

JESUS

IN THE MOVIES 2017

an updated history and
commentary



presented by

movieguide[®]
THE FAMILY GUIDE TO MOVIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

Jesus In The Movies

© TBAehr 2017

Dr. Ted Baehr is Chairman & Founder of the
Christian Film & Television Commission
and Publisher of MOVIEGUIDE®

INDEX

Jesus Christ in the Movies by TedBaehr	3
A Chronicalogical Survey of Some of the Movies & TV Programs Featuring Jesus	7
Passion Play (1897)	7
Passion Play (1898)	7
Oberammergau Passion Play (1898)	7
French Passion Play (1898)	7
French Passion Plays (1902-1906)	7
THE LIFE OF CHRIST (1908)	7
BEN-HUR (1908)	8
THE KISS OF JUDAS (1909)	8
THE BIRTH OF JESUS (1909)	8
THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM (1911)	8
THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET (1911)	8
SATAN: OR THE DRAMA OF HUMANITY (1911)	8
FROM THE MANGER TO THE CROSS (1911)	8
INTOLERANCE (1916)	8
CHRISTUS (1916)	9
CIVILIZATION (1916)	9
LEAVES FROM SATAN'S BOOK (1922)	9
I.N.R.I. (1923)	9
SPARROWS (1926)	9
BEN-HUR (1926)	9
THE KING OF KINGS (1926)	10
GOLGOTHA (1934)	11
OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY (1934)	11
STRANGE CARGO (1940)	11
MARIA MAGDALENA (1946)	11
THE FUGITIVE (1947)	11
QUO VADIS (1951)	12
ST. MATTHEW PASSION (1952)	12
THE ROBE (1953)	12
DAY OF TRIUMPH (1954)	12
BEN-HUR (1959)	13
THE BIG FISHERMAN (1960)	13
KING OF KINGS (1961)	13
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW (1964)	14
THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD (1965)	14
SON OF MAN (TV) (1969)	14
JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR (1973)	15
GODSPELL (1973)	15
THE GOSPEL ROAD (1977)	15
JESUS OF NAZARETH (TV) (1977)	15
JESUS (1979)	16
LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (1988)	17
JESUS OF MONTREAL (1989)	18
MATTHEW (1996)	18
FROM JESUS TO CHRIST: THE EARLY CHRISTIANS (TV) (1998)	19
MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS (TV) (1999)	19
JESUS (TV) (2000)	19
VISUAL BIBLE: THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (2003)	20
THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST (2004)	20
THE NATIVITY STORY (2006)	21
COLOR OF THE CROSS (2009)	22
THE BIBLE (TV) /SON OF GOD (2013,2014)	22
A.D. (2015)	23
THE STAR (2017)	23

Jesus In The Movies

By Dr. Ted Baehr

“And the angel said unto her, ‘Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.’

“Then said Mary unto the angel, ‘How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?’

*“And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’
“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”*

– Luke 1:30-35, 37 (KJV)



EDITOR’S NOTE: This article is adapted from a talk that Dr. Ted Baehr gave at the University Of Judaism in Bel Air, California, on Monday, January 25, 1999. The talk was part of a series entitled “Film, Tape and Sacred Scripture: How Hollywood Interprets the Bible,” which was the Second Annual Program in The Bible and Contemporary Culture, presented at the University of Judaism with the support of the Simmons Family Charitable Foundation.

As the entertainment industry enters into the Third Millennium and the 21st century since the birth of Jesus Christ, it is interesting and instructive to note how movies have portrayed Jesus Christ over the last hundred years. That’s right, Jesus has been featured in movies since the earliest days of the medium – for more than a century!

The earliest representations of Jesus on film were straightforward primitive movies (they called them “recordings” in those early days) of various live “passion plays.” (A passion play is a dramatic presentation of the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.) These passion plays were some of the longest movies made at the time they were made. They were so successful that they eventually convinced the nickelodeon operators that there was an audience not just for shorts, but also for longer, feature length movies. Thus, in part, the modern movie was birthed out of the overwhelming success of the passion plays!

In 1897, two American theatrical producers, Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, filmed a passion play in Horitz, Bohemia. In 1898, R.G. Hollaman and A.G. Eaves photographed a passion play on the roof of a New York skyscraper. The length of the movie was 2,100 feet or 20 minutes. A narrator took the place of captions. Also in that year, the Oberammergau Passion Play was photographed by a Mr. Hurd, an American representative of the first major French filmmakers, the Lumiere brothers, and a French passion play was filmed for the Musee Eden.

The Augustinian Fathers set up the “Bonne Cinema” in Paris to produce good movies. They used churches as a normal place for projecting films until Pope Pius X decreed at the end of 1912 that “even religious films were not to be projected in churches, in order that the sacred



“All these things are as I have found them in the Holy Scriptures, the Glorious Koran, the ancient Hebrew Writings, and in the annals of modern discoveries.”

– Cecil B. DeMille



character of the buildings should be safeguarded.” Therefore, showings of the filmed passion plays were banned in the churches (starting with the cathedrals in Paris).

Consequently, movie producers sought other, more humanistic subject matter rather than the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, although the questions which the church authorities raised about the passion plays had some validity, in hindsight it would have been better if they had worked with the filmmakers rather than expelling them from the churches.

Of course, when reflecting on how Hollywood movies and even television programs have presented Jesus Christ, it is important to keep in mind that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote gospels, not scripts. Their narratives about Jesus Christ inspire and teach through images created by words. The filmmakers who have tackled this sensitive subject have attempted to portray, represent or interpret Jesus through non-verbal images. Regrettably, more often than not, the most important aspect of Jesus Christ’s life, which is His resurrection, has been ignored, though a few movies have presented His resurrection accurately and with reverence.

Each filmmaker has visualized Jesus differently. Some have stuck close to the story of a particular gospel; others have stuck close to the theme of the gospel; and, some have used the figure of Jesus to tell their own personal stories, while others have used gospel stories as a pretext for presenting popular ideologies. Some filmmakers have made movies about Jesus because they wanted to make money. Regrettably, some have done so because they wanted to mock or defame Him, while others have a passion to tell the real story of His life.

In many cases, the personalities and opinions of filmmakers are not reflected in their work. For instance,

many Christians are enamored by the powerful movie CHARIOTS OF FIRE and the superb television program JESUS OF NAZARETH. People have claimed that they have come to Christ and that their lives were changed because of this particular movie or because of this television program.

What is interesting, however, is that CHARIOTS OF FIRE and JESUS OF NAZARETH were funded in part by the same wealthy Muslim, the late Dodi Fayed. Furthermore, CHARIOTS OF FIRE was produced by a Jew, written by an atheist and starred a homosexual who later died of AIDS. With regard to the powerful sermon in CHARIOTS OF FIRE, the homosexual star said they couldn’t get the sermon right so he grabbed a Bible from the church where they were shooting the movie and paraphrased it. With regard to JESUS OF NAZARETH, the director was an active bisexual who chased one of his male actors around his villa in Italy. (He later came to Christ after a serious car accident.) Even the star of the popular JESUS film considers himself an agnostic.

Since movies shape how many people see or learn about Jesus Christ, it is important to look at how different movies have represented Jesus to help set the record straight and to develop media wisdom. Many Christians see themselves as besieged by a Hollywood mass media culture which doesn’t understand the concerns of most Christians and doesn’t understand that no one is born a Christian and that Christianity is therefore only one generation deep. God has no grandchildren. Each Christian has to make his or her own commitment of faith in Jesus Christ, and that commitment of faith whereby each person enters into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, is a gift of God. Thus, Christianity survives only

through the miracle of God’s Grace manifest in a personal faith, and that personal faith comes through hearing the word of God.

Why the Resurrection Is Important

Although the gospel starts with Genesis and goes through Revelation, the pivotal point is the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because: it is through His death that He paid the penalty for each and every man and woman’s transgressions; and, it is through His resurrection that He signed, sealed and demonstrated the victory over sin and death once and for all time.

Prior to His resurrection, the disciples were ready to run away and abandon Him. After His resurrection, they, and many others throughout the centuries, were willing to be martyred for him. Therefore, how filmmakers treat the resurrection of Jesus Christ is extremely important.

As Paul notes in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came

through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."

— 1 Corinthians 15:12-23 (NIV).

Christians believe, like the Jews before them: that we live in a real world (not an imaginary world as the Hindus and many others believe); that we have a real God; and, that we face real suffering. Christians also believe that Jesus really died and was really resurrected. The various movies about Jesus reflect different attitudes about who Jesus was mainly by the way they portrayed His resurrection.

One of the most renowned early movies which featured part of the life of Jesus Christ was D.W. Griffith's movie INTOLERANCE (1916), which studiously avoided the Resurrection. In contrast, DeMille's classic, THE KING OF KINGS, has a real resurrection and shows Thomas putting his finger in Jesus' hand saying, "My Lord and my God."

Many of the movies about Jesus that followed DeMille's classic had severe theological problems, such as THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD, JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR and GODSPELL. THE GREATEST STORY EVERY TOLD, for instance, appears to have a Gnostic resurrection wherein an ethereal Jesus appears to the disciples — not the physically real Jesus of the Gospels. Also, the language used, of course, is not the biblical language. Then, there follows several more faithful attempts, including the television program JESUS OF NAZARETH and the movie JESUS.

It should be noted that the German school of higher criticism, starting in the late 19th Century, wanted to divorce Christianity from its Jewish roots and make it more ethereal and ephemeral, as Jesus is later depicted in

GODSPELL and JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, but that is not what Christians actually believe. Christians believe that the Resurrection is where our hope resides, and the Good News is that Jesus did die for each and every man and woman's failures, weaknesses and sins, so that on the Judgment Day they will receive eternal life with Him in Heaven.

