


# Were you There...?

## A Lenten Reflection



# A Collaboration



Anglican Overseas Aid pursues the dignity, equality and inclusion of people experiencing poverty and marginalisation, working towards a world as God designed it to be, renewed and restored.

Mothers Union Australia seeks to share Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life; maintaining a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service; promoting conditions in society that favour stable family life and the protection of children; and helping those whose families have met with adversity.

With these objectives in mind AOA is proud to collaborate with Mothers Union Australia collaborating to produce this Lent booklet for your reflection and prayer.

## *Were You There...?*

This is the first line of an African American spiritual that may have originated during the slave era.

We hope this title helps you focus on the people who participated in the passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ and reflect on how their stories can help you grow in your Christian faith.



## About the Author

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Robin is Adjunct Associate Professor to the College of Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University, QLD. She has a special interest in women's health and equity issues, particularly in under-resourced settings, teaching and supervising higher degree students researching to improve health outcomes. Robin is President of Anglican Mothers Union Australia and the Chair of the Ministry Education Commission for Diocese of Brisbane. In June 2012 she was commissioned as Anglican Overseas Aid's first Ambassador. She has served on our Board and is a current member of the AOA Development Committee and its Wise Choices for Life Curriculum Resources Team.

**Week 1**

Pontius Pilate

**Week 2**

Mary, Mother of Jesus

**Week 3**

Roman Centurion

**Week 4**

Joseph of Arimathea

**Week 5**

The Women of Galilee

**Week 6**

Mary Magdalene



# Pontius Pilate

## Matthew 27:24

Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea from 26–36 CE. Historians suggest he was ruthless and cruel, often insulting Jewish worship by promoting the emperor as a divine person. He ordered an image of the Emperor Tiberius head be used on coins and may have financed an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem using temple funds. Pilate was very aware of his responsibility to maintain law and order and to keep peace in his jurisdiction, yet he was accused of inciting riots among Samaritans and Jews because of his insensitivity to their religious traditions and practices.

However, Pilate knew he could lose his job if reports of being too harsh on the people, or too lenient with traitors, reached Emperor Tiberius. He found Jesus' lack of defense disconcerting and was not convinced about Jesus' guilt. It has been suggested that Pilate's use of the term 'Messiah' for Jesus may have been an attempt to change the crowd's mind. In the end, pragmatism prevailed when it looked like a riot could erupt. Pilate ordered Jesus to be flogged and crucified, then added a seemingly mocking title to the cross: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'. Perhaps his later refusal to change the sign indicated that Pilate remained troubled by his condemnation of Jesus.

## Reflection

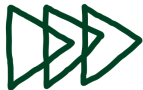
When you witness situations where someone appears to be poorly treated, is it easier to 'wash your hands' than get involved? How does your faith inform your decision-making?

What does the crowd's reaction to the accusations of the Sanhedrin (Jewish Council) against Jesus tell us about the fickleness of public opinion?

How can faith communities advocate more effectively to promote public awareness of issues such as poverty and the effects of climate change?

## Prayer

*God of grace and mercy, look with compassion on all who are unable to live life to the full because of oppression, hunger, poverty and denial of education and healthcare. We pray for leaders in these communities and nations, that their hearts may be open to addressing the needs of their people. Enable them to make wise and just decisions and enable us to recognise our responsibility to support locally-led development for effective change. Amen.*



# A Gap Worth Bridging

The ripple effects of inequality are plain to see for those who are unable to attain an education in Uganda.

When it comes to the chance of having a skilled birth attendant during one of the most physically demanding times of a woman's life, in Uganda one thing seems to matter. Do you have an education? If not, the likelihood of having a skilled attendant during labour is 38%. If you have a primary school education it increases to 55%. Those fortunate enough to have graduated to secondary school have a 93% chance of having a skilled birth attendant. This is because the more educated a woman, the more likely she is to seek out skilled help.

