

The Crucifixion Coronation

CHARACTERS: Claudia Procula (Pilate's wife), Centurion

RUN TIME: 4 minutes

SCRIPTURE/BASED ON: Mark 15-16, Matthew 26-28, Luke 22-24, John 19-20

At rise: *CLAUDIA PROCULA sits center stage. CENTURION enters from stage right.*

CENTURION: *(bowing head and kneeling on one knee)* My Lady.

CLAUDIA: I had a dream, nightmare really, about this man Jesus. You were there when he died?

CENTURION: *(still bowed)* Yes, my lady.

CLAUDIA: I want to know what happened.

CENTURION: It was a crucifixion, my lady. You do not want to hear the details.

CLAUDIA: Please, rise and speak. *(CENTURION does so)* I have already suffered a great deal on account of this man. Now I need to know if it is true, if he was indeed the son of God and a king.

CENTURION: Why ask me. I'm a soldier, not a philosopher or priest?

CLAUDIA: Because you were there and because of what you said when he died.

CENTURION: *(Looks up sharply, stricken, almost panicked)* I ... I

CLAUDIA: Have no fear. I seek to understand, not to trap you. Why did you say that this Jesus was God's son, that his walk to the cross was his Imperial Triumph and his crucifixion a coronation?

CENTURION: You have seen an Imperial Triumph, my lady?

CLAUDIA: Yes. The public celebration of a successful general or the emperor. I was there when Nero walked his Imperial Triumph.

CENTURION: You know where it starts?

CLAUDIA: It begins in the headquarters of the Praetorian Guard.

CENTURION: The soldiers led Jesus away into their headquarters and called the whole company together. They dressed Him in a purple robe, twisted together a crown of thorns, and put it on Him.

CLAUDIA: Similar to when the soldiers put Jupiter's purple robe and a laurel wreath crown on the general.

CENTURION: The guard saluted Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

CLAUDIA: The same as they do for the general.

CENTURION: Then they led Him out to crucify Him at Golgotha.

CLAUDIA: The place of the skull. Skull is much like head ... oh! Like Capitoline Hill where the emperor's Imperial Triumph ends in his coronation.

CENTURION: Not only that, they offered him wine and he refused it.

CLAUDIA: Like the emperor pours out the wine offered to him as a symbol of being ready to bleed for the empire if needed.

CENTURION: Exactly.

CLAUDIA: And I have heard from other inquiries that this Jesus held a ceremony prior to his death – a last supper – in which he declared wine to be his blood, poured out as a covenant for his followers.

CENTURION: He was crucified between two thieves with a great deal of people in attendance, leaders of the Jews, weeping women.

CLAUDIA: I see. Just like the general or emperor is flanked by two others when he ascends the steps to preside over the great crowd.

CENTURION: And your husband ordered a sign to be placed over his head –written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek declaring him to be King – King of the Jews.

CLAUDIA: Then the sacrifice is made.

CENTURION: The Jews sacrifice in order to have sins forgiven. Some of his last words were, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”

CLAUDIA: Hardly what you would expect from a condemned man, suffering.

CENTURION: That’s not all. Remember Augustus Caesar’s coronation was accompanied by the comet, the sign of the god’s approval?

CLAUDIA: Yes. *(beat)* Ah! The darkness and the earthquake!

CENTURION: Powerful signs. We honor the emperor as a god and general.

CLAUDIA: This Jesus claimed to be a king and the Son of God.

CENTURION: A claim I have come to believe now that the soldiers were bribed to say his disciples stole his body away. I know that to be a lie.

CLAUDIA: What really happened?

CENTURION: A violent earthquake. They saw a being, bright as lightning, that descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone. The guards were so shaken from fear of him that they became like dead men.

CLAUDIA: *(beat)* I warned my husband not to have anything to do with that innocent man. But if he is not just a man, then maybe we should all have something to do with him.

CENTURION: I think so, my lady. This Jesus is both king and the son of God.