It is important here to recall the words of Rabbi Gamaliel in the Book of Acts, who advised the leaders of the Sanhedrin in their attempt to keep the apostles of Jesus Christ from preaching the Good News:

"Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For, if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

— Acts 5:38-39 (NIV)

In this regard, the church needs to remember that the Good News is that a faith grounded in the victory that Jesus won on the cross is not fearful of others and is willing to be an ambassador of the Good News of God's Grace rather than a righteously angry defender of the faith. In this way, Christianity overcame the Roman Empire — not by might, but by the testimony of the faithful, often as they were sent to their deaths by the ego-centric, capricious rulers of the state. In this way, by the time of Constantine, Rome became Christianized.

How to Portray Jesus Christ

Aside from the resurrection, filmmakers have always been faced with the question of how to portray Jesus of Nazareth. Movies and television have rarely, if ever, used a Jewish person to play Jesus. In fact, in many of the Jesus films that come out of Hollywood, Jesus is a blue eyed Caucasian blond from England, while all

the bad guys look like they come from a swarthy strain, and clearly there is a message of sorts in that.

However, the historical Jesus is Jewish... and the Good News is that when God came and gave His one and only begotten son for us, He came in the context of God's chosen people. Furthermore, Jesus came to deliver His people from their sins, which is none other than falling short of God's Law — that Law which is the liberating heart of Judaism.

Even so, what Jesus looked like is open to debate. Did he have long hair? Well, Jews at the time of his birth wore their hair both long and short. Did he have a beard? The wealthy, religious Jews of His time often wore beards, but the beards that orthodox Jews wear today date back to several centuries after the time of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the poor, in Jesus' day, rarely wore beards, and Jesus came from a poor family.

Thus, portraying Jesus is more difficult than it seems.

Jesus can be portrayed not only as an indigenous Jew, but also in the abstract. Not only that, but there are Christ figures as well as Jesus figures. A Jesus figure is any representation of Jesus himself. Such a figure can be realistic or stylized. A Christ figure, however, is a character who portrays or symbolizes an important aspect of Christ's nature or His life and ministry.

When the representation of a Jesus figure is realistic, then it is Jesus as He was thought to be. To do so means looking at Jesus from the perspective of His time, not from our perspective. Many critics contend that Franco Zeffirelli has come the closest (so far) to portraying a realistic Jesus in the television special, JESUS OF NAZARETH.

Most film representations of Jesus figures, however, tend to rely on well-known visual portraits of Jesus from

the European Renaissance. These portraits often soften Jesus (though **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW** leans heavily on Renaissance church paintings and yet presents an earthy, real Jesus). These stylized representations present Jesus in non-historical settings, just as Italian Medieval and Renaissance art presented Jesus in Italian settings. They also can tend toward fantasy, as in **JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR**, where Jesus sings, and **GODSPELL**, which portrays Christ as part of a singing troupe of street clowns and mimes.

In contrast to Jesus figures, Christ figures are often either redeemers or saviors. The redeemer figure represents Jesus taking on human burdens and sinfulness in suffering and even death. John Coffey in **THE GREEN MILE** is both a “holy fool” and a Christ figure who bears the sins of others to his own death. The savior figure portrays Jesus Christ’s saving mission, sometimes even to triumph and a symbolic or an actual resurrection. Captain Miller in **SAVING PRIVATE RYAN** is a Christ figure who is willing to lay down his life to save someone whom he doesn’t even know and may not like. Wall*E in the movie that bears his name is willing to die to save mankind.

Other Christ figures include:

- The martyr figure whose suffering and death witnesses to values and convictions. The scientist in **IRON MAN** was willing to die to save Iron Man.
- A Job-like figure where the innocent suffers and is persecuted. Bonhoeffer, who is featured in many movies, was willing to suffer and be persecuted to save his country.
- A popular savior such as the legendary knights or contemporary pop-heroes. Spider-Man and Superman have many Christ-like

characteristics.

- A clown figure who highlights the fact that God’s folly is wiser than human wisdom. Forrest Gump is a holy fool character.
- The reconciler figure who brings enemies together. Wilberforce is ultimately a reconciler.
- The offbeat figure such as the **WATERSHIP DOWN** rabbits and J.R.R. Tolkien’s **THE HOBBIT**.

Movies may also portray Jesus Christ Himself as teacher, wonder worker, all-powerful Creator, monk, human, or Risen Lord. All of this is acceptable if the Christology is orthodox (which merely means right doctrine). An orthodox Christology requires at least:

- A real ontology (which means that reality is real, not just a great thought or something else)
- A real epistemology (which means that a person can really know that reality is real)
- A real soteriology (which means that Jesus really saved us)
- A real resurrection
- A real divinity (Jesus Christ is “very God of very God,” which is how the Council of Nicea resolved the Homoousian conflict that Jesus was of the same essence, or substance, as God the Father, and so there is only one God)
- A real incarnational theology (Jesus Christ was “fully God and fully Man,” which resolves the Gnostic and Arian heresies that Jesus was only one or the other)
- A real history (Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection were actual events in history; thus, they are more than historical, but not less than historical)
- A real morality (Jesus died once for the sins of all)

- A real victory (Jesus Christ’s death was not a defeat but a triumph)

Finally, different kinds of movies that focus on Jesus Christ or other religious themes, including non-Christian ones, also embrace the following types: passion plays, spectacles, epics, experimental or avant-garde movies, drama, supernatural movies, apocalyptic movies, picaresque movies, and clerical movies.

Concluding Thoughts

Whether you accept all of the essential teachings of Christianity or not, Jesus Christ is too important of an historical figure and His impact on society has been too great to treat His life and ministry in a cavalier fashion. Nor should we distort the historical and theological record of those who knew Him and His teachings best, the apostles and their closest associates. These men and women (almost all of whom were religious Jews) diligently reported and recorded the teachings of Jesus and the historical facts about His life, ministry, death, and resurrection. They, and the divine but human savior they followed, deserve the admiration and respect of everyone, not just the movers, shakers and wannabes in the filmmaking community. To deny them that admiration and respect, to distort or mock their story, is to commit a grave injustice. An injustice that can be forgiven, if repentance is made, but an injustice nevertheless.

Having said all that, however, let us remember and celebrate those movies that do indeed honor Jesus Christ and His gospel.

May God help us to nurture and protect them, and to make more of them. Praise God in all things. Amen.

© Baehr, 2003.

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF SOME OF THE MAJOR MOVIES & TV PROGRAMS FEATURING JESUS

by Dr. Ted Baehr

MOVIEGUIDE® thought that this brief chronological survey of the major movies and television programs featuring Jesus would be of interest to you.

THE EARLIEST REPRESENTATIONS

The earliest representations of Jesus on film were straightforward recordings of various passion plays.

Passion Play (1897)

This film was produced by American theatrical producers, Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, in Horitz, Bohemia.

Passion Play (1898)

R.G. Hollaman and A.G. Eaves photographed the passion play on the roof of a New York skyscraper. The length of the film was 2,100 feet or about 20 minutes. A narrator took the place of captions.

Oberammergau Passion Play (1898)

This film was photographed by a Mr. Hurd, Lumiere's American representative.

French Passion Play (1898)

This film was produced for the Musee Eden.

French Passion Plays (1902-1906)

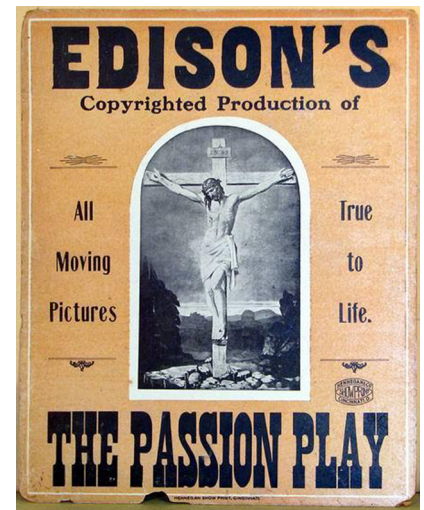
The best known French passion play was produced by Ferdinand Zecca and was 2,000 ft. in length. It made use of panning shots, which were an innovation at the time.

V. Jasset and Alice Guy reproduced Golgotha at Fontainebleau and used a gramophone to help the actors with their emotions. This may be the earliest use of an artificial aid. Despite concern about the reverence of portraying Jesus Christ in person on the screen, there were many other hastily prepared Passions and Lives. Often they were little more than a series of crude living tableaux. Several of these films came from the Italian Cines Company.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST (1908)

Pathe produced this three reel Passion in color. In 1914, it was expanded to seven reels. In 1921, a modern prologue was added.

For many years from the earliest days of movies, the length of a motion picture was indicated by the number of its reels. Each reel ran about 10 minutes, so a movie was a "one-reeler," a "two-reeler," or longer. Since modern projectors accommodate reels holding 3,000 feet of 35-millimeter film or more, the word reel has lost its original meaning in terms of time.





BEN-HUR (1908)

This early version of the famous novel was directed by Sidney Olcott and starred William S. Hart. Kalem was the production company.

THE KISS OF JUDAS (1909)

THE BIRTH OF JESUS (1909)

These were French productions.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM (1911)

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM was produced by Thomas A. Edison. It is interesting to note that Edison had tried at first to give the patents to the motion picture apparatus to his church, but they did not want anything to do with the patents that changed the world.

THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET (1911)

Charles Kent played Jesus Christ and Julia Swayne Gordon played Mary Magdalene in Vitagraph's **THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET**.

SATAN: OR THE DRAMA OF HUMANITY (1911)

This was a four part Italian spectacle from Ambrosio, directed by Luigi Maggi. The second episode featured the life of Jesus Christ.

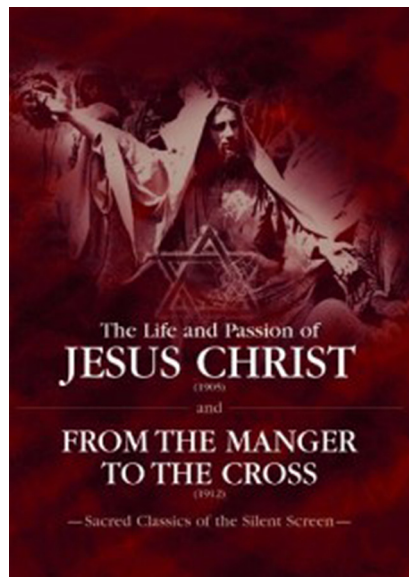
FROM THE MANGER TO THE CROSS (1911)

This is the first major Life of Jesus film from his infancy to his death on the Cross. It was directed by Sidney Olcott for Kalem, the production company. The movie was a great success. The Crucifixion was effective in its simplicity. The Bishop of London declared it better than the Oberammergau Passion. W. Stephen Bush, a reviewer of that time, wrote: "It is not a Passion Play: it is the very story of the Passion and of the many incidents recorded by the evangelists. It is indeed a cinematographic gospel. Because of this sublime work, it will be easier than it was before to go forth and teach all nations." The film was shot on location in Egypt and the Palestine. The Way of the Cross was shot on the actual Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. R. Henderson Bland, an English actor, was both dignified and moving as Jesus. Later, he was a WWI hero. In spite of its success, the principals, Sidney Olcott and Gene Gauntier were forced to leave Kalem as a result of their insistence on making it.

Also: Jesus Christ appeared as a character in several films of this period from 1909 to 1920, including: Pathe's **SAVED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE**, where a vision of Jesus leads a mother to her lost son; **THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER**, in which He restores a dead girl to life; and, **THE CARPENTER**, in which He reconciles a family split by the Civil War.

INTOLERANCE (1916)

Reacting to the outcry over his **BIRTH OF A NATION**, D.W. Griffith focused on the theme of intolerance as the cause of wars and as a prime mover of the world in all ages in his movie by the same name. Griffith used four stories to define intolerance: the Judean story, which presented a small portion of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and avoided the resurrection; the medieval story, which was a dramatization of the war between Catholics and Huguenots in



sixteenth-century France; the fall of Babylon, which was a memorable epic of the ancient world; and, the modern story, which was a dramatic conflict between capital and labor. Howard Gaye played grave and gentle Jesus in this release from Triangle Productions. Griffith clearly depicted the opposition of the Rabbinate against Jesus and his revolutionary “New Law” as his example of ecclesiastical intolerance.

CHRISTUS (1916)

This is a large scale production from the Italian Cines company and directed by Guilo Antomoro. Giovanni Pasquali played Jesus. **CHRISTUS** was filmed in Egypt and designed after famous paintings. It was very successful.

CIVILIZATION (1916)

Hollywood veteran Thomas Ince cast George Fisher in the role of Jesus Christ in **CIVILIZATION**. Ince employed allegory in this tale of the supernatural to show that all war is evil. In this allegory produced by Triangle Productions, Jesus is depicted as wandering in a place called “Borderland,” an area located between earth and eternity. When Count Ferdinand dies, he meets Jesus in Borderland. Jesus announces that he will return to earth in the form of Count Ferdinand to preach peace. The Moving Picture World’s review of June 17, 1916: “What we see is by no means clear, though it is weird and picturesque.”

LEAVES FROM SATAN'S BOOK (1922)

In the first part of this four part movie from the Danish Nordisk Film company, the Devil disguises himself as the Pharisee who leads Judas to betray Christ. Halvard Hoff appeared as Jesus.

I.N.R.I. (1923)

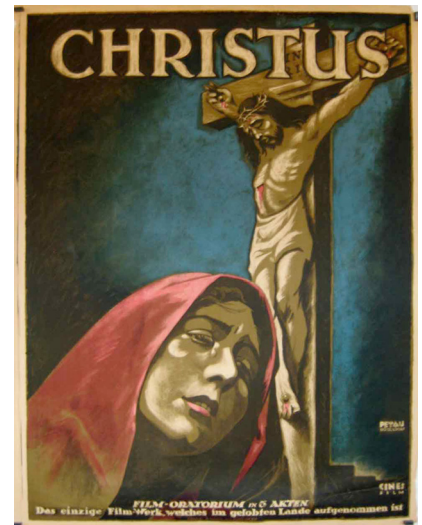
Robert Wiene’s **I.N.R.I.** tells about a convicted murderer who is told the life of Christ by the chaplain. The recounted scenes are enacted in the form of a Passion Play wherein Gregor Chmara plays Jesus Christ. Eventually, The murderer repents. In 1934, the German production company, Universum Film A.G., **I.N.R.I.** was reissued as **THE CROWN OF THORNS**.

SPARROWS (1926)

Mary Pickford plays Mollie, whose sick child is taken peacefully by Jesus in this movie distributed by United Artists.

BEN-HUR (1926)

This renowned version was directed by Fred Niblo for MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer). Jesus was portrayed, but never in close up. Only parts of Jesus Christ are shown, such as a hand, the torso, etc. This coyness was irritating to many reviewers. The hand was too white and too delicate. Furthermore, all the Christ scenes were in color, which destroyed the sense of reality for many viewers. The Last Supper was shown as a replica of da Vinci’s famous, but of course deliberately anachronistic painting. At the end of the movie, superimposed on the scene of the Crucifixion, with the extraordinary addition of two lovers prominent in the foreground, are the words: “He died — but love goes on forever.”





DeMille's KING OF KINGS was the first movie to play at Grauman's Chinese Theater.



THE KING OF KINGS (1926)

The famous H.B. Warner played Jesus in Cecil B. DeMille's KING OF KINGS — still the classic of all movies about Jesus Christ. Produced by Pathé Exchange, Inc., this was the most famous, the most discussed and the costliest religious movie made up to that point and was used for many years by missionaries to evangelize.

The action starts when Jesus is already fully grown and preaching. The first half of the movie include: casting the seven deadly sins out of Mary Magdalene, the raising of Lazarus, the driving of the money changers from the Temple, then the temptation by Satan is inserted, and, the teaching of the Lord's Prayer. The second half concentrates on the Passion, the betrayal by Judas, the trial, the Way to the Cross; Jesus' death, and His Resurrection, which was followed almost immediately in a slight contraction of historical events by the Ascension.

Originally 15 reels long, KING OF KINGS was later cut to 11 by the deletion of a number of scenes such as the calling of the disciples and the discussion over the payment of tribute money.

Throughout the filming, a Jesuit, a minister from the original Federal Council of Churches, and another clergyman were present to give advice. In order to avoid offending Jewish sensibilities, Caiaphas, rather than Judas, was made responsible for Christ's death.

To ensure a proper attitude of reverence, extraordinary steps were taken and publicized. Only DeMille could speak to H.B. Warner when Warner was in costume. He was veiled and transported in a closed car when necessary. On location, he was given his meals in solitude. Prayers were said at the scene of the Crucifixion (which was filmed on Christmas Eve). Mass was celebrated every morning on location. The first day of shooting started with the uttering of prayers by representatives not only of the Protestant and Catholic faiths, but also by Jewish, Buddhist, and Muslim representatives.

KING OF KINGS shows DeMille at his best and his worst. The movie opens with a very inaccurate portrayal of a bejeweled Mary Magdalene living in unbelievable splendor, surrounded by marble palaces, leopards, zebras, revelers, and slaves. This sequence was originally in color. Her lover, Judas, has been absent a good deal lately listening to a poor "carpenter". Slighted, she storms off to see this "carpenter" who has lured Judas away. Of course, she falls for the "carpenter."

Just at this point when the gospel story appears to be reduced to a sex triangle, DeMille changes direction and produces the rest of the movie with rare restraint and dignity. The result is an unsurpassed masterpiece, wherein H.B. Warner gives an inspired and inspiring performance, in appearance halfway between the Victorian vision of the fragile Jesus and the tougher portrayals of later years.

One of the most poignant scenes involves a young blind girl who is listening to a boy's story of a lame man who was healed. The girl is taken into a fisherman's hut. All goes dark, as the audience is placed behind her sightless eyes. Gradually, from all corners of the screen, rays of light begin to radiate, growing ever brighter and more concentrated until, at first in a haze, then clearly, she sees the gentle face of her Healer smiling down at her. Even today, the scene has lost none of its power.

A minister noted to Warner some time later: "I saw you in KING OF KINGS when I was a child and now every time I speak of Jesus, it is your face I see."

The disciples are unusually well-differentiated characters with their own identities rather than a handful of supporters with one or two standing out as in other versions. Ernest Torrence is a splendidly impetuous, lovable Peter. Joseph Schildkraut's somewhat theatrical Judas is the most arresting in the movie. Alan Brooks is Satan in a highly original handling of the temptation scene.

It is clear that the reverence and prayers during the production made a difference.

