

THE EASTER HABIT

by John Cospers and Jamie Bratcher

GENRE: Comedy/Light Drama

SYNOPSIS: Actors in an Easter Pageant realize that they are going through the motions and are no longer in touch with the meaning of the story they tell.

TIME: Over 5 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 6

TOPIC: Easter

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Matthew 27

CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Easter

SUGGESTED USE: Illustration

CHARACTERS:

LARRY—an actor playing Peter

SHARON—an actress playing a servant of the High Priest

DANNY—the prop guy

DOUG—an actor playing a Roman soldier

BILL—an actor playing Judas

JANET—an actress playing Mary Magdalene

PROPS: A scenery flat with a temple background on one side, a table, chairs, a sword, a bag of coins, rope, a whip, a crown of thorns, an onion, and other Easter pageant-related props

COSTUMES: Biblical costumes

SOUND: Six wireless microphones

LIGHTING: Spotlight, general stage

SETTING: On and off stage at a church Easter pageant

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Director's Tip:

The laid-back, comfortable tone of the lines is part of what makes this scene effective— the “play” going on beyond the curtain has become such a routine that the actors are hardly concerned anymore. To pull this off properly, it's vital that the scene really look like spontaneous chit-chat, not like rehearsed dialogue. Ironically, this requires a large amount of rehearsal time. The actors should be completely comfortable with the material in order to convey a sense of unrehearsed looseness, so run lines until they come automatically.

As dramatists, we tend to enjoy scenes that make fun of actors. It's only natural to enjoy a little self-parody at times, but be aware that your audience probably isn't full of drama folks. Some of the humor in *The Easter Habit* is definitely geared toward Christian artists, but the message is for everyone. Take care to set up very clearly the dynamic of a backstage atmosphere, even for those who may have never been backstage before. It may even be helpful to bring in some nontheatrical test-audience members during rehearsal to be sure that the setting is clear.

There's a fair amount of prop humor in this scene, and some of it involves passing off some prop weaponry. Always be sure to give ample rehearsal time to get your actors used to their props—even the most innocuous thing can be dangerous if it's mishandled, and *The Easter Habit* involves (among other things) balancing a stage sword and tossing a crown of thorns. Regardless of how you choose to represent these on stage, be sure there's absolutely no margin for error or risk to your actors.

The Easter Habit may provide a great opportunity for your own drama group to remember the reason for all of the long hours and hard work. It's so easy to get lost in the ritual of another holiday production and lose sight of the real motivation for it all. It would be ironic indeed if your drama group staged a scene like this one while missing the point themselves! Take some extra time this Easter season to sit down with your cast and discuss the Savior who makes this story so worthwhile.

There are a couple of great opportunities to play up contrasts in the scene. One is the huge shift in energy that happens between the on-stage scene at the beginning of the sketch and all that follows. Making the opening lines of Peter's betrayal a tad over the top (without being irreverent) will help play up the irony of the laid-back calmness of the actors backstage.

Second, the easygoing pace of the backstage dialogue can be nicely punctuated by the occasional intrusion of Doug, who always seems to be frantically searching for his next prop. These changes in pace can keep the scene alive and interesting for the audience.