Pilate Error

A play for Easter, about Judean life after the death and resurrection of Jesus

Written by Cenarth Fox

Pilate Error *was much admired and enjoyed by all and added greatly to our Easter worship.*
St Andrew's Uniting Church, Gardiner

It was a privilege to have the play here. Wittily titled, Pilate Error *uses comedy, colloquial expressions, and much Scripture and is a powerful testimony to Christian belief and the extraordinary beginnings of a religion which has shaped our world*. **St Gabriel's Catholic Church, Reservoir**

The play was a great success. Everyone has been very complimentary. **Rushall Park Village**

There are people today who are trying to breathe new life into an ancient Easter narrative and Pilate Error *explores the boundaries of faith through an imaginary dialogue between Pilate, Caiaphas, Mary Magdelene and Mary the mother of Jesus. It was great to have you with us.*
Surrey Hills Uniting Church

Thank you for the wonderful Easter play Pilate Error *which was received with much enthusiasm. The play was sensitively and authentically in keeping with scripture, but also masterly crafted in a contemporary way. The play brought scripture to life and gave the characters flesh. I can thoroughly recommend* Pilate Error *as a wonderful way to 'break open the word' for any congregation.*
All Saints' Anglican Church, Mitcham

Characters

Pontius Pilate, Mary Magdelene
Mary the mother of Jesus and Josephus Caiaphas



Pilate Error

A play for Easter

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Synopsis

While Pilate was sitting in the judgment hall, his wife sent him a message: "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, [Jesus] because in a dream last night I suffered much on account of him."
Matthew 27:19 *Good News For Modern Man*

For centuries, the Roman Empire was widespread and successful. It operated in many countries by the use of force. Roman and sometimes seconded local soldiers crushed nearly all dissent. Executions were common. Rome held sway over vast areas and divided land into provinces including countries in what we now know as the Middle East.

The province of Judea was not a plum posting. In area it was small being about 70 km by 160km. One of its governors, Pontius Pilate, was not from the upper class. He was not a senator from Rome and most probably had military training. Josephus Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest, was from the upper class and his father-in-law was High Priest before him. Both Pilate and Caiaphas held their respective posts, comparatively speaking, for very long periods. Their discussions over the arrest and trial of Jesus are well documented.

Pilate was recalled to Rome after the crucifixion of Jesus and historians offer various opinions as to the fate of the governor in his final years. Some say Pilate converted to Christianity and some churches have even venerated the man or at least his wife. Others believe he committed suicide in disgrace and his body was moved several times as it caused problems wherever it was buried.

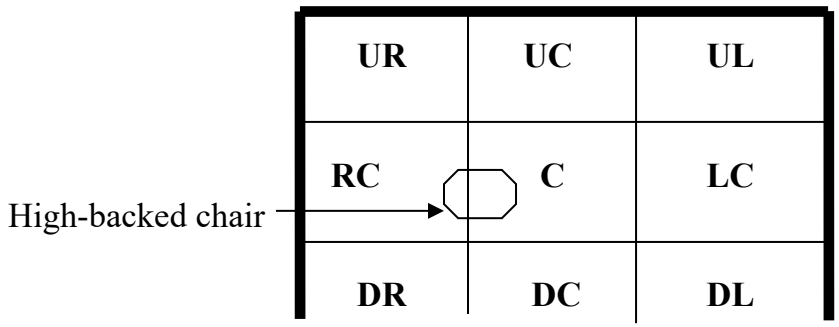
Whilst the characters are real people and the action is based on certain verses of scripture and what might be called 'widely-accepted historical data', the play is a work of fiction.

Costumes and Movement

It is suggested contemporary casual clothes be worn with simple pieces of cloth thrown over the shoulder or head of the various actors. Headgear can determine the period. Pilate could have a simple helmet. The women could be distinguished by contrasting coloured head scarves. Alternatively, traditional clothes of the period could be worn. The premiere performances used traditional costumes which were much appreciated.

Set Design

There need be no set, simply an open space – a stage or the altar area in a theatre or church. If staged in a church, the religious setting of the building is ideal for the performance. A high-backed chair could be used for Pilate to sit in judgment at certain times.



Characters

Pilate is a driven man and during the play is angry at the possibility that his Judean tenure is under threat. He is anxious to discover if anyone has betrayed him and takes the attitude that if he is to fall, others may well suffer with him. Pilate is a WYSIWYG. In contrast Caiaphas is a chameleon where the male is showy and headgear important. His tongue is remarkable and he changes colour according to the political climate. Mary Magdelene is the more outspoken of the two women and is determined to put across her beliefs. She seems to have no fear of those in authority and has never read anything by Dan Brown. Mary the mother of Jesus has a steely determination but is more quietly-spoken.

Stage Directions

This script contains stage directions. They, of course, may not work in every situation and performing groups will choose their own way of staging the play.

