

Why 'The Young Messiah' Will Raise Questions

What would life have been like for a preteen Son of God traveling back from Egypt to Nazareth? Would the young boy show signs of divinity before His first recorded miracle at the wedding? Those are a few of the questions explored in *The Young Messiah*, releasing in theaters Friday from Focus Features.

Anne Rice, one of the most popular horror novelists in modern history, famously returned to her Christian faith in 1998. Leaving behind her vampire stories, she instead focused her writing skills on Jesus Christ, releasing *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, which imagined Him as a young boy, incorporating "legends" that have been attributed to His adolescent years. *The Young Messiah* is the film version of that novel.

The film, directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh and starring Adam Greaves-Neal as the young Jesus and Sean Bean (*The Lord of the Rings*, *The Martian*) as a soldier tracking His family, chronicles Joseph's clan making the journey back to Nazareth. Along the way, the group is targeted by Herod's soldiers while some family members struggle to tell Jesus His origin. "How do we explain God to His own Son?" Joseph asks.

Unlike the recent resurrection-themed drama *Risen*, which wove a fictional story happening to characters outside of the biblical canon, *The Young Messiah* fully engages its main characters in fictional drama. Throughout the film, the devil, a blonde-haired antagonist seen only to Jesus, torments Jesus Bar Joseph, similarly to how the devil mocked that character in *The Passion of the Christ*. In an opening sequence, he orchestrates the death of a boy who had bullied Jesus and then whispers to the crowd that Jesus had done it (Jesus later raises the boy from the dead). In another moment, the devil

plagues Christ with fever and offers Him a vision of Jerusalem burning.

Because the film tells a new, unfamiliar story, it will produce many questions for everyone from the most theologically qualified to the casual viewer. In that sense, it could be a conversation starter among friends, leading them to the true, Gospel canon. The filmmakers were careful to treat Christ and His family with care and respect and, even though the tale is hypothetical and viewers should take caution in drawing conclusions from it, the story could hopefully lead some to consider the true holy character of the boy who was called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

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