

N-Town Plays #29-31

Translated and edited by Haylia Brown

Translator's Preface:

During Medieval Christianity, the scriptures were taught solely in Latin, which resulted in a lack of their accessibility to the general public. In order to increase the people's knowledge of biblical teachings and stories, they began to be taught visually, through Miracle or Mystery Plays, which travelled through towns and cycled through scripture stories.

The *N-Town Plays* are one such cycle, composed of 42 plays which do not appear to have been specific to any particular town, and owe their name to a placeholder which was part of a template for announcing future performances, and was to be filled in later with the actual name of their next destination.

Although the original versions of the plays are able to be read and understood with sufficient knowledge of Middle English and perhaps good footnotes, there has yet to be a more accessible, updated translation. My goal in undertaking this translation is to provide a version that can be comprehended and enjoyed by a modern audience looking for a taste of medieval times through theater, not merely scholars with the desire to delve deep into antiquity. This translation aims to be suitable for a modern performance of these plays—should anyone wish to put one on—and has endeavored to stay as close to the original wording as possible, without veering into overly outdated territory. This has involved dropping the usage of “thee” and “thou”, but retaining words such as “thus” and “forth” that the modern reading should still be familiar with. The clarity of characters, scenes, and stage directions was also prioritized, with a cast of characters and the occasional refinement in scene and setting descriptions being added.

Although the *N-Town Plays* are not historically accurate, and were used by the medieval population to put the stories in a context that they could understand, it is enlightening to see how the events in these trials, as well as characters such as King Herod, Caiaphas, Annas, and even Satan were portrayed and interpreted by those in the Middle Ages.

Because I believe that the matter of jurisdiction over Judea is often overlooked in the matter of Christ's life, and oftentimes the washing of Pilate's hands is the only detail the modern reader will know, I found it significant and fulfilling to translate these three “trial plays”, which are part of the “Passion 2” section of the *N-Town Plays*. By considering them all together, the intricacies of Jewish and Roman governments and the complexities of Pilate's and Herod's territories can hopefully become clearer.

Haylia Brown, John Adams College, 2026

Cast of Characters (*in order of appearance*)

Commenter: The Commenter was a traditional part of these travelling cycles of plays, usually stepping in for a moment at the beginning to provide context and introduction for the entertainment that was about to unfold.

King Herod: This is not Herod the Great, who was approached by the Three Magi and caused Joseph and Mary to flee into Egypt with the Christ-child, but his son, Herod Antipus, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, known for beheading John the Baptist. Although his grandfather was an Idumean forcibly converted to Judaism, and his father (at least outwardly) adhered to the Jewish faith, these *N-Town Plays* have portrayed him as a devout follower of Muhammad. Because Christ was originally born in Galilee, which was under Herod's rule, there was some confusion about whether he or Pilate had jurisdiction over the judgement of Christ.

Knights: The soldiers of King Herod. In true history they would have been Roman soldiers, but the writers and performers of the *N-Town Plays* again took the liberty of portraying them as something more familiar to their audiences: medieval knights.

Messenger: The character with this title in play 29 seems to be either a Jew or a soldier who participated in and witnessed the capture of Christ on the Mount of Olives after His betrayal by Judas. However, the Messenger in play #30 appears to be a different person, a Jew hired by the High Priest Caiaphas to deliver a message to Pontius Pilate.

Jews 1, 2, 3, and 4: These are Jews hostile to Christ, and although they are numbered, it seems that each of them could in fact have signified multiple different people depending on the scene, as we see them both as Jewish authorities inside the Sanhedrin and lay Jews on the streets with the Apostle Peter.

Annas: The father-in-law of Caiaphas, Annas had formerly been High Priest, until he was deposed by the local procurator. After his son-in-law replaced him, Annas continued to exercise significant influence over Jewish affairs, and remained part of the Sanhedrin.

Caiaphas: High Priest of the Jews, it seems he had good working relationships with the Roman leaders of the area. While he is traditionally believed to have been a Pharisee, he may have actually sympathized with the Sadducees, who were popular among Jewish elites.

Jesus: The Christ and the Savior of the world, who, after having barely completed His Atonement, was betrayed and captured and made to stand three trials, two before Pilate and one before Herod, before being condemned to crucifixion.

Scribes 1, 2, and 3: Jewish scholars also known as Soferim [sofer singular], who

preserved and transcribed sacred texts, and were required to go through rigorous training in order to be authorized to record these documents. As they were also interpreters of Jewish law, they often collaborated with the Sanhedrin, assisting with judgments and legislative functions.

