

The Son of God
Israel & the Christians



Musical
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Reader 7: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father!⁴⁸

He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁹

13. The overflowing oil

Some women bring jars of oil to fill the lamps at the tomb of Paul.

Women: The oil of gladness⁵⁰ overflows from the chosen vessel who proclaims to the nations⁵¹ the One who has risen; it feeds the flame of the eternal lamp of mercy that will never go out.⁵²

1. Paul the Apostle, pray for us.

Doctor of the nations, pray for us.

Teacher most fervent, pray for us.

Tireless missionary, pray for us.

2. Servant of Christ, pray for us.

Guardian of the faith, pray for us.

Thrown to the earth, pray for us.

Lifted up by grace, pray for us.

⁴⁸ Col 1:1-2.

⁴⁹ Col 1:13-14.

⁵⁰ cf. Ps 44:8, Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

⁵¹ cf. Acts 9:15, But the Lord said to [to Ananias], "Go, for he is a chosen instrument (vas electionis) of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel".

⁵² cf. Ex 3:2, And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

at Corinth: ... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴¹

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,*⁴²

Reader 4: Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ...To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴³

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*⁴⁴

Reader 5: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*⁴⁵

Reader 6: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of me.*⁴⁷

⁴¹ 1 Cor 1:1-2a, 3.

⁴² 2 Cor 1:3.

⁴³ Rom 1:1-3.7.

⁴⁴ Rom 6:4.

⁴⁵ Eph 1:1-3.

⁴⁶ Phil 1:1-2.

⁴⁷ Phil 2:5-7.

Introduction

*The title of this sacred drama, "The Son of God", obviously refers to the New Testament character of Jesus Christ. But already in the so-called Old Testament there is a "son of God", the first-born in fact, referred to when God says to Moses: "You shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born Son.'"*¹

Referring to the people of Israel God says to Pharaoh, "He is my son." And referring to Christians Jesus says to Saul, "Why do you persecute me?" or, in other words, "I and they are one."

In this perspective the full meaning of the title, including its second part, is revealed: "The Son of God: Israel & the Christians."

*In a journey of faith and conversion, the rabbi Saul of Tarsus discovers whom the Son of God is. His first testimony to the vision of the Risen Lord is expressed as follows: "...and in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'"*²

*I have taken the liberty of altering certain biblical events, hoping thereby to suggest comparisons that can be made in faith. Thus, for example, Saul is identified with the anonymous scribe who asked Jesus what the first of the commandments was.*³

In this sacred drama we accompany Saul, or perhaps it's he who accompanies us, on the path that will reveal the Son of God.

Fr. Johannes Paul Abrahamowicz, O.S.B.

¹ Ex 4:22-23.

² Acts 9:20.

³ Mk 12:28-34 (Mt 22:34-40).

Disciples (off stage): He did not spare...

All: Away with him! Away with him!

Paul (as they lead him away): I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept faith in God³⁶.

Disciples (off stage): He did not spare...

All follow him. The square is empty. A sword appears. A blow is heard. Silence.

12. Shalom, shalom (cf. 1 Cor 13)

Paul's disciples bury his body.

Reader 1: Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace!³⁷

Voices: Shalom, shalom, shalom chaverim, peace be with you. Love is patient, love is kind. Love hopes all things, love bears all things. Love has no end, love is eternal.

Reader continues while voices sing: For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.³⁸

Reader 2: Paul an apostle -- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead -- and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,³⁹

... But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me...⁴⁰

Reader 3: Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God which is

³⁶ cf. 2 Tim 4:7, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

³⁷ 1 Thess 1:1.

³⁸ 1 Thess 4:14.

³⁹ Gal 1:1-3.

⁴⁰ Gal 1:15-16a.

Paul: You have been raised with Christ, so live in his freedom,
freed from human laws that seem to be wise on account of exaggerated devotion, but that serve only to satisfy the flesh.³³

11. He did not spare his own Son

Jew E: This is crazy! Take him away!

(The guards take him. Paul goes a few steps with them, then stops)

Paul: If God is with us, who is against us? He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.³⁴

Disciples (off stage): He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all; how will he not give us everything together with him?

Jew F: Kill him!

(The guards put him in chains)

Paul: Neither death, nor life, nor any other power, nothing and no one will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ³⁵.

³³ cf. Col 2:20-23, If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

³⁴ cf. Rom 8:31-32, What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?

