

Finished With Easter Movies For Another Year

by C.W. Heiser

Well, the Easter holiday is behind us, although it's kind of hard to tell. What did we do? After the ham, and cleaning up the PAAS, what exactly was there to do?

It's not like Memorial day where we get to play highway lottery. Or Christmas, with eggnog and family fights. It'll never be the 4th of July. (The 4th of July is my particular favorite. No presents to remember, and the folks don't expect a call. Just drink and play with fire.)

I don't know about you, but I always end up in front of the T.V., dazed from the endless stream of movies of religious motif. You know the ones I mean. These are the gems where the Roman soldiers always speak with a Brit accent, usually filmed in pana-vista-epic-vision.

But do we watch these films with the right attitude? I think not. So that next year we may have a right heart and right mind, I'd like to offer these brief reviews of some of the standards that are always shown.

The Greatest Story Ever Told:

This one has Max Von Sydow playing Christ with the same characterization he developed for the figure of death in Bergman's The Seventh Seal. I think this guy put Lazarus in the tomb. Interesting interpretation: The sermon on the

mount and the parables are all done together in downtown Jerusalem late at night, with the twenty-third psalm thrown in for good measure. The Roman pigs then come in as a riot squad and break up the crowd. This isn't in the gospels. It may be based on the 1848 clearing of the Paris commune. It's hard to tell, though, as the scene is filmed entirely in the dark. Nice torches.

King of Kings:

The epitome of Jesus as blue-eyed Aryan - Jeff Hunter is a doll. (Why can't these people get it right? Mary probably looked like Barbara Streisand, and Jesus should be played by Jamie

Farr.) Robert Ryan is John the Baptist, which has to be a stroke of casting genius. You'll hum the theme music for weeks.

The Day Christ Died:

Here Pilate and the Priests are establishment buddies, and the disciples might best be described as primitive Wobblies. Filmed as a pseudo-documentary, a la Dragnet, in the end I half expected Barabbas to be picked up again and sentenced in the Superior Court of Los Angeles County.

Jesus of Nazareth:

It takes four days to watch this mini-series, which is a full day longer than Christ spent in hell. Probably the best of the lot: while in most of the movies where Jesus forgives his executioners he looks like maybe he was jostled on an elevator, this crucifixion

looks like it hurts. It is a little hard to follow as all the apostles look like James

Farentino, except for James Farentino who looks like Tony Franciosa.

The Robe:

This is the most insane bunch of Romans ever brought to the screen. How these people ruled the civilized world for five hundred years is beyond comprehension. Apoplexical rage isn't a reaction, it's a religion. The proletariat must have been extremely lumpen then. Victor Mature jumps around a lot.

Demitrius And The Gladiators:

The sequel to The Robe. Victor Mature fights lions and looks older.

The Ten Commandments:

Cecil B. DeMille said that in fifty years this movie would still be in the theatres. He was wrong. Charlton Heston's acting has all the nuances of a stick. I rooted for the Egyptians.

Samson And Delilah:

Victor Mature gets hit on by both Angela Lansbury and Hedy Lamarr, then he pulls down the temple. He's better off with the lions.

Jesus Christ Superstar:

The Romans don't talk like Brits, but they do carry submachine guns, which was done a lot more effectively in an episode of Star Trek.

This Rock Opera was filmed entirely on location in Israel, which explains where the money went. (The Israeli desert looks remarkably like the Mojave. So much for expensive authenticity.) Ted Neely portrays Christ as being short, Mary Magdalene is Chinese, and Judas is Black. You figure it out.

Godspell:

None of the unknown actors in this movie went on to stardom. This could be because of fine ensemble acting, but it isn't. My favorite scene is where a garbage can comes to life to represent the Council of High Priests. I don't know how I missed that in Sunday School.

St. Francis Of Assisi:

Frank is played by Bradford Dillman, who went on to make a career out of playing psychopathic killers. He doesn't hurt the animals, but he wants to.

Our Lady Of Fatima:

A kind of spiritual episode of Father Knows Best. All of the kids look alike and should be named Kitten.

This list could go on, and on, but it would take a saint to continue. If your faith has been shaken, take heart, there's always Christmas when we can watch It's A Wonderful Life on every channel, every night, for weeks.

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