

Play thrills shoppers and passers-by

HUNDREDS of shoppers and passers-by watched the Easter story re-enacted on the streets of Havant.

Actors from churches around Havant told the story of Jesus's final week on earth, including his arrest, trial, death and resurrection, on a stage outside St Faith's Church. It was the latest production by the ecumenical Havant Passion Play group, who staged the 30-minute play four times.

Shoppers in Havant's West Street were surprised to see a donkey being led along the road, with cast members in full costume threading their way between market stalls. They re-enacted Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem before arriving at their temporary stage. The action continued with the story of Blind Bartimeus, the overturning of the tables in the Temple, and the plotting by religious leaders to have Jesus killed.

The actors stretched out a sheet to depict Jesus and the disciples eating the Last Supper, and encouraged the crowd to play the part of the mob baying for Roman ruler Pilate to crucify Jesus rather than Barabbas.

There was absolute silence as Jesus spoke his final words from the cross, and as his mother Mary cradled his body and recited the Magnificat. The play ended with the disciples' astonishment at Jesus's resurrection, and with Jesus's command to go and make new disciples.

It's the fourth such play that the Havant Passion Play group has



Neil Maddock as Jesus in the arms of Christina Jacobs, playing his mother Mary

staged, after previous performances in 2015, 2017 and 2019. It's also the fourth play directed by James Burke-Dunsmore, who portrayed Jesus for years in *The Life of Christ* in Wintershall, near Guildford.

The cast recruited a new actor to play Jesus - Neil Maddock, who wrote, directed and starred in the Southampton Passion in 2011 and subsequent re-tellings of the Easter story in the city in 2016 and 2018.

Christina Jacobs, who played Mary the mother of Jesus, travelled from Plymouth for weekly rehearsals and for the performances.

She said: "I'm fond of Havant and this audience have given us a great reception. I'm not surprised people were silent for those important parts

of the story - that does happen when you tell this particular story."

Laura Bowditch, from Sacred Heart RC Church in Waterlooville, said: "It has been lovely to perform in this wonderful weather, and the crowd have been very engaged. We've been rehearsing every Sunday since January and rehearsals have been intense."

And Elaine Wood, from Havant URC, who played one of the disciples, said: "It's been brilliant to have this many people here listening so intently. Rehearsals have been like doing a really good Bible study, as we get right into character."

For more photos and a video of the performance, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/passion2024