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[Music could be played as an introduction to the play. It might be recorded Easter hymns or music especially composed for the play. If the play is part of a church service, there is no need for special music. The NARRATOR could and should be a member of the church, even its spiritual leader and such a person will give the play a smooth introduction]

NARR'TOR And it came to pass when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Caiaphas its High Priest, a man was executed. Crucifixions were common at that time, but the death of Jesus of Nazareth changed the world. And life became difficult for the governor of Judea. *[NARRATOR exits]*

PILATE *[Loud, angry, offstage]* I don't care! Get out of my sight!
[PILATE enters UL, heads C and addresses the audience/congregation]
I am not a happy camper. I've just received news from Rome. I'm being let go. *[Moving DR]* Me, the governor for ten years; so long I'm owed long-service. I've done exactly what Rome said. "Keep the upper class happy and crush the crims." I've executed thousands but suddenly, it's me in the firing line. I've been betrayed *[Moving DC]* by Caiaphas, that sanctimonious High Priest.

CAIAPHAS *[Enters DR]* You sent for me, Governor.

PILATE Josephus, your ears are burning. *[Studies him. Pointing]* You even *look* worried.

CAIAPHAS I'm always worried, sir, when you call me Josephus.

PILATE *[To DL]*I have news, High Priest; Rome requests my company.

CAIAPHAS *[Towards him]* Oh many congratulations, sir. *[Stops when PILATE speaks]*

PILATE It's not a promotion. *[Turns to face Caiaphas]* I'm being dismissed.

CAIPHAS *[Doesn't believe it]* Dismissed?

PILATE We Romans are ruthless; our favourite sport is backstabbing.

CAIAPHAS You must be mistaken, Governor.

PILATE So I'm gunning for the traitor. *[Into CAIAPHAS]* Someone has stitched me up.

CAIAPHAS I protest.

PILATE *[Straight-out accusation]* You bagged me to the Governor of Syria.

CAIAPHAS *[Straight-out denial]* That is a lie.

PILATE And Rome has decided to act.

CAIAPHAS You're a dictator in a foreign land so naturally you have many enemies.

PILATE *[Building fury]* *You* are my enemy; you with your pharisaic piety and double-tongued duplicity!

CAIAPHAS *[Returns fire]* Who has worked with you and for you since the day you arrived. *[Pause. Both men calm down. CAIAPHAS moves DR thinking]* I suggest we remain calm. If what you say is true, wise heads must prevail.

PILATE *[Thinking aloud moves DL]* But why now? What have I done to deserve the sack?

CAIAPHAS You've made many mistakes, Governor.

PILATE *[Sarcastic]* Yes, thank you, Perfect Priest.

CAIAPHAS *[To DC]* You do realise that your misfortune will quickly become mine? If you're sacked, *I'm* sacked.

PILATE *[Smiling, nodding]* You're right. *[Sees the black comedy]* Isn't irony delicious?
[Sarcastic] The pagan and the priest unite to save their respective skins.

CAIAPHAS *[Ignores PILATE'S wit and returns DR]* On a more practical level, sir, I've heard several rumours.

PILATE *[Back to reality]* There are always rumours.
CAIAPHAS There is a popular movement spreading rapidly amongst the people.
PILATE And there are always movements. Last month we had *two* messiahs and some fruitcake predicting the end of the world. *[Curious]* What happened to him?
CAIAPHAS His followers killed him.
PILATE *[Nods]* Typical. *[Back DL thinking aloud]* No, the reason I'm being chopped is because some high-flyer in Rome wants my job.
CAIAPHAS Hardly, sir. *[PILATE looks at him. PRIEST to behind or beside chair]* Well Judea's not exactly a plum post. We're a tiny province and its Governor is not even a Roman senator.
PILATE *[Miffed but accepts his reasoning. Heads to chair]* There's no need to get personal. *[Pause]* So what about this popular movement?
CAIAPHAS They follow a man you had executed.
PILATE *[Scoffs]* Well that wouldn't be hard. I've executed thousands. *[Sits]*
CAIAPHAS *[To C]* You'll remember this man. We argued during his trial.
PILATE We always argue. *[Realises]* Not the King of the Jews?
CAIAPHAS Jesus of Nazareth; and his followers grow in number every day.
PILATE But he's dead. How does a corpse recruit new members?
CAIAPHAS That's the interesting part. Many say he's still alive.
PILATE *[Adamant]* Not possible. I gave a wealthy Jew permission to bury the body.
CAIAPHAS *[To DL]* All I know is that Christians claim Jesus arose from the tomb.
PILATE *[Shaking head]* I really love the Jewish sense of humour; *[Hops up]* jokes about music knocking down walls, oceans parting, talking donkeys and now, *[Ghostly walk DL]* Ooooo, a corpse who walks.
[CAIAPHAS is unimpressed by the comic figure]
CAIAPHAS His disciples proclaim that Jesus came alive and if Rome has heard this news, that might explain your recall.
PILATE *[Disbelieving]* But why would Rome be interested in religious weirdoes?
CAIAPHAS *[Out front]* They say he did the same for others.
PILATE *Who*? Did *what* for others?
CAIAPHAS *[Looks at PILATE]* Before he was executed, they say Jesus performed miracles including raising the dead.
PILATE *[Exasperated]* Don't tell me you actually believe this stuff.
CAIAPHAS *[Moves DC]* I simply repeat what I hear. You forget we Jews have sought the Messiah for many years and for many reasons. *[PILATE to PRIEST DC]*
PILATE *[Wants to understand]* You mean you want *different* Messiahs?
CAIAPHAS One Messiah but with different outcomes. Some Jews want the re-unification of the twelve tribes of Israel and others the restoration of life under the law of Moses. *[Pause. Calm but the meaning is clear]* Many long for the Messiah to drive out the oppressive Roman Empire.
PILATE *[Mock seriousness, cups ear, wanders DL]* I'm sorry, what was that last bit?
CAIAPHAS I've located witnesses who believe Jesus is alive. Perhaps you should test their claims.
PILATE Listen, Priest. There *are* no miracles, there *is* no god and your religion is myth, folklore and old wives' tales. Life is ruled by the sword and when you die, you die.

