

Gaze on the Christ

Easter Cantata Script

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 29-11

Script by Dave Therit

For Catawba Springs Christian Church

Gaze on the Christ

CHOIR - Introit for Easter

NARRATOR 1

"O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen— Even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!"

Psalm 8, A Psalm of David.

CHOIR - The Majesty and Glory of Your Name

GRANDDAD

Hey, Buddy. How are you today? Is your mom home?

BUDDY

Hey, Granddad. I'm good; just reading a book for English class. Mom's at the store.

GRANDDAD

A book? I thought maybe you were playing one of your video games.

BUDDY

I'm afraid not, Granddad. No video games today. This is an e-book and it doesn't do games.

GRANDDAD

I see. That's probably a good thing. If games were on there it would be sort of like putting the fox in the hen house, and I think I know who would win that fight.

BUDDY

It wouldn't end there, Granddad. The games... I mean the fox might win the first round but Mom would win the last one. She warned me that if I didn't finish this book during Easter break, the term Easter break would take on a whole new meaning.

GRANDDAD

Ouch! I think I'd do what she said then.

BUDDY

You're telling me! Why don't you come on up on the porch and sit down for a while till mom gets home?

GRANDDAD

Thanks, Buddy. It sure is a beautiful spring day to enjoy some time with my grandson. Will your mom be very long at the store? I don't want to take up too much of your time.

BUDDY

She should be back in a few minutes. And don't worry about me. I was planning to take a break right about the time you came over. I may not get one after mom gets home.

GRANDDAD

I see... as the saying goes, 'when the cat's away... '

BUDDY

Well, it might look that way, Granddad, but for the record when dad does this it's called creative time management!

GRANDDAD

(Chuckling)

That's a good one, Buddy. Say, what's the book about?
Is it interesting?

BUDDY

Yes, it is. It's about Barabbas.

GRANDDAD

You mean the Barabbas of the Bible?

BUDDY

Yes, that's the one.

GRANDDAD

He was a pretty tough character.

BUDDY

He sure was.

GRANDDAD

So... What's the author's angle on Barabbas?

BUDDY

Well, he wrote the novel from the angle that a man like Barabbas might have become a different person once he was spared a sure death sentence - especially once he came to realize that the man who took his place was the Messiah.

GRANDDAD

(Rubbing his chin with a hand)

Hmm. That's a really good perspective for a story. You know, it's amazing how Barabbas' life became part of the fabric that was woven into the tapestry of the crucifixion. And there was a purpose in it all. So... does Barabbas become a Christian in the book?

BUDDY

I haven't gotten that far yet. But he seems to be softening up. He really was a bad character.

GRANDDAD

Yes, but he wasn't too bad for the Lord to save him, even though he deserved execution.

BUDDY

It doesn't make sense that Pilate would set a criminal free and execute an innocent man.

GRANDDAD

Oh, it was a grave injustice to be sure. The Governor freed him and crucified Jesus just to prevent a riot.

BUDDY

But Pilate was a powerful Roman official. Why was he afraid of the crowd?

GRANDDAD

It's true.

(Nodding)

He had a lot of authority. But Roman governors, like Pilate, feared nothing worse than riots and rebellion. If word ever got back to Rome that there was unrest in a province then that governor's competency to rule was brought into question. And if he ever had to call in additional soldiers from another province for military support he lost credibility with his peers as well.

BUDDY

So he caved to them just to save his own skin, even though he knew that Jesus was innocent.

GRANDDAD

(Nods)

Yes, yes, there's no question, he was trying to save his own political skin. He tried to convince them of Jesus' innocence but the people would have none of it. Of course, we know who it was that stirred them up the religious leaders who hated Jesus. But Pilate hoped that he might still set Jesus free. He was hoping that the people might not see exactly eye to eye with their religious leaders, especially when it came time to release a prisoner, which was a custom at Passover. Do you remember reading about that in the gospels?

BUDDY

You mean when he gave them the choice between releasing Jesus or Barabbas?

GRANDDAD

Yes, that's right.

BUDDY

That was an odd custom they had, to release a prisoner during Passover.

GRANDDAD

Actually, Governors giving pardons is something we still do today. The pardon of Barabbas was the thing that was odd. The stark contrast between the innocent Jesus and the guilty Barabbas should have shocked the people back to their senses when they were given a choice.