Maidservants 1 and 2: These women are said to have been servants of the High Priest, who were working in the courtyard of the Sanhedrin's hall where the Apostle Peter hides to watch the court's proceedings.

Peter: The Apostle Peter, also known as Simon Peter or the Rock, and said to have been the first Pope. Following the Savior's abduction and trial, Peter is discovered and, out of fear, denies his Lord three times before the cock crowed.

Pilate: Pontius Pilate, the governor of the Roman province of Judea known for presiding over the trial that sent Christ to His execution. Due to his reluctance to give the condemning verdict, however, many Christians, such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church, believe he later became Christian and venerate him as a martyr and a saint. Because Pilate's territory only covered Judea and Samaria, it was initially unclear whether he or Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, should have the duty of judging Christ.

Judas: This is Judas Iscariot, the traitorous apostle who handed Christ over to the Jewish rulers for thirty pieces of silver. Unable to bear the guilt that came afterwards, Judas attempted to return the blood-money and hanged himself.

Satan: The devil himself, ruler of Hell, who is initially excited at the possibility of trapping Christ in his domain, but becomes frightened that the Savior's power might actually be too much for him, and, in an attempt to save Jesus' life, he sends nightmares to Pilate's wife, trying to persuade them to let Christ go.

Demon: One of Satan's devils, who points out the possibility of Christ destroying Hell and being too powerful for them to sufficiently subdue, and influences Satan to change his plan and work to save Jesus' life.

Pilate's Wife: The spouse of Pontius Pilate, who receives nightmares of the torments to be endured should Christ be condemned to die. She urges her husband to let the man go, but is dismissed and sent back to bed.

Barabbas: A condemned murderer and thief, likely involved with the Zealots, Jews who fought against Roman rule. Because of the Passover tradition of setting one prisoner free every year, Barabbas is chosen by the Jews to be released rather than Jesus.

Play #29: Herod; Trial Before Annas and Caiaphas

The procession comes into their places and Herod has taken his place on stage and Pilate and Annas and Caiaphas their places. Also then comes the Commenter, in scholar's clothing, saying:

COMMENTER: Sovereigns and friends, may you all be full of goodness!
Grace, love, and charity ever be among you.
The maiden's son preserve you, that for man died on the cross.
May He that is one God in Three Persons, defend you from your foes.

By the leave and sufferance of the Almighty God,
We intend to proceed with the matter that we left last year,
Wherefore we beseech you that you will be so good as
To keep the passion in your mind that shall be shown here.

Last year we showed here how our Lord, for the love of man,
Came to the city of Jerusalem, to meekly meet His death.
And how He performed the Passover, His body giving then
To His Apostles ever with us, abiding for mankind's sake.

At that Passover, He was betrayed by Judas, who sold Him
To the Jews for thirty pieces to deliver Him that night.
With swords and spears to Jesus, they come with the traitor bold,
And took Him among His apostles at about midnight.

Now would we proceed with how He was then brought
Before Annas and Caiaphas, and sat before Pilate,
And so forth in His Passion, how meekly He bore it for man,
Beseeching you, for the merit of your souls, to take good heed of this play.

Here Herod shows himself and speaks:

King Herod: Now cease your talking, and give your lord audience!
Say not one word, I charge you who are here present,
Be none so foolhardy to presume, in my high presence,
To unloose his lips against my intent!

I am Herod of the Jews, the king most revered,
The laws of Mohammad my power shall fortify,
Reverence to that lord of grace most excellent,
For by his power do all things multiply.

If any Christian be so foolhardy, his faith to deny,
Or if any err against his law,
On gibbets with chains, I shall hang him high
And with wild horses those traitors shall I draw!

To kill a thousand Christians, I give not a hawthorn berry
To see them hung or burnt. To me it is very pleasant
To drive them into dungeons, with dragons to gnaw
And to rend their flesh and bones for their sustenance!

John the Baptist christened Christ, and so he did many a one;
Therefore I myself did bring him to die!
It is I that did kill him, I tell you, everyone!
For if he could have gone forth, he should have destroyed our law!

Whereas Christians appear to me as a great grievance,
It paineth my heart of the traitors to hear!
For the laws of Muhammad, I have in governance,
That which I will keep. That lord hath no peer, for he is God most prudent!

Now I charge you, my lords, that are here:
If any Christian dogs here do appear,
Bring those traitors to my high power,
And they shall soon have judgement.

KNIGHT 1: My sovereign lord, highest in excellence,
In you all judgement is terminable.
All Christian dogs that do not their diligence,
You put them to pains that be unbearable!

KNIGHT 2: Nothing in you may be more commendable
As to destroy those traitors that err
Against our laws! They be most profitable
By their righteousness, so that law you must proffer!