CAIAPHAS *[Refuses to argue topic they have debated for years]* You asked why you're being sacked and I've told you about Christianity.
PILATE But where's the evidence it's done me in?
CAIPHAS I told you, I have witnesses but *[Heading DR]* I'll have them dismissed.
PILATE *[Moving DC]* Just a minute. *[CAIAPHAS stops. PILATE amazed]* There are men who would come before the Governor and tell fantastic tales?
CAIAPHAS Not men. Women.
PILATE *[Greatly shocked]* Women? *Jewish* women?
CAIAPHAS They make strong claims about Jesus whom you executed.
PILATE *[Annoyed]* Stop lying! You remember my words. "I find no fault in this man". *[Pointing]* *You* killed him!
CAIAPHAS *[Ignores PILATE'S accusation]* Then you will see them?
PILATE *[Into Priest]* There's something strange here. *[Moving DL]* A Jew can divorce his wife just like that. *[Snaps fingers]* But a wife cannot divorce her husband.
CAIAPHAS *[Nods. Back DR]* That is true.
PILATE There are Rabbis who pray every day, *[Wanders C, mimics rabbi]* "I thank Thee, God, that I was not born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman".
CAIAPHAS *[Does not react to Pilate's mocking]* Again, that is true.
PILATE *[Angry into Priest]* And now you repeat some ridiculous claim in which your two star witnesses are female whose credibility ranking is minus 24. *[Up close]* What's your game, High Priest?
CAIAPHAS There is no game. *[Exiting]* I will have them dismissed.
PILATE *[Angry]* Stop! *[CAIAPHAS stops]* I'll call your bluff.
CAIAPHAS *[Comes back to PILATE]* Governor?
PILATE Fetch them and if it's a trick, you'll pay, Priest, big-time.
CAIAPHAS *[Offended]* You would treat the High Priest like a common criminal?
PILATE *[Beckons the Priest to him then speaks confidentially]* I'm outa here, Joe. I'm a drowning governor clutches at straws. Comprendi?
CAIAPHAS *[Pause. Nods, quieter]* Si.
[CAIAPHAS exits DR. PILATE moves to the chair which might be on a small raised dais]
PILATE *[Thinking aloud]* Romans fear nothing so why *[Looks at hand]* do I shake?
[CAIAPHAS enters leading the two women. They are hesitant but not afraid]
CAIAPHAS This way. *[Pointing DC/DL]* Stand there. *[The women move as directed. CAIAPHAS is C, MOTHER closer to him and MAGDALENE DL. At first the women make no eye-contact with the powerful men]*
PILATE *[Back into ruler-mode]* Name?
MOTHER Mary, sir.
PILATE And?
MAG'LENE Mary, sir.
PILATE Oh wonderful. Mary One and Mary Two.
MOTHER I am Mary the mother of Jesus of Nazareth.
MAG'LENE I am Mary Magdalene, a friend of Jesus.
PILATE Well your son and friend is no more. *[Women impassive]* You do know he's dead?
MAG'LENE We attended the crucifixion and saw him die at Calvary.
MOTHER We stood below the cross until the very end.
PILATE Very commendable.