BUDDY

It seems like it should have been an easy choice.

GRANDDAD

It should have been, but hate is no friend to reason and good sense. A dumb beast has better sense than an angry mob. Pilate was bewildered when they cried out to release Barabbas and crucify Christ. And the rest is history... Pilate gave in to expediency.

(Shakes head)

It certainly speaks volumes about the depravity of man doesn't it?

BUDDY

It sure does. I'll bet you wouldn't have let Him die, Granddad!

GRANDDAD

That's the saddest part of it all, Buddy. None of us would have done any better. If he was betrayed, denied, and deserted by His own disciples, could we ever think that we would have done any better?

BUDDY

Wow. I never thought of it like that.

GRANDDAD

It's hard to admit that. That's for sure. But the good news is that God had ordained it all along that Christ,
(MORE)

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

the innocent one, the Lamb of God, would die for the guilty, to set us free from the bondage of sin and death... in the same way that the Passover Lamb was sacrificed for the Jews to set them free from the bondage of Egypt. His death on the cross was not an accident; it was not just an unfortunate human injustice. It was done on purpose by God... for us.

CHOIR - Gaze on the Christ

BUDDY

Granddad, there's a paragraph in this book that I'd like you to read. It's the opening paragraph to one of the chapters. When I read it this morning I knew you would like it. I'm pretty sure the author was thinking of the 19th Psalm when he wrote it, where David spoke about the heavens declaring the glory of God.

GRANDDAD

Ok, Buddy. Sure, I'd love to give it a read...

(Buddy hands the e-book to his granddad)

A whirling speck in the ocean of infinity, the earth moved on along its planetary path. Nightly the points of fire that men call stars reflected the glory of Omnipotence. Daily the sun, a burning preacher, proclaimed Omniscient Wisdom creating and sustaining an ordered universe. Light succeeded darkness, and darkness light... but few there were who stopped to consider all these wonders; few who regarded such accustomed nightly miracles and daily marvels. Man, taking all for granted, went about his little ways, and if the morning stars sang together, few were the mortal ears that caught their melody. Man was too busy with birth and death, with love and war, with food for the belly, and clothes for the back to lift his eyes often heavenward. *(Wine of Morning, BJU Press)*

NARRATOR 1

There was a time when man knew God; a time when he walked in fellowship with God. It was just as normal for Adam to walk with God as it would be for us to take an evening stroll with a friend or loved one. But after Adam sinned, nothing was the same anymore. Everything changed for the worse, and grew increasingly worse. Iniquity abounded as the human race spiraled ever downward into utter depravity. Man's lust conceived and brought forth sin, and sin when it was finished brought with it a curse that became mankind's master. Its name was death.

NARRATOR 2

In Romans chapter 1 we read, For when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves... who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

GRANDDAD

You know, Buddy, when man thinks that he's too busy for God, too busy to even acknowledge Him, like this paragraph in your book talks about, what he's saying is that his plans are more important than God's - that he is more important than God. That's prideful, sinful thinking.

BUDDY

I guess, in a way, that's what Adam was telling God when he sinned against Him, that his plan was better than God's.

GRANDDAD

Yes, yes... I think so. It's just so hard to imagine that man could forget God and stray so far from Him after being made in God's own image, but it's true. And until a man or woman is willing to admit that they have

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GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

sinned against a holy God the story of the Gospel just doesn't make sense. But once our eyes are opened to our lost condition we are then in a place where God's gift to us does make sense. Say, you don't happen to have the Bible on this thing do you? I'd like to read something from Ephesians chapter 2.

BUDDY

I sure do. Here, let me show you. (*Reaching over to show his granddad*) Just touch here at the top of the screen, then touch 'Home', then 'Bible', then go to the index; touch on 'Ephesians', and then 'chapter 2', and then just drag your finger across the screen to flip the pages to get to the verses you want; and there you have it... as simple as that.

GRANDDAD

Hmm, as simple as that you say? (*with a skeptical smile*) Don't get me wrong, Buddy. That is pretty amazing, but my eyes started glazing over before you ever got to the drag your finger part. No offense, but I think I'll stick with my Bible with real pages.

