

The Passion of Our Lord According to Matthew

The congregation is invited to participate by reading aloud the parts in bold. In some instances, women and higher voices are invited to speak the “women” parts, and men and lower voices and invited to speak the “men” parts. You are also welcome to follow along in a bible or simply listen.

KEY: Narrator (N) Jesus (J) Pilate (P) **Congregation (C Men, C Women, C All)**

N: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew.

N: When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the twelve disciples. While they were eating, he said,

J: Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.

N: Greatly distressed, each one asked,

C All: Am I the one, Lord?

J: One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. For the Son of Man will die, as the scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that one if they had never been born.

N: Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked,

C All: Rabbi, am I the one?

N: And Jesus told him,

J: You have said it.

N: As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying,

J: Take, eat; this is my body.

N: And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them saying,

J: Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and God’s people. It is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Mark my words--I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.

N: Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. On the way, Jesus told them,

J: Tonight all of you will desert me. For the scriptures say, “God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.

N: Peter declared,

C All: Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.

N: Jesus replied,

J: I tell you the truth, Peter--this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.

N: But Peter insisted,

C All: No, even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!

N: And all the other disciples vowed the same. Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said,

J: Sit here while I go over there to pray.

N: He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them,

J: My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.

N: He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying,

J: My Father, if it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.

N: Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter,

J: Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

N: Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed,

J: My Father, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.

N: When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open. So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. Then he came to the disciples and said,

J: Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? But look--the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here.

N: And even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests and elders of the people. The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal:

C All: "You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss."

N: So Judas came straight to Jesus.

C All: "Greetings, Rabbi!"

N: He exclaimed and gave him the kiss. Jesus said,

J: My friend, go ahead and do what you have come to do.

N: Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's slave, slashing off his ear.

J: Put away your sword. Those who use the sword will die by the sword. Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?

N: Then Jesus said to the crowd,

J: Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the scriptures.

N: At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled. Then the people who had arrested Jesus led him to the home of Caiaphas [...] But even though they found many who agreed to give false witness, they could not use anyone's testimony. Finally, two came forward who declared,

C All: This man said, "I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days."

N: Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus,

C All: Aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?

N: But Jesus remained silent. Then the high priest said to him,

C All: I demand in the name of the living God--tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.

N: Jesus replied:

J: You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.

N: Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said,

C All: Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?

N: Then they began to spit in Jesus' face and beat him with their fists, saying,

C Women: Guilty! He deserves to die!

N: And some slapped him, jeering,

C Men: Prophecy to us, Messiah! Who hit you that time?

N: Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came over and said to him,

C Women: You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean.

N: But Peter denied it in front of everyone, saying:

C Men: I don't know what you're talking about.

N: Later, out by the gate, another servant girl noticed him and said to those standing around,

C Women: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.

N: Again, Peter denied it, this time with an oath, saying:

C Men: I don't even know the man!

N: A little later, some of the other bystanders came over to Peter and said,

C Women: You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent.

N: Peter swore,

C Men: A curse on me if I'm lying--I don't know the man!

N: And immediately the rooster crowed [...] When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and the elders and declared:

C Men: I have sinned for I have betrayed an innocent man.

N: They retorted,

C Women: What do we care? That's your problem.

N: Then Judas threw the silver coins down in the Temple and went out and hanged himself. The leading priests picked up the coins.

C Women: It wouldn't be right to put this money in the Temple treasury since it was payment for murder.

N: After some discussion they finally decided to buy the potter's field, and they made it into a cemetery for foreigners [...] Now Jesus was standing before Pilate, the Roman governor. He asked him,

P: Are you the king of the Jews?

J: You have said it.

N: But when the leading priests and the elders made their accusations against him, Jesus remained silent. Pilate demanded:

P: Don't you hear all these charges they are bringing against you?

N: But Jesus made no response to any of the charges, much to the governor's surprise. Now it was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner to the crowd-- anyone they wanted. This year there was a notorious prisoner, a man named Barabbas. As the crowds gathered before Pilate's house that morning, he asked them:

P: Which one do you want me to release to you--Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?

N: He knew very well that the religious leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy.

Just then, as Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him this message:

C Women: Leave that innocent man alone. I suffered through a terrible nightmare about him last night.

N: Meanwhile, the leading priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be put to death. So the governor asked again,

P: Which of these two do you want me to release to you?

N: The crowd shouted back,

C All: Barabbas!

N: Pilate responded,

P: Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?

N: They shouted back,

C All: Crucify him!

N: Pilate asked,

P: Why? What crime has he committed?

N: But the mob roared even louder,

C All: Crucify him!!

N: Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying,

P: I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours!

N: And all the people yelled back,

C All: We will take responsibility for his death--we and our children!

N: So Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

Some of the governor's soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters and called out the entire regiment. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted,

C All: Hail! King of the Jews!

N: And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

[Please stand as you are able]

Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). [...] Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. They yelled at him:

C Men: Look at you now--you said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuilt it in three days. If you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!

N: The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus.

C Women: He saved others, but he can't save himself! If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants to; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'

N: Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice,

J: Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?

N: Which means, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?"

Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling out for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. But the rest said,

C All: Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him.

N: Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. Many bodies of the saints who had died were raised. After Jesus' resurrection, they left the tombs, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said,

C All: Truly this man was the Son of God!