

PERSPECTIVES

in the First Person
Volume Three

**FOUR DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES
FROM THE CROSS FOR HOLY WEEK**

written by
ROSE ASPINALL

A Friend of the Thief on the Cross

A Roman Centurion

Mary Magdalene

Mary, Mother of Jesus

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

What follows are four monologues (*including a brief appearance by John, the disciple in Mary, Jesus' mother's monologue.*) Each one is written from the perspective of someone who stood at the cross of Jesus—two women and two men; two who loved Jesus and two who didn't understand him. (*One character is fictitious, a friend of the thief who hung next to Jesus.*) There were many others present at the cross, but I like this cross section. Jesus affected people in different ways. (*Isn't that still true today?*) It's important to stay true to scriptural accounts while exploring the real life struggles of those people who encountered Jesus.

Use these monologues one at a time in the weeks leading up to Holy Week or plan an entire service around them by using all four at once. (*They are especially well-suited for a Good Friday service.*) Connect them with songs of your choosing, scripture, and narration.

SUGGESTED ANTHEMS FOR EASTER SUNDAY:

Christ The Lord Is Risen Today praisegathering.com/Detail/14490/

Alive, Forever Amen! praisegathering.com/Detail/13934/

Because He Lives: praisegathering.com/Detail/14502/

For more ideas go to: www.praisegathering.com

COSTUMING:

You may choose to handle costuming one of two ways:

Biblical garb suited for 1st century Jerusalem or basic earth-toned, tunic styled clothing, leather sandals. The clothing can be suggestive of who they represent.

If you plan to costume the centurion, a linen military style loin cloth/tunic with leg wrappings and leather sandals will work. Extras could include a cloak, scarf, apron with leather strips.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

Underscore narrator

Sound effects for the crucifixion, thunder and lighting for the storm

A scrim with Jesus on the cross.

Narrator(s) : The narrator's portion should also be memorized, presenting it in an interactive and engaged manner. (*You may want to consider dividing the narration between two narrators.*)

Optional narrative opening if you plan on using all four monologues together creating a complete service.

ROMAN CENTURION

DRAMA SCRIPT BY ROSE ASPINALL

Optional Opening:

Narrator: Tonight, we invite you. We invite you to come on a journey—a journey to the heart of the Father, our Creator. He has made us for himself—for his glory. But sin has won us over and separated us from him. Now, there is a wide chasm stretched across eternity. It is impassable. We are in a hard captivity and this captivity, brought on by our willful disobedience, has led us to this moment. We—all of us, have been weighed—and found wanting.

But, there is good news! It is the Father's intent to restore us. It has always been his intent. But this—this is not what we expected to happen—this will of a loving Father and the awful choice made by His Son.

Tonight—tonight at long last, justice will meet mercy and be satisfied. You will be witness to indestructible love—but first it will mean the loss of light for all mankind.

This love is a mystery beyond anything we can imagine and soon we will see the truth of it, for the Son will strike at the root of our sin by sacrificing himself. He will do for us what we could not. In but a moment, darkness will have its way and in an act that will shake all of Jerusalem, indeed the entire world, the Son, the living One, the only begotten of God will make of himself a bridge—and bring us back to the Father.

We will relate these events to you by means of scripture and story and song. Now we pick up our story at a most crucial moment. After three years of ministry, of healing and teaching, Jesus is arrested, tried and convicted. He is guilty only of love.

Approximate age 25-45, battle hardened, arrogant, speaks with authority. By the end of the monologue, we see him soften.

Narrator: And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink. Then they crucified Him...Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

(Scripture references Matthew 27:33-43/Luke 23:34)

Roman Centurion: This? This is my job—not my choice. Forgive us? We don't know what we're doing? Perhaps—but this is my duty. As an agent of Rome, I am driven not by cruelty nor mercy, only duty. I have orders.

(He recalls his conversation with his superior and stands at attention.) "See to it."
(Salutes "Roman style" slapping a clenched fist against his chest.) "Yes, sir, I will see to it."
(Back to audience) There's a price to be paid for Roman peace, you know. Did they imagine that the might of Rome is something with which to trifle? Agreements are made between men in politics and religion. I do not involve myself in them. But it does seem that High Priest Caiaphas and his cohorts have some special problem with this one. Tried him in the middle of the night and found him guilty. A simple scourging wouldn't do; they were out for his blood.

And Pilate? Well, he has other matters of concern. He must think of the crowds; rabble rousers and zealots. How much will it cost him if they riot? And if they are not managed, they will riot, mark my words. *(Dismissively)* It's for him to deal with Caiaphas—not me. It's for me to keep the order.

