A Short Play for Easter by A Green, adapted

Disclaimer: This is purely imaginary, although based around real events
The Cast: Narrator/Messenger, Cornelius, Marcus

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NARRATOR: *The year is 43AD. The Roman army, under the command of Aulus Plantius, has invaded Britain. We join their encampment near to a small settlement that will one day be called Exeter. A Roman centurion named Marcus sits alone, deep in thought. He is joined by a fellow centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius is the first to speak.*

CORNELIUS: Greetings, Marcus. How goes it with you?

MARCUS: Greetings, Cornelius. I'm getting weary of these continual wars. I do not understand why we are here. Surely, if treated fairly, the Britons would swear loyalty to Rome. They are a noble race, sons of Troy, as we are. We should be friends, not enemies.

CORNELIUS: I totally agree, Marcus. But I want to ask you about Judea. I'm told you were there when I was. Surprising we never met, although I was based at Caesarea, and you were at Jerusalem.

MARCUS: Don't remind me of those days, Cornelius! It was a nightmare. The Jews all hated us and their priests kept stirring up trouble. I was just glad to get out.

CORNELIUS: Understand, but I had an incredible experience there, Marcus. I heard about the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Saviour of the Gentiles, too.

MARCUS: Jesus of Nazareth! Ah, that name haunts me still. We crucified the man. I was in charge of the execution. I shall never forget that day—the darkness, the earthquake, the heart-rending cries he made from the Cross. They said he was the King of the Jews, but to me he seemed like the Son of God.

CORNELIUS: He is the Son of God, Marcus.

MARCUS: But we killed him, Cornelius. I certified his death myself to the Governor.

CORNELIUS: Jesus is alive! He rose from the dead on the third day, as he said he would. I heard this myself from one of his closest followers, a man named Peter.

MARCUS: Strange rumours did circulate in Jerusalem. Some claimed they had seen angels at his tomb, others that the man really had cheated death. The tomb was definitely empty. The Jews said the man's disciples had stolen his body. There was a bit of a cover-up, but even Caesar heard about it eventually.

CORNELIUS: Jesus showed himself alive to his followers by many infallible proofs. This Messiah offers us the forgiveness of our sins and an eternal inheritance of joy in his Father's Kingdom.

MARCUS: Ah, if only this forgiveness you speak of were for me. My part in this man's death is burning away at my conscience like a thousand scorpions have bitten me. He did nothing wrong. I remember the look he gave us when we nailed him to the tree, full of such compassion; and the words he spoke: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing". What does it all mean, Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes, we are healed.

MARCUS: But I mocked him and gave him loads of abuse!

CORNELIUS: You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to show people the Way.

MARCUS: But I spat on him and placed a crown of thorns on his head, blood everywhere.

CORNELIUS: I know but God will forgive us from all the wrong things we do, if we ask him.

MARCUS: What, even someone violent like me? Can I really get to know this Jesus?

CORNELIUS: What Jesus did on the cross means that he can clean us from all sin. God is so good and always ready to forgive. He's full of loving kindness to everyone who calls on him. Those who say yes to Jesus will never be cast away.

MARCUS: Cornelius, it's like your words are bringing me life. Hope is rising up in my heart! It's like light is pushing back the darkness in my heart. What shall I do?

CORNELIUS: Join the army of the King of kings, Marcus. Be baptised. Become a follower of The Way. A small group of us meet on the first day of the week to worship the Lord and encourage each other to a life of love and faith. Even the commander's wife is sympathetic to us.

MARCUS: Really! The Lady Pomponia? Extraordinary!

CORNELIUS: It is true, Marcus. She has read the powerful words in the Greek scroll written by Matthew, one of Jesus's followers. If you want I can show you my copy.

MARCUS: This is what I've been looking for. The meaning I have needed. God must have sent you to me this day, Cornelius. I believe! I will follow this Jesus!

CORNELIUS: Marcus this is amazing. Jesus is building a kingdom greater than that of Rome. I know that one day, even Caesar himself will bow the knee to Jesus.

MESSENGER: *(bursts in)***.** Urgent message from the Commander. Join your battle groups immediately. The Britons are attacking our camp!

MARCUS: Farewell, Cornelius. We must speak again of these matters.

CORNELIUS: Farewell, brother Marcus. God bless you always.

NARRATOR: *The Romans beat back the British assault. Sadly, Marcus is killed in the engagement. Cornelius buries his comrade at the place where he fell. Later, he marks the spot with a headstone. According to legend, inscribed upon it was the following:*

Here lies Marcus Aurelius Lorrentius of the IX Hispania Legion
Requiescit In Pace (Translates as: 'He doth rest in peace')
(The sign of the Cross)

Devon folklore says the stone was still visible in the 14th Century. Subsequently, it disappeared and all knowledge of the place was lost. The Last Day will reveal it. Amen.