

## AT THE GATE CALLED BEAUTIFUL

A Play for Easter  
by  
Jewell Ellen Smith

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"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple."

--Acts 3:2

**TIME:** About 30 AD, the year after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

**PLACE:** A street in Jerusalem, near the temple gate commonly called the Beautiful Gate.

Also, the Antonia Fortress at the northwest corner of the temple complex.

**SYNOPSIS:** Zimri, a resident of Jerusalem, who for more than 40 years was a lame beggar sitting at the temple gate, encounters two Roman soldiers on patrol duty. And they listen with great interest as he tells of the many times he saw Jesus of Nazareth come to the temple:

When he was 40 days old,

When he was 12 years old,

When he drove out the money changers,

When he taught daily at the temple,

When his enemies conspired to have him put to death,

When an adulteress was brought before him.

One of the Roman soldiers, in turn, describes how his own detail of men mocked Jesus and crowned him with thorns. And, how Pontius Pilate gave in to the angry mob and ordered the crucifixion (this, despite his wife's warning), and finally how Pilate literally--with great ceremony--washed his hands of the whole matter.

The soldiers ask old Zimri to tell the story of his miraculous healing, at the hands of the apostles Simon Peter and John. And finally the young soldiers ask Zimri to teach them to know Jesus the Christ.

**THEME:** Every man is a beggar at the gate--At The Gate Called Beautiful--until he knows the Christ.

**CHARACTERS:** (in the order of appearance):

Zimri, a citizen of Jerusalem, once a crippled beggar.

Atticus, a Roman soldier who has been stationed in Jerusalem for two years.

Linus, a Roman soldier who has just arrived in Jerusalem.

Zimri, as a child beggar.

Zimri's father.

Simeon, a just and devout man who worships daily at the temple, as he awaits the coming of the Messiah.

A passerby

Two women

Anna, an aged prophetess who serves God "with fastings and prayers night and day."

Mary, the mother of the Christ Child.

Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Christ Child, when he was 40 days old.

Zimri, after he became an adult beggar.

A crowd of people from Galilee, including Mary and Joseph and the 12-year-old Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth, at age 12.

The doctors, learned men at the temple: Urijah, Jaazamiah, Jehu, Zebadiah, and Jekamiah

Three merchants

Christ Figure, at about age 30

A crowd of people, including a few small children, who hail Jesus as king.

Enemies of Jesus: Sadducee, Pharisee, and Scribe

Disciples of Jesus: Peter, James, and John

A poor man

An adulteress

Woman's First, Second, and Third Accusers

Roman soldiers: Longinius, Justinus, Titus, and two Guards

Centurion, a Roman army officer.

Mob of people, enemies of Jesus of Nazareth.

Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, or governor, of Judea.

Servant, an attendant in the Antonia Fortress.

Note: Some 40 or more adult players and extras are required. Obviously, several players can do two or more minor roles. Numerous players can appear in all three crowd scenes.

Players would do well to read from the Bible all the background references and quotations. This will help you see your character, do your role, and bring the story to life.

--JES

## **BIBLICAL REFERENCES FOR EASTER PLAY: At The Gate Called Beautiful**

Zimri's Miracle: Acts 3:1-11; 4:22.

Dedication of Infant Jesus and Simeon, Anna Parts: Luke 2:21-38.

Child Jesus in the Temple with Doctors: Luke 2:41-52.

Jesus Hailed as King, with loud "Hosanna to the Son of David!": Matthew 21:8-11, 15; Luke 19:37-40.

Jesus Casts out Moneychangers, Merchants: Luke 19:45-48. See also: Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-18, and Isaiah 56:7

Enemies Ask Jesus about Paying Tribute, Or Tax: Luke 20:19-26.

James & John Ask for High Positions: Matthew 20:20-23, Mark 10:35-45.

Jesus says to Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan": Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33

Teaching of Jesus about faith, prayer: Mark 11:22-26.

Teaching about God's Son: John 3:16.

Teaching that "I am the way, the truth, and the life.": John 14:6

Further teaching: John 11:25.

Soldiers Crown Jesus With Thorns: John 18:1-3, Matthew 27:27-30, Mark 15:16-20.

Claudia, the wife of Pontius Pilate: Matthew 27:19, 20

Jesus the Christ Before Pontius Pilate: Matthew 27:11-26, Mark 15:2-15, Luke 23:2-7, John 18:29-38

Pilate Washes His Hands: Matthew 27:24-26.

Woman Taken in Adultery: John 8:1-11.

### ACT I Scene 1

*Scene I: In Jerusalem, along the street in front of the temple, shortly before daylight. Old Zimri, faithful to his vow to praise God before dawn each day for the rest of his life, arrives at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, spreads down his mat and prostrates himself in silent prayer. He raises up his head and then bows down, again and again. Atticus and Linus, on patrol duty to enforce a newly imposed curfew, come walking around the corner and at first do not notice Zimri.*

LINUS: *enthusiastically* Atticus, you didn't tell me Jerusalem is such a big city!

ATTICUS: *in matter-of-fact tone* Yeah. It's big all right, especially when you get this night-time curfew patrol.

LINUS. I think I'm gonna like it here!

ATTICUS: *stopping to stare at his companion in amazement* Like it? You've gotta be kidding, Linus.

LINUS. No! I mean it!

ATTICUS: Linus, if you like being assigned to Jerusalem, they're gonna crown you with laurel and give you some sort of gold medal! You will be the only soldier in the whole Roman Army that ever liked Jerusalem! This is a stinkin' place!

LINUS. How come?

ATTICUS: Lots of reasons. Oh, I admit that the Antonia Fortress is nice. Our barracks, not bad. But the Jews hate the Romans. Naturally! And you can't blame 'em. So, there's always some kind of riot or disturbance going on. And that gets Pontius Pilate all riled up and worried that he will lose his position.

LINUS. Pontius Pilate?

ATTICUS: The governor. He's a snake! A ruthless coward! You should'a been here last year during the Jewish Passover Festival!

LINUS. What happened?

ATTICUS: On the orders of the great Pilate, our unit had to crucify three men--two wretched thieves and a poor fellow from Nazareth who hadn't done a thing! They called him "Jesus the Christ."

LINUS: *amazed, much interested* Well, what--

*Both soldiers see Zimri for the first time.*

ATTICUS: *pointing toward Zimri* Look! There's some old man who evidently hasn't heard about the curfew. I'll tell you about that crucifixion as soon as we get rid of him.

*Soldiers come up behind Zimri.*

ATTICUS: *in commanding tone* You there! Old man! Move on! *Zimri pays no attention, keeps praying. Atticus shakes Zimri's shoulder.* Don't you know about the curfew? Nobody is allowed on the streets from sundown to sunup! Orders of Pontius Pilate.

ZIMRI: *scrambling to his feet* Curfew? Well, I-- I-- I have-- I have to pray!

ATTICUS: You have to move on!

ZIMRI: But I must keep my vow! Every day, as long as I live, I have to thank God that I can walk!

ATTICUS: *with a wink at Linus* He's thanking his god he can walk! *to Zimri* What's so great about walking? We can all walk.

ZIMRI: Oh, but for forty years, I couldn't make a step!

ATTICUS: What do you mean, you couldn't make a step?

ZIMRI: *earnestly* Soldier, for forty years--every day for forty years--I sat right here at this temple gate begging!