³⁵ cf. Rom 8:35-39, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The plot

*Rav Shaul is teaching future rabbis a nursery rhyme about the twelve plagues of Egypt. With reference to the last plague, the killing of the first-born, the following words are quoted: "And you shall say to pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.'"*⁴
At this point Saul, taking the role of Moses, engages God in dialogue: "Let Israel go"? "He's my Son!" "But they are many!" "He's my Son"!

Meanwhile Jesus goes by. Saul and Jesus talk of the first commandment, the one about love of God and love of neighbour.

*At the well outside the city, John the disciple tells the women who are drawing water how Nicodemus came secretly to Jesus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ..."*⁵

But the serenity at the well is disrupted by the arrival of a rowdy group who are leading Stephen outside the city to stone him. They are led by Saul. Gamaliel, Saul's former teacher and still greatly respected by him, discusses the death sentence with Saul: Stephen has declared before the Sanhedrin that he has seen Jesus of Nazareth, a man but recently condemned to death, at the right hand of God; and that Jesus is the "Son of Man", a scriptural title that attributes eternal power to the Crucified One.⁶ According to the law of Moses, this is a crime that merits stoning.

While on the road to Damascus, Saul the persecutor of Christians has the experience that changes his life. Jesus appears to Saul and speaks to him. Now, with the same melody as the earlier dialogue with pharaoh, Saul answers Jesus with similar words: "Who are

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jn 3:16.

⁶ The prophet Ezechiel is called "son of man" in his visions. In the prophecy of Daniel the "Son of man" is a heavenly being who receives eternal power from God (Dn 7:13-14); Jesus often declares himself to be the Son of man.

you, Lord”? “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” “You are one of them?” “I am.” “They are many!” “I am I!”

From this moment, Saul proclaims Jesus as the Son of God. He is arrested, led away and beheaded. While his disciples lay him in the tomb, we hear quotations from his letters in various languages, announcing peace through the Son of God “to the church of God which is in Corinth,” “to the communities in Galatia,” “to the saints in Ephesus,” etc.

The women who drew water from the well now come to the tomb of Paul bearing oil for the lamps. They call to mind the tending of the lamps that has been carried out from the beginning, and is documented from early in the 7th century.⁷ Even today a symbolic oil lamp is kept burning day and night at the tomb. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the oil for their lamps is a symbol of fidelity. The women celebrate the refilling of the lamps as an act of praise to God’s eternal faithfulness confirmed in the resurrection of his Son and reflected in the consecration of Paul.

⁷ Praeceptum Marmoreum of Gregory the Great (604).

act 3 – in the public square

10. You have been raised with Christ

A group of people is listening to Paul.

Paul: Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God.²⁵

Jew A to his neighbour: Isn’t this Saul, the persecutor of the new teaching?

Paul: Call me Paul because I’m the least of the Apostles, but by God’s grace I’ve been sent to preach Jesus the Christ, raised from the dead!²⁶

You have been raised with Christ, so live in his freedom, freed from the law²⁷ that leads to sin²⁸, freed from sin that only leads to despair, to death²⁹.

Jew A: The crucified Jesus: raised?

Paul: I saw him with my own eyes. His aspect was like lightning that blinded me, but then he gave me back my sight.

Jew B: We’ll hear more about this another time!³⁰

Paul: You have been raised with Christ, so live in his freedom! Seek the things that are above where Christ sits at the right hand of God³¹. You have died but your life is hidden with Christ in God³²!

Jew C: What must we do?

Jew D: What acts of devotion?

²⁶ cf. 1 Cor 15:9-11, For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

²⁷ cf. Rom 7:6, But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

²⁸ cf. Rom 3:20, For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

²⁹ cf. Rom 6:16, Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

³⁰ Acts 17:32.

³¹ cf. Col 3:1.

³² cf. Col 3:3.

Saul: If I tell you, you will kill me; in fact, you would have to kill me, in the name of the Law. *(he gets to his feet)* Kill me then! What difference does it make? The last thing I saw will be the first thing that I proclaim as a new man: Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God!²⁵

Travel companions: What on earth....? *(they raise Saul and lead him away)*

Saul: His face - lightning, his voice - thunder, his word – a sword.

Characters

Saul / Paul (tenor)

Jesus (tenor)

John the Evangelist (tenor)

Gamaliel (tenor)

Women (sopranos e contraltos)

Disciples /Sanhedrin (tenors & basses)

²⁵ This is the first public witness given by Paul to the fact that he has seen the risen Christ (Acts 9:20): And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Saul: They use our scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, and that God has declared him his beloved Son, and that after his death he would be raised to life!