To help bridge this gap, Wise Choices For Life brings education into the community, so even if a girl leaves school early, she is still given the same opportunities to gain important knowledge on reproductive and maternal-child health.

Health assistant Kharunda noticed the difference. Just one month after Wise Choices For Life held community training in her area she saw an overwhelming influx of patients to the health centre where she works, so much so that they needed to add another staff member. It's a relief for Kharunda, who had seen mothers and their newborns tragically die without trained birth attendants present during labour. The challenge now, she says, will be keeping up with demand.



## Mary, mother of Jesus

### John 19:25

Mary is a woman of real courage, determination and faith in God. We see this first in her response to God's call to be the mother of Jesus. Mary's choice to say yes to the angel Gabriel enabled God to come into the world in the form of a child. Later we read Simeon's words to Mary foretelling Jesus' destiny (Luke 2:34-35). Her 'soul is pierced' perhaps for the first time when Jesus is only 12 years old. Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem so he can be in his Father's house learning from the Jewish leaders (Luke 2:43). For Mary, these events would have recalled Simeon's earlier fateful prophecy that Jesus would cause the

rise and fall of many and would be spoken against; not an easy prophecy for a mother to digest.

Yet the greatest challenge for Mary comes at the cross, where her loyalty and courage is again evident. She faces the danger of showing love for someone judged by the Romans as a criminal. Mary is close by, openly grieving. Her heart is again pierced as she listens to the mockery of the soldiers, the bystanders, and one of those crucified with Jesus. She sees Jesus' pain up close but is unable to relieve his suffering and endures the indignity of her innocent son being crucified between two criminals. She is standing with other women, yet is alone in a mother's grief.



## Reflection

How does Mary's courage in the face of immense grief help you connect with the plight of mothers in places where drought, food insufficiency or insecurity, and limited or no access to healthcare for their children are an everyday reality?

How can your faith community effectively respond to the suffering of people living in occupied or war-torn countries?

## Prayer

*God of compassion, we pray for mothers whose hearts are pierced, and for all parents who are unable to effectively care for their children. Show us ways we can reach out in your service to support those in distress, especially women and families. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*



# Roman Centurion

## Mark 15:39b

Crucifixions were commonly used to punish lower class people accused of insurrection or treason, and prisoners of war. The practice was designed to emphasise cruelty and force compliance through fear and terror. Crucifixions were carried out by a group of soldiers led by a centurion. The accused were stripped, whipped and paraded to the site.

This centurion would have witnessed many crucifixions in his career, but this one was different from all others. Despite the usual public taunts, pain,

torture and suffering Jesus endured, he did not retaliate in any way. Instead, the centurion heard Jesus take care of his mother, assure the penitent thief of a place in paradise, cry out to God, and commend his spirit to his Father. Additionally, the centurion and others present experienced a frightening earthquake and a period of supernatural darkness during which he came to the realisation that Jesus was God's son.

A centurion in AD 32, having proved his worth by demonstrating bravery and leadership in battle could work his way up through the ranks, or be appointed by the Roman Senate. He would command a unit of about 100

soldiers – assigning duties, maintaining discipline, providing training and commanding respect as led from the front. Thus, the centurion overseeing Jesus’ crucifixion would not have been easily influenced, but on this day his worldview was transformed. The word ‘truly’ indicates certainty. There is no question in the centurion’s mind that Jesus was God’s son. The reader is left to wonder how Jesus’ crucifixion affected this man’s future.

### Reflections

In John 18:14, Caiaphas the high priest advised the Jewish leaders that it was better to have one person die for the people. How might Jesus’ death have changed the centurion’s life?

When we pray about AOA’s projects in countries torn by war and oppression, what is God calling us to do differently in our own lives?

In our secular society, what new approaches could you use to proclaim Jesus as God’s Son to those outside the faith community?

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we know that when we cry out to you, our prayers are heard. We ask you to give us the courage to recognise you in difficult situations and the willingness to act for change. We pray for people living in occupied lands, advocating for peace and justice for all. Amen.*





# A Micro-business with Macro-benefits

When Kanika's world was thrown upside down by her husband's death, she started working as a maid to earn an income. However, the inconsistency of the work meant that, at times, she had no income to support her family.