ATTICUS and LINUS: *in unison* Begging?

ZIMRI: I was a crippled beggar. When I was just a little boy, my father would bring me down here to the Temple every morning to beg from all the people who passed by.

*Spotlight focuses on another part of stage where Zimri's father brings in the crippled child Zimri, sets him down on a pallet and then leaves. Several passersby drop coins in child's small basket and move on. Meanwhile, Old Zimri keeps talking*

And I sat there, at the temple gate called Beautiful, day after day, year after year--a lame beggar.

*Spotlight returns to soldiers and Zimri.*

LINUS: *seriously* Well, Old Man, why aren't you crippled now?

ZIMRI: *joyously* A miracle! A plain miracle! Done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth!

LINUS: Jesus of Nazareth? *turning to Atticus* Atticus, that's the name of the innocent man you said was crucified, isn't it?

ATTICUS: Yes. And later on we heard a very strange thing about him. It was said that he came back to life and walked out of his grave. But naturally, I didn't believe that.

ZIMRI: It's true!

LINUS: *to Zimri* Did you ever see this Jesus?

ZIMRI: Many times! Many, many times. The first time I saw him was a good thirty years ago. He was a baby in his mother's arms, and I was still a child. Would you like for me to tell you about it? It was a wonderful thing!

LINUS: Sure.

ATTICUS: I'd like to hear your story, too, old man, but it's getting daylight, and I've got to turn in my curfew report. *turns to Linus* Linus, since you're not officially on duty yet, you can stay here as long as you like, but I can't.

LINUS: I would like to hear about this man who walked out of his grave, that is, about when he was a baby.

ATTICUS: I'll tell you what: you stay here. I'll go sign in and make my report, and I'll meet you back here in exactly half an hour. Then we'll go have breakfast together.

LINUS: Sounds good to me.

*Atticus leaves, walking at a brisk pace.*

ZIMRI: Soldier, son, my name is Zimri. What is your name?

LINUS: It's Linus. And my friend is Atticus.

ZIMRI: Atticus and Linus, both good Roman names. Linus, this is a long, wonderful story I have to tell you. Let's find a place to sit down.

*Zimri and Linus move a short distance and sit on the temple steps, a bench in the courtyard, or whatever is convenient. Zimri keeps talking as they are getting settled.*

ZIMRI: As I was saying a few minutes ago, I was just a small boy when the infant Jesus was brought to the temple for the traditional dedication and sacrifice. Rich people sacrificed a lamb. Poor people brought two pigeons or two young turtledoves.

That's all according to our Law of Moses. But of course, you being a Roman, you don't know anything about that. But it's our religious custom to dedicate the firstborn son to the LORD.

Now it happened that at that time I had two special old friends who came to the temple every day to worship: a devout man named Simeon, and the prophetess Anna. I had great respect for both of them....

*Voice fades out as Simeon enters and stops to talk to the child Zimri. There is no break as Scene 2 opens.*

## - Scene 2

*Scene 2. At the temple gate. The child beggar Zimri is already in the spot where he always begs. Old Simeon, his robes dragging the ground, waddles in from right stage and goes straight over to talk to little Zimri. Since he is a friend, little Zimri does not hold out his coin basket. His face lights up when he sees Simeon approaching, and he waves to the old man.*

SIMEON: *cheerfully* Ah, good morning, my little friend! *pats Zimri's head, eases a coin into the basket*

CHILD ZIMRI: Good morning, Honorable Simeon.

SIMEON: It is a good morning, Zimri. Like all other days, "this is a day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

CHILD ZIMRI: Yes, Sir.

SIMEON: Zimri, you're too young to know much about God, but remember this: God will bless you. He has blessed me more than any other man in all Jerusalem.

CHILD ZIMRI: He has?

SIMEON: One day God will send the Redeemer--to save all Israel. He promised it long ago, by the old prophets.

And we've waited for this Redeemer, this Messiah, for hundreds and hundreds of years. My father and his father and his father's father waited.

And now God, by his Spirit, has told me that I, Simeon, will not see death until I have seen the LORD's Messiah!

CHILD ZIMRI: Will I get to see him?

SIMEON: I hope so, Zimri. Maybe today will be the day. I am very old now. So he has to come soon.

*Simeon walks slowly away and enters the temple door. A passerby gives the little beggar a coin, keeps going. From the opposite direction, two women--chatting to themselves--approach.*

CHILD ZIMRI: *holding his basket toward the women* Alms! Alms! Give alms to the lame!

*One woman stoops and drops a coin into the basket, and they hurry on, still talking and talking.*

1<sup>ST</sup> WOMAN: That poor beggar child!

2<sup>ND</sup> WOMAN: I wonder why he's crippled?

1<sup>ST</sup> WOMAN: His feet are all twisted. He was born that way. His mother told me that, and I hadn't even asked her.

2<sup>ND</sup> WOMAN: So there he must sit the rest of his life. A pity.

*The aged prophetess Anna enters, walking slowly and with great difficulty. She carries a basket and an extra shawl over her arm. She and the child beggar are glad to see each other. Both wave.*

ANNA: Zimri! Guess what I brought you this morning? *kneels down by child and starts uncovering contents of basket.*

CHILD ZIMRI: *eagerly, as he leans over to look into basket* What is it?

ANNA: I brought you a sweet cake! *takes out big round bun and hands it to child*

CHILD ZIMRI: *much delighted* Oh! A sweet cake! With honey on it? *takes cake*

ANNA: Yes! A big, fat cake with plenty of honey!

CHILD ZIMRI: *turning cake over in his hand and then giving it a big lick with his tongue* May I eat it now?

ANNA: Sure! Eat it whenever you like.

CHILD ZIMRI: Oh, thank you, Ma'am! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! *begins eating bun as if he is half starved*

ANNA: *standing up* Zimri, it's right chilly this morning. The wind is out of the east, and it feels like it's going right through me. So I want you to keep this wool cloth wrapped around you. *puts shawl around child, tucks it under his feet* If you get too cold, you could get sick.

CHILD ZIMRI: Yes, Ma'am.

ANNA: Has the honorable Simeon come yet?

CHILD ZIMRI: *still eating* Yes, Ma'am. He is real happy today. He said somebody is coming.

ANNA: Did he say who is coming?

CHILD ZIMRI: He told me, but I didn't understand it. *continues eating*

*Anna walks on, going toward a different door from the one Simeon used. She stops, talks to herself.*

ANNA: *pleasantly* Ah, I know who Old Simeon thinks is coming today. Bless his heart! Every day, every day he thinks the Messiah will come. I never saw anybody so patient as good Old Simeon. We all know the Messiah is coming some time. God has promised to send him. And the prophets have foretold it. Simeon just knows he will live to see him come. And he will. God has told him so.

I hope I can see him, too. But I don't know. *shakes head* I'm getting so old. Eighty-four already.

*walks a few steps, stops again*

But I can hope...

I wonder how the Messiah will look when he does come. Surely he will be a great king!

One of the prophets foretold that he will rule upon the throne of David! That he will be praised! That "his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace!" *Isaiah 9:6, 7*

Oh, I hope and pray I get to see the Messiah King!