KING HEROD: Now by glorious Muhammad, My sovereign savior,
These promises I make, as I am a true knight!
Those that exceed his laws are only in error.
To the most shameful death, I shall make them die!

But one thing greatly troubles my delight,
There is one Jesus of Nazareth, as men tell me,

Of that man I desire to have a sight,
For with many great wonders, our law he fells!

The Son of God, he calls himself;
And the King of Jews, he says he is,
And many wonders of him befalls,
My heart desires to see him!

Sirs, if he should come into this country,
With our jurisdiction, look ye to spy,
And let him be brought unto me,
And the truth myself I should then try.

KNIGHT 1: Tomorrow my journey I shall begin
To seek Jesus with my diligence.
If he come within your province,
He shall not escape your high presence.

KNIGHT 2: My sovereign, this is my counsel that you should take:
Set a man that is both wise and strong,
Through all Galilee a search to make.
If Jesus be entered among your people,

Correct his deeds that do be wrong.
For his body is under your rule,
As people talk among themselves,
That he was born in Galilee.

KING HEROD: Then of these matters, sirs, take heed,
For a while I will rest myself.
Appetite indeed requires me to do so,
And the physicians tell me it is best.

TRIAL BEFORE ANNAS AND CAIAPHAS

Here shall a messenger come running and crying, “Tidings! Tidings!” round about, “Jesus of Nazareth is taken! Jesus of Nazareth is taken!” and afterwards hailing the princes, saying:

MESSENGER: All hail, my lords, princes of priests!
Sir Caiaphas and Sir Annas, Lords of the law!
Tidings I bring you, receive them in your breasts!
Jesus of Nazareth is taken, therefore you may be glad!

He shall be brought here to you at once,
I tell you truly, with great distress,
When he was taken, I was there among them,
And there I was near to catching a blow!

Marcus bore a lantern and went into the press.
At once he was struck, and off went his ear!
Jesus had his disciple put up his sword and cease,
And set Malcus' ear again, as whole as ever!

As I may prosper, I thought it was a strange sight!
When we came first to him, he came to meet us
And asked whom we sought that time of night.
We said "Jesus of Nazareth—we would gladly have him."

And he said, "It is I that am here in your sight."
With that word, we all were overthrown backwards, everyone.
And some on their backs, lay upright!
But standing upon their feet, like men, there was not one!

Christ stood on his feet as meek as a lamb,
And we lay still like dead men till he bade us rise.
When we were up, fast hands we laid upon him,
But yet I was not pleased with the new situation.

Therefore take now your counsel and advise yourselves right well
And beware that he make you not beguiled,
For, by my wealth, I dare swear upon this seal
You shall find him a strange fellow.

Here they bring Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas, and one shall then say:

JEW 1: Look, look lords—
here is the man that you sent us to bring.

ANNAS: Therefore we can thank you, then,
And you shall have the greater reward for it.

Jesus, you are welcome here into our presence!
For oftentimes we have diligently sought you.
We paid your disciple thirty coins,
And as an ox or a horse, we have truly bought you.

Therefore now you are ours, as you stand before us.
Tell us why you had troubled us and subverted our law!
You have often contradicted us, and done even more,
Wherefore it was needful for us to bring you to judgment.

CAIAPHAS: Where are your disciples that follow you about?
And what is your doctrine that you preach?
Tell me now somewhat, and bring us out of doubt
That we may teach other men your preaching.

JESUS: At times that I have preached, it was done openly,
In the synagogue or in the temple where all the Jews come.
Ask them what I have said and also what I have done.
They can tell you my words; ask every one of them.

JEW 1: What, you fellow, to whom are you speaking?
Will you speak so to a bishop?
You shall have a blow on the cheek—I make a vow—
And give you a knock for it!

Here he shall smite Jesus on the cheek.

JESUS: If I had said anything amiss,
Then you may bear witness of it.
And if I have said nothing but good in this,
You do wrong to harm me.

ANNAS: Sirs; take heed now to this man
That he destroy not our law!
And bring all the witnesses against him that you can
So that he may be brought to judgement!

SCRIBE 1: Sir, this I heard him say with his own mouth:
“Break down this temple without delay,
And I shall set it up again
As whole as it was, by the third day.”

SCRIBE 2: Yes, sir, and I heard him say also
That he was the Son of God,
And yet many a fool thinks so,
I would wager my hat upon it!

SCRIBE 3: Yes, yes, and I heard him preach many things
And against our law in every regard,
Of which it would take a long time to make a reckoning
That would tell all to this court.

