

Good Friday Service – Eyewitnesses of Christ’s Death

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(30 minutes before service, various candles are lit around room. Until service begins, keep up M/M Slide: “Please enter the worship center quietly. Use these moments for silent prayer.”)

Opening Song: The Power of the Cross [Bb-C or C] KG-Files V1-4

*(*7 Pillar Candles are Lit during Song.) (*Readers are Seated on stage.)*

Set the Pace: Good evening, and welcome to our Good Friday worship service. This year we consider eyewitnesses of Christ’s death at the foot of the cross and how they responded to Jesus.

This Good Friday service can be called “Tenebrae” which means darkness/gloom. As the evening goes on, you will notice that the room will progressively get darker. Our pastoral staff has written Scripture-based readings, which are included in your devotional booklets. After each of the readings, one of seven candles will be snuffed out. When the last candle is out, we will be left in silent darkness. After a time of solitude, we will be prompted to soberly leave in silence and to return on Easter Sunday to celebrate Christ’s resurrection.

Tonight, we consider eyewitnesses of Christ’s death from John 19: the Chief Priests, the Soldiers, Mary Magdalene, the apostle John, Nicodemus, and Joseph.

We have 7 goals tonight: 1) Let us **reflect** on the eyewitnesses of Christ’s death—consider the men and women who were present at the foot of the cross and how they responded to Jesus. 2) Let us **remember** the sacrifice of Jesus Christ & the suffering he endured. 3) Let us **recognize** the seriousness of sin & penalty that we deserve. 4) Let us **repent**, turn away from sin, and turn to the Lord for forgiveness. 5) Let us **realize** the greatness of our Triune God – To see His character, holiness, justice, wrath, love, mercy & grace. 6) Let us **respond** to the Lord in reverent worship, singing, prayer, and obedience. 7) Let us **return** on Easter Sunday in hope of the resurrection. *(Screen goes black).*
Prayer.

(On the Screen, Project the 7 “Let us” italics statements below).

On Screen:

- 1) *Let us **reflect** on the eyewitnesses of Christ’s death at the foot of the cross and how they responded to Jesus.*
- 2) *Let us **remember** the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*
- 3) *Let us **recognize** the seriousness of sin.*
- 4) *Let us **repent** and turn to God for forgiveness.*
- 5) *Let us **realize** the greatness of our Triune God.*
- 6) *Let us **respond** to the Lord in reverent worship, prayer, and obedience.*
- 7) *Let us **return** on Easter Sunday in hope of the resurrection.*

(*Cross Light Fades ON.)

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***Reading for Dark Candle 1 (by Wesley Price)**

1. The Chief Priests: Annas and Caiaphas

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, This man said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” (John 19:19-22)

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They had been waiting for this day. This was a red-letter day for their hopes – that they could work the system, that they could drive the Roman machine for their own purposes. And the icing on the cake? “We have no king but Caesar.”

That had driven the governor over the edge. Now, they had him where they wanted him. This man, Jesus from Nazareth...who did he think he was anyway? Sure, he had fooled the masses into thinking that he was someone special, but everyone knows that would-be messiahs are dangerous. Everybody knows that a man claiming to be a king would agitate Rome, would volatilize Judea, would subvert the plan to use Rome for all it was worth. And everyone knew that the chief priests were the real kings. They had been ruling since the days of the Maccabees. “You have to have order in this place, and order comes from tradition – not some upstart from Galilee.”

So, they stood there as this king “wannabe” dragged his broken body up the hill. “Serves him right,” they sneered. The nails ripped him. The sun burned him. The scaffold shook him to his core. And there he hanged.

They stood there as the centurion gave orders. The soldier carried the plank. The Roman recruits hammered it in place. His crime was being advertised. The charges made against

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him were clear. The priests and their lackeys gasped. IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDAEORUM (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews).

As quick as their sensibilities could respond, they sent a messenger. (It would be indecent for one of *them* to run.) He tells the man who tells the priest who tells the governor, “Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” That is the crime they wanted him punished for.

“What I have written *stays* written,” Pilate says with crooked grin.

