

Kathy Hillman: 'Hallelujah! Christ arose!'

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By Holy Week, the preschoolers John and I teach in Sunday school have turned 2. They put their own chairs around the table and take their napkins to the trash after snack time. But most exciting, they sit reasonably still as they listen to a story and sometimes remember Bible people and verses.



Kathy Hillman On Palm Sunday, our church provides palm fronds for each child. After the story, we walk around the room, waving the branches, chanting, "Hosanna! Hail King Jesus!" The girls and boys ask to wave the leaves periodically during the hour. As parents retrieve them for the ride home, they clutch their precious palms. Many wave the branches all afternoon until the stems break.

On Easter, the preschoolers help make resurrection bread as they hear a simple story of how God turned a sad day into a glad day. John and I pray these experiences will help prepare them for hearing God's call to make the Easter story their own when the time comes and to tell others about Jesus.

As I remember these children, my mind glimpses other Holy Week memories—most serious, a few not. Grandmother Barton always bought my younger sister and me new Easter outfits. One year, Gran purchased

excruciating-to-wear hats kept in place with jagged metal combs that dug and squeezed the scalp. On the way to church, my sister managed to roll down the car window and discard her torturer. I wanted to but was afraid.



Preschoolers at Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco learning about Palm Sunday with real palm branches. (Kathy Hillman photo) Sometimes, like me, we want to, but we're afraid. We shy away from sharing the significance of the holiday, but three remembrances illustrate my Easter story.

During one Holy Week, Columbus Avenue Baptist Church held noon services. As I slipped into the chapel on Good Friday, I had no idea the ministerial staff planned to do for us what Jesus did for his disciples. They gathered towels and poured water into basins. My heart pounded as Joanne Cresson, the children's minister I greatly admired, gently washed my feet in one of life's most humbling moments. I realized that's what Christ did. He humbled himself and set an example of service. Worship concluded with the ministers serving a silent Lord's Supper as a reminder of Jesus' broken body and shed blood.



Kathy Hillman's husband John portraying Pilate in the Easter pageant at Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco. For 76 years, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's Easter pageant has brought Holy Week to life. Several times, our sons and my husband acted in our own church's production. John first played a tough Roman soldier, roughly arresting Jesus, raucously preparing him for crucifixion, and rudely handling those who followed him to Golgotha. As I watched, I grew uneasy. I no longer saw a soldier. I saw my husband doing those things.

The second year, the director cast John as Judas, and I grew even more uncomfortable as my husband betrayed my Lord. The following Easter that discomfort reached a new level when John played Pontius Pilate.



Kathy Hillman with her sister and father, dressed up for Easter. In a scene so intense the director chose to use a scrim, he took water, washed his hands, and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood." Then he handed "Jesus who is called the Messiah" over to be crucified. When John dried and held up his palms, I knew the answer to my discomfort. My husband represented me, just as the Roman soldier and Judas and Pilate did. I put Jesus on the cross. He died for my sins. But that's not the end of the story.

When I was in elementary school, several families planned a sunrise Easter service. We drove out a little way from Eldorado to a beautiful spot facing east. Volunteers read Scripture, provided special music and offered a devotional thought. We closed with the hymn "Christ Arose." Just as the sun crested the horizon, we reached the refrain.

*Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes,
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And he lives forever, with his saints to reign.*

He arose! He arose!

Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Yes, Christ died for me and for each of us, but he also conquered death. I cannot, nor can any of us, earn or buy or be good enough to merit salvation. But by his grace, he forgives and saves. Each of us individually must believe and receive his gift. No one can do it for us.

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“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)
That is the Easter story.

Kathy Hillman is president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. She also is director of Baptist collections, library advancement and the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society at Baylor University.