CAIAPHAS: What say you now, Jesus?
Why do you not answer?
Do you not hear what is said against you?
Speak man, speak! Speak, you fool!

Do you scorn to speak to me?
Do you not hear how many things they accuse you of?
Now, I charge you and conjure by the sun and the moon
That you tell us whether you are God's Son!

JESUS: God's Son I am. I do not deny it to you.
And you all shall see at Doomsday
When the Son shall come in great power and majesty
And judge the quick and dead as I tell you.

CAIAPHAS: Ah! Out! Out! Alas, what is this?
Do you not hear how he blasphemes God?
What need do we have of more witnesses?
Here you have heard all his own words!

Do you not think he is worthy to die?

And everyone will shout:

ALL: Yes, yes, yes, we all say! He is worthy to die! Yes, Yes, Yes!

ANNAS: Take him away and beat him some deal
For this blasphemy at this court.

Here they shall beat Jesus about the head and body and spit in his face and pull him down, and set him on a stool and cast a cloth over his face. And the first shall say:

JEW 1: Ah, fellows! Beware what you do to this man, For he prophecies well!

JEW 2: That shall be tested with this blow!

And JEW 2 strikes Jesus on the head.

What, you Jesus, who gave you that?

JEW 3: Where, where! Now I want to know how well he can prophecy Who was that?

JEW 4: Ah! And now I want a new game to begin
That we must play at, all that are here!
Wheel and pull—wheel and pull!
Come to the hall whoever will. Who was that?

Meanwhile outside, shall the women come to the Jews near the Apostle Peter and say:

MAIDSERVANT 1: What, sirs, how do you get on with this man?
Do you not see one of his disciples, how he beholds you, then?

Here shall the other woman say to Peter:

MAIDSERVANT 2: Ah, good man, it seems to me by your appearance
That you should be one of his disciples.

PETER: Ah, woman! Until now,
I never saw this man since this world first began!

And the cock shall crow.

MAIDSERVANT 1: What, that you may not say! You are one of his men!
By your face well may we know you!

PETER: Woman, you speak amiss of me! I know him not, so I swear to thee!

JEW 1: Ah, fellow man, well met! For you are of my kinsmen's sort!
When we took your master in the yard, then all your fellows forsook him.
And now you may not forsake him, for you are of Galilee, I gather.

PETER: Sir, I know him not, by him that made me,
And you would have me believed on an oath!
I take record of all this company
That what I say to you is true.

And the cock crows. And then Jesus shall look on Peter. And Peter shall weep and then he shall go out and say:

Ah! Woe! Woe! False heart, why will you not break?
Since your master, you have so cowardly forsaken!

Alas, where shall I now on earth rest
Till he, of his mercy, will take me to grace?

I have forsaken my master and my Lord Jesus
Three times as he told me I should do
Wherefore I may not have sorrow enough!
I, sinful creature, am so much to blame

When I heard the cock crowing, he cast on me a look
As if to say, "Remember what I said before."
Alas the time that I ever forsook him,
And so will I think on it forevermore.

Play #30: Death of Judas; Trials Before Pilate And Herod

CAIAPHAS: Messenger! Messenger!

MESSENGER: Here, lord, here!

CAIAPHAS: Messenger, you shall go in haste to Pilate,
And say we commend ourselves to him in word and deed

And ask him to be at the court at once,
For we have a great matter that he must address.
In haste now, go your way
And see that you do not delay!

MESSENGER: It shall be so, lord, by this day.
I am as swift as a thought

Here Pilate sits on his stage, and the messenger kneels to him, saying:

All hail, Sir Pilate, so fair to behold,
Prince of all the Jews and keeper of the law.

My lord Bishop Caiaphas recommends himself to you
And asks you to be at the court by dawn.

PILATE: Go your way, fine messenger and commend me to them also.
I shall be there in haste, and so you may say

By the earliest morning hour, I shall come to them.
I'll tarry no longer nor make any delay.

Here the Messenger comes again and brings an answer, saying:

MESSENGER: All hail, my lords and bishops and princes of the law!
Sir Pilate commends himself to you and bade me to tell you

He will be at the court in haste, soon after the day has dawned.
He wishes that you should be there by morning without further delay.

CAIAPHAS: Now may you fare well, my good page.
Take this for your message.

THE DEATH OF JUDAS

Here Judas comes to the Jews, saying:

JUDAS: I, Judas, have sinned and committed treason,
For I have betrayed this rightful blood!
Here is your money again, all and some,
For sorrow and grief, I have waxed mad.

ANNAS: What is that to us? Consider yourself now—
You have made a covenant with us;
You sold him to us, as a horse or cow;
Therefore, you must bear your own deeds.

