

MARY ON SCREEN

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Miracle Maker: SAF and Christmas Films p.16
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Mary, Mother of Jesus: Metropolitan Productions, Inc. p. 31

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Author: Malone msc, Peter, 1939–
Title: Mary on Screen
ISBN: 978-0-9804390-4-5
Notes: DVD references to films referred.
Subjects: Place of Mary, Mother of Christ, in 7 recent movies.
Series: Nelen Yubu Productions, No.19
Dewey Number:

Formatting for printing has been performed by the Nelen Yubu Productions editor, Martin Wilson msc.
Text set in Garamond 12 pt in Serif PagePlus X5

Printing by Finline Print and Copy Service:
Finline Print & Copy Service
Unit 2, 2A Burrows Road
ST PETERS NSW 2044
Tel. (02) 9519 0552

MARY ON SCREEN

*To celebrate 150 years of the title,
“Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,”
given to Mary by Jules Chevalier.*

PETER MALONE

MSC

NELEN YUBU PRODUCTIONS

CRC, KENSINGTON NSW

2011

Other Publications by Peter Malone in Nelen Yubu Productions:

—Peter Malone msc (1987), *In Black and White and Colour: Aborigines in Australian feature films*. 156 pp.

—Peter Malone msc (2000), *My Names: sketches and glimpses in hindsight*. 179 pp., soft cover.
(ISBN 0 9587869 1 7).

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Mary, the image of her son: Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

WHEN Jules Chevalier offered the title, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, to his congregation and then to the Church, he said that he had spent a long time pondering whether it was a suitable theological title. He wrote a great deal about Mary as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart as have many of his religious daughters and sons since.

One of the aspects of the devotion that earlier commentators highlighted was the relationship between Jesus and his mother. It drew attention to Mary's motherhood (as did the original statue of Mary with the 12 year old Jesus in Issoudun). It drew attention to Mary's power of intercession with Jesus, noting her action at the wedding feast of Cana.

Since then, as we can see in so many prayers and hymns, these themes have been honoured.

However, there are many ways of enriching our appreciation of Mary as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Sister Merle Salazar FDNCS from the Philippines, for instance, has emphasised the Gospel understanding of Mary in her Jewish context, Mary the Jewish girl who conceived and gave birth to Jesus and reared him in Nazareth.

Another way of developing an understanding of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is to learn from the proclamation by Paul VI during Vatican II of Mary as the Mother of the Church. It means that we, the Church, who are graced and redeemed,

see in her the fulness of grace and redemption. We mirror her in the living out of our spirituality. But, the point is that she first mirrored Jesus so that we see the best of ourselves in her and we know that this is the pattern of spirituality of Jesus himself, the patterns and ways of his heart.

We can see this in the tradition of the Immaculate Conception and The Assumption of Mary. Jesus is full of grace and Mary his mother was gifted in this way. And, since Jesus rose from death to new life, so Mary is gifted after her death with this new life as well. In both these mysteries, she is our pattern for being graced in our baptism and in new life in Jesus after our death.

As St Paul said to the Philippians, 'In your minds (and hearts), you must be the same as Christ Jesus...' (2:5).

Therefore, in appreciating the title, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, we look first to Jesus and the qualities of his heart in order to see those same qualities in Mary, the image of her son. The daily prayers in several of the Chevalier Family prayer books give an example of this. First is the prayer to Jesus with a particular emphasis on his heart (Worship, Sharing his Sorrow, Love...). It is followed by the shorter prayer to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, repeating those emphases for Mary's role.

Perhaps it is a little stretch but, if we were to name these qualities of the Heart of Jesus, we might see them as expressed by Jesus himself in the Beatitudes.

Jesus is the most authentic person to have walked the earth, truly pure of heart and sincere.

Jesus' authenticity means that in no way can he lord it over others, he is one of the lowly, the poor in spirit.

Jesus, in his dealing with others, reveals that God is not an angry God, but, as Jesus himself is, meek and gentle of heart.

