

Piet Jozef SWERTS

ST. JOHN PASSION

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to John

for soloists, mixed choir, woodwind quintet, continuo and strings [2024-2026]

ORCHESTRAL SCORE

ZODIACEDITIONS

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ST. JOHN PASSION

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

PARS 1

1. The evening falls – *tutti*

The evening falls, the light grows pale,
The silence reigns, all voices fail.
The Son of Man walks on alone,
In love, unto the end he's shown.
He knows what soon must come,
His hour, the pain, the cross, the tomb.
Who sees Him there, so great, so small?
Who dares to serve the Lord of all?
He who has knelt is lifted high,
A man for whom we thank and cry.
O Love, more powerful than death,
O Light that breaks the shadow's breath,
Be near to us, become our sight,
When darkness turns to sacred light.

2. Announcement – *tutti*

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

3. It was just before the Passover Festival [Jhn. 13:1-13:17]

¹ It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not everyone of you."

¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.
14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.
15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.
16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.
17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

4. To do Your will [Ps. 40:9 and Ps. 119:107] — *aria for soprano*

To do Your will, O God, I yearn,
Your law within my heart does burn.
I am afflicted, Lord, so low—
Give life according to Your word.

5. Jesus predicts His Betrayal [Jhn. 13:18-13:20] — *Jesus (bass-baritone)*

18 “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfil this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.’
19 “I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I am.
20 Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”

6. The One You send [after Matthew 25:40] — *chorale for choir and congregation*

1. (*All*)

The one You send into our time
Bears forth Your light, Your truth sublime.
Through him, You enter in our days,
With words that win by love and grace.

2. (*Women*)

You dwell where love is pure and near,
Where hearts make room for what is dear.
Who serves with joy in Your desire
Will find in all Your holy fire.

3. (*Choir*)

Teach us to see whom You have sent,
Marked by Your sacred testament.
May who we are reflect Your name,
In deeds that shine and spread Your flame.

7. After he had said this [Jhn. 13:21-13:28]

21 After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”
22 His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.
23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.
24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.”

²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"
²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.
²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly."
²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him.
²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor.
³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

8. The Sin speaks [Ps. 36:2] — *Chorale (choir)*

The sin speaks into the sinner's heart,
Deep in his soul — no fear of God he knows.
He walks upon a crooked path
And never from his evil goes.
He speaks deceit and dark intent,
And flees from what is wise and good.

9. Jesus predicts Peter's Denial [Jhn. 13:31-38]

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.
³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.
³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.
³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
³⁶ Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."
³⁷ Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."
³⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

10. I will sing [Ps. 101:1,2, 5,7, 8] — *aria by Peter (tenor)*

I will sing of throne and justice in a song for You, O Lord,
Reflecting upon the perfect way — when will You come unto me?
Who secretly defames a friend, I silence with my word,
In my palace there's no place for those who lie and deceive,
Whoever speaks falsehood shall not appear before my eyes.
Every morning I will silence all the guilty in the land,
From the city of the LORD I drive out all who work injustice.

11. Jesus prays to Be Glorified [Jhn. 17:1-8] — *evangelist, Jesus, female choir*

¹ After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.
² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

⁶ “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

12. Your word returns not void again [*after* Jesaj. 55:11] — *aria for bass-baritone and male choir*

You send it forth — it bears its fruit,

It does what pleases You, O Lord,

And speaks to heart and soul with grace.

Your word returns not void again.

13. Jesus prays for His Disciples [Jhn. 17:9-11, 20-21] — *Jesus (bass-baritone)*

⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Jesus prays for All Believers

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

14. Ubi caritas — *for soprano solo and choir*

Uni caritas et amor, ibi est Deus in nobis.

Congregavit nos in unum amor Christi fons pacis.

15. I am the Alpha and the Omega [Rev.1, v.8] — *for soprano solo and choir*

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,

“who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

PARS 2

16. Jesus arrested [Jhn. 18:1-11]

¹ When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

² Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

³ So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

⁵ "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)

⁶ When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷ Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

17. You hush while others speak [after Jesaja 53:7] — Chorale for choir, soprano - and tenor solo

(women)

You hush while others speak,
You bow where men strike You,
You choose the road of suffering,
And bear what none will do.

You drain the depths completely,
Where God seems turned away,
And man find no reply.