BUDDY

No offense taken. But it would be kind of nice to have you in the 21st century with us, granddad.

GRANDDAD

Ouch. Just wait till your mother gets home... (*chuckling*)
We didn't lose your place in the book did we?

BUDDY

It's Ok. When I go back to the book it will automatically open to where I left off.

GRANDDAD

Now, I do like that. I'll admit, this technology is pretty amazing stuff. But what's even more amazing is the grace of God. Listen to this from Ephesians chapter 2 'But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins,

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GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

hath quickened us together with Christ... For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast.'

I love that phrase "But God who was rich in mercy..." That's where the story of redemption begins, Buddy. It begins with God, the God of mercy. Our God loved us even though our helpless, and hopeless race had fallen into the darkness of sin and death. Man had no hope of finding God through his own efforts. Any hope at all for us had to come by way of His rich mercy.

CHOIR - By Your Mercy

GRANDDAD

You know, Buddy. Man has it all wrong. His pride tells him that he either doesn't need God at all; or, that there's something he can do to earn God's approval, which is another way of saying that he thinks he's good enough to meet God on his own terms, not God's. He wants to be in charge of his own life while giving lip service to God. But either way, it's His pride that keeps him at arm's length from God. I used to be that way.

BUDDY

You, Granddad?

GRANDDAD

Yes, me. And do you know what it took to humble me?

BUDDY

No, I don't think I do?

GRANDDAD

A little eight year old girl... your mother.

BUDDY

What happened?

GRANDDAD

Well, your grandmother kept after me to go to church and accept Christ. She even had the preacher come by to reason with me, several different times, hoping that he could talk some sense into me. But you know, salvation is about more than just knowledge and reason. It's about the heart. My heart was simply closed to the truth.

BUDDY

What did mom do?

GRANDDAD

She and your grandmother came home from church one Sunday morning. Well, there I was parked in front of the TV set, waiting for a big football game to come on. Your grandmother got after me, saying that I should have been at church because the message was so good and the gospel was so clear. I just sort of let her comments run off of me like water, when that precious little eight year old girl ran over to me and threw herself onto me. She wrapped her skinny little arms around me, buried her head in my chest and began to weep.

BUDDY

What happened then, Granddad?

GRANDDAD

The stony heart within my soul melted. I had always heard that Jesus loved me, but that day I felt His love for me through the tender heart and tears of a child. She didn't try to out argue me or convince me. She didn't have to say a word. She just humbly poured out her heart and with her tears did something that no amount of logic and argument could do.

BUDDY

Wow. Mom did that, just by crying?

GRANDDAD

Yes, but it was more than just the crying. Let me see if I can find a verse. I know it by heart but I want you to read it. Let's see, now how does this thing work again? I guess I'd better let you do it. Look up James 46.

BUDDY

Sure thing, granddad... Here it is Jas 46, 'But he gives more grace. Wherefore he said God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.'

GRANDDAD

There you have it. Your mother - only eight years old - had the humble faith of a child that was a reproof to my own pride. When I looked down at her I saw how horrible my pride really was. I realized then that my pride stood between me and God, and that as long as it did there was no chance of reconciliation. In fact... what does this verse say?

BUDDY

It says that God 'resists the proud.'

GRANDDAD

Yes, and that's why Jesus spoke so harshly to the Pharisees. They were so sure that they were God's special people because they were so good, or so they thought, and did so much for God, but on the inside they were dead men. When I saw my pride that Sunday morning I saw my sin. That's when I saw the love of Jesus, and I accepted Christ.

BUDDY

I guess that's really what this book I'm reading is about. It is about Barabbas' pride. It's about man's pride. You know, Granddad, I think pride is probably man's greatest sin. I memorized a passage in Proverbs for Bible class a few months ago that lists 7 things that the Lord hates, and number 1 on the list is a proud look. I really hadn't thought about why it was first on the list until just now.

GRANDDAD

Buddy! That's a tremendous thought from a boy whose diapers I used to change... out of the mouth of babes...!

BUDDY

(*Grimacing*) Grandad...

GRANDDAD

You know, Buddy, we've stirred up some good memories this morning... some really good memories. Oh, say! Here comes your mom now. I think I'll go and give her a big hug! Let me know how the book turns out... better yet, I'd like to read it when you finish it. I really hope Barabbas turns his back on his pride and gets saved!