Kanika (right), who hails from Kolkata, India, heard about a tailoring class run by Cathedral Relief Service. The year-long course gives females over 14 the opportunity to learn how to sew, embroider and knit. It also prepares women to run their own micro business, with financial and business management training and the setting up of individual bank accounts.

'I am so happy that I joined the sewing training and now can earn some money to sustain myself and my children.'



'I am so happy that I joined the sewing training and now can earn some money to sustain myself and my children,' says Kanika. 'I am grateful to all who support this initiative and to Cathedral Relief Service for providing this opportunity and giving us the liberty to use the sewing machines for our work.'

# Joseph of Arimathea

John 19:38



Joseph of Arimathea was a man of wealth, indicated by the fact that he had his own tomb, not just anywhere, but in a garden close to Jerusalem. Despite being a prominent Jewish leader as a member of the Sanhedrin (Jewish Council), Joseph was a secret follower of Jesus. Some suggest he was attracted to Jesus' teaching in the hope that if Jesus really was the Messiah, he would bring the new Kingdom to the Jewish people. Whatever his understanding, Joseph was prepared to use his influence to serve Jesus in one last act of kindness.

In doing so he risked his reputation and position, stepping outside social and political boundaries. He did not consent to the Sanhedrin's decision to ask for Jesus to be killed nor the actions they condoned during Jesus' trial.

Joseph courageously asked Pilate for Jesus' body' (Mark 15:43 notes he 'went boldly to Pilate'). As one of the only male followers left - because the disciples had run away - and with the help of Nicodemus, another secret follower who had previously come to Jesus by night, Joseph took Jesus' body from the cross and gave him a proper burial. He wrapped him in strips of linen using the spices Nicodemus

brought, as was the burial custom, before placing Jesus in his own new tomb. This was a very public act, associating him directly with Jesus, thus leaving himself open to great personal risk should his actions be reported to the Sanhedrin.

### Reflection

What is your view of the character of Joseph of Arimathea, who left his tribute until Jesus was dead?

What insights do you gain about the cost of discipleship?

In what way do Joseph's actions challenge you to be courageous and stand up for injustice at community events such as prayer vigils?

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we ask you to strengthen our resolve to stand apart from popular opinion that is inconsistent with Christian values. Give us the courage of Joseph of Arimathea to challenge those in our families, workplaces and community groups to turn aside from negativity or derogatory behaviour and focus on words and actions that contribute to the wellbeing of all. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*



# A Resourceful Approach to Climate Change

The Reverend Rahab Wanjiru isn't someone to give up easily. Having overcome many gender barriers to achieve her dream of working directly in the church, she understands how important it is to be resourceful.

Seeing the effects of climate change, Rahab (right) wasn't about to let her community succumb to its impacts. After participating in a strengths-based development approach with the Anglican Church of Kenya, Mt Kenya West Diocese, she realised her community is surrounded by natural resources that are not well-used due to a lack of awareness.

Rahab encouraged people to use their vacant land for farming, livestock and pasture production. Men have increased pasture growing and recently harvested approximately 340 bales in just 2.5 acres of land. Women have begun





savings groups to ensure they can diversify their income and support their families.

With the growing awareness in the community about the adverse effects of climate change, Rahab has been encouraging them to explore how land can be sustainably used and protected into the future.

'Imarisha Maisha II' receives funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

**Australian  
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# The Women of Galilee

## Luke 24:1

Jesus had a high regard for women at a time and in a culture that considered them to be merely property and of very low status. These women were active followers of Jesus, not often named in the Bible because of the social disregard for their status. Yet Jesus included women among his disciples, giving them access to his teaching and the opportunity to learn from his interactions with others. They in return used their own money to supply the needs of the itinerant Jesus and his disciples.