GOLGOTHA (1934)

Written and directed by Julien Duvivier for Film Union, GOLGOTHA was the first Passion to be made in sound. Robert le Vigan plays Jesus Christ, and the renowned Jean Gabin plays Pontius Pilate. Since it is a Passion, the movie covers only the events of Holy Week.

OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY (1934)

The Oberammergau Passion Play was filmed again as a silent movie.

STRANGE CARGO (1940)

Using an obvious Christ figure, STRANGE CARGO is an unusual and well-acted redemption drama with strong performances by all the actors. The plot follows a group of convicts from their prison break to their deaths or final "escapes." The Christ figure serves as the collective conscience with whom each has to deal or deny.

The story tells about prisoners from Devil's Island who come back from a day of work and find an extra man, Cambreau, played by Ian Hunter, in their midst, who seems to have supernatural knowledge of the other convict's lives and seeks to develop their better natures. A cynical unbeliever, Gable hurls the stranger into the sea during a famous quarrel. The stranger clutches a wooden plank assuming a crucifixion-like posture. Gable realizes who the stranger is and is converted to belief in God. The stranger disappears.

STRANGE CARGO was directed by Frank Borzage for Pathé Exchange, Inc. and stars Clark Gable.

MARIA MAGDALENA (1946)

Luis Alcoriza played the part of Jesus of Nazareth in this Mexican movie. Luis Alcoriza gave an impressive performance in a deeply felt and fairly successful production.

THE FUGITIVE (1947)

John Ford's adaptation of Graham Greene's novel, THE POWER AND THE GLORY is about a revolutionary priest in Central America. This is an allegorical attempt to reflect the story of Jesus Christ with an American outlaw as the good thief and a native informer as Judas.

In this RKO production, Henry Fonda plays a priest who is running away from soldiers during Mexico's violent anti-clerical period and wants anyone linked to Christianity dead. The fugitive finds shelter with a faithful Indian Woman, who gives the priest directions to Puerto Grande, where he can board a ship and sail to freedom in America. On his journey, he meets a man who says he will protect him. In reality, he is the Police Informer.

THE FUGITIVE is one of the high points of black-and-white cinematog-



raphy. With exceptionally good editing and music, this movie confirmed that Ford was also an “artistic” filmmaker.



QUO VADIS (1951)

QUO VADIS is one of those incredibly pro-Christian biblical epics that it is hard to imagine Hollywood producing. Directed by Mervyn Le Roy for MGM, this exquisite movie clearly shows the redemptive power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforming the evil world system of man.

In QUO VADIS, Roman general Marcus Vinicius, played by Robert Taylor, is caught between the tyrannical Nero and the beautiful Christian Lygia. The events from the life of Jesus Christ are shown as tableau during a sermon by St. Peter.

In word and deed, QUO VADIS magnificently shows how the love of Christ overcame the power of lust of the Roman Empire. For those who believe in taking up arms against their oppressors, QUO VADIS shows a better way. For those who don't understand the power of the gospel, QUO VADIS is a ringing testimony to the power of the resurrected Christ. The miracles, the preaching, the teaching are all so well done that QUO VADIS can be used in a catechism teaching.

ST. MATTHEW PASSION (1952)

Robert S. Flaherty made the ST. MATTHEW PASSION based on the choral work by J. S. Bach.



THE ROBE (1953)

Directed by Henry Koster for 20th Century Fox, THE ROBE is utterly inspirational. Starring Richard Burton, Jean Simmons and Victor Mature, this Hollywood classic is the story of a slave under the rule of Rome, who turns to Christianity when embracing the robe of Christ. Burton plays Marcellus, a Roman centurion who won the Robe of Christ on the roll of a dice after the crucifixion. Tormented by nightmares, he returns to Palestine to try and learn what he can of the man he killed. His slave Demetrius swoops up the robe and converts to Christianity. Mad emperor Caligula cannot abide Christians and demands that Burton secure the robe for him. When Burton doesn't give up the robe, he is sent to his death.

THE ROBE was the first to use Cinemascope. The addition of new magnetic sound tracks provides realistic sound effects. In size, color, the sweep of pageantry conveyed by the lavish costumes and backgrounds of Old Rome, and through the great story by Lloyd C. Douglas, this is an impressive movie. It is a well-acted drama. The simple urgency of the theme and its spiritual magnetism are complemented by the film's trimmings and trappings, talkative scenes and broad, but expansive, direction.

The Crucifixion scene is one of the more successful. The Cinemascope screen gives a hint of tragic grandeur. Christ's words from the Cross are heard while we are shown the agonized upturned face of a Greek slave (Victor Mature). Blood drips onto Mature's hand.

DAY OF TRIUMPH (1954)

Robert Wilson played Jesus in the Rev. James K. Friedrich's movie, DAY OF TRIUMPH, produced by Century Films Inc. This was the first Technicolor,

English-speaking sound film in which one actually saw and heard an actor playing Jesus Christ (whose face was never shown in such films as BEN-HUR or THE ROBE). Once shown on TV annually, it now seems very dated.

BEN-HUR (1959)

BEN-HUR ranks among the most honored of films, taking 11 of 12 Academy awards.

The movie starts with the birth of Christ and the visit by the Magi. Judah Ben-Hur of Judea (Charlton Heston) reunites with his friend, Massala (Stephen Boyd) who becomes the Roman commander of Jerusalem. However, Massala asks Judah to betray his own people by informing on the dissenters. When Judah refuses, Massala finds a way to frame his friend and send Judah to the galleys of the Roman war ships. He also sends Judah's mother and sister to a dark, cold cell. In battle, Judah rescues the governor and becomes a Roman "favorite son." In time, Judah becomes a skilled charioteer and defeats Massala in a daring chariot race. Judah then rescues his mother and sister, who have become lepers, and takes them to Christ. Though it is too late for them to meet Jesus, his shed blood renews them and regenerates Judah.

There are not enough superlatives to acclaim this picture. Its honors are rightly deserved and its legacy should continue throughout the generations. BEN-HUR contains brilliant ironies and counter-points that tell an indisputable tale of compassion and forgiveness found through Jesus Christ.

Directed by William Wyler and shot in Italy for MGM, the movie is visually highly exciting, though some critics say that it is less so than the old silent version.

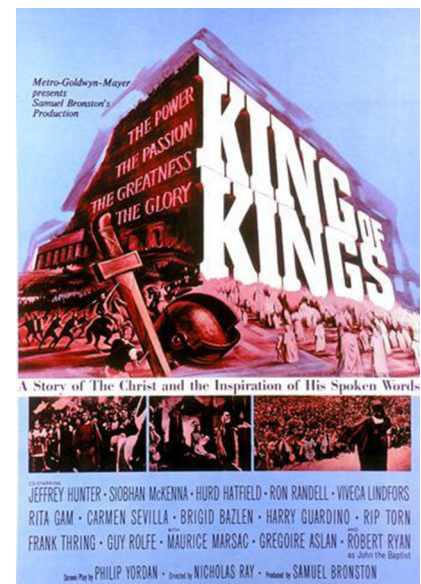
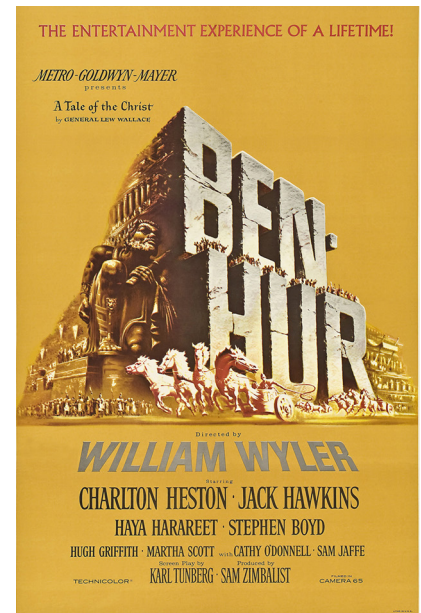
THE BIG FISHERMAN (1960)

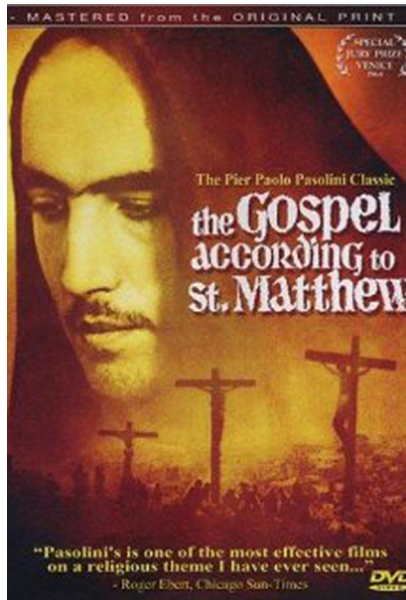
Directed by Frank Borzage for Centurion, this is a vast religious epic, from Lloyd Douglas' book about the life of St. Peter. Regrettably, Peter is trivialized and the gospel is distorted. There is no Crucifixion, and Jesus Christ is shown without an enemy in the world.

KING OF KINGS (1961)

The 1961 KING OF KINGS was a great disappointment, and is not to be confused with Cecil B. DeMille's impressive life of Jesus 1927 movie by the same title. Not only was the movie poorly edited; but, also this version treats the gospel as a revolutionary underground movement, with Barabbas and Judas working together to destroy Roman oppression, and Jesus is caught up in the upheaval. Aside from the introduction of irrelevant battles, the movie lacks a clear emphasis on Jesus' divinity, omits miracles and changes significant facts. Furthermore, Jeffrey Hunter does a poor job as Christ. However, the movie does portray a real resurrection.