MAG'LENE A number of women followed Jesus and his cross on the way to Golgotha.
PILATE What's with all you *women*? Where were the men?
CAIAPHAS Trembling behind locked doors believing your soldiers would do to them what you chose to do to their leader.
MOTHER We know about my son's capture and interrogation.
PILATE *[A touch human, moving DR]* Well madam, your son did receive a trial of sorts but some *[Indicating CAIAPHAS]* were determined to bring him down.
CAIAPHAS I followed the rules.
PILATE *[About CAIAPHAS]* He's very big on rules.
MAG'LENE *[MAGDALENE forthright, crosses MOTHER]* We do not respect our spiritual leaders. *[MOTHER touches MAGDALENE'S arm as a warning to be careful]*
PILATE Mmmm, I like your frankness, woman.
MAG'LENE And we despise their closeness to our oppressive invaders from Rome.
[Tense moment. Pause. CAIAPHAS is shocked Will PILATE immediately order their arrest and death? Milk the moment. Suddenly he laughs out loud]
PILATE Well said, women of Judea. Pity your men aren't quite so bold. *[To chair]* Look, I'm feeling generous. I'm going to give you women a chance to speak your mind – *[CAIAPHAS fuming]* and without retaliation. *[Moves to CAIAPHAS]* Muggins here is having apoplexy but I'm the boss. So, come on, tell all, *[Returns to chair]* give me your best shot. *[Sits. CAIAPHAS to RC side of chair]*
[Pause. What will they say? Women exchange glances. MOTHER to C, lowers headgear]
MOTHER We have come to testify that Jesus Christ is alive today.
PILATE I like it. Straight to the point and clear as crystal. Now, Jesus who?
MAG'LENE Jesus Christ. *[Lowers headgear]*
PILATE *[Shaking head]* Never heard of him.
CAIAPHAS Christ is from the Greek *Christos* and in Hebrew, *messiah*.
PILATE *[Realises]* Oh, Jesus of Nazareth.
MOTHER My son is alive.
PILATE I assume you can prove that. Convince me. *[Arms folded in defiance]*
MAG'LENE We left the city and joined the crowd heading to the place of execution.
MOTHER My son was ordered to carry the beam upon which he was to be hung.
PILATE Standard procedure; and we don't charge for humiliation.
MOTHER My son was in great pain. He was tortured during his *so-called* trial.
PILATE Yes *[Indicating CAIAPHAS]* Captain Thuggery here believes confession is good for the soul.
CAIAPHAS It is a clear infringement of Hebrew Law to erroneously claim to be the Messiah and a clear infringement of Roman Law to encourage the people to revolt.
PILATE *[Mocking CAIAPHAS]* The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.
MAG'LENE *[To PILATE, crossing MOTHER]* You, sir, encouraged the people to release Barrabas and to have Jesus killed.
PILATE *[At MAGDALENE]* Now hang on. Caiaphas wanted Jesus found guilty. I found him innocent and sent him to Herod who did the old return-to-sender trick.
MAG'LENE The arrest of Jesus was done on the quiet in the dead of night.
PILATE *[To DL]* Yes and if I'd made an instant judgment, there would have been no crowd and no protest. Point taken. *[Beats chest]* Mea culpa. Pilate error.

CAIAPHAS *[To DR]* I acted for the good of my people. If Jesus had incited the crowd, the Romans would have crushed any demonstration and removed whatever rights we Jews currently enjoy.
[CAIAPHAS feels under attack from everyone]
MOTHER *[Moving DR to Priest]* The Passover privilege is a right the people still possess. We get to choose one prisoner's freedom.
MAG'LENE *[Follows MOTHER]* But the priests infiltrated the crowd and urged them to vote for Barrabas.
PILATE They've got you there, Josephus.
MOTHER *[At CAIAPHAS]* The normal practice is to scourge the victim just before the crucifixion, but my son was beaten in custody.
CAIAPHAS *[Furious. To DC]* I am not on trial here.
PILATE *[Heading to chair]* That could be arranged. *[At women]* Now ladies, you're here to *prove* a dead man walks. *[Moving to sit]* So please, put up or shut up.
MAG'LENE We witnessed the crucifixion and remained because we could not bear to see Jesus left on the cross to be attacked by birds and wild dogs.
MOTHER Joseph of Arimethea kindly agreed to have my son's body buried in his tomb.
PILATE *[Frustrated]* This is not evidence that Jesus is alive. You're time-wasters. *[Stands]* Sorry. No proof, no case. *[Heads UL]* Caiaphas, get rid of them.
CAIAPHAS *[Pointing leading DR]* This way.
MAG'LENE *[Stops, defiant, calling to PILATE]* Governor, you're wrong.
PILATE *[Stops, angry UL]* Hey! *[Threatens]* I'm Pilate the executioner.
CAIAPHAS *[Angry]* Begone, before I have you stoned to death.
MOTHER *[Defiant]* We are not afraid. Both of you should tremble in fear before God.
CAIAPHAS *[Pointing and roars]* Out! *[CAIAPHAS moves towards women as if to herd them out]* Move!
MAG'LENE *[Calling]* Listen to your wife!
CAIAPHAS *[Threatening]* Begone!
PILATE *[Loud]* Wait! *[Pause. Trio freeze. PILATE speaks slowly]* Do not move!
[PILATE is loud and dominant then moves slowly to C pointing at the women]
CAIAPHAS *[Moving to Pilate]* Women can be stoned, sir.
PILATE *[Crosses in front of Priest. Up close to MAGDALENE]* Listen to my wife? *[Threatening]* What know ye of my wife?
MAG'LENE It is spoken that your wife warned you about Jesus.
PILATE *[Angry]* It is spoken? By whom? To whom? When? Tell me!
MOTHER We know of your wife's message at my Son's trial.
PILATE *[Angry but fascinated]* You know of my wife's dreams? Are Christians soothsayers? Can you foretell the future?
MOTHER We know my Son is alive.
PILATE *[Moving DL]* Y'know, I *might* believe you if you can tell me why I'm being sent from Judea.
CAIAPHAS *[Moves towards Pilate]* Sir, they are clearly fraudsters.
PILATE *[Beckons them to him and women move DL]* If Christianity is the answer, if the dead come alive and miracles do happen, tell me, why am I getting the sack?
CAIAPHAS Throw them out.
PILATE *[At CAIAPHAS]* Oh you'd like that.