Then Judas casts down the money and goes and hangs himself.

TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

CAIAPHAS: Now, sirs, the night has passed;
the day has come. It is time this man had his judgement,
And that Pilate tarried in the hall alone
Until we should present this man.

And therefore, we now go forth with him in haste.

JEW 1: It shall be done, and that quickly!

JEW 2: Yes, but see that he is bound right well and fast!

JEW 3: He is secure enough. Let us go at a good pace.

Here they lead Jesus about until they come to the hall.

CAIAPHAS: Sir Pilate, take heed to this matter
We have brought Jesus before you,
Who brings down our law
And brought us much shame.

ANNAS: From this city to the land of Galilee,
He has brought our laws into confusion
With his crafty words and necromancy,
Showing things to the people by false simulation.

SCRIBE 1: Yes, yet, sir, another and worst of all:
Against Caesar, our emperor that is so noble.
King of the Jews, he calls himself.
So our emperor's power should be nothing?

SCRIBE 2: Sir Pilate, we cannot tell you half the crimes
That Jesus has wrought in our country!
Therefore, we charge you in the emperor's name
That he be put to death in haste!

Pilate: What say you to these complaints, Jesus?
These people have sorely accused you
Because you bring up new laws
That were not used in our days.

JESUS: I care nothing for their accusations,
So long as they hurt not their own souls, nor any others.
I have not yet found what I have sought.
For my Father's will, I must go forth.

PILATE: Jesus, I believe it is true that you are a king
And you are also the Son of God—
Lord of earth and of all things.
Tell me the truth, if it be so.

JESUS: In heaven is my Father's intent known,
And in this world was I born.
I was sent hither by my Father
To seek that which was lost.

All that hear me and believe in me
And keep their faith steadfastly,
Though they were dead, I shall restore them
And shall bring them to endless bliss.

PILATE: Listen, sirs, no you have heard this man—what do you think?
Do you not all think, by your reason,
That what he says may well be true,
And that it should be considered as such?

I find nothing objectionable in him
Of error nor treason, nor of any manner of guilt.
The law will, in no conclusion

Spill his blood without a fault.

SCRIBE 1: Sir Pilate, the law rests in you,
And we truly know his great trespasses!
This matter shall be told to the emperor,
If you let Jesus pass from you this way.

PILATE: Sirs, then tell me one thing—
What shall be his accusation?

ANNAS: Sir, we tell you altogether,
For his evil works we brought him here!

And if he had not been an evildoer,
We should not have brought him to you!

PILATE: Take him, then, after your judgement
And deal with him after your law.

CAIAPHAS: It is not lawful to us, you say,
To slay any manner of man.
We bring him to you because
He should not be our king.

You know well we have no king
But our emperor alone.

PILATE: Jesus, are you king of the Jews?

JESUS: So you say now to me.

PILATE: Tell me, then, Where is your kingdom?

JESUS: My kingdom is not in this world, I tell you with a word.
If my kingdom had been here,
I should not have been delivered to you.

PILATE: Sirs, consider now as you can:
I can find no fault in this man.

ANNAS: Sir, here is a great testimony! Take heed of it!
And knowing there is great mischief in this man,

And not only in one day or two,
It has been many years since he began!
We can tell you of a time, where and when
That a great many thousand he had turned,
And all this people can well testify,
From here into the land of Galilee!

All, “ Yes, yes, yes!”

PILATE: Sirs, of one thing, then, give me reconciliation.
Was Jesus born in the land of Galilee?
For we have no power nor any jurisdiction
Of any man of that country.

Therefore, you shall tell me the truth,
And another way I shall provide
If Jesus was born in that country:
The judgement of Herod, he must abide.

CAIAPHAS: Sir, as I am truly sworn to the law,
I have no fear of the truth.
I know that he was born in Galilee—
I can tell in what place and where.

Against this no man may contend.
For he was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
And this you now know, and let it be acknowledged
That his birth was proven to be in the land of Galilee.

PILATE: Well, sirs, since I know that it is so,
I must needs see the truth of this.
I understand right now what must be done:
The judgement of Jesus does not lie with me.

Herod is king of that country,
To judge that region in length and in breadth.
The jurisdiction of Jesus must now be his.
Therefore, Jesus, to him in haste you will be led.

To the court, make haste that you may go quickly,
Let him be presented to Herod at once.
And say I commend myself to him with word and deed,
And I have sent Jesus to him.

SCRIBE 1: This errand shall be sped on in haste,
In all the haste that we can do!
We shall not tarry in any degree
Until we come to Herod's presence.