Directed by Nicholas Ray for MGM, the movie came after his youth-oriented movies like REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (1955), I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN and I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF, and so it was dubbed I WAS A TEENAGE JESUS. Even the grammar was bad, with this Jesus telling the rebelling Jews: "Romans are conquerors. If you become conquerors, you will be no different than [sic] them."





GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW (1964)

Director Pier Paolo Pasolini's GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW adheres rigidly to the facts and the spirit of this one gospel. Only at the Crucifixion is the Virgin Mary allowed to be emotional, and the effect is shattering.

Pasolini shot his movie in Southern Italy on a very tight budget for Arco Film S.r.l. The cinematography, with chalky whites and dusty grays, strikingly reproduces the "feel" of the Palestine. He used huge facial close-ups and arrogant Pharisee headdresses as well as a strange mix of music, which ranges from Bach to a Congolese Mass, to great effect.

Many of his scenes are unforgettable: the death of Herod, Jesus as a tiny boy running into Joseph's outstretched hands, a radiant and unglamorous young Mary, and Jesus Christ on trial glimpsed from afar over the shoulders of the watchers and guards.

In traditional Jewish manner, the fact of the miracles is blunt, so the scenes of leper faces cuts to a healed face and the walking on water is literal. Peter's denial is also blunt.

Regrettably, the apostles are never distinguished, and Judas and Peter even resemble each other.

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD (1965)

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD is slightly overlong and crammed with stars, but not as bad a movie as many critics claim. In spite of the involvement of the Protestant Film Office, the movie has some theological inaccuracies including attempts to exonerate Judas, Judas falling into the sacrificial fire instead of hanging himself as the Bible tells us, and a very weak ending which has a conceptually resurrected Jesus appearing in the clouds in a vision that leans toward nominalism. These and other divergences from the Bible are so apparent that it is clear that Director George Stevens should have stuck to the facts.

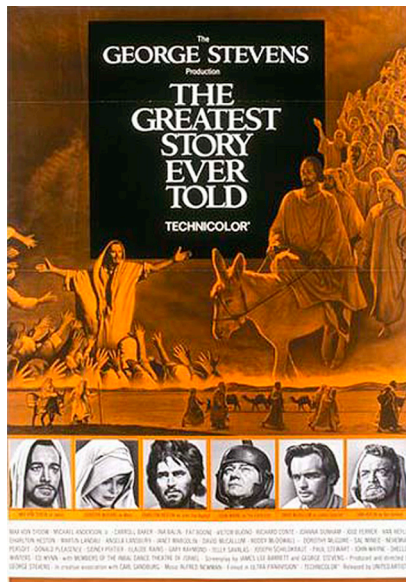
THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD is a beautifully photographed movie, but, regrettably, some of the most spectacular scenes ever filmed lose all validity because of star cameos. It is difficult to believe John Wayne as a Roman centurion supervising Christ's crucifixion. These cameos were not needed.

George Stevens, its director, producer and co-writer, spent almost a decade bringing this project to the screen. Even with all his experience, he was unable to translate his vision into the cinematic experience he wanted. Whereas the book was a masterful historical novel with prose so powerful that the reader feels he is living the events, the movie feels lifeless, meandering and somehow pointless. At times, however, the viewer can see flashes of what Stevens had in mind in translating the book to the big screen.

Individual sequences, such as the raising of Lazarus and the Crucifixion, are magnificent. Max Von Sydow did an excellent job as Christ, and as an unknown in the U.S., he was very believable. He is a strong, virile, compassionate, and at times humorous Jesus who exhibits the attributes of the Son of God gentle Jesus of the child's bedside, as well as the Son of Man trudging from place to place. Furthermore, Telly Savalas and Claude Rains are convincing as Pilate and Herod.

SON OF MAN (TV) (1969)

SON OF MAN is Dennis Potter's theologically aberrant reading of the life



of Christ. Jesus is portrayed as a fiery carpenter who believes people love their enemies rather than fight and who is racked by self doubt as to whether or not he is the Messiah.

JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR (1973)

JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR presents a Jesus figure, using the musical idiom of the 1960s. It is interesting to note that it now appears very “dated.”

The movie is adapted from the musical by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber which employed imaginative lyrics and contemporary sounds. Although it is theologically controversial, JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR has a wonderful score. Director Norman Jewison’s movie adaptation for Universal Pictures had echoes of the stage version, but was more reverent and even hinted at the resurrection, which the play assiduously avoided.

Ted Neely played Jesus Christ in this modern retelling of the gospel story, which sets Christianity on edge by partially turning the villains of the story into the heroes. Used by God to accomplish His purpose, Judas is presented as noble and knowledgeable. Pontius Pilate is a troubled man who has premonitions of the truth about Jesus and his own role in his death.

GODSPELL (1973)

GODSPELL is a 1960’s rock opera retelling of the story of Jesus in a New York setting. Directed by David Greene for Columbia Pictures, GODSPELL lost out at the box office to the overshadowing JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR. Also based on a prior, successful theatrical musical, GODSPELL does not have the song recognition that JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR does. Furthermore, the New York City setting provides a colorful and distracting backdrop to the movie’s symbolic style. Even so, its cinematography is stunning.

GODSPELL uses a Jesus clown figure to summarize the life and death of Christ according to the Gospel of Matthew. The characters in GODSPELL are colorful, humorous and human. Regrettably, the movie reflects the brief ascendance of the humanization of Jesus promoted by the German school of higher criticism and avoids the divinity of Christ and His resurrection.

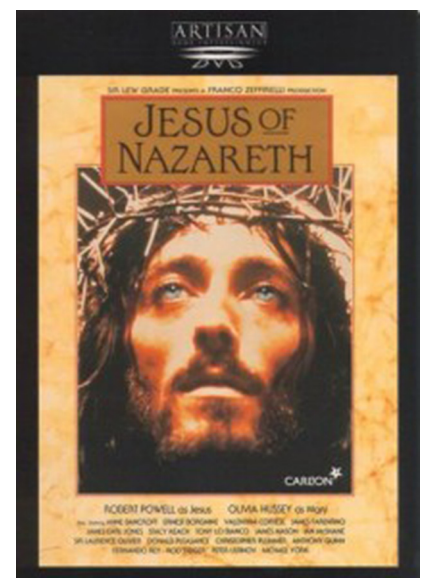
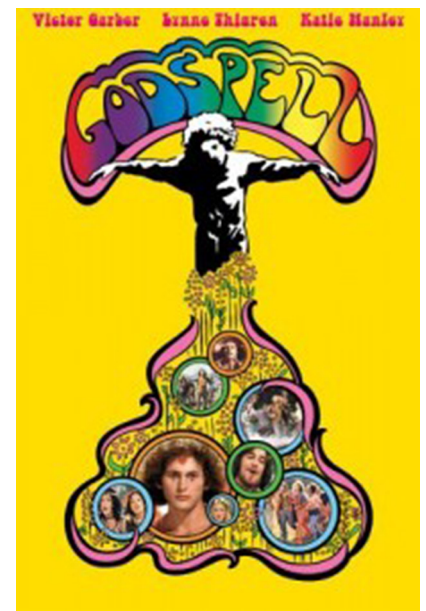
THE GOSPEL ROAD (1977)

Directed by Robert Elfstrom, who also plays Jesus Christ, and written and narrated by Johnny Cash, THE GOSPEL ROAD is a mediocre musical journey through Holy Land which tells the story of the life of Jesus.

JESUS OF NAZARETH (TV) (1977)

Directed by the renowned Franco Zeffirelli and produced by our friend and former history professor Vincenzo Labella for Sir Lew Grade and Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI), JESUS OF NAZARETH was originally made for TV in 1977. This excellent television movie attempts historical accuracy. Many passages of the Bible are quoted verbatim, the locations look authentic. Aside from Robert Powell as Jesus, Olivia Hussey as Mary and Stacy Keach as Barabbas, many of the other characters are actually played by Semitic-looking actors. Of its six hour and twenty minutes, the first hour is devoted solely to the story of Jesus’ birth, and 12 minutes is devoted to the Last Supper as well as 12 minutes to the Crucifixion.

Regrettably, the resurrection is ambivalent and could either be real or



Peter's remembering Jesus. Also, some minor details of the biblical account are changed for dramatic purposes. For instance, Nicodemus comes to Jesus during the day rather than by night (John 3:2). Also, scenes are added to help the dramatic development that are not in the New Testament gospels.

While not graphic by today's standards, some of the scenes — baby boys being ripped from their mothers' arms and slaughtered, nails being driven into Jesus' hands — may disturb young and/or sensitive children.

Many critics believe that Franco Zeffirelli's JESUS OF NAZARETH is by far the best depiction of biblical events ever filmed. James Farentino is superb as the apostle Peter. Even Robert Powell does a serviceable turn as Jesus.

Many people have said that they came to Jesus Christ as a result of this television epic.

JESUS (1979)

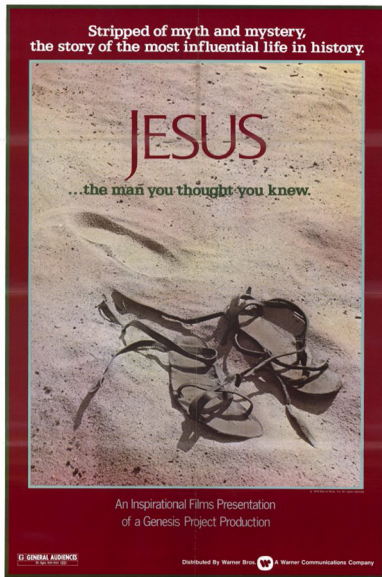
The JESUS Film, released in 1979 by Warner Bros, has been viewed by 3.3 billion people as of this writing thanks to the efforts of Campus Crusade for Christ. 108 million people have indicated they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ after seeing the film.