BUDDY

Ok, Granddad. I'll let you know when I'm finished. See you later.

NARRATOR 1

During His earthly ministry, Jesus turned much of man's thinking about true religion and the Kingdom of Heaven completely around. Most men of His day thought that the wealthy and well educated, the doctors of the law, and the highly respected religious leaders held a special place in God's heart and plan. Instead, Jesus blessed the poor in spirit, the meek and lowly of heart, and little children because of their humble ways. He blessed the children when His disciples would have turned them away.

NARRATOR 2

The disciples' thinking was that children would be a waste of His time - that only adults should come to Jesus. But Jesus said to His disciples, Suffer (or *permit*) the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven. In His great mercy God had revealed truths about His Kingdom to little children, truths that He had hidden from those who were so proud in their own wisdom and understanding.

NARRATOR 1

Jesus went even a step further and told His adult hearers that they must become like children to enter into the kingdom of God. He made it clear that adults must become like children and not the other way around when coming to God. And those who would humble themselves as a little child would be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.

NARRATOR 2

Jesus' words couldn't have been truer, for when He entered the Temple and performed miracles of healing on Palm Sunday, the first day of the Passion Week, immediately, the proud and haughty high priests and scribes, blinded to the truth, became indignant and were furious while the little children shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David.

CHOIR - Blessed Is He

NARRATOR 1

The week of Jesus' passion leading up to the crucifixion gives us a picture of mankind that is not at all flattering. On Palm Sunday, the same day that the children blessed Him in the Temple, the crowd shouted their hosannas as Jesus, the King of the Jews, made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Just days later, however, the fickle crowd would shout, crucify Him, crucify Him as they spewed out their poison against Him.

NARRATOR 2

Before the week had drawn to a close all of His disciples had failed Him. Judas betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver. Peter, would then deny that he knew Him three times... and the rest would flee from Him while He stood alone on trial, to become a substitute for a man who was a transgressor, an insurrectionist, a murderer - a man named Barabbas!

NARRATOR 1

Look closely with me at the gloriously woven tapestry of the crucifixion. Do you see Barabbas there? Although he wasn't there physically on a cross that day, he was, nevertheless, a prominent figure in the scene of the cross. If you'll but look at the cross through the eyes of our Heavenly Father you'll see Barabbas there, for when the Father looked on His Son He saw a transgressor, an insurrectionist, a murderer. He saw Barabbas' sin when He looked upon Jesus.

NARRATOR 2

Now, look closely again at the cross. As you look, if you can be honest and humble, you will see your own sin come into plain view. Do you not see your sin there? When our Heavenly Father looked upon His Son hanging there, that is what He saw your sin and mine. In fact, He saw the sins of the world, for the Bible says that Christ is the propitiation (*the satisfaction*) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

NARRATOR 1

Now that you see yourself there, do you not understand what Christ did for you on the cross? He took your place and became sin for you when He died on the cross for you. It was there that the Savior and the sinner met. It was there that God's justice and love met. It was there that the Father turned His back on His only Begotten Son and let Him suffer and die as He took our place and became the transgressor. What will you do with the one who transformed a cruel and rugged cross into a thing of such great glory for us?

CHOIR - Beneath the Cross of Jesus

NARRATOR 2

The Bible tells us that all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the
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NARRATOR 2 (CONT'D)

Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. You and I may not think that we have gone as far astray as others have gone; but we have, nevertheless, gone our own way. And our own way has fallen far short of God's glory. In God's eyes there is none righteous. We are all on level ground at the foot of the cross. We all come to the cross empty handed. The good news is that Christ can cleanse and make us whole! He can make us righteous.

NARRATOR 1

There is nothing that we can bring to Him today to make things right. All we can do is come as we are, with empty hands and hungry souls... As we consider the most wonderful story ever told, may God's Spirit move within us and light our way.