And with that their hearts began to sink. Rome would not be used. Abuse of its systems would not be tolerated. Pilate sends the message loud and clear: “Rome is executing this man because he IS your king – not merely because he claims to be; and Rome has only one way to deal with rival kings.” After all, they had pledged their allegiance to Caesar and disavowed a proper, Jewish claimant.

They had been waiting for this day, but when it came, it came with disappointment. Annas and Caiaphas had made a politically savvy declaration – that Caesar was their king, but this would become a self-inflicted condemnation. They had colluded with the enemy. Sure, they had silenced the bleating lamb – throwing him on the sacrificial table. But the table was a gamble, and they had lost the bet. Rome could not be controlled.

As they shuffled back to their homes, their bittersweet victory replays in their hearts. They are unaware that their power play is an utter failure. The bleating lamb they had silenced was not a victim. He was not a pawn in a political power struggle. He was a willing participant in a powerful demonstration – the gospel of God. He would rise from the grave, would ascend to the throne of His Father in heavenly places, and would prove them wrong, would prove Pilate correct – that Jesus of Nazareth truly was – truly *is* – the King of the Jews, the King of Kings.

(Reader then snuffs out Dark Candle #1 [on far stage right] and is seated).

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Song: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded [Am] CH-316 V1-4

***Reading for Dark Candle 2 (by Mark Armstrong)**

2. The Soldiers

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, 24 so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things. (John 19:23-24)

As the soldiers played their role in the crucifixion of Jesus, I cannot help but notice their indifference to who He was. The man they treated like a common criminal was actually the Savior of the world. While He was dying, giving His life as a payment for their sin, they were playing games at the foot of the cross. A man’s outer garment, his cloak, was a precious possession. It also served as his blanket and his bed. And history tells us that when a man died, his outer cloak was usually given to his family. So for these soldiers to tear it into four pieces was an insult to Jesus and his family and friends. Can’t you see them laughing and jeering, making a mockery of our Savior’s death?

These men, as well as many others who were there as witnesses, were oblivious to the historical significance of the events of that day. Scripture was being fulfilled in that very hour. The prophets of old had been foretelling it for hundreds of years. Even the specific role the soldiers would play was foretold in detail in Psalm 22:18, “*They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*” Yet, they remained oblivious, ignorant to the reality of the moment. Being too preoccupied with themselves and their agenda, they missed seeing the God-man give His life as a ransom. Instead, they saw the death of a mere “imposter.” Nonetheless, God still used them to carry out His perfect plan.

I wonder how many of us remain indifferent to the death of our Savior. While we may see Jesus as our Savior rather than a common man, we still miss the significance of that day. Jesus’ death was more than a free ticket to Heaven. But in our selfishness, we are prone to think that way. We focus only on what we can get out of it. And in doing so, we miss seeing our Savior suffering and dying on that dreadful cross. We miss the injustice and humiliation He must have felt. Yes, praise God, we benefited from the death of Christ. But I don’t want us to miss the fact that He suffered greatly in order to achieve those benefits for you and me. Because when we miss this, I think it causes us to be more apathetic toward our sin. It’s as if we are playing games at the foot of His cross. We get

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so wrapped up in the things of the world—possessions, success, fame, status, comfort—that we become oblivious to our Savior. Our agenda blinds us to God’s perfect plan.

Every time we sin we should remind ourselves that it was for our sin that Jesus suffered and died. His blood was spilt for our sins—yours and mine. And we should take that seriously. Our sin against our Savior should grieve us greatly.

But Christ’s death should also serve to remind us that the power of sin has been broken. The Man who died on the cross that day would live again! By conquering sin and death, Jesus offers new life to those who will trust in Him. Our selfishness and indifference can be replaced with a growing allegiance to our Savior, the God-man, whose blood is sufficient to cover the sins of the world. Even the sins of four Roman soldiers.

(Reader then snuffs out Dark Candle #2 [on far stage left] and is seated).

Lord’s Table: Men Distribute Bread

Song: This is Our Freedom [D-Eb] [LW-Files]

***Reading for Dark Candle 3 (Zach Nelson)**

3. John 6:48-51

Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

(Reader snuffs out Dark Candle #3 [2nd candle in from stage right] and is seated).