As Centurion, I command a hundred, a rank I did not achieve easily and far too often a bloody and thankless job. Today, on this hill, I command, not a hundred—but four. A

small contingent. Let's hope it's enough to see the job carried out—without complication. As I said, I have orders.

I've seen men die—a thousand—no ten thousand and more, some courageously—some crying and begging—some cursing. Many a Jewish rebel has met the end of my gladium. Still I prefer battle to this. Crucifixion is a messy business. A soldier expects to die but an itinerant preacher? Sometimes you just get on the wrong side of things, I suppose.

(Trying to justify) It's true, my men got rough with Jesus. Violence once unleashed is hard to put back in the bottle and Pilate's board didn't read, Jesus, the Nazarene preacher, it read Jesus, King of the Jews! If he or his followers fancied a kingdom for themselves, well, that alone made him a threat to a man like Caiaphas. Besides a king should have a robe—and a scepter, should he not? There's little enough fun in this godforsaken place. It was just a bit of sport. Still, it went further than I expected. Flogged, yes—but crucified? I didn't expect that, *(shakes his head)* not after the crowds that chased after him. Still it doesn't fit. Jesus was no insurrectionist. In fact, it seems that everywhere he went, people were healed.

There was a time, when a fellow centurion and friend, Lucius, who was stationed in Capernaum at the time had a servant, highly prized, who fell terribly ill—actually paralyzed and unable to even lift his head. I can tell you, Lucius was beside himself. This was no ordinary servant. He loved him. He came to me one day at the end of himself. He said, "I'm going to Jesus. I'm going to ask him to heal him." I advised him against it, "Don't get mixed up with these Jews. It's a mistake." But you know, he didn't listen. He went to Jesus anyway and to my surprise, Jesus did it. *(incredulous)* He healed a Roman slave! Why would he do that? And by what power?

Lucius, rather looked out for Jesus after that. I'm glad this duty did not fall to him today. It would not sit well—duty or not.

(Looking up at a darkening sky.) I don't know...I don't like it. This crucifixion leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth. Storms come up suddenly in this place—but not like this. This man was a hardly a criminal and executing an innocent is not my custom. Justice may well catch up with all of us for this one. *(He nervously looks up again and shakes his head.)* This blackness! I don't like the looks of it. It's been this way for hours. I don't like it at all. *(haltingly)* Surely, he was a righteous man, this Jesus. *(closing his eyes, long pause but then then we see him steel himself)* But...I have my orders.

Lights fade.

FRIEND OF THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

DRAMA SCRIPT BY ROSE ASPINALL

Approximate age: 20-30, a man of coarse speech, a cynical zealot who doesn't understand Jesus' mission. Believes violence is the only path.

Narrator: One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

(Scripture reference Luke 23:35-43)

Friend of the thief: In paradise? Malachi? Well, that's a first—a bandit and zealot ushered into the kingdom by a dying would-be Messiah! Oh, don't get me wrong, we are in dire need of a Messiah! Just not one who ends up on a cross! Malachi knows this—knows it as well as he knows that killing a Roman will get you a place on this hill! Murdering insurgents and thieves have their special attention. He's not the first the Romans have hung up as an example. You make your choices and take your risks. He knows this.

(Jerking his head in Jesus' direction) We both knew the Carpenter. Who didn't? For a time we even thought perhaps he was one who might lead us in our righteous war—liberate us from these pagans. Reports came our way; Jesus was calling out the Pharisees! Said they were hypocrites and vipers! And what he did at the temple? Well, now this is the Messiah we've been waiting for! So, we went to hear him preach. Could hardly get near him. The Pharisees were there too, up to their tricks, trying to trip him up—to get him to say something to incriminate himself. "Tell us, then, what you think," they said. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Thinly disguised questions. He knew they were testing him. So, he says, "Whose likeness is this?" "Well, it's Caesar's," they said. "Then, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

We knew then that his ideals didn't exactly line up to ours, so we stopped following him around. There were others who had...shall we say, more immediate ways of dealing with pagans. (the edge of anger) You do not render anything to someone who worships pagan gods, and worse, one who allows himself to be worshiped as a living god! We are not friends of Caesars! We must break this yoke of tyranny! Caiaphas has exchanged his true devotion for wealth and power. It is treason of the worst sort.

When Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world...(shakes his head without finishing the sentence) well, I'm sorry for him. He allowed himself be taken—delivered into the hands of these gentiles. A man of his abilities? He had plenty of opportunity! He

could have called a reign of terror down on them all! But in the end, he wasn't our man. If he was the Son of God, do you think his Father would just let him hang there? As for me, I have no intention of giving up my sword. I'll bide my time.

I hope at least that Malachi finds comfort in Jesus' words. A dying man wants some mercy for what he's done, doesn't he? Mercy's hard enough to come by. God knows Malachi needs it today.