TRIAL BEFORE HEROD

Here they take Jesus and lead him in great haste to Herod. And Herod's stage shall open showing Herod in all his estate, all the Jews kneeling except Annas and Caiaphas. They shall be standing etc.

SCRIBE 1: Hail, Herod, most excellent king!
We are commended into your presence:
Pilate sends you, by us, greeting,
And charges us by our obedience.

SCRIBE 2: That we should do our diligence
To bring Jesus of Nazareth unto you
And charges us to make no resistance
Because he was born in this country.

ANNAS: We know he has wrought great folly
Against the law, and openly shown.
Therefore, Pilate sent him unto you
That you should give him judgment.

KING HEROD: Now, by Muhammad, my god of grace,
This is a very kind deed from Pilate!
I forgive him now his great trespass,
And shall be his friend without end.

That he would send Jesus to me,
I sorely desired to see him.
Great favor shall Pilate find in this!
And Jesus, you are welcome to me!

Jew 1: My sovereign lord, this is the case:
The great falseness of Jesus is openly known.
There was never a man who did so greatly trespass,
For he has almost destroyed our law!

Jew 2: Yes, by false crafts of sorcery
Wrought openly to all the people,
And by subtle points of necromancy,
Many thousands will have fallen from our law.

CAIAPHAS: Most excellent king, you must take heed!
He will destroy all this country, both old and young
If he proceeds but ten more months!
By his miracles and false preaching,

He brings the people into great delusion
And says daily among them all
That he is Lord, and king of the Jews,
And the Son of God, he calls himself.

KING HEROD: Sirs, all matters I have heard said
And much more than you tell me.
They shall all be laid together,
And I will take counsel thereon.

Jesus, you are welcome to me—
I give Pilate great thanks for sending you.
I have desired for very long to see you
And to learn of your miracles.

It is told to me that you do many a wondrous thing:
Making crooked legs straight and blind men to see,
And giving life to those that were dead,
And making lepers fair and whole.

These are wondrous works done by you!
By what means they are done, I would know the truth!
Now, Jesus, I pray you— let me see
A miracle wrought in my presence!

In haste now, do your diligence
And perhaps, I will show favor to you!
For now you are in my presence—
Your life and death lie here with me!

And here Jesus shall not speak a word to Herod.

Jesus, why do you not speak to your king?
What is the cause of you standing so still?
You know I may judge all things:
Your life and death lie in my will!

What? Speak, Jesus! And tell me why
These people here do accuse you so!
Spare not, but tell me now openly
How you can excuse yourself.

CAIAPHAS: Look, sirs, this is a false subtlety from him!
He will not speak, but when he pleases;
Thus, he deceives the people in every degree!
He is entirely false, you may well trust!

KING HEROD: What? You unhangd wretch! Why will you not speak?
Do you scorn to speak to your king
Because you have broken our laws?
I think you are afraid of our questioning!

ANNAS: Nay, he is not afraid, but uses false wile
Because we could not accuse him
If he does not answer you.
He knows he cannot defend himself.

KING HEROD: What? Speak, I say! You foul creature, may you fare evilly!
Look up! May the devil rebuke you!
Sirs, beat his body with bare scourges
And attempt to make him speak!

JEW 1: It shall be done without tarrying.
Come on, you traitor, may you receive evil!
Why will you not speak unto our king?
We will teach you a new lesson!

Here they pull off Jesus' clothes and beat him with whips.

Jew 2: Jesus, we will not break your bones,
But we shall make you skip!
Have you lost your tongue? You may not speak?

You shall now feel this whip!

JEW 3: Sirs, take these whips in your hands
And spare not while they last
And beat this traitor that stands here!
I think that he will speak in haste.

And when they have beaten him until he is all bloody, then King Herod says:

King Herod: Stop, sirs, I command you by the name of the devil of hell!
Jesus, do you think this is a good game?
You are strong to suffer shame.
You would rather be beaten lame than confess your faults?

But I will not destroy all of your body,
Nor put it through more pain here.
Sirs, take Jesus at your own will
And lead him home again to Pilate.

Greet him well and tell him
He shall certainly have all my good friendship.
Tell him that I give him power over Jesus,
Whether he will condemn or save him.

SCRIBE 1: Sir, at your request, it shall be done.
We shall lead Jesus at your demand
And deliver him unto Pilate
And tell him all, as you command.

Play #31: Satan and Pilate's Wife; Second Trial Before Pilate

Here Satan enters the stage in the most horrible manner. And while he plays, they shall put on Jesus' clothes and rest a white cloth over all and lead him about the place and then to Pilate, by the time that his wife has finished her part.