(men)

No rebel in Your eyes,
No complaint, bitter word;
You are the Lamb of mercy,
That walks toward the cross, O Lord.

Your silence speaks of true faith,
Your offering moves us still,
Your pain becomes release.

(all)

You bear the fear of all,
You know the night so cold,
You are by God forsaken,

Yet hold fast unto Him.
Who sees You in Your silence,
Learns quiet trust enduring,
And suffering turns to love.

18. Jesus arrested [Jhn. 18:12-14]

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him
¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.
¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

19. One man must die — *aria by Kajafas (bassoon and bass-baritone)*

One man must die to save the crowd,
His sacrifice we bear, avowed.
What worth his life, if all are slain
And we together die in vain?
You think too small, you see too late,
I see the path that rescues fate.
Then let him fall, as fate has willed,
Thus serve we God — and people's will

20. Peter's First Denial [Jhn. 18:15-18]

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,
¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.
¹⁷ "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."
¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

21. O Lord, I stand here in the darkness — *aria by Peter (tenor)*

O Lord, I stand here in the darkness,
by the fire, far from Your light.
What I feel is fear and trembling,
and my heart knows You no more.
Give me strength, O Lord of Heaven,
that I never may forget You.

22. The High Priest Questions Jesus [Jhn. 18:19-24]

¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.
²⁰ "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.
²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

²²When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded.

²³“If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”

²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.

23. My soul is still in You, O Lord — chorale

(inspired by Psalm 31:6, Psalm 22:2 and 11)

My soul is still in You, O Lord,
My spirit I give You.
They bind me fast, yet You remain
My rescue firm and true.

Why, O my God, are You so still?
My cry rises in scorn.
Yet still my heart knows You will lead
Though I walk crowned with thorns.

What You decree, that I will too,
Your will shall be enough.
My offering is not by force,
but love unto the cross.

24. Peter's Second and Third Denial [Jhn. 18:25-27]

²⁵Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

²⁶One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”

²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

25. What have I done this time? — aria by Peter (tenor and soprano)

What have I done this time?
Three times I spoke a lie.
I could not stand in truth,
My faith has flown and died.

I said: “Till death itself
I will stay close beside You.”
But fear turned all to lead,
My words were false, untrue.

His mouth spoke not the truth,
His heart with fear did quake.
Then loud the rooster cried,
His soul broke like a break.

The light broke at dawn,
The heavens turned to grace.
But darkness crept in him:
The night fell on his face.

26. Jesus before Pilate [Jhn. 18:28-32] — *evangelist, soprano, choir*

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected.

³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

27. Chorale[Ps. 94:21] — *a capella choir*

The wicked band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.

28. Pilate then went back inside [Jhn. 18:33-38] — *evangelist, Jesus, soprano, choir*

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this, he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

29. What is truth? — *aria by Pilate (bass-baritone)*

What is truth?

A word — on ev'ry tongue.

A shade — in fiercest light,

a voice — no one has heard.

I see a man — bound, still,

His eye speaks more than law or will.

But guilt?

No... guilt I find not in Him.

30. With this, he went out [Jhn. 18:38-40] — *evangelist, choir*

³⁸ With this, he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover.

Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ The shouted back: "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!"

31. O Lord, how blind is human heart — *chorale (choir)*

O Lord, how blind is human heart,
that You reject there in the hour of pain,
and choose for guilt and for darkness,

O Lord, forgive us all our guilt.

O Lord, how foolish is our mind,
that pride casts all Your truth from all the land,
and builds on stone that soon will break,

O Lord, be merciful to us.

PARS 3

32. Jesus Sentenced to Be Crucified [Jhn. 19:1-6] — *evangelist, choir*

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe

³ and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more, Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him."

⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"

33. O God, mine eye is full of grief — *aria by Maria (soprano)*

O God, mine eye is full of grief,

My heart sinks down in deepest woe.

My soul is broken by their scorn,

I seek for comfort, find it none.

For Him they raise their voices high,

Like lions roaring round about.

Protect my Son, my light most pure,

O Lord, where art Thou? Hear my cry.

34. "You take him and crucify him" [Jh. 19:7-16] [free adaptation] — *evangelist, choir*

Evangelist

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

Choir

"We have a law, and according to that law, he must die because he claimed to be the Son of God."

Evangelist

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace.

"Where do you come from?", he asked. Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?"

Don't you realise I have the power either to free you or to crucify you!"

