

'Risen' Star Joseph Fiennes: This Epic Story Is 'Beyond Me'

Joseph Fiennes, known for starring role in Hollywood blockbusters such as *Shakespeare in Love* and *Enemy at the Gates*, returns to the big screen in *Risen* (Affirm Films), a biblical epic released Feb. 19 placing a spotlight on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As somewhat of a *CSI: Jerusalem*, Fiennes plays Clavius, a Roman soldier tasked with sealing the tomb and subsequently investigating the missing body.

During the film's red carpet premiere, Fiennes spoke with *Charisma News* about what drew him to the role and the epic story.

***Risen* is a movie about Jesus Christ, but it's mostly about your character, Clavius. How did you feel going into it, that this is basically a movie resting on your shoulders?**

It is, but I felt lesser sense of pressure on myself but rather on all of us respecting the narrative we were entering. It's an incredibly precious and wondrous story full of mystery and held dear to millions. So I guess really the big respect for me was handling the narrative than me carrying the movie.

What was it that initially interested you about this story and character?

First thing, it read like a detective noir film. I was page 30, 40, and thought, "This is the story of Christ, but I don't think it is the story of Christ. I'm enjoying it like (the movie) *Chinatown*. It's a man sucked into a murder mystery but a mystery in a theological sense." This was great. The other big takeaway is most films that depict the life of Christ do not depict the life of Christ because the life of Christ went

on from the crucifixion. But so many times, I've been left at the cross in all its pain and agony. But we've never been given the final equation, which is the biggest, the whole point. I've never seen that in film, whether it's (Martin) Scorsese or whether it's (Mel) Gibson. We're always left at the cross, but the whole point is the other equation! We want to search for Christ, for the resurrected Christ. I think it's brilliant that this is happening now, during Lent and Easter. I got re-engaged with a conversation on faith in an uplifting way, not in that very heavy, depressing kind of image of what I'd been left with previously in film.

There's a line where Pilate says, "Without a corpse, we have a potential Messiah." So that focused people on the dilemma he and Clavius were facing.

Clavius is the go-to man for Pilate, and he's going to get it done. The great thing, it's kind of like a Greek tragedy, we all know the ending. But yet we get back at the beginning and we're going to see how this ending is going to affect this guy. Once we observe that journey, we get to quietly have that conversation with ourselves. And that's what I love about this movie. It's not preachy. It's not right up in your face. You're allowed to watch this man deconditioned and have to hit a revelation. We've hit the revelation. We've read it, whether you believe it or not. We know the structure. But then quietly we get to have that conversation with ourselves, and that's what I love, I love that kind of distance.

Was there any trepidation with tackling a story about Christ? Did you anticipate pushback? It's sometimes a tricky thing to portray.

A narrative like this is tough for people to digest. They don't see the importance of it. I truly think if you can be riveted by transformers, you're going to be pretty riveted by this. So there's a part of me that goes, "I can't second guess myself. I have to go with my stomach." I'm aware that this

could be tabbed as a religious movie. I'm aware that the faith-based community is really very supportive. I haven't heard from the center file group so much yet, so we'll see what happens when reviews come out. For me, it's a powerful mystery, and I'm happy to take the bullet for it. If it's something where people don't want to employ me because I only do religious movies, then so be it. I think it's beyond that and beyond me.

Talk about the journey that Clavius takes in this film. It's a big change.

I always felt that if a 20-something actor played this, I don't know if I would believe he's ready for change. (But Clavius) is ready for change. He doesn't know, but he's at the end of his career. He's done with the industry of death and warfare. He wants out. He wants to get to the senate. He's spiritual in that he prays to Mars and he's engaged in a spiritual level. He's quietly prepped, even as a nonbeliever, to be possibly part of God's plan. I love that idea that he ferries these men out through this gulley away from men who want to put them to death. If he didn't do that, the word wouldn't get out. I love that he might have been, even at the cross, he might have been part of the plan. We can all live together, whether you're a believer, an agnostic, a nonbeliever, we're all part of the mystery and I love that component that he is part of it, and he thinks he's investigating, and he doesn't know that he's probably being investigated too.