*tone becomes more contemplative*

Yet, he may not be a king. One of the old prophecies handed down to us is that he will be a child. That "a virgin will conceive and bear a son." And he will be the one. *sighs, heavily*

Well, God in his wisdom will decide, and then send him. As a king. As a babe. It won't matter which he chooses. *exit*

*There is no break before the next scene. Child Zimri remains on his pallet, enjoying his bun. Mary, Joseph and Christ Child enter from left stage.*

### - Scene 3

*Scene 3: Mary and Joseph arrive at the temple gate called Beautiful. She carries the 40-day-old Christ Child. Joseph has a cage in which there are two live pigeons, or doves. Joseph is unsure of which entrance to take into the temple proper. They notice young Zimri and go to him.*

JOSEPH: *as he drops a coin into Zimri's basket* Beggar Boy, do you know which door we should take? We've come to dedicate the Child Jesus and to make the sacrifice, but we don't know where to find the priest. Do you know?

CHILD ZIMRI: I don't know. But Honorable Simeon knows, and he went that way.

*points to door used by Simeon; at the same time Simeon comes out*

That's him. That's Honorable Simeon. He knows everything.

*Joseph approaches Simeon. Mary lingers behind. Joseph and Simeon talk; but the audience does not hear them.*

JOSEPH: Mary! Bring the Babe. The Honorable Simeon wants to see him.

*Mary hurries to Joseph and Simeon. She holds the Babe out toward Simeon.*

MARY: Sir, he is 40 days old, today. *Pulls blanket back from child's face.*

SIMEON: *taking child in his arms* Let me see this little one. *exclaims with great joy* Ah!

It's him! It's the Messiah! The LORD be praised! This is the Holy Child! Israel's Redeemer! The Messiah has come! My prayers are answered! I did live to see him!

*Simeon turns from Mary and Joseph, and still holding the Child, lifts his head in prayer.*

Oh, LORD! Blessed be the LORD! LORD, now I can depart in peace, "according to thy word. Mine eyes have seen thy Salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." *Luke 2:25-38*

*Mary and Joseph speak to each other, as an aside.*

JOSEPH: What wonderful things he says about the Holy Child!

MARY: Yes! Marvelous things!

SIMEON: *coming to Mary and Joseph* Ah, I bless you! Both of you! *looks at Babe again* This Child! This Child! The prophethess Anna must see him! She, too, has been looking for the coming of our Redeemer. *calls out Anna! steps closer to doorway* Anna! Come see!

*Anna hurries out.*

ANNA: You called me, Simeon? *sees baby, steps closer to look at him.*

SIMEON: *in a tone of triumph* He's the blessed Messiah, Anna! Our long-awaited Saviour!

ANNA: *gazing at Babe with awe* Oh! Thanks be to the LORD our God! He has redeemed Israel! *softly touches Babe's head* Look how beautiful the Holy Child is. His little face shines like a star.

SIMEON: This Child shall be "the bright and morning star" for Israel; for the Gentiles, too...

ANNA: Yes! Yes! This blessed Babe will be the "Light of the World." Oh, I must tell everybody in Jerusalem! *turns to Simeon* Just think, Simeon, we have both lived to see the Messiah come!

SIMEON: Yes, we have. The mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting.

*turns to Mary and Joseph*

Come, come, let us take this Holy Little One into the House of the LORD.

*Simeon still holds Babe as the four exit into the temple door. Spotlight returns to Old Zimri and Linus. Child Zimri's father comes and carries him off stage.*

End of Act I

## ACT II, Scene 1

*Scene 1: Old Zimri, the former crippled beggar, and the Roman soldier, Linus, are still seated near the temple gate called Beautiful. Zimri continues to recount the times he saw Jesus of Nazareth come to the temple.*

ZIMRI: Ah, Linus, you cannot imagine what Jerusalem used to be like when the Passover festival time came. It was wonderful! Even I enjoyed it--despite the fact I was just a crippled beggar. As I grew larger, my father could no longer carry me in his arms. He had to drag me down here every morning on a sort of sled.

*Spotlight picks up 20-year-old Zimri as his father drags him to his usual begging place and leaves him. Old Zimri continues his story.*

People from everywhere flocked to the temple. Whole families would come, traveling for days to get here. There would be parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins all coming to Jerusalem to celebrate our greatest religious festival: The Feast of the Passover!

*Crowds of people begin to pass by the temple gate, some going in one direction, some the other. A number go in and out the temple doors--with the men and women using different doors. All are in a holiday mood, talking and laughing. Mary, Joseph, and the 12-year-old Jesus are the last to be seen entering the temple. Zimri continues talking. Stagehands place small round table, four stools on far right stage.*

When I was something like 20 years old, I remember seeing young Jesus of Nazareth here at the temple. Under rather odd circumstances.

LINUS: How was that, Sir?

ZIMRI: Well, the festival was over and the family of the Child Jesus started their long journey back to Galilee. But the young Jesus lingered here at the temple, talking to the learned men--scholars and doctors--who always gathered here to discuss the ancient writings, the Law of Moses, and what-have-you.

*Five Doctors and 12-year-old Christ Child enter from right stage, settle themselves around the small table--three at the table with young Jesus, two in the background. The men appear to be talking, making gestures with their hands; but what they say is not audible until Zimri stops speaking.*

ZIMRI: At the time, the Child Jesus was only 12 years old. And the learned men were amazed at his wisdom. I was close enough that I could hear them speaking. As I listened, I forgot all about begging!

*There is no break. Scene 2 simply opens as light shifts to the 20-year-old Beggar Zimri and then to the Doctors*

### Scene 2

*Scene 2: Child Jesus is seated at a table with doctors Urijah, Jehu, and Jekamiah. Jaazmiah (Ja-as-a-mi-ah) and Zebadiah stand in the background. Urijah holds a sacred scroll, another lies on the table. Young beggar Zimri pulls his pallet a few feet closer to the group.*

URIJAH: I declare, young Jesus of Nazareth, it's a pleasure to talk with you!

JEHU: Very refreshing, indeed!

JEKAMIAH: It is a pleasure to be in your company. You are an unusual child.

CHILD JESUS: Sirs, I am the one who is fortunate. I love to hear you speak of the LORD our God.

URIJAH: Tell us, young Jesus, what do you think the LORD requires of our nation Israel--such as it is now, ground under the heel of the Romans?

CHILD JESUS: Sir, God requires of us the same as he has always required: "To walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD our God with all our heart and all our soul." *Cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-14*

*All Doctors murmur their agreement.*

URIJAH: That is well said, my son.

CHILD JESUS: May I ask all of you a question?

URIJAH: By all means.

CHILD JESUS: We all know that no man has seen God. But what do you think he is like?

URIJAH: Ah, now that is a question to make us think. *turns to Jehu* What say you, Honorable Jehu? What is God like?

JEHU: Well, I-- uh-- I-- *grabs up scroll on table* Let me quote, or read, a line from the Song of Moses:

"He is the Rock, his work is perfect;  
For all his ways are judgment;

A God of truth and without iniquity,  
Just and right is he." *Deut. 32:4*

URIJAH: *to Child* Is that a good answer, my son?

CHILD JESUS: Yes. God is our Rock, our hiding place in time of trouble. And God is a Spirit. But he is also our Father in Heaven. We can pray to him.

*Doctors nod their heads, murmur agreement, and look from one to another. Jaazamiah and Zebadiah speak the following two lines as an aside.*

Jaazamiah: This child is wise beyond his years.

Zebadiah: He must have had a great teacher up in Galilee.