Jesus

¹¹ "Your power is given from above. The one who gave me up bears greater guilt."

Evangelist

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but they kept shouting.

Choir

"If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

Evangelist

¹³ Pilate brought Jesus out, sat down, and said:

Pilate

¹⁴ "Here is your king."

Choir

"Take him away! Crucify him!"

Pilate

¹⁵ "Shall I crucify your king?"

Choir (high priests)

"We have no king, but Caesar!"

Evangelist

¹⁵ Finally, Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

¹⁶ So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

35. Though I walk through the valley dark — *chorale (choir) after Ps. 23*

Though I walk through the valley dark,

Your staff, your comfort stays with me.

You lead me on to endless light,
and give my soul new sight to see.

You set a table spread for me,

With oil, You crown my head now.

Your goodness follows all my days,
till in Your house I dwell always.

36. Carrying his own cross [Jhn. 19:17] — *evangelist, continuo*

¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

37. Reflection — *Elegia for violin and strings*

38. The Crucifixion of Jesus [Jhn. 19:18-27] [*free adaptation*] — *evangelist, Jesus, choir*

Evangelist

¹⁸ They crucified him, and with him two others — one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Choir

²¹ "Do not write: King of the Jews, but that he claimed to be king."

Evangelist

²² Pilate answered:

"What I have written, I have written."

Evangelist

²³ The soldiers took his garments, divided them in four. But for the robe without a seam, they cast the lot once more.

Choir

²⁴ They divided all his garments, and they cast the lot once more. Thus was fulfilled the Scripture word.

Evangelist

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas,

²⁶ and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her,

Jesus

"Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

39. Stabat Mater — *soprano*

There the Mother stood in silence,
full of tears beside the cross,
where her Son hung in sore grief.
Through her heart there passed such sorrow,
she found comfort in no hour,
When the sword pierced deep her soul.
Ah, her heart was torn in pieces,
all its burden she must carry,
as the Mother of the Child.
She beheld Him there forsaken,
saw His breath grow slow and fading,
as His soul to God was given.
Let me share with you your weeping,
at your pain not turn away,
till my very final hour.
Let me go with you, O Christ,
through Your Mother unto You, Lord,
to the joy and light most pure.

40. The Death of Jesus [Jhn. 19:28-30] — *evangelist, Jesus, choir*

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

41. It is fulfilled — *tutti*

It is fulfilled, the night now fades,
The cross stands open, the stone is gone.
From wounds flows a silent might,
that love has brought to full completion.
He knows what yet shall come,
His hour, the death, the life to be.

Who sees Him there, so great, so true?
Who feels Him living, ever near?
He who has served has given us,
a man for whom we thank and tremble.

O Love, more strong than death itself,
O Light that breaks from deepest dark,

be near to us, become our sight,
When Life itself shall light our way.

42. Finale — *tutti*

Rest now in peace, Lord of all ages,
Your path fulfilled, your battle still.
We follow You through all our stages,
and wait until the final will.

The grave is closed, the night has fallen,
In the darkness lives Your light.
No death can ever break Your calling,
You are the hope that holds the night.

O Lamb of God, for us delivered,
You bore the guilt of all mankind.
From death and pain new life is given,
Your love remains the ground we find.

Stay with us, Lord, in fear and sorrow,
until You lead to endless land.
Then death itself will be no morrow,
And life will bloom from Your own hand.

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I dedicate this St. John Passion to all who listen, sing, and perform, to all who suffer and hope, to everyone who seeks light in the darkness.

May this music bear witness to a love stronger than death, bring comfort to those who know sorrow, awaken hope in those who doubt, and grant joy to those who believe that love endures.

Written in gratitude for life itself, and in the faith that music connects us to the mystery that is greater than ourselves.

Varsenare, 20th of May 2026.

ORCHESTRATION

flute

oboe (also ad lib. *oboe d'amore in A*)

clarinet in Bes

bassoon

horn in Bes

mixed choir (SATB) (min.20)

soprano *Solo* (also *Maria, servant*)

tenor *Solo* (*Evangelist, also Peter, Pilate*)*

bass-baritone *Solo* (*Jesus, also Caiafas, Pilate*)*

continuo-organ

violins I

violins II

violas

violoncellos

double basses

duration ca.125'

**Arias by Peter, Caiafas, and Pilate might be sung by additional soloists ad lib.*