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Passion Play: Feeding 5,000

Andrews University began a new tradition on campus this year. Nearly 5,000 people from the local area and beyond traveled to Berrien Springs to experience the first annual Easter Passion Play on April 19.



Jesus (David Oakley as Jesus) comforts Mary Magdalene after the Pharisees demand she be stoned.



Andrews students Noelia Modad, Andrew Bueno, and Nicholas Zork gave samples of cheeses to the audience in the marketplace.



Eva Ryckman, senior biology and Spanish major, let passers-by pet her chicken.

About 2,500 tickets had been reserved ahead of time, and nearly 700 VIP tickets had been distributed, but the university did not expect the crowd of about 1,700 that showed up for the last performance, open to those without tickets. This group was split into three separate groups, making a total of ten shows performed by the end of the day.

Directed by three young adults—Lawrence Galera, Kristin Denslow, and Heidi Whitehead—the play began in the Pioneer Memorial Church with a multimedia presentation introducing Jesus as our world's hope. Once outside, Jesus rode into "Jerusalem" on a donkey, and the audience was invited to take part in the sights, smells, tastes, and feels of an authentic marketplace—complete with sheep, lambs, goats, chickens, cows, calves, and a miniature horse. The Last Supper, Garden of Gethsemane, and Pilate's judgement of Jesus all culminated with a powerful crucifixion scene.



Andrews alum, David Oakley, as Jesus, breaks bread with his disciples at the Last Supper.

Finally, the audience witnessed Mary's agony at the death of her Son and a Roman guard's speculation that Jesus truly was the Son of God, before an emotional resurrection of Christ took place.



Pilate—Ellis Merritt, senior theology major—washes his hands of all responsibility regarding Jesus' death, with the help of Anthony Cochran.

Responses from the audience were overwhelming. A guest book in the hospitality tent at the end of the presentation gave guests the opportunity to write such things as: "We drove from Rockford, Ill., to see this and would drive all the way from California to see it again!" and "I wept as I saw the love of my Savior for me."



Jesus is crucified.



He is risen!

Facing the threat of rain during the day, all ten shows made it through without a drop—a miracle since many sources later told the play directors that immediately surrounding towns had been rained on for several hours.

Andrews University was privileged to be used by God to spiritually feed nearly 5,000 people. You are invited to mark next year's Passion Play dates on your calendar: April 10–11, 2004. For more information and to see a wide range of pictures of this year's play, log on to www.aupassionplay.org.

Katie Shaw, University Relations news writer