JEKAMIAH: Young Jesus, the rabbi in your village of Nazareth must have taught you the holy writings, that is, the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms. What do you know of the words of God?

CHILD JESUS: Sir, I know that our ancestor, David the king, spoke truth when he wrote these words: "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." *Psalm 12:6*

ALL DOCTORS: *in unison* Amazing!

*Spotlight shifts to 20-year-old Beggar Zimri. Mary and Joseph--both much distraught--have just stopped to question him. They speak rapidly, without waiting for answers.*

MARY: Oh, Beggar Man, our son is lost! Have you seen him?

JOSEPH: He's a boy twelve years old! From Nazareth!

MARY: He's about this high! *measures with hand* And he has brown hair and blue eyes! His name is Jesus!

*Editor's note: this may be modified to match the description of the person playing the part of Child Jesus.*

JOSEPH: We haven't seen the Child in three days! And we've looked all over Jerusalem! We thought he was among our relatives, with the other boys. But he wasn't!

MARY: Have you seen him, or heard of him? He was wearing a blue cloak.

BEGGAR: Ma'am, could that be him over there with the doctors? *points to group on opposite side of stage. Mary and Joseph notice group for first time.*

MARY: *gasps* Oh! It is! Joseph, that's Jesus! *runs to group*

JOSEPH: *right behind Mary* Yes! *under his breath* God be praised! We've finally found him!

*Mary runs to Child, kneels and grasps his feet.*

MARY: *with much emotion* Oh, Son! Son! We've been looking for you for three days!

JOSEPH: We thought we'd never see you again. *turns to men* Gentlemen, you must pardon the Child's mother and me. We were almost halfway back to Nazareth when we discovered him missing. And we've been worried to death!

URIJAH: We understand.

MARY: *to Child* Jesus, Son, how could you do this to us? We've wept and we've prayed and we've wept some more. *gets up*

CHILD JESUS: *getting up and putting his arm around his mother* I'm sorry, Mother. But I thought you would know that the time has come when "I must be about my Father's business."

JOSEPH: Come, we must go home to Nazareth.

*Three leave--via left stage--arm in arm, with the Child walking between Mary and Joseph. Doctors leave--right stage. Beggar remains on stage. Spotlight returns to Zimri the narrator and Linus.*

### End of Scene 2

### Scene 3

*Scene 3: Zimri and Linus continue their conversation from extreme left stage. Zimri's descriptions set the mood for the episode in which the Christ drives the merchants and moneychangers from the temple grounds.*

LINUS: Honorable Zimri, did you see this young Jesus of Nazareth every year when the Passover time came?

ZIMRI: No, unfortunately I didn't. It was almost 20 years before I saw him again. I'm sure he came, but I just didn't see him because of the crowds of people.

Jerusalem has some 25,000 people living here, but at Passover! My, oh my! There must be a hundred thousand! The temple courtyard is always alive with people. There are rabbis, and scribes, and pilgrims from all over Palestine and the Roman Empire. Merchants selling doves, young sheep and cattle for the sacrifices.

And the money changers. In this whole area *gives sweep of hand* they had their tables set up to convert foreign currency into Jewish silver shekels.

*As Zimri talks, merchants and moneychangers set up shop, bringing in three small tables, stools, two cages with birds, three cages with young goats or lambs. At the same time a Crowd, of People walk through the area, most going off left stage--in preparation for the Triumphal Entry episode.*

LINUS: I don't understand why the moneychangers were necessary.

ZIMRI: Our Jewish law requires that every man pay an annual Temple Tithe, or tax, in silver shekels. So, the people had to deal with the moneychangers.

And of course the pilgrims who came from far away were obliged to buy their sacrificial animals after they got to Jerusalem.

I'm afraid the merchants and moneychangers were corrupt. They made enormous profits.

*Zimri's voice fades; spotlight picks up moneychangers.*

1<sup>ST</sup> MONEY CHANGER: *with glee, as he takes coins from his moneybag and stacks them on his table* I don't know what you intend to do this Passover, my friend, but as for me, I'm going to get rich!

2<sup>ND</sup> MONEY CHANGER: Me too! To get their hands on my silver, these pious Jews are going to have to fork over the limit!

1<sup>ST</sup> M. C.: *leaning over and speaking confidentially* I tell you what let's you and me do!

2<sup>ND</sup> M. C.: *eagerly* What?

1<sup>ST</sup> M. C.: Let's you and me agree on a rate of exchange, add 50 per cent to that, and then both stick to it!

2<sup>ND</sup> M. C.: Great! Friend, you are a money genius! We'll stick to this bargain now, no matter what!

*Two shake hands. Light shifts to three merchants and their caged animals. First Merchant is stuffing hay into a cage. Second Merchant is posting a sign on his bird cage. Third Merchant, just arriving, pauses to talk to Beggar Zimri.*

3<sup>RD</sup> MERCHANT: *tossing coin to Zimri* Well, Beggar Man, I guess you're glad Passover time is here again!

BEGGAR ZIMRI: Yes, Sir. I'm glad. Many people will go into the temple to worship, and I hope they will remember to give alms to the lame.

3<sup>RD</sup> MERCHANT: Beggar, it's a pity you don't get yourself something to sell to these pilgrims--like we merchants and moneychangers do. *waves hand toward companions* You could make a fortune! What you do is raise the price on everything.

Everybody wants to buy the traditional "lamb without blemish." Of course the poor have to settle for a couple of pigeons or turtledoves.

But they're all so excited they don't know what they're buying. Yesterday I sold completely out of lambs. So today I'm going to get rid of some scrawny little goats! *Laughs* The people that buy 'em will never know the difference!

*Laughs again, starts to move on, turns back and shakes his finger at Beggar.*

Beggar, don't you dare repeat what I just told you!

*Third Merchant turns abruptly when he hears the distant noise of many people shouting "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!"*

3<sup>RD</sup> MERCHANT: *running over to First Money Changer* By the beard of Abraham! I wonder what that is?

1<sup>ST</sup> M. C.: It's people shouting! But I can't tell what they're saying! Can you?

CROWD: *still off stage* Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

3<sup>RD</sup> MERCHANT: They're crying "Hosanna!" Look!

CROWD: *comes into view on stage, all waving palms, with children in front, the Christ Figure in the center, and friends and followers on the sides and behind, and all chanting joyously*

Hosanna!

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!

Hosanna!

Hosanna to our King!

*Major portion of Crowd halts. Two women guide children on through the temple door, as the children continue chanting.*

CHILDREN: Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

*Christ Figure strides toward money-changers and merchants. Peter, James and John stop near Beggar Zimri. Pharisee, Sadducee, and Scribe join the crowd, stopping not far from Peter, James, and John.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *indignantly* What is the meaning of all this? *waves hand toward animal cages* What are you merchants and moneychangers doing here at the temple?

3<sup>RD</sup> MERCHANT: We're just selling a few lambs for the sacrifice.

1<sup>ST</sup> MONEY CHANGER: We're offering a service to the pilgrims.

CHRIST FIGURE: Scoundrels! *knocks over first money table*

Robbers! *knocks over second money table*

*Shoves third table aside, throws an empty cage across courtyard*

It is written that this temple, my Father's House, is a house of prayer! The house of prayer for all people! You have made it a den of thieves!