CAIAPHAS Jesus was an agitator and a false prophet.
PILATE *[To DC in front of women]* He called you a hypocrite.
CAIAPHAS *[Joins PILATE]* He spoke blasphemy.
PILATE Fancy telling the top priest he's full of sin.
CAIAPHAS *[Losing it, moves towards Pilate]* He lied! Jesus lied!
PILATE *[Losing it]* *You* lied! The High Priest lied!
[Shouting match interrupted by calm but insistent Mary]
MOTHER Gentlemen. *[They face women. Pause]* Do you wish to hear of my son's resurrection? *[PILATE to women]*
PILATE I do but first tell me how you know of my wife's dream? *[MOTHER behind Pilate]*
MAG'LENE All things are known to Jesus of Nazareth, he who has risen from the grave.
PILATE But gossip from my wife's servant is not proof that Jesus is alive. Secondhand information doesn't count.
MOTHER We were at the crucifixion and later at the tomb.
PILATE Explain.
MAG'LENE I went to the cemetery although when I arrived the tombstone was rolled away.
MOTHER My son's body was not inside, and the priests paid the guards to spread a false tale. *[WOMEN now are keen to tell all. Their convictions are on show]*
CAIAPHAS *[Moving DR]* This is now *literally* an old wives' tales.
MAG'LENE The people were told a wild storm moved the stone and that friends of Jesus had taken his body.
CAIAPHAS Which is obviously what happened.
PILATE *[To MAGALENE]* Did you go inside the tomb?
MAG'LENE No, I ran to ...
PILATE *[To MOTHER]* Did you?
MOTHER No.
PILATE *[To DC]* Then you are not eyewitnesses.
MAG'LENE But I returned to the tomb.
MOTHER And we both saw my son when he later appeared to his followers.
PILATE He appeared later?
MAG'LENE Before ascending to his Father on high.
PILATE *[Hands up]* Whoa, stop. *[To MOTHER]* Jesus went up in the sky to your husband?
MOTHER Not to his Earthly father but to his Heavenly father, to God, Jehovah.
[PILATE is puzzled. What are they talking about?]
CAIAPHAS They're fools, Governor, and are wasting your valuable time.
PILATE *[*Moves to CAIAPHAS. Soft*]* These women have the guts to stand up to their High Priest and a cruel Roman dictator who could have them killed like that. *[Finger snap. Quiet but emphatic]* Butt out. *[Stares at CAIAPHAS then moves back towards MAGDALENE]* Back at the tomb, what happened?
MAG'LENE *[Crosses Mother]* It was empty.
PILATE What, nothing?
MAG'LENE *[Emotional memories]* The clothes used to wrap Jesus were there all neatly folded.
PILATE But no body?
MAG'LENE *[More emotion]* I was weeping when a man, I thought was the gardener, spoke my name.