Thunder, lightning, Saul falls to the ground.

Jesus: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Disciples: Thrown to the ground, Rav Shaul falls, taken by surprise, struck at midday, enveloped in light bright as a thunder bolt:

Jesus: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Saul: Who are you, Lord?

Jesus: Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Saul: Are you one of their number?

Jesus: One whom you are persecuting!

Saul: They are so many!

Jesus: It is !!

Saul: They are so many!

Jesus: It is !!

9. His face

Travel companions: What's happened? What's happened? *(they raise Saul, almost motionless because of the blindness, and they get him to sit down)*

Saul: His face - lightning, his voice - thunder, his word – a sword.

Disciple A: What's happened to him?

Disciple B: Why does he keep his eyes shut?

Disciple C: ... as though he were blind.

Saul: Yes, I'm blind and I'll remain so till death. But the last thing I saw opened my eyes to see beyond.

Disciple A: What did you see?

Disciple B: With whom did you speak?

Disciple C: Rabbi, tell us!

Two men throw their cloaks at Saul's feet then each of them picks up a stone.

Two men: To us, witnesses, the first stone!²³

Saul: This is what God's Law demands!

The two men begin the stoning. The members of the Sanhedrin join in.

Stephen: Lord Jesus, receive my spirit; *(he falls on his knees)* do not hold this sin against them *(he dies)*.²⁴

Gamaliel: The Son of man remains a mystery! *(he goes back to the city)*

Saul gives the witnesses their clothes: Here are your clothes. You've finished your work, but for me it's just the beginning. Now I have to go to Damascus.

8. The Son of God II

The two witnesses: Your zeal convinces us!

Two disciples (A+B): Let us go with you!

Disciple C:: For the Lord

Disciple D: and for the Law that he has given us!

Saul: Here are the letters from the chief priest. They give us permission to imprison men and women who follow this new doctrine.

Disciple A: They have their baptism,

Disciple B: they absolve sins,

Two disciples (C+D): they don't understand why we're still waiting for the Messiah.

²³ cf. Deut 17:7, The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death...

²⁴ cf. Acts 7:59-60, And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

act 1 – in the Yeshiva

The future rabbis are in a Yeshiva⁸ awaiting the start of the lesson. Saul enters and greets them: How many of you have now learnt by heart the ten plagues of Egypt? Today we'll repeat them in the form of a rhyme.

1. If Pharaoh ...

Saul sings and the disciples repeat: If Pharaoh, after seeing
1. the waters of the Nile changed into blood, had let us go, God would have spared him.

2. ...the waters..., and frogs to cover the land of Egypt, he would have ...

3. ...the waters..., and frogs..., swarms of mosquitoes on all living things, he would have ...

4. ...flies everywhere, in all the houses,

5. ...the plague to kill all the animals,

6. ...open wounds on men and beasts,

7. ...and ice from heaven to strike the wheat,

8. ...locusts to consume anything remaining,

9. ...and then three days of total darkness...

But Pharaoh wouldn't listen! If he had let us go, God would have spared him.

2. Eye for eye

Saul: Eye for eye! Tooth for tooth!⁹ Son for son! Thus says the Lord: Israel is my son, you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your first-born.¹⁰

⁸ Yeshiva = rabbinical school.

⁹ cf. Ex 21:23-25, If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (cf. Deut 19:21).

Disciple: Master, isn't it cruel this vendetta: "son for son"?

Saul: In the beginning the vendetta was sevenfold. Remember the scripture: "...if anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold."¹¹ Then the Lord taught us not to get revenge like the other peoples, but only: "Eye for eye,..."

A disciple announces that Jesus of Nazareth is going by outside. Jesus appears with a few followers. Saul and his disciples go to meet him.

Saul: Rabbi!

Jesus stops and turns towards him.

Saul: Rabbi, what is the first of the commandments?

3. Hear, O Israel¹²

Jesus: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments rest the whole law and the prophets. There is no other commandment more important than these.

Saul: You have spoken well, He is one; to love him with your whole life, and to love your neighbour as yourself is worth more than holocausts and sacrifices.

Jesus: You are not far from the kingdom of God.

Jesus and his disciples move off.

cf. Lev 24:19-20, When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured.

¹⁰ cf. Ex 4:22-23, And you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me'; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son."

¹¹ Gen 4:15.

¹² Mk 12:28-34 (Mt 22:34-40); cf. Deut 6:4-5, Lev 19:18

The women take their jars and leave.

