

Joel Osteen to Produce Movie About Mary

Megachurch pastor and best-selling author Joel Osteen will produce his first movie, considered the biblical prequel to the story of *The Passion of The Christ*.

Israeli actress Odeya Rush will play the role of Mary in *Mary, Mother of Christ*, which Lionsgate will distribute in North America next year, *Variety* reported.

"Mary is portrayed as a brave, faithful young woman who readily embraces her divine destiny regardless of the sacrifices and hardships she must endure," said Osteen, whose best-selling books include *Your Best Life Now* and *Every Day a Friday*.

Rush joins actors Julia Ormond and Peter O'Toole in the movie, to be directed by Alister Grierson. The original screenplay for *Mary, Mother of Christ* was written by Benedict Fitzgerald (*The Passion of The Christ*) and Barbara Nicolosi, *Variety* said. *Mary, Mother of Christ* is produced by Mary Aloe of Aloe Entertainment and Shawn Williamson of Bright Light Pictures.

Besides Osteen, Mike Dolan and Ben Barton of Smithfield Street Productions, Alan Weinberger of the ASCII Group, the Samaritan Group and philanthropists Frank Carlucci (former U.S. Secretary of Defense), Mike Connell, Robert Gottlieb, Mike Nead and Herb Lande will also serve as executive producers, *Variety* reported.

Filming is scheduled to begin this summer in the Middle East.