The movie has been translated into 566 languages with 232 in process. The audio/radio version is available in 54 languages, and another hundred languages will be added this year. Also, the JESUS film has been re-configured to reach different audiences (niche strategies):

- Special Soccer Edition for use during the World Cup
 - New children's version entitled "The Story of Jesus for Children"
 - New "More Than Gold" version will be distributed during the Olympics
- this year, the DVD version allows a choice of 8 languages and connects to Internet websites and additional film information.
- Internet website allows people to view the film in 51 different languages
- Radio version utilizes a adaptation of the film script for radio drama
- Audiocassette version allows the radio version to be circulated easily
 - Millennial Tribute to Jesus television broadcast reaches many we have not reached in other ways
 - Special Cricket edition of the video was utilized in India during the Cricket World Cup

Produced by John Heyman, a Jewish believer, the JESUS film is theologically very accurate, although it is not, as many people assume, the entire text of the gospel of Luke and it does add some material to adapt the gospel to movie drama. Whereas JESUS OF NAZARETH has an ethereal quality in many scenes, such as when special effects and classical music announces the angel appearing to Mary, the JESUS film follows the Jewish tradition of realism, so that when an angel appears, he walks on screen. Some critics have misunderstood the theological significance of this. From the biblical perspective, rooted in Judaism, God's creation is real. The resurrected Jesus is real. Angels are so real that any of us could be entertaining angels unawares. Thus, the very real earthiness of this version is in its favor. This is the obverse of biblical epics. It presents the story of Jesus without the usual Hollywood digressions and additions. The Crucifixion is an especially powerful.

Narrated by Alexander Scourby, produced by The Genesis Project and filmed in Israel, this movie retells the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, raised by a Jewish carpenter. The movie encompasses the entire gospel story from the miraculous virgin birth to the calling of his disciples, public



miracles and ministry, ending with his death by crucifixion at the hands of the Roman empire and resurrection on the third day.

It is interesting to note that the actor in JESUS is not a believer. Rather, Brian Deacon, who played Jesus in this film, calls himself “a lapsed Catholic who hasn’t practiced his faith.” Deacon testified, “I’ve always found it difficult to know how truth can be proclaimed to others; to me it’s more of a private matter.”

Even so, as Campus Crusade for Christ notes, every two seconds, sometimes in the midst of global chaos and conflict, someone indicates a decision to receive Christ as personal Savior as a result of seeing the JESUS film. Therefore, many mission experts have acclaimed the “JESUS” film as one of the greatest evangelistic success stories of all time.

LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (1988)

Distributed by Universal Pictures, THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST is the most blasphemous movie ever made. As if that wasn’t bad enough, it is boring.

Judas (Harvey Keitel) is strong, knows exactly who he is and what he 1988 Jesus Christ in the Movies Page 19 wants. Jesus (Willem Dafoe) is weak, confused, fearful, doesn’t know who he is, and from time to time falls on the ground in a faint after hearing voices. Jesus says he wants God to hate him. He makes crosses because he wants God to hate him. He doesn’t know if the voices come from God or the devil. Jesus says: “I’m a liar, a hypocrite, I’m afraid of everything.... Do you want to know who my God is? They’re fear ... Lucifer is inside me. He tells me I am not a man, but the Son of Man, more the Son of God, more than that, God.”

Of course, for Jesus who is very God of very God to say this is blasphemy of the first order, as well as abhorrent for its metaphysical implications.

At the Last Supper, after the apostles partake of the Bread and the Cup, blood and flesh are seen dripping from some of the apostles’ mouths.

When Jesus visits Mary Magdalene’s house, the room is filled with men sitting down, watching Mary have sex with a customer. Jesus sits down and watches, implying that God lusts after human women.

Later, Jesus and Mary Magdalene (Barbara Hershey) fornicate, and Mary breathes, “We can make a baby.”

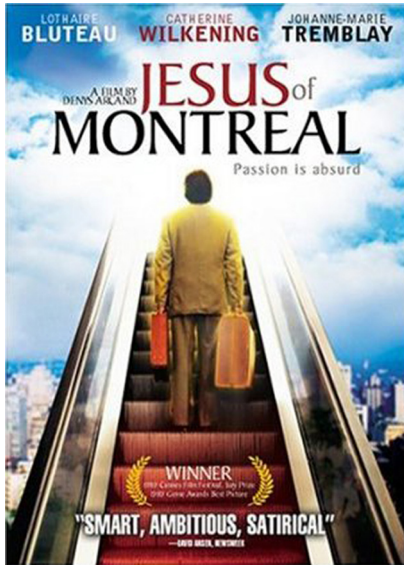
I screened the movie before it opened and had the opportunity to appear on television network news, THE ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER, THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW, THE MORTON DOWNEY JR. PROGRAM, THE SONYA FREIDMAN SHOW on CNN, many radio programs and in many newspapers, where I pointed out that Jesus was fully God and fully man, that He was sinless, and that He redeemed mankind through His death and resurrection.

It is interesting to note that director Martin Scorsese was expelled from a Roman Catholic Seminary and writer Paul Schrader went to Calvin College. Nikos Kazantzakis, who authored the novel upon which the movie is based, journeyed philosophically from Greek Orthodox to Marxism to Hinduism — all of which are represented in this historically and biblically inaccurate and befuddled movie.

There is no doubt that many people were hurt by seeing this evil, pantheistic movie which desecrated the Gospel.



UNIVERSAL PICTURES • COMPLEX COORDINATES • THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST
WILLEM DAFOE • HARVEY KEITEL • BARBARA HERSHEY • HARRY DEAN STANTON • DAVID BOWIE
PAUL SCHRADER • NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS • PETER CARRILLO • GREGORY PIERRE DEUTER • MICHAEL BELLONIS A.S.C. • EDWARD G. RAND
THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE • THEATRALE



JESUS OF MONTREAL (1989)

Filled with profanity, pornography and promiscuity, JESUS OF MONTREAL is another blasphemous attack on Christ and the Church. The movie is set in Montreal, Canada, and revolves around the passion play that has been performed every year for the past 40 years by a Roman Catholic Church.

One summer, Father Leclerc, the worldly Roman Catholic priest in charge of the play, turns to a group of actors and actresses, including Constance, a single mother who has had an ongoing affair with Father Leclerc Martin, whose bread and butter comes from pornographic movies and Daniel, a struggling, young, unemployed actor chosen to play Jesus and direct.

As the story unfolds, Daniel adopts Jesus' identity both off and on the stage. In one scene, the Mary Magdalene-actress washes Daniel's back in the bathtub as the film's way of re-telling the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with precious oil. In another scene, Jesus' descent into hell after his death on the cross is depicted by Daniel wandering around in Montreal's subway, which is haunted by uncaring, oblivious people. Thus, the film dwells on artistic and symbolic portrayals of biblical accounts of Jesus' humanity, but completely omits his divine nature.

The film's intent is to leave the audience pondering if Daniel is an actor who played Jesus, or Jesus returned to Earth as an actor. Perhaps the movie's most offensive scene occurs when doctors transplant various organs from Daniel's body after he dies to other people in a pathetic attempt to use technology for a counterfeit, or substitute resurrection.

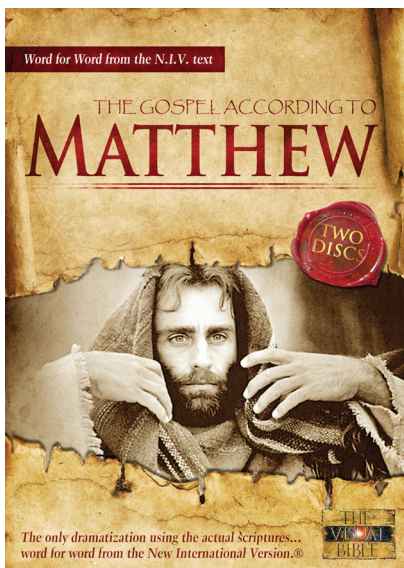
The director, Arcand, says his film has more to do with the plight of struggling young actors than his conception of the Scriptures.

MATTHEW (1996)

While other movies and television programs about Jesus Christ have paraphrased the Bible for dramatic effect, MATTHEW, produced by Visual Entertainment, translates the Bible verbatim. The first in the Visual Bible series, MATTHEW, is one of the best and clearest translations brought to life through the movie medium. Indeed, the very words of Christ and every word by every character is lifted completely from the New International Version.

Since the movie is a verbatim rendition of the Gospel, it doesn't have the emotive dramatic structure of a JESUS OF NAZARETH, which included a large amount of text written by screenwriters. Also, since MATTHEW is visualized, it may not coincide with the way you imagined the scenes or characters in your own mind. (Indeed, every Christian has their own concept of how Jesus looks.) Many movies have Christ straight-faced and somber. Here, He is full of joy and life. Some may argue that this Jesus Christ is too joyous, too earthly, too intimate, but since the text is straight from the Bible, his portrayal is uncompromising and biblical.

The movie starts out with pastoral pictures of the Israeli countryside. Matthew is presenting some background information on himself and why he wrote the book, "to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the long awaited Messiah." He then goes into the genealogy of Jesus, explaining it to scribes and even young children. (As the verses are stated, the chapter and verse are indicated on the lower right hand corner.) As the story progresses into the life of Jesus, the Bible text is read in narration by the Matthew character until the other players are given their lines. Then, dialogue and narration are traded back and forth throughout the rest of the movie.



