



## WHAT IS A PASSION PLAY?

Today's passion play is a dramatic portrayal of what has been called the greatest story ever told. It is the story of Jesus' life, his timeless teaching and his last days. The play has all the elements of stories that are compelling and moving: treachery, betrayal, injustice, sacrifice, redemption, forgiveness and happy endings. This Easter 2011, we hope you get a glimpse of the extraordinary person of Jesus in today's re-enactment of his life, death and resurrection.

## WHO IS JESUS?

As you will see Jesus defies description in so many ways. There is no simple response to who he is or what he says about himself. He lived most of his life in an obscure village in first century Palestine and worked as a carpenter until he was thirty. He was also a man who spent three years of his life publicly teaching people about the kingdom of God and attracting passionate attention that has continued for over two thousand years.

He described himself as God in unmistakable claims that were both controversial and yet hard to deny. Controversial because such claims were in violation of the Jewish law. Hard to deny because they were accompanied by spectacular miracles. Water was turned to wine, bread was multiplied to feed multitudes of starving people, blind men received sight, crippled beggars walked again, distraught women saw their children raised from the dead, tormented people received peace and sinners were forgiven and released from guilt and despair.

Because of these claims, Jesus was suspected and hated by many people who saw this display of the kingdom of God as a threat to the existing political and religious regimes. He was betrayed to his enemies by one of his companions and, although innocent, the Jewish leaders demanded his death. A request the Roman governor granted.

When he was dead, he was placed in a borrowed grave and his friends and followers fled in fear of a similar fate. But that wasn't the end of the story. What follows is an account of the defeat of death, the chance of new life and the hope of resurrection. It is a story that is still being told today.

## WHO WAS PETER?

Peter was a fisherman who left his trade to become a disciple of Jesus. Although he swore he would never abandon his friend, Jesus was taken into custody and three times Peter denied that he even knew him. But after meeting with the risen Jesus, Peter was never the same again. He was also killed by people who did not understand the kingdom of God. He was martyred by upside-down crucifixion in 64AD, saying he wasn't worthy of dying in the same way as Jesus.

## WHO WAS PONTIUS PILATE?

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea at the time Jesus was brought to trial. Although he did not see Jesus as a political threat, he was swayed by the crowds that had gathered to demand that Jesus be put to death. He is remembered in art and literature as the man who refused to save an innocent man yet attempted to wash his hands of his guilt.

## WHO WAS MARY?

Mary was the young mother of Jesus who lived to see her son crucified before her eyes. Two moments in her life are often immortalised in art and music. We see her as the devoted mother of a child born because of an angel's promise. We also see her as a weeping mother holding the broken body of her crucified son. One other moment is dramatised today: her realisation that Jesus did not remain in the grave, but rose again.

## WHO WAS MATTHEW?

Matthew was a tax-collector working for Roman occupiers of Galilee to tax his own people. He gave that up to become one of Jesus' twelve disciples and later in his life he wrote an eye-witness account. His account interweaves an understanding of the Old Testament with his first hand knowledge of the life and person of Jesus. Today's passion play is based on Matthew's account.

