



## Classical Academic Press Women of the Tradition Lesson Plan

**Focus: Dorothy L. Sayers**

By Carrie Eben

Age level: 10-14

Text: *The Man Born to Be King*

Suggested timeframe: From Advent to Easter

### **Introduction:**

Although Dorothy L. Sayers is known primarily for her detective fiction and her essay, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” her writings and plays illuminating Christian dogma are her most significant. Sayers created a radio drama play-cycle about the Life of Jesus Christ which graced the British airways during the critical period of the Second World War in 1941-1942. This play-cycle includes twelve plays which aired during the Children’s Hour on BBC radio. Each play is around 45 min in length. Up until this time in Great Britain, characterizing the biblical Jesus was not allowed. Sayers broke through this boundary and successfully created a series of plays which gave the British people hope, reminding them of the true dogma surrounding the life of Jesus Christ. This creative and dramatic retelling of the life of Christ through radio drama allows students to receive truth about Christian dogma surrounding the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, see themselves as part of the story, and empathize with the characters in the story.

### **Learning Goals:**

*Facts:*

- To learn the people, places, and timeline of events surrounding Christ’s birth, life, and death as evident in the gospels and the *The Apostles Creed* (with special focus on the highlighted):

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.**

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Skills ( intellectual virtues of attention, carefulness and thoroughness practiced through specific skills)*

- careful reading and listening



- attention to vocal inflection and characterization
- attention to volume
- careful diction
- thorough memorization
- careful timing
- attention to characters, setting, climax, and resolution (parts of narrative story)

### *Ideas (Logos):*

#### *Students can:*

- *Engage* with Christ, both fully human and fully man, as a historical person in time and space whose life, death, and resurrection changed history and allowed reconciliation between God and man
- *Experience* the poetic presentations of biblical history/events allowing them to see themselves in the story.
- *Empathize* with the historic/biblical characters and their decisions in the play.

### **Sample lesson:**

#### *First play in the cycle: Kings of Judea*

##### **November:**

- Read the portions of the gospels surrounding Christ's birth (Matthew 2, Luke 2)
- Listen to radio drama on Audible with the script in hand. Starting with *Kings of Judea* before Christmas (around 45 min to listen to first play)
- Compare the events in the Bible with the events in the first play. What details are in each of the versions? Why did each author include some details but not others? Why do Mark and John neglect the details of the birth of Christ? What is their focus?
- Read the character descriptions and assign parts for a reader's theater radio drama (there are 22 parts in the first play and room for stage directors, props masters and music production—students can play multiple roles )
- Students work on memorizing their parts (or they can read) for the radio drama
- Begin practicing for the radio drama. Discuss appropriate inflection and characterization as observed in the Audible recording as well as proper diction and volume.

##### **December:**

- Set up “microphones” as stage props for the “radio stage” set in the 1940s (microphones can be live, or simply pretend as students work on vocal projection)
- Students can research/create commercials that might have aired during the British 1940's wartime which can be inserted between acts
- Production of this radio drama can be set for a Christmas recitation for parents and/or students or another special event



- Another option is to produce an audio recorded “radio” drama not on stage. This can be sent out to parents and students at Christmas time as well or just enjoyed as a class.

### **Follow up (optional)**

- During the Lenten season, choose another one or two (or all of the) plays if desired. Read the appropriate Gospels and discuss.
- Read *The Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare and historical records of non-Christian ancient historians Josephus and Tacitus and compare the characters and history
- Read CS Lewis’s characterization of Jesus as Aslan in Narnia series and compare
- Memorize a poem about Christ from Sayers’s collection of poetry *Catholic Tales and Christian Songs* (I have included two of my favorites below)

### **Primary Resources:**

The Synoptic Gospels

*The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus*

*Christ* by Dorothy L. Sayers

*The Man Born to be King*. BBC Audible version of the Radio drama Released Dec 2, 2021 (each play is 45min, all 12 dramas are 8 hours 28 min total)

### **Other texts and poetry to integrate:**

*The Bronze Bow*, Elizabeth George Speare

*Book of Antiquities* by Josephus (books 18 and 20) c.AD 93-94

<https://gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm>

*Annals* by Tacitus (book 14, chapter 44) c.AD 115

<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/home.html>

*The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis

*Catholic Tales and Christian Songs*, by Dorothy L. Sayers (poetry)

Favorite poetry from Sayers:

### **THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST**

By Dorothy L. Sayers

GOD met man in a narrow place,  
And they scanned each other face to face.

