

**Were You There?**  
**Sunrise Readers' Theater, a/k/a the Confirmation Class**  
**Haddam and Higganum Congregational Churches, Haddam, CT**  
**Haddam Meadows, Easter Sunrise, March 27, 2016, 6:30 a.m.**

*Voices: Joseph of Arimathea (Michael); Nicodemus (Thomas); Mary Magdalene (Jordan);  
Joanna (Stella); the other Mary (Sally); Salome (Bridget)*

*Congregation Sings:* Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

*Joseph:* I am Joseph, from the town of Arimathea. I was there when they laid him in the tomb. In fact, I was the one who laid Jesus' body in the tomb—with some help from Nicodemus, who is here with me this morning.

I served on the governing council of Jerusalem, which was called the Sanhedrin. I was there when they brought Jesus before the Council. They accused him of plotting to overthrow our Roman overlords. I wasn't convinced of his guilt, but I was concerned about the possibility of an uprising during the Passover festival. I guess that's why I went along with the Council's vote to send him to Pontius Pilate. I agreed that it was better for one man to die than for many to be killed during an uprising.

*Nicodemus:* Like Joseph, I was there when they laid him in the tomb. In fact, I helped Joseph carry Jesus' dead body from the cross to the garden where the tomb was located. I helped Joseph give a proper burial to Jesus' brutalized body.

You probably remember that I'm a Pharisee, a religious scholar. I studied the law and the prophets diligently, and I tried my best to follow all of God's commands. We Pharisees had our problems with Jesus. From some of the things he said, we were convinced that he was trying to abolish the law and the prophets.

But I was intrigued by this man Jesus. I wanted to get to know him. So I approached him one night, under cover of darkness. He told me, "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born anew." So I said to him, "How can anyone be born anew after having grown old?" He said to me, "This is what I mean: no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."

Later on, I ended up watching Jesus suffer and die on the cross. When I saw Joseph coming toward the cross carrying a linen cloth, I knew that he wouldn't be able to carry Jesus' body by himself, so I offered to help.

*Joseph:* Yes, we were there when they laid him in the tomb. We were the ones who laid him in the tomb. He was dead. End of story.

*Mary Magdalene:* I too was there when they laid him in the tomb. I'm Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' closest followers. These are my friends and companions who also followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem: Joanna, the other Mary, and Salome.

*Joanna:* You may not know my name or my story. I'm Joanna. I was a wealthy woman who helped to provide for Jesus and his followers as they undertook their dangerous trek from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus treated us women with the same love and respect he showed to the men who were his followers. And unlike the men, we women didn't run off and hide when Jesus was crucified. We were there when Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus' lifeless body down from the cross and laid it in the tomb. We saw with our own eyes that Jesus was dead. End of story, or so we thought.

*The Other Mary:* I'm the other Mary. I have two sons, James and Joses, who grew up to be followers of Jesus. I was there when they laid him in the tomb. We saw with our

own eyes that Jesus had died a terrible death on the cross, we saw that he was dead and buried. To quote Joanna, “End of story, or so we thought.”

*Salome:* I'm Salome. What impressed me about Jesus was the respect and compassion he showed to so many people, women as well as men. When he taught us what life would be like in the Empire of God, I wanted to live that kind of life. And so I followed Jesus, from Galilee to Jerusalem, to his death and burial. I was there when Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped his body in a linen shroud and laid it in the tomb.

*Mary Magdalene:* I know you've heard a lot about me. Some of what you've heard is true, some of it isn't. I wasn't a prostitute. I didn't have red hair. I wasn't Jesus' girlfriend or his wife. The truth is that I suffered for years from untreated mental illness, but then Jesus came along and healed me and called me to follow him. I was there when they laid him in the tomb.

*Congregation Sings:* Were you there when he rose up from the dead?

*Mary Magdalene:* Yes, I was there when he rose up from the dead. But let us tell you how this all happened. The other women and I, we saw that large stone being rolled into place to close off the entrance to the tomb. We also saw that no one had bothered to anoint Jesus' body with the proper perfumes and spices.

*Joanna:* It was getting late in the day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Joseph and Nicodemus wanted to make sure that the burial of Jesus' body was completed before sundown. They were in a hurry, so they didn't have time to anoint his body. Fortunately for us, we had just enough time to buy spices and ointments before the sidewalk vendors closed up their shops for the Sabbath.

*Salome:* You may be wondering what we were thinking. With that large heavy stone rolled across the opening to the tomb, how were we going to get inside to anoint Jesus' body? I guess you could say that we were walking by faith and not by sight. And you know what? Our faith was rewarded. Much to our surprise, when we got to the tomb early in the morning on the day after the Sabbath, we found that the stone had been rolled away. What's more, Jesus' body was nowhere to be found. The four of us had a vision of angels, who at first terrified us, but then asked us, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised from the dead.”

*The Other Mary:* When the vision ended, the four of us looked with amazement at each other and at the empty tomb. Then, without a word, we took off to where the other disciples were gathered, and told them what we had seen and heard. At first they didn't believe us, which I suppose wasn't all that surprising. After all, Jesus was human like the rest of us, and once he was dead, which we had seen with our own eyes, he certainly wouldn't be coming back to life. Besides, the men in the inner circle weren't always as respectful toward us women as Jesus had been.

*Mary Magdalene* But yes, we were there when he rose up from the dead. We saw with our own eyes the empty tomb. In the days and weeks that followed, there were many of us who met the risen Jesus in different places: in the Upper Room, along the Emmaus Road, on the beach by Tiberias Lake. Sometimes we didn't recognize him at first. Once he appeared to me when I was alone in the garden. I thought he was the gardener, until he called me by name and I recognized his voice.

*Salome* The last time we saw Jesus, he told us to stay in Jerusalem until we were “clothed with power from on high.” So we waited there until Pentecost, when we were filled with the Holy Spirit. But that's a story for another day.