Dwayne Leads: Congregation Eats Bread

Lord’s Table: Men Distribute Cup

Song: There is a Fountain [Bb]

CH-336

V1-5

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***Reading for Dark Candle 4 (Jordan Branch)**

4. John 19:53-56

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

(Reader snuffs out Dark Candle #4 [2nd candle in from stage left] and is seated).

Dwayne Leads: Congregation Drinks Cup

(After Communion, All Stage/House Lights fade OFF.)

***Reading for Dark Candle 5 (by Bob Jones)**

5. Mary Magdalene

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25)

When we think of those who traveled with Jesus in his earthly ministry, we usually think of the twelve apostles. But the Gospels tell us that there were a number of women who also traveled with them. This was an uncommon practice among the rabbis, but an example of the way Jesus honored women. These women had been delivered from evil spirits and from diseases. In turn, they supported the apostolic team financially and cared for their material needs.¹ One of them, perhaps the most famous in our day, was Mary Magdalene, called “Magdalene” because she was from the town of Magdala, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

In recent years books and films like the *The Da Vinci Code* have made Mary Magdalene popular by claiming she had a romantic relationship with Jesus. But there is no historical evidence for that, only the speculations of Bible rejecters. Others suggest she was a former prostitute, or the unnamed sinful woman who entered Simon the Pharisee’s house to wash Jesus’ feet

¹ Luke 8:1-3; Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41. Each passage uses the same verb, *diakoneō*, to describe these women’s ministry, a general term referring to various forms of practical (diaconal) service.

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with her hair and her tears,² or the Mary from Bethany who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume.³ But there’s no proof for any of these notions.

What we do know about Mary from the Bible is this: Seven demons were cast out of her.⁴ We don’t know when or how – was it Jesus himself or his apostles? – but those details are unimportant. What we do know is that God’s grace rescued her, and it was a radical transformation. The perfect number seven suggests the most severe form of demonic affliction. And in response to that mighty deliverance, Mary Magdalene became a fervent follower and a sacrificial supporter of Jesus.

The next time we meet Mary is here in John 19. She was one of four devoted women at the foot of the cross, staring at the tragic, bloody site, seeing the Savior who delivered her from Satan now being delivered over to death for her sins and for ours. Surely Mary would agree wholeheartedly with this paraphrase of Jesus’ words, “do not rejoice that the spirits *are cast out of you*, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”⁵

But like my story and your story, Mary’s story does not end at the cross. It gets better. For when we turn to the next chapter in John’s Gospel we find some amazing things. Mary Magdalene did more than merely help prepare his body for burial.⁶ She was the one who, on resurrection morning, ran to tell Peter and John that the stone had been removed and that Jesus was gone.⁷ She then became the first person to *see* the risen Jesus, as she stood outside the tomb crying over Jesus’ absence, until he appeared to her. She was the first person to *hear* the risen Jesus, as he called his sheep by name, “Mary,” and to speak to him.⁸ She was the first person to *touch* Jesus, probably clasping his feet in worship until Jesus asked her to not hold on to him.⁹ And she was the first one to run to the apostles and eagerly *announce* that she had indeed seen the risen Lord.¹⁰

Mary Magdalene was an amazing woman, transformed by an even more amazing God. What we see in Mary is a life of gratitude to Jesus her

² Luke 7:36-50

³ John 12:1-8

⁴ Luke 8:2

⁵ My paraphrase. The actual text of Luke 10:20 reads, “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” While Mary was a recipient of our Lord’s (or his apostles’) exorcistic ministry, her greater and eternal joy went beyond being demon-free. She was a daughter of God and a heaven-bound heir of eternal life.

⁶ Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; cf. Luke 24:1

⁷ John 20:1-2

⁸ John 20:10-16

⁹ John 20:17, as NIV, NASB95, ESV, and commentaries by Gerald L. Borchert, D. A. Carson, Donald Guthrie, Andreas Kostenberger, and Leon Morris.

¹⁰ John 20:18; Luke 24:9-11

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Savior, a life of faithful service in serving the Lord’s servants, a life of fervent devotion to him who delivered her from the powers of darkness, a life that planted her right there beneath the cross of Jesus, and a life that witnessed and proclaimed eagerly to others the risen Christ.