Lights fade.

MARY MAGDELENE

DRAMA SCRIPT BY ROSE ASPINALL

Approximate age: 20-30, completely devoted to Jesus.

Narrator: Mary Magdelene, the woman out of whom Jesus cast seven demons, is also standing nearby. Mary is always nearby. If it's true that he who is forgiven much loves much, then it is certainly true of Mary. Her heart is broken. So great is her love for Jesus she cannot understand how anyone would hate him.

Jesus' forgiveness of his own executioners stings her heart. How could he even in death think of others? Was it only days ago they'd all come into Jerusalem singing? How'd they all loved him then—praised him. And how easily their love had turned to hate.

Mary Magdelene: *(Looking around a moment as if searching. She sounds small, forlorn, questioning.)* Jesus, you are abandoned! Where are they? All of them—they were all shouting with the rest of us. Hosanna! Hosanna, God save us! *(Her voice trails off)* God save us...*(a pause, she collects herself.)* He's going to die. *(Despair)* He is—and I can't do anything about it and I can't bear it! I can't! *(A little frantic, pointing to someone in the audience)*

You...you were there, weren't you!? When he healed the boy, the one from Nain? And his poor mama crying, her only son—gone. You remember her face, don't you? When

Jesus gave her son back to her? What would she have done—a poor widow like that? *(Speaking to another, desperate, faster and faster)* And you—I saw you there, didn't I? The lame man, you remember him, right? Remember how he danced? He'd never walked before! And...and the blind man? He said, I see men—like trees! Walking! Remember?! Oh, please, say you remember. *(Sorrowful)* It wasn't that long ago... *(voice trails off)*

Oh, where would I be had I not met him that day? He saved my life. Oh sweet mercy, as sure as the sun rises—he saved me! He spoke to me as if I mattered. Me! He was the only one, you know—the only one who ever saw me! All they saw were my demons. Do you know what it's like when nobody will touch you? Do you know the ache it leaves on your skin?

(Remembering that day) “Be gone.” That’s what he said! Seven times! Be gone! And every time another one left and then another and another—until they were all gone and I was empty. The anger and hurt left too! I knew it then; I would never leave his side—could never. Never!

I don’t know why they hate him. You think it’s his goodness? Maybe it shines too brightly. Maybe it burns their sinful hearts. Maybe they all have too much lose. Not me, I have nothing to lose. Nothing! Because he...he gave me everything.

Lights fade.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

DRAMA SCRIPT BY ROSE ASPINALL

Age: Approximate age, mid forties. She is heartbroken. Her speech is halting and broken.

Narrator: When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, they divided them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what they did.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” (*John 19:23-25*)

Mary, Mother of Jesus: Even now, he cares for me? Oh Jesus, (*bites her lip and tries again*) my sweet Yeshi. (*offering this small, tender, intimacy to the audience*) He has always been Yeshi—to me...my name for him. (*closing her eyes tightly, fist to her mouth*) Are there no angels left to catch my son? (*a pause*) I have always known—this sword. It has been waiting to pierce my heart. He was— (*she shakes her head and corrects herself*) he is—not mine. I said yes to this, to all of this, many years ago. It is a bitter cup, (*She breaks down. A moment later gathers herself.*) and yet, his will. I will not—I cannot take it back now. Oh, but today, I wish I had not been born.

I have not always understood Yahweh’s plans—but I have trusted.

(*She engages in a moment of fanciful thinking.*) Perhaps even now, Gabriel will appear as did he so many years ago? His Father protected him from evil then—when Herod sought to kill him. We fled to Egypt as the angel instructed. Perhaps today...another miracle? And yet, I do not think so, for Simeon’s words still echo in my heart. “Many will fall because of him..he is a sign most will deny, and a sword will pierce your heart also.”

Oh, it is pierced and the wound is great. There will be no healing for me. My heart...oh my heart is breaking.

I was so young when I bore my Yeshi. Now that I'm old, will I regret what I've been given? No, I cannot! He has been my delight all these years—from his birth when we laid him in the feed trough in Bethlehem until even now.

But there is no where to run as I did then. Not to Egypt with my Joseph, for he is gone. Not to Elizabeth and Zechariah. For they are gone too. And their dear son John? Gone, all gone.

Oh, that I could go back to those years, to celebrate one more Passover with my Joseph and my Yeshi, one more story from his lips...but oh, he would not be pleased to hear me speak so. Even now, he is about his Father's business as he has always been...*(at this, John emerges from the shadows, puts his arm around Mary to lead her away.)*

John: *(gently and with great love)* Come, Mother, come. Enough. You must come with me now. I will care for you. You won't be alone. *(Mary reluctantly nods, then allows herself to be led away.)*

Lights fade.

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