*There is a wild scramble as money changers grab and scrape up their money, the merchants grab their cages, and all run away--going off right stage. Sadducee, Scribe and Pharisee speak to each other as an aside. Peter, James, and John overhear their remarks.*

*Crowd gathers around Christ Figure, who sits down to teach.*

SADDUCEE: *gesturing toward Christ Figure* Look at that! Something has to be done about this man from Galilee! You heard this crowd hailing him as "the Son of David!"

SCRIBE: Yes, even the children! That means they'll try to crown him king! Probably during Passover!

SADDUCEE: If it comes to that, the Romans could kill us all!

PHARISEE: We Pharisees know something has to be done to stop this madman from Nazareth. But the people adore him, hang on his every word. *turns directly to Sadducee* You know the High Priest personally. What does he say about this would-be king?

SADDUCEE: Caiphass thinks this Jesus--this prophet from Galilee, or whatever he is--is a danger to Israel! That we must find a way to have him destroyed!

SCRIBE: But how?

SADDUCEE: We could bring charges. Legal charges. Have him tried, and condemned, by Pontius Pilate.

SCRIBE: Yes! That's the answer, since our Council can't impose the death penalty!

SADDUCEE: The High Priest says it is better that one man should die than that our whole nation perish.

PHARISEE: *with his finger on his lips* Shh-hh-h! Not so loud. Some of his followers may hear us. Let's stay and hear what he is going to teach the people today.

SADDUCEE: Perhaps we can trap him with a clever question, force him to incriminate himself.

PHARISEE: That should be easy. I know! I'll ask him about paying taxes to Rome!

*Three move on a short distance. Spotlight shifts to Peter, James, and John. They are huddled together and speak among themselves--for the audience.*

John: *with alarm* Peter, what should we do? Should we warn the Master?

Peter: By all means! And right now! I'll just tell him outright that his enemies are plotting his death and that he has to leave Jerusalem.

James: Let's see if we can get a word with him before he begins teaching. John and I want to speak to the Master about another matter, too.

Peter: What, if I may ask?

John: When he is crowned king, we want him to keep us in mind for important positions!

Peter: Don't be ridiculous! If you brothers start asking favors, the other disciples won't like it! Neither will I.

*Three move on toward Christ Figure. A mutual friend stops Peter to talk with him. James and John go on. Spotlight shifts to seated Christ Figure. He is encircled by followers and strangers; several are kneeling in front of him. Others stand farther back. James and John go directly to C. F.*

JOHN: Master, could my brother and I have a word with you, in private?

*Christ Figure rises, leads James and John aside--one on one side, the other on his other side.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *speaking fondly, cheerfully, as he puts his arms around their shoulders* Ah, my dear disciples, my "Sons of Thunder" from Galilee, what is it you wish to speak to me about?

JOHN: Master, it's a favor we ask. We know that soon you will be crowned king. So, when you come into your kingdom, we want to be with you!

JAMES: Yes, Master. Please let one of us sit on your right hand and the other on your left!

CHRIST FIGURE: *in sad tone* Oh! *shakes his head* You poor young disciples. You don't know what you ask.

Could you drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

JOHN: *with enthusiasm* Yes, Master, we could drink of any cup!

JAMES: Master, we will do anything for you!

*Peter approaches, but says nothing.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *warmly, sadly* You are two of my beloved, my chosen disciples--with me a long time--but you still do not understand what lies ahead. There will be a bitter cup: untold suffering. The baptism will be death.

JAMES & JOHN: *with shock* Master!

CHRIST FIGURE: Many times I have told you that my kingdom is not of this world. But when I do come into my glory and my kingdom, it will be my Father in Heaven who prepares the seat on my right hand and the seat on my left. These are not mine to give.

JOHN: *to Christ Figure* But we just thought that--

PETER: *interrupting* Master?

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes, Simon Peter?

*James and John ease themselves aside*

PETER: *cupping his hands near his lips so as not to be overheard* Master, it's not safe for you to stay here! You must leave Jerusalem! Before the Passover! Your enemies are plotting your death!

CHRIST FIGURE: *calmly* Simon Peter, you sound more like Satan than like yourself. If you talk like this I will have to say: "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

PETER: *much shocked* Master!

CHRIST FIGURE: I know what my enemies have planned. I know the will of my Father in Heaven. And I will do My Father's will.

Today, and every day during Passover, I will teach here at the temple--as is my custom. So, call the people together.

Have I not told you, Simon Peter, that I came to give my life as a ransom for many?

PETER: *subdued, disappointed tone* Yes, Master, you have.

*steps forward, raises his voice*

Friends, strangers, pilgrims from far away, and residents of Jerusalem, if you would hear the teaching of the Master, Jesus of Nazareth, come near. *beckons to all*  
*Peter steps back. Crowd comes in closer. All stand or sit in something of a semi-circle so that there is no person between the Christ Figure and the audience. Scene 3 melts into Scene 4 without any break.*

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Scene 4

CHRIST FIGURE: *now seated* Verily I say unto you--as I said to the wicked merchants and moneychangers--the Temple of God is a house of prayer.

When you come to the house of prayer, or when you pray in secret, have faith in God. The man who has faith can say unto a mountain, "Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea" and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he asks shall come to pass--that man shall have whatsoever he asks. The mountain will be moved into the sea.

Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

*--Mark 11:23-26*

*Pharisee whispers to his companions, then approaches C. F., bows and speaks. Players, see Mark 12:14-17 for this episode.*

PHARISEE: *loudly, with seeming humility* Great Teacher, we know that you are true and do not favor one person above another, and that you teach the way of God. So, tell us this: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" Shall we pay taxes to the Romans, or shall we not pay?

CHRIST FIGURE: Ah, Sir, you are of the Pharisees.

PHARISEE: I am.

CHRIST FIGURE: Why do you tempt me with such a question? *pauses* What? No answer? Bring me a coin, that I may see it.

*Pharisee beckons to his companions. Scribe hurries over with a coin and hands it to Pharisee.*

PHARISEE: *as he hands coin to Christ Figure* Here is a denarius, which--as all know--is our most common coin, a day's wages.

CHRIST FIGURE: *holding up coin so that the inscription is visible to the Pharisee* Whose image and superscription does it bear?

PHARISEE: That of Tiberius Caesar.

CHRIST FIGURE: *handing coin back to Pharisee* Then I say this to you: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

*Crowd murmurs agreement. Pharisee and his companions fade into background, but do not leave. A tattered looking man, obviously poor, comes to C. F.*

POOR MAN. Great Teacher, I'm just a poor man standing here in rags, but please tell me

what I could do to inherit eternal life.

CHRIST FIGURE: I am the Way. The Truth. And the Life.

He that believeth on me--though he were dead--yet shall he live.

POOR MAN: Believe on you? What does that mean?

CHRIST FIGURE: Believe that I am the Christ, the Saviour. That I am the Son of the living God! *spreads out hands to crowd* Let all who have ears to hear listen to my words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." *John 3:16*

CROWD: *loud murmur of delight*

POOR MAN: *with enthusiasm* Let me be your disciple and follow you!

CHRIST FIGURE: The man who would follow me must deny himself and take up his cross. Yet the yoke is easy and the burden is light.

POOR MAN: I will bear any burden, Master! I will!

CHRIST FIGURE: You, Poor Man, and all other men who are my disciples shall be like the salt of the earth.

Ye shall be the light of the world.