This Visual Bible is useful for comment, preaching, teaching, and illumination, as well as entertainment for the family. It is literally, a Visual Bible that children and adults can appreciate. It is accessible, clear and entertaining. Furthermore, the Visual Bible is a well-made, worthwhile presentation of the Truth of the Word of God, a tool needed to be seen by all the peoples of the world.

FROM JESUS TO CHRIST: THE EARLY CHRISTIANS (TV) (1998)

FROM JESUS TO CHRIST brings together the skepticism of the Jesus Seminar, some of whose theologians are represented in the program, and the pretentiousness of German higher criticism from the late 19th Century, to form a very confused portrait of Christianity.

In the FRONTLINE program, biblical scholars attempt to offer a thorough cultural analysis of the life and thought of Jesus. The analysis relates his teachings to the political environment, economic and material culture of his time, but the effect of the program is to present Jesus as just a product of his culture, and his thought and works as mere variations on what others were thinking and doing at the time.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS (TV) (1999)

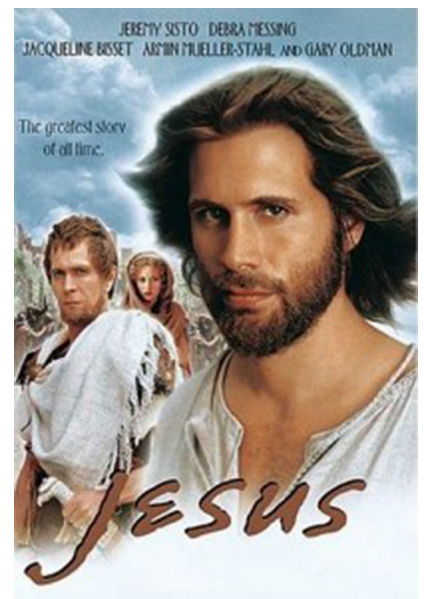
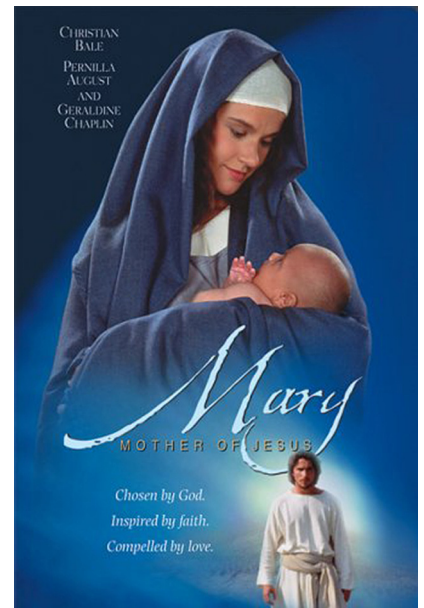
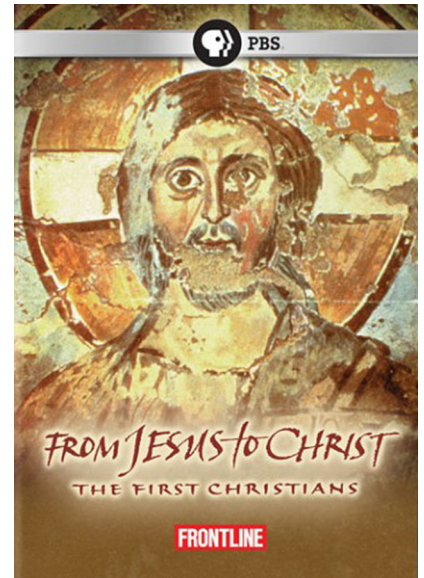
MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS is a spindly green sprout in a wasteland of television. The program tells the gospel from Mary's point of view, from Christ's birth, to his crucifixion, and finally to a very ephemeral resurrection, although it is clear that the tomb is empty.

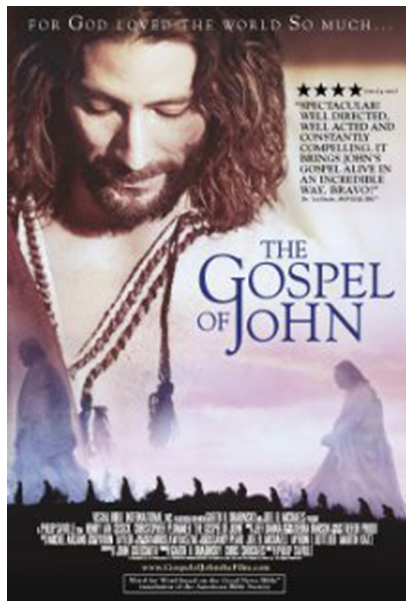
This movie does not deify Mary; rather, it errs in the other direction, making Mary a slightly politically correct woman who, in the end, tells the apostles to go out and do good. This dried message is not at all fruitful, nor does it explain the power of the Christian faith that grew from 12 apostles to billions of people. It is doubtful many people will lose their faith by watching this TV movie. It is improbable that anyone will come away worshipping Mary. However, it is likely that many people will persist in the confusion that Christianity is a religion rather than a personal relationship with a personal savior who is Jesus the Christ. All in all, MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS shows us the need for Jesus Christ and the short sightedness of our age

JESUS (TV) (2000)

When doing a screen adaptation of the story of Jesus, it is best to stick close to the text of the Gospels to avoid sectarian squabbles, but also to give the story its maximum dramatic impact. JESUS, produced by some committed Christians, tries to give a contemporary slant to the story by adding some extra-biblical material. This production makes Jesus more playful, youthful and down to earth, slightly diminishing the tension of Jesus being fully God as well as fully human, but it is clear that the program recognizes: Jesus is the Messiah; His miracles are unique, pronounced and definitive; He is the Son of God; His passion reflects His divinity; and, His death culminates in His Resurrection.

Although this is an orthodox and faithful production, it fails to find a completely clear line through the Gospel story. Various accents also clash, diminishing the story. The story gets to the Truth in the end, but there are bits and pieces which are going to aggravate the more critically inclined in the audience. This is too bad. Clearly, everyone wanted to put forth Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life.





VISUAL BIBLE: THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (2003)

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is the greatest story ever told in the most powerful language of the 21st century. It is an inspired presentation of the Truth that will delight people of all ages.

Although nothing is added to the biblical text, or taken away from it, the scriptwriter, John Goldsmith, a committed Christian, has done a superb job of staging and setting the story in a way that is constantly compelling. The lead is a Shakespearean actor, Henry Ian Cusick, who gives an authoritative, yet warm and endearing portrayal of our Lord Jesus. The casting is much more Middle Eastern than any of the movies that have gone before, although not all the actors are Semitic. The historical details are accurate and faithful. In places where there could be debates, the filmmakers have wisely chosen to go with the authoritative and more literal and orthodox interpretation.

Finally, the intensity and the pacing in THE GOSPEL OF JOHN works extremely well. A movie is the sum of its parts, and all of the parts of THE GOSPEL OF JOHN come together to produce a magnificent whole. There is no doubt that THE GOSPEL OF JOHN will stand the test of time, and all those involved are to be commended.

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST (2004)

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST is not your average Passion Play, although it covers the time period from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Resurrection. Going beyond most passion plays, it highlights in stark, dark, intense terms the spiritual warfare raging around Jesus Christ during His passion in a concrete way.

The first scene has Jesus weeping in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Satan, an androgynous figure accompanied by a snake, tries to tempt Jesus and turn him away from his destiny on the cross. When Jesus arises, he stomps on the head of the serpent. Quickly, Judas leads the temple guards into the garden to arrest Jesus. From that point, the brutal treatment of the Messiah is shown in stark detail, up to the Cross and beyond.

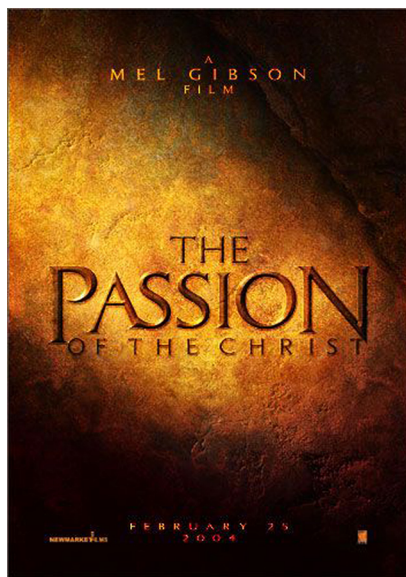
When the screening of this movie at a recent Christian conference ended, people started crying out, "Thank you, Jesus!" "I love the cross!" "I'm sorry Jesus!" Worship continued for about two hours after the movie was over.

Thus, it is more than clear that the movie can transform and convict those within the Body of Christ. In fact, there are signs of revival and a deepening of faith whenever anyone sees THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST.

Deacon Keith A. Fournier, founder of Catholic Way, said in his commentary on the movie:

"I really did not know what to expect. I was thrilled to have been invited to a private viewing of Mel Gibson's film THE PASSION ... This was not simply a movie; it was an encounter, unlike anything I have ever experienced.

"In addition to being a masterpiece of filmmaking and an artistic triumph, THE PASSION evoked more deep reflection, sorrow and emotional reaction within me than anything since my wedding, my ordination or the birth of my children. Frankly, I will never be the same. When the film concluded, this invitation-only gathering of "movers and shakers" in Washington, D.C. was shaking indeed, but this time from sobbing. I am not sure there was a dry eye in the place. The crowd that had been gladhanding before the film was now



eerily silent. No one could speak because words were woefully inadequate. We had experienced a kind of art that is a rarity in life, the kind that makes heaven touch earth.

