

What is Oberammergau?

Oberammergau Passion Play is a [passion play](#) performed since 1634^[1] as a tradition by the inhabitants of the village of [Oberammergau](#), [Bavaria](#), Germany. It was written by Othmar Weis, J A Daisenberger, Otto Huber, Christian Stuckl, Rochus Dedler, Eugen Papst, Marcus Zwink, Ingrid H Shafer, and the inhabitants of Oberammergau, with music by Dedler.^[2] Since its first production it has been performed on open-air stages in the village. The text of the play is a composite of four distinct manuscripts dating from the 15th and 16th centuries.^[3]

Length and frequency

The play is a staging of Jesus' [passion](#), covering the short final period of his life from his visit to Jerusalem and leading to his execution by crucifixion. It has been criticized as being anti-semitic, but it is the earliest continuous survivor of the age of Christian drama.

The Oberammergau production takes place in one day, but the running time has varied due to the many revisions that have taken place through the years. In 2010 it had a running time of 5 hours, beginning at 2:30 pm and ending at 10:00 pm, with a meal break. It was staged a total of 102 days and ran from May 15 until October 3 that year.^[4] According to a record from 1930, the play then had running time of approximately seven hours. It started at 8:00 am and ended at 5:00 pm with a meal break. Audiences come from all over the world, often on package tours, the first instituted in 1870. Admission fees were first charged in 1790. Since 1930, the number of visitors has ranged from 420,000 to 530,000. Most tickets are sold as part of a package with one or two nights' accommodation

The play continues to be staged every ten years, in the last year of each decade – that is, the year whose numeral ends with a zero; hence, the next performances will be in 2020. However, these regular performances at ten-year intervals have been punctuated with additional performances such as those of 1934 (over and above the regular 1930 schedule) to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the original vow, and again in 1984 (over and above the regular performances of 1980 and 1990) in celebration of the 350th anniversary of the first performance.

Background

In 1633, the residents of [Oberammergau](#), [Bavaria](#), Germany, vowed that if God spared them from the [bubonic plague](#) ravaging the region, they would produce a play thereafter for all time depicting the life and death of [Jesus](#). The death rate among adults rose from one person per 1000 per year in October 1632 to twenty in the month of March 1633. The adult death rate slowly subsided to one in the month of July 1633. The villagers believed they had been spared and they kept their part of the vow when the play was first performed in 1634.

The play is now performed repeatedly over the course of five months during every year ending in zero. 102 performances took place from 15 May until 3 October 2010 and is next scheduled for 2020.^[5] The production involves over 2,000 performers, musicians and stage technicians, all residents of the village.^[6] The play comprises spoken dramatic text, musical and choral accompaniment and *tableaux vivants*, which are scenes from the [Old Testament](#) depicted for the audience by motionless actors accompanied by verbal description. These scenes are the basis for the typology, the interrelationship between the Old and [New Testaments](#), of the play. They include a scene of [King Ahasuerus](#) rejecting [Vashti](#) in favor of [Esther](#), the brothers selling [Joseph](#) into slavery in [Egypt](#), and [Moses](#) raising up the [nehushtan \(bronzeserpent\)](#) in the wilderness. Each scene precedes that section of the play that is considered to be prefigured by the scene. The three *tableaux* mentioned are presented to the audience as prefiguring Christianity [superseding](#) Judaism, [Judas](#) selling information on the location of Jesus, and the [crucifixion](#) of Jesus.

The evolution of the [Passion Play](#) was about the same as that of the [Easter Play](#), originating in the ritual of the Latin Church, which prescribes, among other things, that the Gospel on [Good Friday](#) should be sung in parts divided among various persons.