CHOIR - Empty Hands Open Arms

NARRATOR 2

Faith in what Christ did on the cross for us not only brings us salvation but it brings us into a relationship with our Heavenly Father, who, the Bible tells us, is holy. We are adopted into the family of God. Just as any loving father cares for his children, our Heavenly Father cares for us as He works in us a new creation in Christ Jesus. God is creating in us a work, just like one would create a beautiful poem or tapestry. Line by line and strand by strand, He conforms us into the image of Christ. The Christ who took our sinful image upon Himself on the cross now transforms us into His sinless, holy image unto ever increasing glory through faith in Him.

NARRATOR 1

To demonstrate to His disciples the love that He and the Father had for them, on the very night of His betrayal, when He and His disciples were in the upper room, Jesus spoke tenderly to them as a father would to

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NARRATOR 1 (CONT'D)

his children. In John chapter 13, He called His disciples, little children. The word translated as little children is a word that a father would use if he wanted to speak intimately to his children as his darling or precious children. As Jesus gave them His final instructions before His crucifixion, His love for his precious children was undeniably real.

NARRATOR 2

Jesus and His disciples then made their way from the upper room and started the descent to the Brook Kidron that flowed through the valley far below the eastern wall of the temple mount. They would cross over the brook on their way to the Mount of Olives where there was a garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus would agonize in prayer and then be arrested. But along the way, before reaching the brook, Jesus stopped and prayed for them and for all believers, both those who were living then and those who would believe on Him in the future..

NARRATOR 1

His prayer included everyone here today who has believed on Him, and all those who will one day in the future believe on Him. He prayed the prayer recorded in John, chapter 17, which we sometimes call the Lord's High Priestly Prayer. His prayer was a beautiful illustration of His present ministry of intercession for us as our Advocate at the right hand of Father, which John the apostle speaks of in the first epistle of John, chapter 2.

NARRATOR 2

John makes it clear that the Christ who died for us didn't abandon us after the resurrection when He ascended into heaven. In addition to giving us His Holy Spirit to comfort us, Christ himself even now intercedes for us just as He prayed on the night He was betrayed. He prays for His Father's precious children that we would be sanctified, made holy, by His Word.

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NARRATOR 2 (CONT'D)

Our sanctification is the key to all of the good things that He desires for us. He is always ready to help us as we battle temptation and as we live for Him. As our advocate He does not condemn and chide, but He intercedes for us before the throne of grace.

CHOIR - He Faithfully Prays

NARRATOR 1

Following His Resurrection, Jesus gave His disciples important instructions before He ascended back to His Father in heaven. They were to be His witnesses throughout all the world. He promised them that as they testified of Him He would be with them, even to the end of the age. The power of the resurrection so transformed that group of weak and fearful disciples that they became faithful to do what He had commanded them, even unto death. This morning, by means of both word and song we too are giving witness to the resurrection power of Christ.

NARRATOR 2

We give testimony to the fact that by His power He has saved us and has changed our lives. But that is not the end of the story He will continue to change us into His image as we grow and live for Him. He especially desires that we love and serve one another just as He loved us, that the world might know that the Father sent His Son into the world. And one day when we see Him as He is, we shall be like Him.

NARRATOR 1

This morning we glory in the cross, and in the resurrection, which demonstrates that God the Father was fully satisfied with Christ's sacrifice offered there for us. We focus on the cross for God has determined that all wisdom must proceed from the cross.

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NARRATOR 1 (CONT'D)

Though the world may deem it foolish, the preaching of the cross is the power of God, and it reveals the very heart of God.

NARRATOR 2

We do not believe that this assembly of people gathered here today is here merely by chance. Neither do we believe that our existence on this earth is by chance. We consist of more than just matter and energy that randomly interacts. If that's all that life was comprised of then we would not be having this conversation. We were created with purpose and design, as moral creatures in the image of God, with souls that will live somewhere forever. Within our souls God has placed a yearning for Him, a void that can only be filled by Him. There is a reason for you being here today. Please do not take lightly the love of God in Christ for you. If you feel God's tender tug at your heart today, then in simple childlike faith respond to His wonderful love.

CHOIR - His Wondrous Love

NARRATOR 1

As we conclude this Easter program this morning we leave you with words from Philippians, chapter 2 and from the Psalms as we worship God the Father, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The Psalmist Said:

Both Narrators

"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name;
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness... O worship
the LORD in the beauty of holiness fear before him, all
the earth."

CHOIR - Holy Is He