(Reader snuffs out Dark Candle #5 [3rd candle in from stage right] and is seated).

***Reading for Dark Candle 6 (by Scott Lorenz)**

6. The Apostle John

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:26-27)

An unsung hero of the Titanic tragedy was revealed yesterday, 97 years after the disaster¹¹. A never-before-seen archive describes how dad Arthur West sacrificed his life while making sure his wife and little children survived.

Thirty-six-year-old Arthur was taking wife Ada and daughters Constance, five, and ten-month-old Barbara to start a new life in America when the doomed liner sank in 1912. The article states: “He managed to get Ada and the kids into a lifeboat—but dashed back to the family’s second-class cabin to grab a flask of hot milk for the youngsters.” Arthur returned to find the lifeboat being lowered into the freezing north Atlantic. He shimmied down a rope and handed the drink to Ada—before saying goodbye and selflessly climbed back on deck. His actions meant he not only kept his children warm but also left space on the lifeboat for other women or kids. Arthur became one of the 1,517 victims of the disaster, and his body was never found.

Ada, 33 at the time, described her husband’s bravery in letters she later wrote:

“My dear people, here’s the end of my first awful week without my dear old boy. The experiences I have been through with all the other poor creatures have been enough for two lifetimes. We were amongst the first to leave the ship. Arthur placed lifebelts upon the children then carried them on to the boat deck.”

¹¹ “**Selfless hero of Titanic tragedy**”, John Coles, 03/25/2009, *The Sun*.

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Let me draw your attention to another letter describing an equally astounding act of selfless self-sacrifice from John 19:26-27: “And the Lord said to Mary and John ‘Woman, behold your son . . . Behold your mother.’”

I always read it from the viewpoint of Jesus looking down on Mary and John. But to read the passage through the eyes of Mary or John and see His tortured body and hear his raspy voice brings panic and grief like survivors in a lifeboat looking back at the tragedy unfold.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John remained there—adrift if you will—with our Lord, a vigil I suppose, not unlike any of us who would stand watch with a loved one for their care and comfort. And here we are reminded again of the sorrow and grief of Easter.

But more than this, when we look through John and Mary’s eyes there is something else. In His simple last words, we see resolve, tender love and self-sacrifice.

Remember that Jesus is very near death. John and Mary move close enough to the cross to hear Him. Seeing His terrible suffering, they heard something unexpected. They did not hear a cry of remorse, nor did they hear words of bitterness, nor words that sought comfort from a mother, nor did they hear words of regret. They heard, “Mother, behold your son.” Then with his eyes falling on John they hear, “Behold your Mother.” Of all the things that Jesus could have said, we hear tender words of selfless resolve.

With great weight and pain, His death bears in. Jesus’ heart is not swayed to neglect the care of His mother. And with words of affection that reveal the heart of God to its core, Jesus entrusted His mother to the care of John. A simple, selfless act in the midst of a Titanic tragedy.

Jesus’ words reveal God’s heart of affection, and they reveal God’s heart of resolve. For like the prophets of old who gave their lives, Jesus never spoke words of doubt. The resolve we hear in the words of a prophet like Habakkuk, “in wrath remember mercy . . . and yet I will exalt in the Lord,” is the same resolve John and Mary hear at the cross. Resolve great enough to care for those He loves while His own life was sinking fast. Resolve great enough to take pause while saving the world in order to care for those He loves.

This Easter, let us gather our strength, and show others the love of Jesus with the resolve we see demonstrated by Christ at the cross. Could we not do the “heroic” in a sinking world?

(Reader snuffs out Dark Candle #6 [3rd candle in from stage left] and is seated).

Song: Be Unto Your Name [C-D] AF-104

**(*At close of song, musicians turn OFF all lights on music stands).
(*Cross Light Fades OFF . . . All stage/house lights are already OFF).**

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***Reading for White Candle 7 (by Josh Berrus)**

7. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:38-42)

There are two men burying Jesus tonight, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Both of these men are Jewish believers, high-ranking men, religious leaders, and personal friends of Jesus. James Stalker in his book *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ* states that if Joseph and Nicodemus had not been there, it is likely Jesus’ body would have been “carried off to some obscure and accursed ditch.” These two friends of Jesus are preparing his body for burial. Nicodemus and Joseph’s service of love and respect for the body of Jesus is courageous and sacrificial.