PILATE *[Pause]* And?
CAIAPHAS He *was* the gardener.
MAG'LENE It was Jesus.
PILATE You saw him?
MAG'LENE He was as close as you are to me now.
PILATE But did you touch him?
MAG'LENE No, he told me not to.
PILATE So Jesus could have been, what do you call it, a spirit or ghost?
MOTHER He *is* alive.
MAG'LENE There were angels there too, but Jesus was definitely a human.
PILATE *[Hands up again]* Hold it, too fast. Angels?
CAIAPHAS *[Into PILATE]* In Judaic history, Jehovah has appeared to us mere mortals in different forms, even as a burning bush.
PILATE *[Incredulous]* Your God is a burning bush?
CAIAPHAS Angels are heavenly creatures sent by God to instruct his people.
PILATE *[To DL]* You Jews are very lucky. We pagans don't have any angels.
MOTHER Everything which happened had been prophesied.
MAG'LENE "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."
PILATE I'm really lost now. Who is this 'Son of Man'?
MOTHER *[To DL]* My son and God's Son.
PILATE Jesus is God's Son?
MAG'LENE God the Father and God the Son.
PILATE *[To MOTHER]* So as the mother of Jesus, you are married to God?
CAIAPHAS *[Moves to DC]* This is absurd. They are lunatics and worse, *women*.
MOTHER God created his Son within my womb.
PILATE *[Shaking head]* He what?
CAIAPHAS Have them removed!
[Pause. PILATE is interested but confused. He's never heard of these things. He thinks then crosses and takes CAIAPHAS DR]
PILATE *[To CAIAPHAS]* Did you bribe people to invent a story about a storm rolling away the stone so friends of Jesus could pinch his body?
CAIAPHAS Whatever I did was for the good of my people.
PILATE Answer the question.
CAIAPHAS I object to being interrogated and especially in the presence of blasphemous women.
PILATE *[Persistent]* Did you pay to spread a false story?
CAIAPHAS *[Pause]* The priest and elders may have discussed the matter.
PILATE *[More persistent]* Did you lie?
CAIAPHAS *[Almost explodes]* All right, yes! We paid soldiers to say that friends of Jesus removed his body. It was to prevent crowd trouble. Satisfied?
PILATE Yes but did the friends of Jesus actually carry out some grave-robbing?
[MEN turn when the WOMEN speak]
MAG'LENE *[Moves a little DC]* No-one removed the body. Jesus came alive.

MOTHER *[Follows MAGDALENE]* And then my son appeared to me and Mary and to his disciples and spoke to many witnesses.
PILATE *[Moves towards WOMEN]* You could be lying or brainwashed; anything.
MAG'LENE But Jesus is much more than the resurrection. There are prophesies fulfilled, miracles and moreover, he is God's gift to the world.
CAIAPHAS *[Into Pilate]* The priests alone can speak of God. These women blaspheme. Jesus spoke blasphemy.
PILATE *[Turns to Priest]* But only if he's wrong.
CAIAPHAS *[Flustered]* Sir, you do not understand Jewish law.
PILATE *[Turns to WOMEN]* Tell me about prophesies; and make it believable.
MOTHER Zechariah said, "See, your king comes to you riding on a donkey."
PILATE Is that a *recent* prophesy?
MAG'LENE Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.
PILATE *[Remembers, shocked]* He did. *[PILATE turns from PRIEST to WOMEN]*
CAIAPHAS *[Scoffs]* Thousands of men ride donkeys. Is everyone the Messiah?
MAG'LENE And Zechariah foretold the price of the betrayal saying, "So they paid thirty pieces of silver".
MOTHER And the chief priests paid Judas thirty silver coins.
PILATE *[To CAIAPHAS]* Is that true?
CAIAPHAS I cannot recall.
PILATE *[Shaking head]* You are such a politician.
MOTHER The prophet Isaiah spoke of the Chosen One. "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth".
MAG'LENE *[To PILATE]* And the dictator of Judea fulfilled the prophecy when he said to Jesus, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?"
PILATE *[Shocked]* I did say that.
MOTHER But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge - to the great amazement of the governor.
PILATE *[More shocked]* How do you know this?
CAIAPHAS Don't be fooled, sir. They play with words.
PILATE Just like you. *[To WOMEN]* You mentioned other things. Go on.
MAG'LENE Jesus performed many miracles including turning water into wine.
PILATE *[Turns to CAIAPHAS]* Is that true?
CAIAPHAS *[Moves DR]* He made outrageous claims and said he was the King of the Jews.
PILATE *[Follows Priest]* Well maybe he was. Maybe he spoke the truth and maybe you saw him as a threat and had him done away with.
CAIAPHAS And maybe this folly has run its course. Maybe these women are ignorant and bitter and out to make trouble.
PILATE *[Into PRIEST]* Oh High Priest, thou protesteth too much.
CAIAPHAS We are supposed to be looking for the reason Rome is acting against you.
PILATE *[In close to CAIAPHAS]* And maybe there are other things more important in life. *[Turns back to face WOMEN]* Continue.
MOTHER *[Crosses MAGDALENE and moves closer to PILATE]* My son cured diseased and disabled people and even brought the dead back to life.
PILATE Oh now, come on. Raising the dead is definitely beyond the pale.
CAIAPHAS At last.

MAG'LENE *[In behind MOTHER]* My brother Lazarus had been dead for several days when Jesus brought him back to life.

PILATE *[To DL]* Right, enough claims. Give me solid evidence to prove these things.

MOTHER *[Towards DL]* Proof is all around. But there are none so blind as those who will not see.

PILATE *[Genuinely confused]* What does that *mean*?

MAG'LENE *[Following Mother]* And even the highest in the land must humble themselves before God.

CAIAPHAS *[To DC]* This is out*rageous*. Now they mock us.

MOTHER *[Faces Priest]* Faith is essential, even for the High Priest.