Jesus' gentleness of heart means that he is compassionate towards everyone, that he is merciful.

Jesus' gentleness and compassion mean that he was continually reconciling people to God and to one another, a peacemaker.

Jesus' love for the truth, however, brought him into conflict with authorities. He loved seeking after truth and justice, but was persecuted for this, even to death.

Jesus' grieved for those who suffer, sharing the fullness of their physical and mental anguish with them. He mourned, but his comfort was the hope of new and risen life.

The Beatitudes remind us who Jesus was as he walked the earth. They also indicate the qualities and grace for our lives. They reveal to us how Mary is Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

While Jesus offered what we might call doctrinal teaching in his sermons and sayings, he knew that most people learn through experience and the gathering of that experience in images and stories.

In the 21st century, we are people of the moving image. This booklet celebrates the 150 years of the title and the deepening understanding of the title and its role in the Chevalier Family's Heart Spirituality. So, suggestions are offered for looking at screen images, familiar from the Gospel stories, as a way of contemplating Mary in the light of her Son's life, as a way of praying with the film, as a stimulus for discussion and sharing our faith.

Seven films have been chosen. There will be a focus on one scene from each film to illustrate the Beatitude quality in Mary. But, first, a reminder of how Mary has appeared on our screens since the early 20th century.

THE MARY FILMS

MARY appears in a number of the early silent films which dramatised the life of Jesus. They are now lost, although stills are often reproduced. Mary and the infancy stories were very popular as was her role at Cana and her being at the foot of the cross.

D.W. Griffith includes the sequence of the miracle of Cana in his 1916 biblical and historical epic, *Intolerance*. He also used a Mary image of the eternal mother rocking the cradle of children. Mary is also featured with reverence in the nativity scenes in the 1926 *Ben Hur* and in many episodes of Cecil B. De Mille's 1927 story of Jesus, *The King of Kings*.

From 1927 to 1961 when *King of Kings* was released – the first mainstream Gospel film in which Jesus spoke – there was an absence of Jesus films. This seems a strange phenomenon for such a long period which included the Depression, World War II and the early decade of the Cold War. By the early 1950s, with *The Robe*, Jesus was glimpsed or part of him was seen, like his lower legs and feet in the Crucifixion scene in *The Robe* or seen from the back in *Ben Hur*. Mary is seen as a crib like figure in the Bethlehem tableau.

It can be noted that independent Protestant film-makers, especially in the 1940s and 1950s had no hesitation in presenting Jesus as a fully seen and speaking character.

Four films from the period 1961-1971 really introduced the character of Mary to cinema. Irish actress, Siobhan McKenna played her in *King of Kings* and Dorothy McGuire

in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965). While they were full characterisations of Mary, the treatment tended to be of the very reverent and restrained kind. The danger with this kind of representation is that Mary seems to be something of a statue or painting come to life, but still the equivalent of a painting.

It was Italian directors who had most success in making Mary more of a flesh and blood character. As early as 1964, in Pasolini's *Gospel According to Matthew*, the director cast a young girl for the nativity scenes and the flight into Egypt. She was not a professional actress and Pasolini wanted audiences to appreciate her youth and innocence and her response to what God was asking of her. When it came to the Passion sequences, he cast his mother. The weeping and wailing Mary at Calvary, rather Italian histrionic in style, was an older woman who had experienced life and suffered with her son. Roberto Rossellini also brought this Italian style to his 1975 *The Messiah*.

One of the most popular screen portraits of Mary is found in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977). With its large scope and eight hour running time for television, the director had plenty of time to show Gospel scenes at length. Olivia Hussey was Mary, both as a young girl and as a mature woman. Zeffirelli and his writer, novelist Anthony Burgess, spent a great deal of time on the infancy narratives, including an Annunciation where the presence of the angel Gabriel is suggested rather than seen as well as the grief of the Crucifixion.