Therefore, let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven. *Matt. 5,16*

*turns to CROWD*

A new teaching I give to every man who hears my voice: "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.

"Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." *Luke 6,27,28*

CROWD: *in disbelief* Love our enemies?

CHRIST FIGURE: In all things, "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." *Matthew 7:12*

Moreover, I say unto you "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

-  
Begin Scene 5 *without any pause*

*There is a sudden and great commotion on the fringe of right stage as three Accusers drag in a woman taken in adultery. Two of the men are pulling and shoving the screaming woman along, the third carries a big container of rocks. These he begins passing out to any spectator who will take one. The Pharisee, Scribe, Sadducee and three other men grab one of the stones. Players, read John 8:3-11 for a detailed account of this event.*

ADULTERESS: *screaming and kicking* No! No! You cruel men! You can't do this! *tries*

*to dig in her heels; her sandals slide on the ground*

1<sup>ST</sup> ACCUSER: *loudly* Come on, Woman! You're an adulteress!

2<sup>ND</sup> ACCUSER: *very loudly* You must be stoned to death!

ADULTERESS: *wailing and screaming* No! No! Not me! You can't stone me to death!

No! No! I want to live! Let me go! No! No! Don't! Don't! Let me go! *keeps up struggle*  
Please don't kill me!

1<sup>ST</sup> ACCUSER. Hush, Woman! It's our law!

*Accusers compel Adulteress to stand before Christ Figure. They continue holding her arms. She gets quiet, now looks constantly at the ground.*

1<sup>ST</sup> ACCUSER: *somewhat out of breath because of his exertion* Great Teacher, this wretched woman was taken in adultery! In the very act! Now the Law of Moses commands us that such a stupid, vile woman be stoned to death. But what do you say? *Christ Figure does not answer. Instead, he stoops down and with his finger writes on the ground--as if he had not heard.*

2<sup>ND</sup> ACCUSER: *with considerable irritation* Great Teacher, didn't you hear what my friend said? This creature here--this woman--was taken in adultery! The Law of Moses says stone her to death! And we've brought the stones. But we--

3<sup>RD</sup> ACCUSER: *very loudly as he shakes and holds up his bag of rocks* Plenty of stones! Who else wants to help us put this wicked woman to death? *continues walking up and down, shaking bag of rocks*

2<sup>ND</sup> ACCUSER: *still speaking to Christ Figure* We know the Law, but we want to hear what you say.

*Christ Figure stands erect.*

CHRIST FIGURE: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

*stoops again to write in the sand*

*There is a hush, throughout the crowd. The Accusers and all others look from one to the other. One by one, they all leave, the ones holding rocks going first. Peter, James and John remain in the far background. The Adulteress continues to stand motionless in front of Christ Figure. Christ Figure stands erect again.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *with great compassion* "Woman, where are those thine accusers?"

Hath no man condemned thee?"

ADULTERESS: *humbly* No man, Lord.

CHRIST FIGURE. Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more...

*Woman exits right stage. Christ Figure walks slowly off left stage. Peter, James and John follow him. Father of Beggar Zimri comes and drags him and his pallet away.*

END OF ACT II

### ACT III, Scene 1

*Scene 1: Same as previous scene. The area before the temple is now empty. But Zimri and the Roman Soldier Linus are still on far left area of stage. Linus is much impressed with Zimri's account of the many times he saw Jesus of Nazareth at the temple. The two are waiting for Soldier Atticus to return.*

LINUS: *eagerly* This Jesus of Nazareth! I never heard of a person like him! His teachings are fantastic! And to think--he was crucified!

ZIMRI: *sadly* On the very day of Passover, last year. It was as if he were the lamb, slain for Passover.

*Atticus hurries in, cheerful and apologetic for being late.*

ATTICUS: Sorry to be late getting back. I thought our Centurion would never get through giving orders.

LINUS. What's going on?

ATTICUS: For one thing, all leaves are cancelled and all soldiers garrisoned in the Antonia Fortress have been put on alert.

LINUS: All of us?

ATTICUS: All six hundred.

LINUS: But why?

ATTICUS: Evidently, Pontius Pilate is afraid there will be an uprising among the Jews during their Passover. I sure hope Pilate doesn't order any crucifixions this year. If he does, this is one Roman Soldier *taps himself on chest* who is going AWOL without blinkin' an eye!

*Editor's note: "AWOL" is a military abbreviation for "absent without leave"--meaning a serviceman has deserted.*

LINUS: I wouldn't blame you.

ATTICUS: I told you, didn't I, that last year my pal Longinus was ordered to stab his spear into the side of this man from Nazareth, and after he did it, he went plumb berserk! That night he cried! Oh, he cried. Like a baby. He cried so much he went blind! Completely blind! They sent him back to Rome.

*Note to players: There is a legend, dating back to the Middle Ages, that the soldier who pierced the side of the Christ as he was dying on the cross was named Longinus and that he went blind.*

ZIMRI: *to Atticus* Did you see the trial before Pilate?

ATTICUS: Yes, I was there for part of the trial. But I'm sure not proud of the role I played. It was after Pontius Pilate had ordered our Centurion to keep the poor man under constant guard that I got involved.

We had heard that this Jesus was accused of claiming to be "King of the Jews." So, we soldiers thought we'd be smart and crown him king.

*There is no break as Scene 2 unfolds on another section of stage*

## Scene 2

*Scene 2: A cell-like Room in the Antonia Fortress, where the Christ is being held during part of his ordeal before Pontius Pilate. The room has one or two stools, a small table, and a rack on which there is a scarlet cape which is part of the Centurion's uniform.*

*As the scene opens, three soldiers are bringing in the Christ Figure, whose hands are tied before him. As the four enter, Atticus leaves Zimri and Linus and becomes part of the action.*

*It is Longinus and Titus who hold the arms of the Christ Figure. Justinus carries a heavy chain.*

ATTICUS: *to fellow soldiers* Step lively there, soldiers! When you're guarding a king, you mustn't drag your feet!

LONGINUS: *Still grasping arm of C.F.* Atticus, what do you know about guarding kings or anybody else?

ATTICUS: Plenty, my dear pal Longinus! Plenty! *grabs up stool and brings it forward* For one thing, you've got to seat a king on a throne! Titus, help Longinus bring this great "King of the Jews" to his throne.

*Two shove C.F. onto to stool. Justinus hands over the chain and they fasten feet of C.F. to stool.*

ATTICUS: *coming over to Justinus* Justinus, don't you know how to behave in the presence of royalty?

JUSTINUS: Of course I know how to behave in the presence of royalty! *kneels before C. F. in a short but elaborate bow*

LONGINUS: *as if searching everywhere* Where is the king's crown?

TITUS: We may have to make the king a new crown. But out of what?

ATTICUS: Titus, you have absolutely no imagination. Go out in the courtyard and gather some laurel leaves.

TITUS: Laurel leaves? Atticus, this is not Rome! The only thing growing around this wretched place is briars and thorn vines!

ATTICUS: Well, go get something! A king can't be a king without a crown! Longinus, you go help him.

*Titus and Longinus hurry out.*

*As this scene is in progress--and the soldiers continue the crowning of the prisoner--the MOB assembles on another part of stage, where Pilate's judgment seat is set up.*

JUSTINIUS: *walking around Christ Figure as if interested in his appearance* I think our great king would look better in royal garments--something colorful. Purple is the color kings wear! Where can we get him a purple robe?

