

Rob Lowe Stars in New End-Time Comedy

Here's your guide to three hot January shows:

You, Me and the Apocalypse

The premise in about 100 words:

The world is coming to an end in 34 days, thanks to an 8-mile comet hurtling toward Earth. Life as we know it is counting down to extinction, save a hodgepodge of unlikely individuals trapped safely in a bunker miles beneath the Earth's surface. That group includes Jamie (Mathew Baynton), a cute but unassuming banker with a twin brother who runs a cyber terrorist organization; Sister Celine (Gaia Scodellaro), a sweet nun who recently took a post under Father Jude Sutton (Rob Lowe) in the Devil's Advocate office; and Rhonda McNeil (Jenna Fisher), a librarian who took the rap for her son's hacking of the National Security Agency. Premieres Jan. 28 on NBC.

Religious themes:

Um ... the apocalypse! And with it, all of the philosophical questions The End forces us to confront: What is the meaning of life? Is there life after death? Is God watching? Beyond that, though, the show's most significant religious explorations come from Sister Celine and Father Jude, who are tasked with investigating the biblical prophecies surrounding the end times, including the identities of false messiahs and perhaps an antichrist. Father Jude is an unlikely priest – he drinks and swears and seems to want to have a lot of sex before the world ends – but he seems to have genuine faith somewhere under all that smarm.

Mercy Street

The premise in about 100 words:

Two nurses care for wounded soldiers in Mansion House, a luxury hotel in Alexandria, Va., that has been turned into a hospital at the start of the Civil War. Mary (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), a New England abolitionist, and Emma (Hannah James), the daughter of the Confederate hotel owner, butt heads as they try to balance their medical duties with their dueling allegiances. Both women are further troubled as they try to make their way through a man's world, headed by Dr. Byron Hale (Broadway's Norbert Leo Butz). A moving subplot features Samuel Diggs (McKinley Belcher), a free black man who knows medicine but needs to keep that secret. Premiered Jan. 17 on PBS.

Religious themes:

The key to the show is found in the title: mercy. As one character explains in the first episode, all who arrive at Mansion House receive treatment. No questions asked. The location of Mansion House, in a Union-occupied Southern town, only highlights, if at times strains, the grace the characters offer and experience. Given that this is a Civil War-period drama, biblical allusions and religious sensibilities are often on display. One of the more interesting characters is Chaplain Hopkins (Luke Macfarlane), who, in spite of the mysteries he hides, reminds workers and patients that God does not see uniforms.

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