CAIAPHAS How dare you!

MAG'LENE Unless you become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

CAIAPHAS This is blasphemy!

MOTHER It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

PILATE If that's true, we're both in big trouble, Joe.

CAIAPHAS *[To DL]* A word, sir. *[Softer voices which build in volume]* Can you not see the evil of their so-called religion?

PILATE No.

CAIAPHAS It is why their leader was executed.

PILATE At your behest.

CAIAPHAS These women make ludicrous claims. Why tolerate their behaviour?

PILATE *[Suddenly serious]* Because Rome is about to put me to the sword and I want to know why.

CAIAPHAS Well it's clearly got nothing to do with Christianity.

PILATE I'll decide that. *[Pause. Intimate]* I'm not ashamed to admit *[Looks back at WOMEN, whispers]* what these women claim has got me worried.

CAIAPHAS *[Cannot believe him]* You? Worried?

MAG'LENE Be not afraid for the Lord thy God is with thee.
[MEN turn and face the two calm WOMEN. PILATE stunned]

MOTHER *[Towards DR preaching]* Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

PILATE *[Timidly follows WOMEN]* What are you saying? Who are you?

MAG'LENE *[Towards DR preaching]* Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

PILATE *[Nervous. Turns to CAIAPHAS]* They are angels?

CAIAPHAS They are liars who play on the fears of ignorant people.

MOTHER Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. *[PRIEST to PILATE]*

PILATE *[Desperate at WOMEN]* Yes but what *is* truth? And can you guarantee it?

CAIAPHAS *[Leading PILATE DL with PRIEST C side]* For many years you've been a cruel but strong leader. History will remember you as decisive. But you will become a laughing-stock if you listen to these deluded simpletons.

PILATE But they knew my wife was warned about Jesus in a dream.

CAIAPHAS I beg you to remember your place in history.

MOTHER Jesus is alive and wants you to find peace and forgiveness.
[Pause. MEN look back at WOMEN]

CAIAPHAS You'll end your career as Pilate the Gullible.

PILATE I'll end my career with a dagger in my back. *[MEN look at one another before PILATE relents and moves back to WOMEN]* You've had your say. Now go.

MAG'LENE *[Into Pilate]* We are not prophets, sir, but followers of Jesus whom we believe to be the risen Christ.

PILATE I said, "Go".

MOTHER *[In behind Magdalene]* We bear witness to the truth of God becoming man.

PILATE Truth? Do you know how many people claim ownership of truth? *[Indicating CAIAPHAS]* He's been spouting the "truth" for decades.

CAIAPHAS I am the High Priest.

PILATE He paid to spread a false story. That's his version of the truth. What's yours?

MAG'LENE We believe one day pagans will believe in Jesus Christ.

MOTHER Even those pagans of the mighty Roman Empire.

PILATE But that's a future claim; easy to make and impossible to prove.

CAIAPHAS They have no proof.

MOTHER Jesus Christ means good news for all people.

MAG'LENE Even in such godless cities as Rome.

PILATE *[To DR]* If you spoke like that in Rome you'd be fed to the lions.

MOTHER But we are not afraid to die. That is the strength of our faith.

MAG'LENE Do *you* have faith? Do you know a peace which passes all understanding?

CAIAPHAS *[He's had enough]* This is too much. Now they mock us. *[Heading DR]* I will take my leave.

PILATE No you won't. *[CAIAPHAS stops DC]* You'll leave when I say.
[This is a tense moment. CAIAPHAS doesn't want the women here in the first place and for them to be given the right to speak freely is a huge insult to the High Priest. To now be dressed down in front of these women is the last straw. The standoff is broken by MOTHER]

MOTHER The threat of death holds no fear for a Christian. We have the promise of life beyond the grave.

MAG'LENE All your armies, all your power, all your temples and laws will never bring you close to God.

CAIAPHAS *[Frustrated and angry]* Why do you allow this drivel?

PILATE *[Into Priest]* Because I want the truth. Because after years of endless killing I finally meet people without fear. And they are women! Why are they so brave? And is there even a skerrick of truth in what they say?

MOTHER Much more than a skerrick.

CAIAPHAS *[Turns on his master]* Look at you. A ruthless Roman ruler conned by women.

PILATE You've done everything to ridicule and destroy Jesus of Nazareth. Why?

CAIAPHAS The man was a criminal.

PILATE But Judea is teeming with crooks. What's he done to make you so determined? Was he *more* than just a criminal?

CAIAPHAS He blasphemed. He claimed to be close to God.

PILATE What, closer than you?

CAIAPHAS And these women prove him to be false. Ask them about their beloved leader's words. "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." *[Turns DL]* Go on, ask them.
[This stops everyone. PILATE wants an explanation]

PILATE *[To the WOMEN]* Are you false prophets?