ATTICUS: *grabbing up Centurion's scarlet cape* Let's pretend the king is colorblind and put this scarlet robe on him!

JUSTINIUS: No! That belongs to the Centurion! What if he comes in?

ATTICUS: Aw, the Centurion won't be back for hours. *drapes cape around Christ Figure* Now, that's better!

*Titus and Longinus stride in. Titus carries a crown of thorns, Longinus a long reed. Two Guards follow T. and L. in.*

TITUS: *triumphantly* Here's the beautiful crown! *holds up mass of thorns* And, furthermore, we've recruited two more loyal subjects for the king! Loyal Subjects, kneel before his highness!

*Two Guards kneel, rise and back away.*

LONGINUS: *bringing reed to C.F.* Here, King! I brought you a scepter ... A Golden symbol of your authority! *tries to hand reed to C. F., who does nor respond.* King, you can't rule without a scepter! *whacks C. F. with the reed and then leans it up against him.*

TITUS: Who wants to crown the king?

LONGINUS: Not me! My hands and fingers are bleeding now--just from making the

blasted thing! *looks at fingers* I'm gonna have my head examined if I ever touch another thorn bush! *tries to pick thorns from his fingers.*

TITUS: *looking at Atticus* You, Atticus?

ATTICUS: The honor is all yours, Titus.

TITUS: *mashing crown down on head of C. F.* Prisoner, I crown you King! "King of the Jews!"

*Six soldiers kneel in mock humility.*

ALL SOLDIERS: *in Unison* Hail to the "King of the Jews!" Hail! Hail!

*Centurion strides in, wearing uniform that includes red-plumed helmet. He is surprised, and outraged at the antics of the soldiers.*

CENTURION: What's going on in here?

*Soldiers scramble to their feet, come to attention.*

ATTICUS: It's nothing, Sir! Nothing! We were just having a little fun. Trying to pass the time away.

CENTURION: *coldly, calmly* How stupid.... Bring the prisoner in to stand before Pontius Pilate--in his private chambers.

*Turns to go, then wheels back around and shouts at the soldiers when he realizes that they have draped his uniform cape around the prisoner*

*My cape! You idiots!*

ATTICUS: *grabbing cape from C.F. and shoving it into hands of Centurion* Here's your cape, Sir! It's not damaged a bit, Sir! But I'm sorry!

CENTURION: *grabbing cape* Any more fool stunts like this *shakes crumpled cape at group*, and I'll have you court-martialed!

ALL SOLDIERS: *in quavering chorus* Yes, Sir!

CENTURION: *still in a rage* Every last one of you! *storms out*

ALL SOLDIERS: *not in unison* Yes, Sir!

*Two guards make a dash for it, and get ready to take their stand on either side of Pontius Pilate's judgment seat.*

ATTICUS: *all frivolity gone* Let's get with it, guys.

*Four unchain Christ Figure, take him out, leaving the crown of thorns on his head and his hands tied. They also leave the heavy chain attached to one of his ankles.*

### End of Scene 2

### Scene 3

*Scene 3: An outdoor area in the Antonia Fortress, where Pilate's official judgment seat has been set up and where a MOB, all enemies of Jesus of Nazareth, have assembled to await the conclusion of the trial. These spectators, led by the Jewish authorities, have made secret plans to demand the death penalty for the Christ.*

*The Sadducee, the Pharisee, and the Scribe are in the forefront. As the scene opens, the Two Guards march out and take their stand on either side of the judgment seat.*

*The MOB is quite restless. There is considerable murmuring. The MOB becomes quiet as the Centurion--now wearing his scarlet robe--enters from left stage.*

*Before the Centurion reaches the area of the judgment seat, Claudia, Pilate's wife--a lovely woman who evidently knew much about Jesus of Nazareth--rushes in and goes*

*directly to the Centurion. Claudia is greatly upset, out of breath from running.*

CLAUDIA: *grasping the Centurions arm to steady herself* Oh, Centurion, Sir, you must help me!

CENTURION: *stopping to give her his full attention, though he does not know who she is* Of course, Madam! What is the matter, Ma'am? You look exhausted.

CLAUDIA: *still trying to catch her breath* I ran all the way! I must speak to Pontius Pilate! It's urgent! Very urgent!

CENTURION: *with sympathy* I'm sorry, Ma'am; but that's impossible! You see, the governor is questioning a prisoner brought in by the Jewish authorities. And the trial will start any minute now!

CLAUDIA: But you don't know who I am!

CENTURION: No, Madam. I don't know who you are. But we--

CLAUDIA: I am the wife of Pontius Pilate!

CENTURION: *much flustered* Wife? Well, I-- I-- I don't--

CLAUDIA: I have to warn him! My husband must not condemn this Jesus of Nazareth! I had a terrible dream last night because of him!

CENTURION: A dream about the Jewish prisoner? You know him?

CLAUDIA. Yes, I know him. I have heard him teach. And, oh, this dream I had last night! Parts of the dream were dreadful! Parts beautiful!

*Claudia becomes calm, speaks slowly now and with much feeling.*

CENTURION. Yes, Ma'am.

CLAUDIA: I dreamed that my husband condemned Jesus of Nazareth. Ordered him crucified. And four soldiers nailed him up on a cross--out there on that hill they call "the Place of the Skull."

Hour after hour he was hanging there.

And then, a great darkness came over the land, and the whole world trembled and shook. Rocks crumbled to dust.

The dead came up out of their graves and walked to and fro on the streets of Jerusalem.

After a long while, the sun came out again. And the man on the cross was dead. His rich friends came to my husband and asked if they might bury the body. He said yes.

So his friends wrapped him in burial garments--pure fine linen--and brought layers and layers of burial spices, as is the Jewish custom. And they laid him in a tomb in a garden--a garden all green, and quiet. There was a great stone there. With it, they sealed the tomb.

But angels came down from heaven and rolled the stone away. And I saw Jesus of Nazareth walking in the garden. Alive!

Then, I saw him go to Galilee, and his friends found him there. Forty days passed by. The angels came again. And Jesus disappeared with them, into the shining clouds, into heaven.

*Claudia pauses, changes tone.*

Centurion, I believe this Jesus is the Son of the living God! My husband must not condemn him!

CENTURION: *much moved* Oh, Madam, I don't know what to say! I wish--

*Pontius Pilate strides in, the soldiers bring in the Prisoner, and Pilate sits down, while the Centurion and Claudia are still talking.*

CLAUDIA: Oh, goodness!

CENTURION: *in haste, as he holds out a writing slate he has been carrying along with his official papers* Here, Ma'am. Write a message to your husband, and I'll try to get it to him--before it's too late.

*Claudia grabs slate and pen, quickly writes a few lines, hands slate back to Centurion.*  
*Cf. Matthew 27:19*

CLAUDIA: Thank you, Centurion.

*Claudia hurries away; Centurion goes to Pilate.*

PILATE: *looking up* Yes, Centurion?

*Centurion leans toward Pilate, says something in undertones, hands him the slate, and moves aside.*

PILATE: *looks at the message briefly, frowns* Ah, my wife and her dreams! *puts it down in his chair as he stands up to address the MOB in stern, matter of fact tone* Here is your prisoner, a man from Nazareth, whom you have accused and brought to me for judgment.

