, accompanied by sounds and images.

Narrator: Many of the Jewish people were amazed at the things Jesus said and did and they believed in him. The chief priests and nation's leaders were very jealous of Jesus. They called a meeting at the home of Caiaphas, the high priest and secretly planned to have Jesus arrested and put to death.

'What do we do now?' they asked. 'If we let Jesus continue, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and take away what little power and privilege we still have.'

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the chief priests and asked

'How much will you give me if I help you arrest Jesus?' They paid Judas thirty silver coins and from then on he started looking for a good chance to betray Jesus.

A few days later, late at night, Jesus was alone with his friends in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas arrived with a mob of armed soldiers sent by the priests. He had told them beforehand, 'Arrest the man I greet with a kiss.' Judas walked right up to Jesus and said, 'Hello, teacher!' Then Judas kissed him and the men grabbed Jesus and arrested him.

Jesus was led off to the high priest. Then the chief priests and the nation's leaders tried to find someone to accuse Jesus of a crime, so they could put him to death. Finally, some men stood up and lied about him. The high priest stood up in the council and asked Jesus, 'Why don't you say something in your own defence? Don't you hear the charges they are making against you?' But Jesus kept quiet and did not say a word. The high priest asked him another question, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the glorious God?' 'Yes, I am!' Jesus answered. At once the high priest ripped his robe apart and shouted, 'Why do we need more witnesses? You heard him claim to be God! What is your decision?'

They tied up Jesus and led him off to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate questioned Jesus, but could find nothing wrong. Pilate knew that the chief priests had brought Jesus to him because they were jealous of his popularity, but, not wanting to cause trouble, Pilate sentenced Jesus to death. He ordered his soldiers to beat Jesus with a whip and nail him to a cross.

The soldiers made fun of Jesus and led him off to be nailed to a cross. At midday the sky turned dark and stayed that way until the middle of the afternoon. The sun stopped shining, and the curtain in the temple split down the middle. Jesus shouted, 'Father, I put myself in your hands!' Then he died.

(When the DVD ends a spotlight highlights Mary who walks in slowly from the side. She stands near the screen and delivers her script with overwhelming sadness.)

Mary: What have they done to my son? Why did they have to be so cruel?

Oh God, how could you let this happen? I trusted you! I trusted you and it came to this. Oh my son, why have you had to die in this way?

When I think back to the terrible journey to Bethlehem before you were born... and having to run away to Egypt to escape from King Herod when you were a tiny baby ... Remember how we thought we'd lost you that time in Jerusalem when you were only twelve years old?

All the wonderful things you did. You healed those who were unwell; you cured those who could not walk... you gave sight to those who could not see. How could it come to this?

So many people will remember what you did in your life... how you taught us about your Father God and helped us to understand about his kingdom.

I never thought it would be like this. I knew it would come, but, oh... it's so hard.

Oh Jesus, my son, I will miss you so much...

God, why did this have to happen?

It's so final.

(Mary quietly leaves as the spotlight fades. After a short space of time, Peter enters and the spotlight is brightened again.)

Peter: I'm a fisherman. I used to think a night at sea in a bad storm with no fish was bad enough. I thought I'd left that behind when I met Jesus. But now... I'm not sure... I'm so confused. Jesus is gone. They killed him. Three years of my life, everything I believed in... gone! I believed in Jesus. I gave up my home and my job. I left my family and joined him. The more I heard him speak, the more I saw what he did, the more certain I was that Jesus was special. I'll never forget the day that I suddenly realised so clearly... so clearly... that he was the Son of God. He was the one we had been waiting for. The one people had said would lead us to freedom. *He* was the one... but now he's gone... he's dead. I'm so confused. What did I do wrong?

Last week everyone was cheering and shouting when we came into Jerusalem.

What a day that was, everyone wanting to get close, everyone wanting to be involved. You should have been there! The next day, Jesus really upset the temple leaders, throwing the market traders out and upsetting the moneychangers. He seemed so angry, but people really approved of what he did. You should have seen the way he did it. You'd have loved it!

And then, at the Passover meal, as we were celebrating the way that God rescued our ancestors from slavery in Egypt, Jesus washing out feet like that and telling us to remember him as a servant. That was a strange but special time. He ate with us, washed our feet and then gave us bread and wine to remember him by. If you'd been there, you'd never forget.

I can't believe it's been just one day since we ate that special meal with Jesus. After the meal, we went to his favourite place: the garden outside the city. I wish I had stayed awake when Jesus went off to pray, but I didn't. And then the guards came to arrest him... that woke us up! I wanted to fight, to protect him. But Jesus stopped me. I'm sure we could have escaped, but he let them take him away.

They took him to the high priest's house. They were all waiting for him in the middle of the night. I followed. I wanted to see what was happening, see what Jesus would do. I wanted to be there. I was like a spy following right into the enemy camp, trying to keep away from the guards. It was there I said three times that I didn't know Jesus. How could I have said such a thing! But there was danger all around me. Jesus couldn't have heard me, he was too far away, but he turned and looked me straight in the eye. I knew I had let him down, denied him, betrayed him. I got really scared then and ran away.

As that dreadful night turned into dawn, I learnt that they had dragged Jesus in front of Caiaphas, the high priest, and then Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Troublemakers had stirred up the crowd and they were condemning Jesus to death. Pilate had handed him to the soldiers to be taken away. That was all before nine o'clock in the morning.

I heard that some of the women had seen Jesus die. The soldiers had beaten Jesus, and then they had killed him by hanging him on a cross. It was the middle of the afternoon when Jesus died, and there could be no mistaking that he was dead. The women saw his body taken down, wrapped in cloth and placed in a grave. It was a cave dug into the hillside with the entrance closed by a huge stone. I don't even know who owned the grave.

This is the worst day of my life. I did nothing. I just allowed it to happen. And now it's all over. I can't believe it's happened. I'm afraid the guards will come for me.

Somehow, I thought Jesus would always be with me, but that can't happen... can it? I want to leave Jerusalem... perhaps I should go back to fishing. I can't believe what's happened.

(Peter exits slowly as the spotlight fades. Depending on the attention span of the children, it may be necessary to shorten Peter's script, but the important elements of the story need to be retained.

After a short space of time for reflection the original storyteller appears from the direction that Peter and Mary left. He asks the children to quietly follow him.)