God spoke first: "What ails you, man,  
That you should look so pale and wan?"

Quoth man: "You bade me conquer harm  
With no strength but this weak right arm.



"I would ride to war with a glad consent  
Were I, as You, omnipotent."

God said: "You show but little sense;  
What triumph is there for omnipotence?"

Said man: "If You think it well to be  
Such a thing as I, make trial and see."

God answered him: "And if I do,  
I'll prove Me a better Man than you."

God conquered man with His naked hands,  
And bound him fast in iron bands.

## CHRIST THE COMPANION

By Dorothy L. Sayers

WHEN I've thrown my books aside, being petulant and weary,  
And have turned down the gas, and the firelight has sufficed,  
When my brain's too stiff for prayer, and too indolent for theory,  
Will You come and play with me, big Brother Christ?  
Will You slip behind the book-case? Will you stir the window-curtain,  
Peeping from the shadow with Your eyes like flame?  
Set me staring at the alcove where the flicker's so uncertain,  
Then suddenly, at my elbow, leap up, catch me, call my name?  
Or take the great arm-chair, help me set the chestnuts roasting,  
And tell me quiet stories, while the brown skins pop,  
Of wayfarers and merchantmen and tramp of Roman hosting,  
And how Joseph dwelt with Mary in the carpenter's shop?  
When I drift away in dozing, will You softly light the candles  
And touch the piano with Your kind, strong fingers,  
Set stern fugues of Bach and stately themes of Handel's  
Stalking through the corners where the last disquiet lingers?  
And when we say good-night, and You kiss me on the landing,  
Will You promise faithfully and make a solemn tryst:  
You'll be just at hand if wanted, close by here where we are standing,  
And be down in time for breakfast, big Brother Christ?

## THE MAKERS (at the beginning of *The Man Born to be King*)

By Dorothy L. Sayers

The Architect stood forth and said:  
"I am the master of the art:



I have a thought within my head,  
I have a dream within my heart.

“Come now, good craftsman, ply your trade  
With tool and stone obediently;  
Behold the plan that I have made—  
I am the master; serve you me.”

The Craftsman answered: “Sir, I will:  
Yet look to it that this your draft  
Be of a sort to serve my skill—  
You are not master of the craft.

“It is by me the towers grow tall,  
I lay the course, I shape and hew;  
You make a little inky scrawl,  
And that is all that you can do.

”Account me, then, the master man,  
Laying my rigid rule upon  
The plan, and that which serves the plan—  
The uncomplaining, helpless stone.”

The Stone made answer: “Masters mine,  
Know this: that I can bless or damn  
The thing that both of you design  
By being but the thing I am;

“For I am granite, not gold,  
For I am marble and not clay,  
You may not hammer me nor mould—  
I am the master of the way.

“Yet one that mastery bestowed  
Then I will suffer patiently  
The cleaving steel, the crushing load,  
That make a calvary of me;

“And you may carve me with your hand  
To arch and buttress, roof and wall,  
Until the dream rise up and stand—  
Serve but the stone, the stone serves all

“Let each do well what each knows best,



Nothing refuse and nothing shirk,  
Since none is master of the rest,  
But all are servants of the work—

“The work not master may subject  
Save He to whom the whole is known,  
Being Himself the Architect,  
The Craftsman and the Corner-stone.

Then, when the greatest and the least  
Have finished all their labouring  
And sit together at the feast,  
You shall behold a wonder thing:

”The Maker of the men that make  
Will stoop between the cherubim,  
The towel and the basin take,  
And serve the servants who serve Him.”

The Architect and Craftsman both  
Agreed the Stone had spoken well;  
Bound them to service by and oath  
And each to his own labour fell.