Audiences on either side of the Atlantic had different reactions to the *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, North Americans tending to find it too irreverent, even blasphemous, while the British enjoyed the style of its satire. Whatever the reaction, it was another perspective, not so much on the Gospel stories as on the way they were solemnly treated in

biblical epics. Brian's mother was a screeching harridan, upbraiding the Magi on their visit (where they hurried away to the real birth of the Messiah up the street) and urging the gullible crowds away from the grown-up Brian with the now famous words, 'He's not the Messiah, he's just a naughty boy'.

Post-Python, it meant that the Gospel stories would have to be made differently and not leave themselves open to satire.

The late 70s and early 80s saw the popularity of the telemovie and the mini-series. Two Mary films came out of Hollywood. The first dealt with the same period that *The Nativity Story* covers, *Mary and Joseph* (1979). Reviewed poorly, it nevertheless had quite some appeal for younger audiences who were able to imagine what her experiences must have been like for Mary (even though the protagonists were particularly American in look and sound). There was also *The Nativity*, focusing on this same period and the birth of Jesus (1984).

The only appearance of Mary on the cinema screen during the 1980s was in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). All the characters here are shown as down to earth and earthy, in keeping with the origin of the film as a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis rather than a Gospel. One interesting appearance in this film is Mary, along with other guests, men and women, at the Last Supper.

Again, the 1990s did not have so many Gospel films (except for local religious groups in different countries making their own films for localised audiences). The Italian, *Mary, Daughter of her Son*, dramatised the life of Mary as did the French *Mary of Nazareth*, by French director, Jean Delannoy (1995) which was a rather literal rendition of the Gospels with many sequences hurried because of the small budget. But, from 1999 there have been quite a number.

These include a film explicitly named *Mary, Mother of Jesus*, made for CBS television in anticipation of the Millennium. Mary is portrayed with great reverence by Pernille August. At the same time, there was a Jesus for the Millennium with Jeremy Sisto giving an attractive performance as a very human Jesus yet one who conveyed his sense of divinity. Mary appears quite extensively in this film, very much present during the public life and ministry of Jesus. She was played by Jacqueline Bissett.

Mary appears in the animated *The Miracle Maker*, in the television film, *Judas*, where the Annunciation is explained verbally as Mary talks to Judas in her kitchen. The Canadian-made *The Gospel of John* includes the complete text of the Gospel with Mary appearing at Cana and at Calvary. The appearance is confined by the use of the actual text.

Which leads to Mary in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Mel Gibson's take on Mary shows her as older, with an inner serenity that manifests itself in profound, emotional but restrained grief. There are brief flashbacks to the very human Mary, anxious as the child Jesus trips and falls, a playful scene at Nazareth as Jesus makes a table and he splashes her as she urges him to his meal. She is shown in the company of Mary Magdalene, especially at the scourging after which they attempt to mop up Jesus' blood and at the foot of the cross. Not only are there echoes of the Pieta, but Gibson has a prolonged take of the silent, sorrowing Mary staring straight to camera.

After the success of *The Passion of the Christ*, Hollywood made *The Nativity Story*, which combined a reverent approach to the scriptures with a desire to present a Mary who was real, not a Madonna. The film's narrative took place over the year before the birth of Jesus. This meant a young, vigorous Mary.

A different Mary is the large as life, operatic mother in the South African *Son of Man*, an example of inculturation of the images of Jesus and Mary. This is also the point of the American *Color of the Cross* I and II where Mary and Jesus are black.

In forty five years, Mary has moved from devout and reverent Gospel figure to a flesh and blood character.

Seven Mary films

THROUGH the seven film clips, we retrace the Gospel accounts which include Mary:

The annunciation in *Son of Man*, the visitation in *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, the journey to Bethlehem in *The Nativity Story*, the finding in the Temple and Mary's letting Jesus go in *The Miracle Maker*, Cana in *The Gospel of John* and two versions of the passion, death and burial of Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ* and *Jesus*.

