

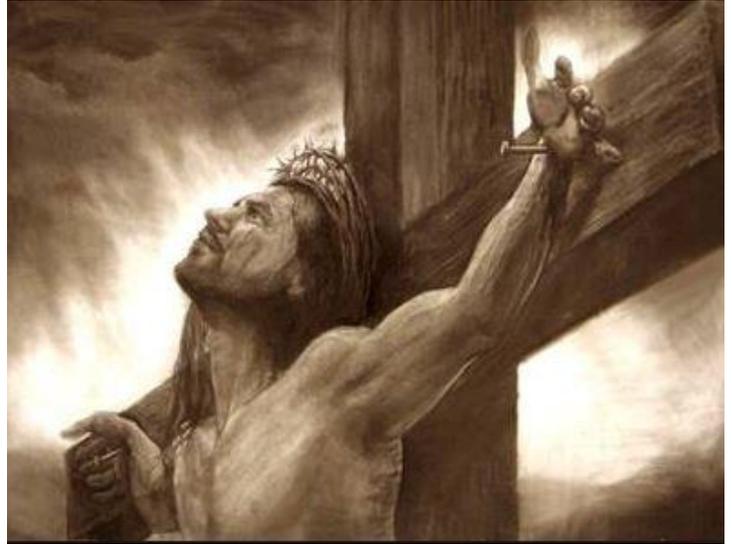
## Heroic Easter Characters

Hidden by the big picture of Easter are a number of behind-the-scenes biblical characters. We all know the main storyline but our fuller understanding of God's story is enriched by the supporting roles of other biblical characters. Perhaps you can identify with the important role each of these played in God's story. What kind of role can you play to share God's message with people today?

**Simon of Cyrene:** Simon was the person pulled out of the crowd to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha. In Roman times criminals carried their own crosses, but Jesus was too weak from torture and beatings to carry His own cross. God placed Simon where he would be the one ordered to carry the cross for Jesus.

You can imagine that blood spattered from Jesus onto Simon of Cyrene and may have impacted him to be among those who first believed. Bible scholars tell us that the people of Cyrene were some of the first to place their faith in the resurrected Jesus.

**Question:** Where has God placed you to play a role in His story today?



**The Centurion:** Centurions were men of power, influence and wealth in the Roman government. The word centurion means "captain of 100." A centurion witnessed Jesus' death and it changed his heart.

- He was there when Jesus said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34).
- He was there when Jesus responded to the thief on the neighboring cross who admitted his guilt and asked for forgiveness. *Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:43).
- And the centurion was there when Jesus proclaimed, *"It is finished."* *With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* (John 19:30).
- The centurion's heart was changed. *"The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."* (Luke 23:47). The centurion witnessed Jesus' concern for others instead of for Himself.

The centurion recognized what others refused to see –both the human and divine natures of Jesus.

**Question:** How has your heart been changed as you have heard the story and seen evidence of Jesus' impact on the lives of others?

**John the Apostle:** While other disciples fled, John was the only disciple present at the crucifixion. Even though he let Jesus down in the Garden of Gethsemane he risked his life for his friend, Jesus, at the crucifixion. Golgotha was an emotional setting. John stood at the foot of the cross, beside Jesus' mother. *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."* *From that time on, this disciple took her into his home* (John 19:26-27).

John not only stood up for his friend but he accepted the responsibility to look after His mother for the rest of her life.

**Question:** Would you stand up for your friend and take on a major responsibility when it is needed?

**Joseph of Arimathea:** Joseph was a secret disciple. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the judicial body of the Jews. Because of his position in the community he had a lot at stake showing empathy for Jesus. He did not agree with the decision to arrest and prosecute Jesus, so he acted. After the crucifixion, Joseph petitioned Pontius Pilate for Jesus' body and transported it to his own tomb. The tomb was Joseph's investment for his own family, yet he was willing to give it up for Jesus. *Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid (Luke 23:50-53).*



Joseph voted his own conscience, used his influence for good and courageously stepped up to do the right thing, no matter what it could cost him.

**Questions:** How about you? In the face of pressures, will you stand up for what is right and true, regardless of the cost? How heroic are you?

**Pilate's Wife:** Women of that time were not treated as equals with men. Pilate's wife is not even identified by name in the Bible. She had a dream and sent a message to her husband. *While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." (Matthew 27:19).* God was working through her.



She is the only recorded person who spoke up against the decision to kill Jesus. God used Pilate's wife to deliver timely advice.

**Questions:** How about you? Does God work through you, calling you to action?

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help me to take a fresh look at the Easter story, one that points out the courage of supporting characters during the tumultuous times of the crucifixion. We have the opportunity to be supporting characters also. And, we live in difficult times. It is unpopular to be an advocate for the faith today. Give me the courage to be a faithful disciple today, boldly proclaiming the truth. Amen.