A law professor whom I admire sat in front of me. He raised his hand and said, "After watching this film, I do not understand how anyone can insinuate that it even remotely presents that the Jews killed Jesus. It doesn't." He continued, "It made me realize that my sins killed Jesus." I agree. There is not a scintilla of anti-Semitism to be found anywhere in this powerful film. If there were, I would be among the first to decry it. It faithfully tells the Gospel story in a dramatically beautiful, sensitive, and profoundly engaging way.

Those who are alleging otherwise have either not seen the film or have another agenda behind their protestations. This is not a "Christian" film, in the sense that it will appeal only to those who identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ. It is a deeply human, beautiful story that will deeply touch all men and women. It is a profound work of art.

Even so, moviegoers will have to bring some knowledge of the Gospel to comprehend the movie. The film was shot in Aramaic and Latin, even though the lingua franca of the day was Greek in spite of the ascent of the Roman Empire, and the Pharisees most likely would have used Hebrew, while the rest of the inhabitants spoke various other languages (including Aramaic). Regardless of the subtitles and the languages, Mel shot the movie almost as a silent movie, using images to relate the greatest story ever told.

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST is an artistic masterpiece. The pacing and style have a foreign feel, and the violence is intense. Those who watch it will understand, perhaps for the first time, the price that Jesus paid to forgive us our sins. This is real grace, not cheap grace. THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST is a must-see movie, beautifully directed and powerfully acted, with terrific sound. It could be argued that some of the violence could have been toned down and that the gleeful torturers are over the top. On the other hand, the violence and the glee of the Romans who were scourging Jesus highlight the demonic quality of the battle Jesus was fighting.

What a joy it is to know that His shed blood has redeemed us!

THE NATIVITY STORY (2006)

THE NATIVITY STORY is one of those very rare movies that brings the Gospel alive in a compelling, interesting, entertaining manner that shatters expectations. The movie references and quotes Scripture throughout. King Herod sends out the troops to kill all the innocents in Bethlehem and stop the prophecy that there will be born a King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The movie then flashes back to a year earlier in the town of Nazareth, introducing the audience to the life of Joseph and Mary. Soon, an angel of God comes to Mary to tell her that she is with God's child, born by the Holy Spirit. Joseph and Mary have to journey to Bethlehem to register for the Roman census. In the fullness of time, the prophecies of God are fulfilled.

THE NATIVITY STORY is a nearly perfect movie. It has one of the best scripts ever for a biblical story. A sense of jeopardy is present throughout. The dialogue, the plot development, the turning points are refreshingly dramatic. Best of all, THE NATIVITY STORY testifies in every way to Jesus the Messiah and is clearly evangelistic without being preachy.





COLOR OF THE CROSS (2009)

COLOR OF THE CROSS opens with the credit blackchristianmovies.com. The movie comes across as exactly that. Being Black comes before being Christian. The purpose of the movie appears to be to explore the idea that Jesus was Black and so to ask whether racism was a factor in his crucifixion. Even so, the movie does focus on the preparation for the Last Supper, the Last Supper itself and Jesus Christ's Passion. It includes, therefore, the things that Jesus says about the bread and the cup, His comment about the importance of being a servant, and His admonition that those who live by the sword will die by the sword.

MOVIEGUIDE® recommends caution for younger children in viewing COLOR OF THE CROSS, not because Jesus is Black, but because the movie adds the issue of racial discrimination in the Gospel. This will confuse those who are not familiar with what the Bible says about Jesus. Thus, it subtracts from the impact of the Good News. The Gospel is good news for people of every color because Jesus paid the price for the sins of all mankind.

THE BIBLE (TV) /SON OF GOD (2013,2014)

In 2013, THE BIBLE came on the History Channel as a series, with the final episodes covering the life of Jesus. This portion was edited into the movie SON OF GOD that came out the following year.

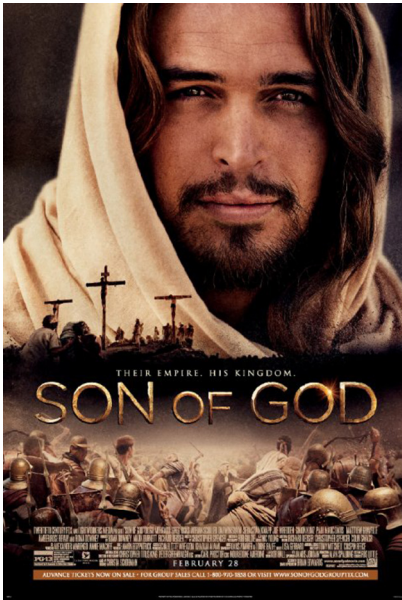
SON OF GOD begins with John narrating God's promise and covenant with His people through Israel's history as the Romans take control of the countryside. After showing the birth of Jesus, 30 years later Jesus approaches Peter to call him to join His mission to change the world. Jesus is confronted by Pharisees regarding his teaching and the miracles. Then, as conflict mounts between the Romans and the Jews during Passover, Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds and tension around Jesus increase as Jesus begins His journey to the Cross.

SON OF GOD is a captivating showcase of God's grace. The acting is excellent, including the powerful ending. The movie is life changing, but the pacing could be tighter. Thus, the movie opens strongly, but the first half is a too episodic. Also, some biblical episodes, including dialogue, seem too truncated. That said, the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish and Roman leadership is strong. Also, the movie has a powerful resurrection sequence. SON OF GOD clearly shows that the death and resurrection of Christ is a glorious reminder of God's love.

A.D. (2015)

A.D.: THE BIBLE CONTINUES shows the power of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus in the lives of the disciples and the Roman world. It starts with the trial of Jesus and features three major characters: the high priest, who believes Jesus is a false messiah whose popularity will cause the Romans to destroy the Jews; Pilate, the Roman governor, who is willing to make peace in Israel at any cost; and Peter, whose courage fails when Jesus is arrested.

The first episode does a great job showing the Crucifixion's impact, the earthquake that hit Jerusalem, the tearing apart of the Temple veil, and the power of the Resurrection. It's more powerful, more cohesive and better filmed than THE BIBLE series. The ending is particularly powerful. That said, since this is history, it takes time to cover some important facts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. This slightly diminishes the story's dramatic arc. Even so, this episode emphasizes who Jesus is and the difference the Resurrection made in the disciples. A.D. is powerful television, powerful art and powerful theology.



RISEN (2016)

RISEN is about a Roman soldier and non-believer, Clavius, who leads the soldiers who crucified Jesus and guarded His tomb. When the soldiers guarding the tomb fall asleep and Christ's body goes missing, Pontius Pilate orders Clavius to investigate. Clavius and his aide try to bribe one man into giving them information about the whereabouts of the disciples, but he refuses. They then interrogate Mary Magdalene, who tells them they can't find the body because Jesus has risen from the dead. After more and more of Christ's followers come to them, Clavius wonders if the Christian message could be true. Will Clavius literally see the truth?

RISEN is a dramatic, epic movie about Jesus Christ rising from the dead. The movie is well done, with excellent suspense, great acting and superb production values. RISEN has a strong Christian, biblical worldview promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ, including the Resurrection. It tells a powerful story with a realistic portrayal of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. RISEN is a really good movie to show non-believers and skeptics who mistakenly don't believe that Christianity is true.

THE YOUNG MESSIAH (2016)

THE YOUNG MESSIAH is a movie about the young Jesus living in Egypt with Mary and Joseph and then returning to Israel. In Egypt, Joseph learns that Herod the Great has died, so he decides to return with Jesus, Mary and their close relatives to Israel. Along the way, Jesus asks his cousin to reveal more about his birth and his parents' perspective toward who he is. These revelations are accompanied by miraculous demonstrations of Jesus' divinity. Meanwhile, Herod's successor has heard rumors the young messiah survived his father's murderous attack in Bethlehem. He orders Severus, a Roman centurion, to hunt the young messiah down and kill him.

THE YOUNG MESSIAH is a very well crafted movie. It brings tears to the eyes of everyone who screens it. It is also theologically sound and avoids theological pitfalls. The movie is like a visual, entertaining sermon that presents the totality of who Jesus is in a wonderful, unique, winsome, dramatic way. THE YOUNG MESSIAH is not only a must see movie; it's also a movie you'll want to see many times.

THE STAR (2017)

THE STAR is a wonderful, hilarious, deeply reverential animated family movie centered on the birth of Jesus, but from the perspective of a lowly donkey named Bo. Bo and his best friend, Dave the dove, have dreams of joining the royal parade. When Bo escapes his owner's clutches, he finds himself accompanying a pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph on their way to Bethlehem. Bo may be a part of a bigger adventure than he expected. However, the evil King Herod has his top soldier looking for the pregnant Mary.

THE STAR is tremendous fun, with wonderful lessons along the way. A touching story from a unique perspective, THE STAR sets itself apart from many of the other nativity movies. Obviously, the movie condenses and shifts a few incidents found in the Bible, but never sacrifices a very strong biblical Christian theology. However, the movie deftly balances the goofy fun of the animals with a deeply redemptive reverence for God and the birth of Jesus Christ. Overall, THE STAR is almost void of objectionable content. It's a must-see Christmas movie for everyone.



Movieguide.org

THE CHRISTIAN FILM & TELEVISION COMMISSION
4073 MISSION OAKS BLVD., CAMARILLO, CA 93012