Saul, in the foreground, indicates the place for the stoning. Gamaliel, an elderly pharisee, arrives.

Gamaliel (worried): Saul, Saul!

Saul: Gamaliel, my teacher, come and take a stone; let us adore the one God and destroy the blasphemers!

Gamaliel: I am innocent of his blood!²¹

Saul makes a sign to the sanhedrin to wait.

Saul: Gamaliel, what are you saying? We all heard him say that he saw the heavens open and the Son of man at the right hand of God!

Gamaliel: And if what he says is true?

Saul: The Son of man has eternal power²², but he's talking about Jesus of Nazareth. Does the Son of man die on a cross? What a scandal for all believers!

Gamaliel: Well then, his disciples will disperse.

Saul: His disciples are mad; they say he's been raised from the dead and they make a new doctrine of it; the people are beginning to take them seriously! This doctrine must be nipped in the bud, right now!

²¹ cf. Dan 13:45-46, While Susanna was being led away to be put to death, God aroused the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel; and he cried with a loud voice, "I am innocent of the blood of this woman!"

²² cf. Dan 7:13-14, I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Woman: John, stop a moment, tell us about Jesus, about when he was still among us!

John stops, comes towards them and sits down: Did you know that the leader of the Jews, Nicodemus, once came secretly to visit us?

6. Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-5,16)

John: It was night time and Nicodemus said to Jesus: you are a teacher come from God; for no one can work the signs that you do unless God is with him.

And Jesus replied to Nicodemus: Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John and the Women: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John: Nicodemus said to him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?

Jesus answered: Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The members of the sanhedrin arrive, greatly agitated. They are dragging Stephen along to stone him. The last of the group is Saul.

7. He has blasphemed

Sanhedrin: He has blasphemed against God. It is a capital offence; he will be stoned.²⁰

²⁰ cf. Lev 24:16, He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him.

Saul: Did you notice?

Disciple: He gave the commandments of love of God and of neighbour the same importance.

Saul: This is a new teaching.

Disciple: But the love of neighbour is no new teaching!¹³

Saul: No, but to tie it to love of God, in our daily prayer, in our daily profession of faith.

Disciple: Rav Shaul, why do people talk so much about this Nazarene?

Saul: Because..., because he thinks he's..., because he acts like... the messiah,... or in fact, like the son of God!

Saul to all his disciples: Now let's get back to Pharaoh. And don't forget that each of us has a bit of that Pharaoh inside.

4. The Son of God I

Disciple A: I'll be Pharaoh!

Disciple B: I'll be Moses!

Saul: And I'll be the voice of God!

Moses: Hear, O Pharaoh, turn to God, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: "Israel is my son, my first-born son."¹⁴

The Lord: Let my first-born go!

Pharaoh: Let Israel?

The Lord: My first-born!

Pharaoh: Let them go?

The Lord: My first-born!

Pharaoh: There are so many of them!

The Lord: It's my son!

Pharaoh: There are so many!

The Lord: It's my son!

¹³ cf. Lev 19:18, ... But you shall love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.

¹⁴ cf. Ex 4:22-23, And you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me'; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son."

Disciple C: Now I'll be Pharaoh!

Saul: And I'll be Moses!

Disciple D: Can I be the voice of God?

Moses: Hear...

Disciple E: I'll be the Lord!

Disciple F: I'll be Moses!

Saul: That means I'll have to be Pharaoh?!

Moses: Hear...

act 2 – outside the city

Some women are drawing water from the well outside the city.

5. Come to the waters

Women: Come to the waters¹⁵, draw from the well that the Lord gave to your fathers, replenish your jars, fill your hearts, tell your dear ones that God is with us. Turn back, Lord, marána tha¹⁶. Your people await you, marána tha. Quench the thirst of your faithful ones¹⁷, marána tha. Don't disappoint those who hope¹⁸, marána tha.

Woman: Remember the prophet Isaiah: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation"¹⁹. When will this prophecy be fulfilled?

Woman: Who knows? Maybe today? We must be always ready!

John passes by.

The women see him.

Woman: It's the young disciple of Jesus.

Woman: Hello, John!

John returns the greeting.

¹⁵ cf. Is 55:1-3: Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.

¹⁶ cf. 1 Cor 16:22, Marána tha: Our Lord, come!

¹⁷ cf. Jn 4:14, Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst...

¹⁸ cf. Ps 118:116, Uphold me according to thy promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope.

cf. Rm 5:5, Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

¹⁹ Is 12:3.