MOB: *loudly, in unison* Away with him!

PILATE: *raising his hand for silence* I have questioned this man, and I find he has done no evil.

SADDUCEE: *loudly, as he waves his fist* He deserves to die!

MOB: *very loudly, in unison* He deserves to die!

PILATE: *again, holding up hand to quiet Mob* What crime has he committed?

SADDUCEE: He stirs up our people! He could cause an open revolt!

PHARISEE: We heard him telling the people--right at the temple gate, mind you--that we Jews should not pay taxes to Caesar.

PILATE: *with disbelief* Not pay taxes?

SCRIBE: Your Honor, this man claims to be "King of the Jews"!

*Pilate sits back down.*

PILATE: *turning to Christ Figure* Jesus of Nazareth, are you the "King of the Jews"?

CHRIST FIGURE: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight! And I would not be standing here in chains, accused by the Jews.

PILATE: Then you do consider yourself a king?

CHRIST FIGURE: You say that I am a king because you have heard others say it.

PILATE: Be sensible. Don't you realize that I have the power to crucify you? And I have the power to release you!

CHRIST FIGURE: You could have no power at all against me, unless it were given from above.

PILATE: *in undertone to C.F.* You are being most difficult. If you would try to defend yourself and say the right things, I could let you go!

*Pilate gets up, turns to Mob.*

As you all know, in Jerusalem we have a custom that each year at your Passover festival I release one prisoner for you.

MOB: *loudly, in unison* Right! One prisoner!

SCRIBE: *with disrespect* Yeah, Governor, who is it goin' to be this year?

PILATE: *disregarding Scribe* Now tell me, would you like me to let this innocent man go? Or would you prefer that I release the notorious robber and murderer, Barabbas?

PHARISEE: *shouting* Release Barabbas! *signals to mob* Right, everybody?

MOB: *loudly, in unison* Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas!

PILATE: Then what shall I do with this man called Jesus the Christ?

MOB: *waving arms, shouting very loudly, in unison* CRUCIFY him! CRUCIFY him!  
CRUCIFY him!

*Pilate throws up his hand in disgust, sits back down.*

PILATE: The man is guilty of no crime!

SADDUCEE: *easing himself closer to Pilate and speaking in his most cunning tone* But, Honorable Pontius Pilate, we have a law that says he should die! He has blasphemed! He has claimed to be the Son of God!

PHARISEE: *joining Sadducee, right in front of Pilate's chair* And don't forget this man is trying to make himself king! Caesar wouldn't like that, now would he?

SADDUCEE: *As a thinly veiled threat* If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend! *Pharisee and Sadducee back away, smiling triumphantly at each other. Pilate, visibly shaken, beckons the guard on his right; the guard comes, Pilate whispers to him; the guard hurries out.*

*Pilate looks at Claudia's note again, puts it aside, gets up to address the mob. He paces back and forth, as if trying to decide what to say.*

PILATE: *in desperation* Very well. Have it your way! First, the man shall be flogged--as is your Jewish custom. Then, he shall be crucified--as is Roman law. **BUT HIS BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS!**

*Murmur sweeps through mob, showing all to be pleased. Servant trots in with a large silver bowl of water, a towel. He goes straight to Pilate, holds out the bowl before him.*

PILATE: *loudly* I wash my hands before you!

*carefully washes and dries hands*

I am innocent of the blood of this just person.

*Gives wave of the hand toward Christ Figure*

Soldiers, take the prisoner away!

*Soldiers lead Christ Figure off stage. Pilate exits in another direction.*

*There is considerable undertone talk among members of the Mob. Individuals leave gradually, some going in one direction, the others by another exit. Without being noticed, soldier Atticus returns to Zimri and Linus.*

End of Scene 3

#### Scene 4

*Scene 4: At the place near the temple gate where Zimri and the two Roman soldiers have been talking. Atticus has rejoined Zimri and Linus. They continue their conversation as if there had been no break.*

ATTICUS. Now, like I was telling you, I am sorry I had any part in that whole affair. I wish I hadn't even been there! But you know something? Part of what that lady told the

Centurion about her dream came true! There was an earthquake, and it got pitch dark at high noon!

ZIMRI: All of that dream the lady had came true! Jesus of Nazareth walked out of his grave! Alive! His friends saw him. Talked to him. Ate with him. And they saw him disappear into the clouds.

ATTICUS: I wish our Centurion had seen him. He got really shook up. Right after the crucifixion he kept saying to us--over and over--"He was the Son of God!" Surely he was! I know he was the Son of God!

ZIMRI: I know it, too, Soldiers. Or else, how could his very name have cured me?

LINUS: Sir, you were going to tell us about that. You said something about it being a miracle, after you had been a lame beggar all your life.

ZIMRI: It was like this: I was sitting right over there "At the Gate Called Beautiful"--begging just like I'd been doing every day for over forty years--when two men named Simon Peter and John came along.

They were disciples of this Jesus and were on their way into the temple. *pauses* And--Well, just let me show you how it was, how I was begging and everything.

*Zimri goes over to his former begging spot, sits down, and wraps his cloak over his feet to show how he looked as the crippled beggar.*

ZIMRI. *slumped over, looking at the ground, holding out his beggar's basket, and wailing in a pitiful chant*

Alms! Alms! Alms for a poor crippled beggar!

Alms! Alms! Pity the poor who have to beg!

Alms! Alms! Give alms!

Alms! Before you enter the temple! Alms!

*Peter and John approach and stop near the beggar. Zimri does not look up. Instead, he shakes his basket, keeps repeating his droning chant.*

PETER: *with kindness* Beggar, look at us.

ZIMRI: *without lifting his head* I'm asking alms. A farthing. A mite. Just anything you can give. I'm a poor beggar.

PETER: Lift up your head, Beggar. Look at us.

*gently lifts up Zimri's face by placing his hand under the beggar's chin.*

"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee.

"In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk!"

*Peter clasps Zimri's right hand. John assists. And Zimri stands up--a bit unsteadily. He takes a few halting steps. Then he begins leaping about.*

ZIMRI: *overcome with joy* My feet! My feet! Look at my feet! They're not twisted! They're straight! I can walk! I can run! Praise be to God!

JOHN: Friend, would you like to go with us into the temple, to thank God and His Son, Jesus our Lord?

ZIMRI: Yes! Yes! I will thank Him! In the temple! On the streets! Everywhere! And so long as I live, I will come here at dawn--every day of my life--and thank God.

*Zimri walks with Peter and John toward temple. They enter; Zimri comes back to Atticus and Linus. The soldiers are amazed at what they have seen and heard.*

ATTICUS: Honorable Zimri! That was an amazing thing that happened to you!

LINUS: What can we say, after that?

ZIMRI: Soldiers, let me tell you both a truth: Every man is a beggar at the gate--At the Gate Called Beautiful--until he knows the Christ.

ATTICUS: *in slow, contemplative tone* You must be right. Yes. Beggars.

LINUS: *seriously, slowly* Yes. We're all lame beggars at the gate. Crippled in heart and soul.

*brightens and quickens speech*

I wish I knew this Jesus the Christ!

ATTICUS: Me, too.

ZIMRI: *joyously* Come with me, Soldiers, and I will teach you of Christ our Lord.

*Three go off together. Zimri, in the center, is talking and waving his hands with much delight.*

THE END

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