SATAN: Thus I reign, roaring with a ringing wrath,
As a devil most mighty, dreadful is my blow!
Many thousands of devils, they bow down to me,
Burning in flames as fire out of flint!

Whoever serves me, Satan, to sorrow is he sent
With dragons in dungeons and devils full dark.
In brass and brimstone, the wretches are burnt
That wander in this world to work my will.

With mischief on earth I mark my victims,
Those who mock Jesus that Judas sold.
No matter how crafty or cunning the scholar,
I'll drag them to hell as bold traitors.

But there is one thing that grieves me sore.
Of a prophet that men call Jesus.
He pains me every day, more and more
With his holy miracles and all his works!

I had him once in a temptation
With gluttony, with covetousness, and vainglory!
I attacked him in all the ways that I could do,
And he utterly refused them and defied me!

The rebuke that he gave me shall not go unavenged!
I have begun something and more shall be done!
For all his humble walking, he shall not escape from me,
But I shall bring him to my dark dungeon!

I have made ready his cross that he shall die upon,
And three nails to fasten him. With those he shall not stir!
Be he ever so holy, he shall not go from me,
But with a sharp spear, he shall be smitten to the heart!

And suddenly he shall come to hell, though he be so stalwart.
And yet, I am afraid of his coming, he will do some revenge!
Therefore, I shall go warn hell that they look about,
That they make ready chains to bind him within the lake.

Hell! Hell! Make ready, for a guest shall come here!
Jesus shall come here, that is called God's Son!
And he shall be here by the hour of noon,
And with you here, he shall wander and have a very wretched rest.

Here shall a devil speak in hell:

DEMON: Out upon you, we conjure you
That we may never see him in hell!
For if he once be in hell,
He shall shatter our power!

SATAN: Ah! Ah! Then I have gone too far!
But here is some cunning, I have a shrewd plan.
My game is worse than I thought!
I may say my game is lost!

Look, one trick I have yet cast
If I might save Jesus' life.
Hell's gates shall be shut fast
And keep secure all that I have.

To Pilate's wife I will go now,
And she is asleep, fast in bed,
And bid her without another word
To send for Pilate in haste.

I shall go, and this will be,
To bring Pilate into belief.
Within a while you shall see
How I will go prove my craft.

Here shall the devil go to Pilate's Wife. The curtain will be drawn as she lies in bed, and he shall not make any noise, but, soon after he has come in, she shall make a piteous noise, coming and running off the stage. And her shirt and her tunic in her hand, and she shall come before Pilate like a mad woman, saying:

PILATE'S WIFE: Pilate! I charge you to take heed!
Do not judge Jesus, but be his friend!
If you judge him to be dead,
You are condemned without end!

A fiend appeared before me
As I lay sleeping fast in my bed.
Never since the time that I was born
Was I so sorely aghast!

As a wild fire and thundering blast,
He came crying unto me.
He said, 'They that beat Jesus or bound him fast,
Without end shall they be damned!'

Therefore, see your way out of this
And let Jesus get clear from you.
The Jews, they will be deceitful
And put all the trespasses on you.

PILATE: Thank you, my wife, you are forever true.
Your counsel is good, and ever has been.
Now you should return to your chamber,
And all shall be well, my lady, as you shall see.

SECOND TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

Here the Jews bring Jesus again to Pilate:

SCRIBE 1: Sir Pilate, you will hear good tidings from me!
From Herod the king, you have goodwill.
And he sends Jesus again to you,
And bids you choose to save or kill him.

SCRIBE 2: Yes, sir, all the power now lies in you,
And you know our faith, he has nearly corrupted it!
You know what mischief may come of this.
We charge you to give him judgment!

PILATE: Sirs, truly you are to blame,

To beat, strip, and bind Jesus this way,
Or put him to such great shame,
For I find no fault in him.

Nor did Herod either, to whom I sent you.
He could rightly find no fault in him,
But sent him again to me by you,
As you know well, everyone.

Therefore, understand what I shall say.
You know the custom in this land
Of your Passover day that is near at hand,
That any thief or traitor be in bonds,

For the worship of that day, shall go away free,
Without any price.
Now that I think, it would be right
To let Jesus now go quietly

And do to him no more spite.
Sirs, this is my advice.
I would know what you say.

Here all of them shall cry:

ALL: No, no, no!

SCRIBE 1: Deliver us the thief Barabbas,
That was imprisoned for manslaughter!

PILATE: What shall I do, then, with Jesus?
Shall he abide or go?

SCRIBE 2: Jesus shall be hung on the cross!
Crucifixion, we all cry.

PILATE: Sirs, what has Jesus done amiss?