MOTHER My son did speak those words.
MAG'LENE And may well have meant someone in this very room.
CAIAPHAS *[Fuming moves DC]* I refuse to endure this diatribe any more. *[At PILATE]* Imprison me, dismiss me, *kill* me, but get rid of these blaspheming witches.
[Exits DR. Pause. PILATE is unsure. He thinks]
MOTHER *[Into Pilate]* My son *is* alive, sir. We have seen the risen Lord.
PILATE *[Quietly]* Maybe. Just leave me.
MAG'LENE *[Into Pilate]* We could pray with you, sir.
PILATE *[Little louder]* I said, "Leave me".
MOTHER God loves you and ...
PILATE *[Loud and fierce]* Get out! *[MOTHER draws MAGDALENE away]* Get out or I'll kill you myself!

[Afraid, the WOMEN scamper and exit DR. PILATE is alone, still unhappy and addresses the audience as he did at the beginning. He is pensive]

Things have moved on. I'm about to lose my job and now, I have doubts. Did I err in ordering the death of Jesus? Did he really die and, more importantly, if he did, is he now alive? *[Moving DL]*

[The other three characters enter and form a pattern with PILATE DL, MOTHER next to him, then CAIAPHAS and MAGDALENE on the other end DR. The middle two characters could be slightly upstage and even on a higher level – a step of the altar perhaps]

CAIAPHAS MOTHER
MAGDALENE PILATE

A pagan has no fear of death but suddenly I feel ... uncertain. Why did the priests want Jesus dead? Why spread lies about his resurrection? Who *is* Jesus? And what is truth?
[PILATE is solemn and thoughtful. Each character addresses the audience in character but pays no heed to the others although sometimes their lines follow the meaning of the one before. They are individuals]
CAIAPHAS *[Addressing audience]* We Jews are commanded to serve God.
PILATE *[He is thinking aloud]* I wonder if *I* could ever believe in God?
CAIAPHAS We must pray daily and often.
PILATE In the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth?
CAIAPHAS God will hear my voice.
PILATE And in Jesus Christ, said to be His only Son?
CAIAPHAS The just live by faith.
MOTHER "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."
PILATE Was He conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary?
CAIAPHAS God said, "You shall do My ordinances".
MOTHER My son suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified.
MAG'LENE And standing by the cross were His mother and Mary Magdalene.
PILATE I found no fault in that man.
CAIAPHAS I was High Priest for 18 years.
MAG'LENE I told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord".

MOTHER My son descended into hell.
PILATE The third day He arose again ....
MAG'LENE From the dead.
CAIAPHAS I have upheld God's law.
MOTHER "For Christ is the end of the law."
[Slow tempo. If used, MUSIC BEGINS softly]
PILATE Yet for Christians, there is one God.
MOTHER I see him, but not now.
MAG'LENE I behold him, but not near.
CAIAPHAS Thou wilt change them.
MOTHER And they will be changed.
MAG'LENE But Thou art the same.
PILATE And Thy years will not come to an end.
QUARTET Amen.

[MUSIC swells. Actors move together down front, bow then exit]

Ends

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Request a Show Application.

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Christmas of the Animals

It's the story of Christmas as told by the animals.
50-minute cantata/musical for choir, narrator and animals.
Use piano, backing CD or orchestra.
Ideal for schools and churches.

There's the donkey which travelled to Bethlehem carrying Mary, the camels carrying the wise men, the sheep in the fields, the cattle in the stable, the innkeeper's dog and the mice under the straw near the manger.

The songs are catchy with simple part-singing. Each song is linked by a short speech from your narrator. He or she introduces each animal who could then appear. Loads of fun with wonderful costumes. Even tap-dancing mice!

The story of Christmas is told in a fun and funny yet respectful way. You see when Mary and Joseph had to move to the stable, the innkeeper's dog just bounded along. He was a super friendly pooch who just loved being with people. And he has a story to tell. "I'm the Rin Tin Tin at a well-known inn in the town of Bethlehem."

And those tiny terrified mice hiding under the straw near the infant Jesus. What a story they had to tell their children and grandchildren. Here are some of the words of the finale with all the animals, your choir and narrator joining in.

Make Christmas A Part of You

You might be part of Christmas but is Christmas a part of you?
It's fun to run with Santa, with friends and family too
But the magic part of Christmas can make your heart brand new
So please be part of Christmas, make Christmas a part of you.

There are band parts if you have a live orchestra, the piano/vocal score is ideal for conductor and/or accompanist, and the backing CD means you have another option for your instrumental accompaniment. *Christmas of the Animals* is very popular with young voices although the show is ideal for a mix of adults and children. You could even have a well-known person in your community as the Narrator - a sporting, political or show biz star. As with all FOX plays and musicals there is lots of free support material - free lyric sheets, notes for the director and musical director.

Staged with much joy and success in the USA, Australia and Britain.

Free preview script from Fox Plays – www.foxplays.com

Other Easter Plays

Believing Thomas
Romeo and Juditha