

THE EASTER STORY PAGEANT AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF HOLLYWOOD TO FEATURE MUSIC, PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Intimidating!

That description is often used by someone who has been asked to portray Jesus Christ in a dramatic presentation.

Tom Best, who will fill the role of Jesus in First Presbyterian Church of Margate's Easter Passion Play, adds fear, trembling and distinct honor.

"I didn't aspire to it," Best, a resident of Parkland, explained, "but they asked me to do it. The problem is that no human can grasp the role." Best said that he has been continually reading through the script and the biblical record to understand the person of Jesus so that he can better portray him on stage.

"I'm not really nervous about playing Christ," Best said. "I just want to do justice to who he is."

Best helped to write the script that is very closely tied to the story of Jesus in the Bible, according to Steve Zehr, a resident of Coral Springs, who works as the church's director of worship. "We didn't want to do a typical church pageant," Zehr said, explaining why his church has presented the play for the past seven years. "Our Passion Play presents the entire life of Jesus in a way that people can understand it."

Passion Plays began as a way to bring the Bible story of Jesus Christ to life for an illiterate population, explained Tim Flay, a resident of Deerfield Beach who is the play's director. "We try to bring the characters off of the page, out of the text, into a real existence," he said. "Today, Passion Plays are still alive and fulfill the same purpose. That of presenting the story in a way that is different than it is presented from the pulpit."

Flay said that he worries about keeping the portrayal of all of the characters accurate. "A Passion Play could take liberties with the events, but that would destroy or detract from the real story."

The director has his own role to consider--he is playing Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, in this year's play. Describing it as a "bit part," Flay said that he has never played a villain in any drama before.

"It's been challenging to try to understand Pilate as a guy who was pulled into the situation against his will, and could not find grounds to condemn Christ," Flay said. "He was coerced by the crowd to crucify Christ. He was a villain, but not by choice."

The First Presbyterian Church Passion Play will be presented on Palm Sunday weekend, March 23 and 24 at 8 p.m. If space is available, tickets can be purchased at the door for

\$8 reserved seats and \$5 for general admission. The church is located at 7955 Royal Palm Blvd in Margate. For reservations and information, call 954-752-3030.

Pageants may be less ambitious than Passion Plays, but they are popular among many congregations because they involve music and present the Easter story in an easy-to-understand way. Over one thousand people are expected to attend an Easter Pageant on March 29 at First Baptist Church of Hollywood.

"People don't always know why they come to church on Easter, it's just part of their tradition," explained Jim Zabloski, the church's Creative Director. "We want to be able to just tell them the story of Jesus' resurrection."

Zabloski, who lives in Plantation, wrote the script for this year's presentation that, he said, will feature ten to twelve musical presentations along with personal testimonies from church members. "We will also show a film clip on the life of Martin Luther and a short sport's video," he said.

Among those speaking will be Beverly Weisblat of Hollywood. "Jim (Zabloski) has been asking me to give my testimony because I'm very verbal about my belief," Weisblat said.

Explaining that she tried several different religious expressions before becoming a Christian, Weisblat said, "I can tell you exactly when it happened--October 26, 1997. I wasn't a believer, but drove a friend to church and heard the Gospel very clearly. I don't know why it took so long, but I knew then exactly where I was going."

Weisblat said she is not nervous about getting up in front of such a large audience to make her three-minute presentation. "My reason to be here now is to tell others," she said.

First Baptist's Easter Pageant will be presented at 7 p.m. on Sunday, March 29 at the church, 1708 N. 60th Avenue in Hollywood. For information, call 954-966-2350.

THE EASTER STORY PAGEANT AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF HOLLYWOOD TO FEATURE MUSIC, PERSONAL TESTIMONIES
South Florida Sun-Sentinel, March 22, 2002