Nicodemus appears several times in the gospel of John. In John 3, we see he was a Pharisee who was hungry for truth and came to Jesus by night. Jesus instructed him on the basics of salvation—Nicodemus needed to be “born again” spiritually. Jesus taught of sin and grace using the story of the brass serpent from Numbers 21. The ancient Jews bitten by poisonous snakes were to look up by faith at the uplifted serpent. Jesus predicted his own death: “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Being *lifted up* has a dual meaning of being crucified and glorified. Jesus would fulfill both meanings: he would be exalted through his crucifixion. Jesus also used the imagery of light and darkness describing sinners in spiritual blindness. It is apparent that in time Nicodemus came out of darkness into the marvelous light and put his faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord. Four chapters later in John 7, Nicodemus courageously spoke up and defended Jesus before the Jewish council. Most of the religious leaders rejected Christ, passed judgment on Him, and worked to arrest Him. Nicodemus confidently spoke truth and strove to get Jesus a fair hearing. He said: “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” The Sanhedrin replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” The religious leaders could only respond with sarcasm and disdain. They hated Jesus, and they accused Nicodemus of being as ignorant as the Galileans. The meeting ended abruptly, and they returned home. Nicodemus appears again in John 19 with spices to assist in the burial of Jesus.

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The other individual who helped bury Jesus was Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a rich man (Matt 27:57), a disciple of Jesus Christ (John 19:38), a good and righteous man looking for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:50-51), and a respected member of the Jewish council who did not consent to their decision and action to put Jesus to death (Mark 15:43). He asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. Joseph came and took Jesus’ body from the Romans. He took it down from the cross and wrapped it in a linen shroud. Joseph laid the body in his own new nearby tomb, which he had cut in the rock and where no one had ever yet been laid.

Nicodemus came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. There were several women from Galilee who witnessed Christ’s burial (Matt 27:61; Mark 15:47). The women then went home to prepare spices and ointments and planned to return after the Sabbath to complete burial procedures (Luke 23:55-56).

Tonight is a time of doubt and confusion. Jesus’ disciples have fled into the night. Before today, they were convinced Jesus was the Messiah. Soon after Jesus’ death, two of the anguished disciples said, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). Surely it would have been him. Jesus was the great teacher, healer, and miracle worker. There was no one like Him in all the earth. They were convinced Jesus was the great Messiah who would overthrow Rome and begin a new kingdom. But their great leader is now dead. He was arrested, tried, led off to die, crucified between two thieves, and buried in a nearby tomb. What now?

Not only is tonight a time of doubt and confusion, it is a time of sadness and grief. Joseph and Nicodemus work quickly, meticulously, and lovingly as night falls. The sky is dark. Jesus is dead. His lifeless, abused, and torn body is being prepared for burial. Blood is everywhere. Jesus’ head is mangled from a crown of thorns. His hands and feet are nail scarred. His back is destroyed by countless beatings. His side is pierced. His bruised and mangled body is being prepared for burial. What now?

Little did they know that hope was coming. Light was around the corner. On the third day, joy would come in the morning. Questions would be answered. Doubts would be stilled. Grief would cease. Joy would come in the morning. Little did they know.

But for now, tonight is a time of doubt and confusion. It is a time of sadness and grief.

Nicodemus and Joseph courageously and lovingly prepare the body of Jesus for burial with a spice mixture of myrrh and aloes, bind it in linen cloths, and lay the body in the tomb. And Joseph rolls a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and goes away.

(Reader turns off lecturn light).

(Reader then snuffs out White Candle #7 [stage center] and is seated).

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*(After 1 minute of silent darkness, Bring up last M/M Slide: **"You are dismissed. Please leave the worship center in silence. Let us return on Easter Sunday remembering the hope of the resurrection."** Bring up House Lights a little.)*

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