During the crucifixion, the women of Galilee stayed at a distance from the cross, despite the danger posed by the soldiers and bystanders. They endured the three hours of frightening, inexplicable darkness. This would have taken great courage, devotion and loyalty since Jesus' enemies surrounded the cross. Later they took the trouble to follow Joseph of Arimathea and 'saw the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid' (Luke 23:55). Imagine the bravery of these women visiting the tomb in the dark, cognisant of the danger from soldiers guarding it, with no clue about how they would access the body to anoint it, but going forth in faith to perform one last act of caring for Jesus.

## Reflections

What are the ways you manage, or could manage, your own means so that there is enough to provide for others?

Drawing on the example of these women, would your faith drive you to risk the cold, dark predawn and your own safety to embalm Jesus' body? What challenges would this present for you?

How does the church have an obligation to enable marginalised groups to have an active voice in the community? How could this happen where you are?

## Prayer

*Generous God, we pray for those on the edges of our communities and in the under-resourced countries of your world. Show us how to be more generous in our support for their needs. May we be open to your guidance as we seek to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with you. Amen.*



# Farmers Collaborate to Reap Rewards

‘Resilient’ and ‘strong’ are words that might describe the people who reside in Ethiopia. Not vulnerable.

However, with a population that depends on rainfall-based agriculture, the repercussions of civil war and the impacts of climate change have made communities particularly vulnerable to famine.

To mitigate the effects of ever-increasing dry periods, the Ethiopian Anglican Church Social and Development Organisation is working with 355 farming households, totalling 1,240 people, to build carefully designed trenches in their arid farmland that will capture water and prevent the loss of both topsoil and water. The farmers are paid for their time and will reap the rewards with access to better food crops for longer.

The restored areas, known as watersheds, are protected until the land recovers. Crops are then planted and animals able to graze. In the meantime the group of farmers moves to a new area to start the process again. Through this collaborative effort communities take charge of their livelihoods and wellbeing.



Farmers build trenches  
in their farmland.



# Mary Magdalene

John 20:11,16

Mary of Magdala, named 14 times in the Gospels, appears to have been a follower of Jesus from early in his earthly ministry. She is first mentioned in Luke 8:2 as having been cured of seven demons. Some also suggest it was Mary Magdalene who lived a 'sinful life' and came to Jesus with repentant tears (Luke 7:36-38), then washed his feet and anointed them with costly perfume. Whether or not this was her, Mary Magdalene appears to be a woman of independent means who provided some financial support for Jesus and his disciples.

Mary did not forget what Jesus had done for her. She was at the cross,

and then, with another Mary, she followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the grave where they laid Jesus' body, so they would know where to return after the Sabbath to complete the burial rites. On the day of resurrection, Mary Magdalene was again at the tomb, but this time two angels told her Jesus had risen. She ran to tell the disciples the good news. Later, Mary was the first person to see the risen Jesus.

These visits to the tomb could have been hazardous, especially the second time when Mary went alone. Devotion and love for Jesus spurred her on to talk to a man she thought was the gardener, someone she did not believe she knew - an action contrary to social norms for Jewish

women. A woman alone would have been a target for violence, especially in a garden setting with Roman soldiers roaming the streets. Also, the male disciples were in hiding. If anyone recognised her as a disciple of Jesus and reported her to the authorities she could have been arrested.

### Reflections

Where do you find comfort when you feel lonely, lost, or sorrowful?

How can you and your faith community support victims of family violence and promote respectful relationships between couples, family members and the community?

Mary recognises the gardener as the risen Jesus only when he calls her by name. Where or what is Jesus calling you to?

### Prayer

*Lord God, we pray for all victims of gender and family violence and their perpetrators. May your blessing be on our Anglican Overseas Aid partners working to support women's empowerment and reduce gender-based violence in your world. Amen.*



Find out more at:  
[anglicanoverseasaid.org.au](http://anglicanoverseasaid.org.au)  
or call us on: 1800 249 880



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