The crowd clamors:

ALL: Crucify him, we say together!

PILATE: Sirs, since all of you so will to
Put Jesus to woe and pain,
Jesus shall go with me a while.
I will examine him between us two.

Here Pilate takes Jesus and leads him into the council room and says:

Jesus, what do you say now? Let us see.
This matter you must understand now.
You might be at peace before me,
If not for the people of this land.

Bishops and priests of the law,
They do not love you, as you must see,
And the common people have drawn against you.
You might be at peace before me,

This I tell you plainly. What say you, Jesus?
Why do you not speak to me?
Do you not know that
I have the power to set you on the cross?

And I also have the power to let you go forth?
What can you say to this?

JESUS: You truly have no power over me,
But that which my Father has granted to you.

I came to fulfill my Father's will,
That mankind should not be destroyed.
He that has betrayed me to you at this time,
His sin is greater than yours.

SCRIBE 1: You princes and masters! Take heed and see
How Pilate is favorable in this matter,
And thus our laws may be destroyed,
And all be unrecoverable to us.

Here Pilate leaves Jesus alone and goes to the Jews and says:

PILATE: Sirs, what would you do now with Jesus?
I cannot find anything in him but good.
It is my counsel that you let him go.
It is a pity to shed his blood.

CAIAPHAS: Pilate, I think you are doing a great wrong
Against our laws, to defend him so.
And the people here are so strong,
Bringing you a lawful testimony.

ANNAS: Yes, and if you let Jesus get away from us,
This we shall all uphold:
You shall answer for his trespasses,
And we shall call you a traitor to the emperor!

PILATE: Now, then, since you will have no other what
But that Jesus must always die,
Servant! Bring me water, I pray you,
And you shall see what I will do.

Someone brings water.

As I wash my hands clean with water,
So must I be guiltless of his death.

SCRIBE 1: His blood must be on us
And on our children after us!

*And they will all cry, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"
Then Pilate goes again to Jesus and brings him, saying:*

PILATE: Look, sirs, I bring him here to your presence
That you may know I find no offense in him.

SCRIBE 2: Deliver him! Deliver him, and let us go
To the cross that he is due!

PILATE: Sirs, would you that I should put your king on the cross?

SCRIBE 3: Sir, we say that we have no king but the emperor alone!

PILATE: Sirs, since in any case it must be so,
We must sit and do what our office requires.

Bring forth to the court those that are to be condemned,
And they shall have their judgement.

Here they shall bring Barabbas into the court, and Jesus, and two thieves in their shirts but bare-legged, and Jesus standing at the bar between them. And Annas and Caiaphas shall go into the council room when Pilate is seated.

PILATE: Barabbas, hold up your hand,
For here at your delivery do you stand.

And he holds up his hand.

Sirs, what say you of Barabbas, thief and bold traitor?
Shall he go free, or shall he be kept in prison?

SCRIBE 1: Sir, for the solemnity of our Passover day,
By our law, he shall go away free!

PILATE: Barabbas, then I dismiss you
And give you license to go free.

And Barabbas runs off. Pilate addresses the two thieves, saying:

Dysmas and Jesmas, there you stand.
The law commands you to hold up your hands.

Sirs, what say you of these two thieves?

SCRIBE 2: Sir, we say they both are guilty.

PILATE: And what say you of Jesus of Nazareth?

SCRIBE 1: Sir, we say he shall be put to death.

PILATE: And you can put no trespass against him?

SCRIBE 2: Sir, we all will that he should be put upon the cross!

And they will all cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Yes! Yes! Yes!”

PILATE: Jesus, your own people have rejected
All that I have said or done for you.

I charge you all at the beginning
That you will vow before me
That no man shall touch your kind
Except he be a knight or gentleman born.

First, you shall take off his clothes
And make him naked.
Bind him to a pillar, as tight as you can,
Then scourge him with whips that all men may see.

When he is beaten, crown him for your king
And then you shall bring him to the cross.
And to the cross you shall bind him fast,
And on three nails, his body shall rest.

One shall go through his right hand,
Another through his left hand also.
The third shall be smitten through both the feet
And the nails there be made to fit well.

And yet, you shall not hang alone,
But on either side of you shall be—
Dysmas, now I deem that you
Shall be on his right hand,

And Jesmas, you shall be hanged on the left hand,
On the Mount of Calvary that men may see.

Here Pilate shall rise and go to his stage and the bishops with him. And the Jews shall cry for joy with a great voice and harass Jesus and pull off his clothes and bind him to a pillar and scourge him, with one saying:

JEW 1: Be glad, our king!
For this is your first beginning!