

Why 'Risen' Is Changing Faith-Based Movies

The resurrection story isn't new to the big screen.

The King of Kings, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and *The Passion of the Christ* are classic films giving the biblical account of Jesus' life and have all become Easter staples.

Now, *Risen* hopes to join that list—but this time, focusing primarily on the days after Christ was crucified and those who disbelieved.

The movie, which released in theaters Feb. 19, was written with a skeptic's view in mind. After all, the film's main character, Clavius—played by Joseph Fiennes—is a pagan Roman officer.

He and his aide, Lucius—played by *Harry Potter* star Tom Felton—are tasked with disproving claims that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. The path their assignment puts them on, though, is a transformational one that many may be experiencing in real life.

"It was a moving journey to go on," Fiennes said. "What I love is the sense of the crumbling of a man's conditioning and him getting to a place where he can take on another philosophy."

Action with a Message

Risen stays true to the period piece standard. Filmed in Malta and Spain, the movie's setting visually takes a trip back in time, even down to clothing and fighting techniques.

"I've always wanted to tell a story like this where it really feels like a big Hollywood movie," Mickey Liddell, producer of *Risen*, said. "Obviously we want the faith community to feel that they're represented in the right way. But if you're not a

believer, all the action and great dramatic moments offer so many other reasons to be entertained.”

Yet beautiful imagery and tough-guy fight scenes aside, *Risen* has a real message centered on the Bible that may have some moviegoers assessing what they believe and why. The film is filled with moments that signify what it means to know Christ.

“Show me the Messiah,” Clavius says in Risen while questioning Mary Magdalene about Jesus.

She responds, “Open your heart and see.”

“There is no greater narrative than the mystery of Christ and what I love is that we embrace it, we accept it, we don’t try to challenge or reinvent it,” Fiennes said.

He admits his character isn’t the most likable guy. In the movie, Clavius puts Christ to death and helps seal His tomb.

“But the bigger picture is it’s all about second chances,” Fiennes said. “My character is in the business of death. And then he’s released from that through his witnessing of events. And I think audiences can connect deeply with second chances.”

For Felton, who remembers learning about the resurrection in Sunday School, being part of *Risen* also added some historical context to what it may have been like to be alive when Jesus resurrected.

“Getting a chance to learn about Rome and what was happening in the world at that time gave more flesh to the story of Jesus and His crucifixion and resurrection,” he said.

A Movie ‘Done Right’

The commitment of the actors in *Risen* metaphorically speaks to the reverence believers attach to Christ.

“The content we were dealing with, we all knew it was one of the most famous stories of all times,” Felton said.

To capture the right camaraderie, the casted disciples, along with Mary Magdalene (María Botto), spent all the time they could with each other on and off set—even having informal Sunday gatherings.

Fiennes voluntarily went to gladiator school in Rome to make sure fight scenes were as authentic as possible. He and Cliff Curtis, who plays Jesus in *Risen*, avoided interacting with each other up until it was time for them to meet on camera to make the moment more powerful. Curtis also took a vow of silence for months—speaking his first words through his role as Jesus.

Risen is the latest movie from AFFIRM Films, a faith-based division of Sony Pictures Entertainment. Last year, the company took the box office by storm with its release of *War Room*.

AFFIRM’s goal is to help change the landscape of Hollywood by offering quality, faith-based movies that can encourage and inspire people. The journey that films like this can put a person on is something Fiennes hinted to when asked what being in *Risen* has meant to him.

“We’re all born into the mystery,” Fiennes said. “Some of us have clarity on the mystery. I’m always searching to understand what this is and what my part, my role is in this mystery. This movie has bought me closer to that understanding.”