There are other striking Mary sequences in films that could have been used here which would serve as inspiration for prayer and reflection on Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. There are the more traditional and familiar images of *King of Kings* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. However, the stark black and white simplicity of Pasolini's *Gospel according to Matthew* can be a welcome contrast: the young Mary and her betrothal, pregnancy, the birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt; the older more mature (and highly emotional) Mary on Calvary, portrayed by Pasolini's mother. For many, the favourite Jesus film is Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* with Olivia Hussey bringing the young Mary to life as well as the older Mary at the crucifixion. There are also the brief flashbacks to Nazareth, even playful moments, in *The Passion of the Christ*.

1. THE MIRACLE MAKER (2000)

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
you adore the Father in Spirit and truth.
Form us on the pattern of your living -
the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Sunday)*

The film

The Miracle Maker is a different kind of development for the Gospel film. It is a puppet film with animated flashbacks, a more simple presentation of the Gospel stories but with visual flair.



The two dimensional animation via the flashbacks (the Nativity, Finding in The Temple) as well as the use of some symbols (the temptations in the desert, the raising of Lazarus, the agony in the garden and the Emmaus journey) and stylised parables (especially the houses built on sand and rock and the Good Samaritan) make a significant contrast to the three

dimensional puppetry. Jesus' words are spoken by Ralph Fiennes who presents him as a strong-minded, genial young man with more than a touch of humour. He speaks the parables and teachings beautifully and clearly and brings powerfully anguished emotion to such scenes as the Agony in the Garden.

The film's particular appeal is to children but most adults would appreciate and enjoy this telling of the story. Tamar, the daughter of Jairus and Rachael, is ill and cannot be cured. The decision to put Tamar and her parents to the fore as disciples and recipients of the miracle where she is raised to life means that this is a child's view of Jesus and his message. The audience sees Jesus through Tamar's eyes throughout the whole film.

Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the gentle image of the Father and of Jesus

Since *The Miracle Maker* is the story of Jesus' public ministry and his passion, death and resurrection, Mary appears here in a brief flashback which, despite its brevity, reminds us of Mary's mother love for Jesus. Despite her worries about finding a place for his birth and her upset when she and Joseph lose Jesus in Jerusalem, she was able to learn that Jesus' first commitment was to his Father and his mission.

In the film, the flashbacks are in two dimensional drawings, while the main action of the film has three dimensional puppetry. Before Jesus sets out on his mission, he speaks with his mother and she remembers, first his loss in the Temple and her search and, secondly, Bethlehem, his birth and the gifts of the Magi.

But the fresh look at Mary in this scene is how she talks about his mission with Jesus, knows that he must leave home. As he sleeps, she gently smooths his hair. She lets go and sees him on his way. This is the gentle mother of a

gentle son who reveals, not the anger of the Father, but his gentleness and compassion.

Blessed are the gentle, they shall have the earth for their heritage.

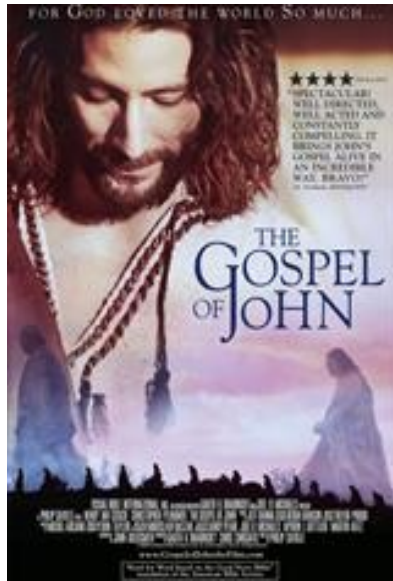
2. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (2003)

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
water became wine at your prayer;
help us by your motherly powerfully
when we appeal to the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Monday)*

The film

A traditional version of the Jesus' story, *The Gospel of John*, the film follows the text itself, 'every single word is there'.

The Gospel of John offers a visualisation of the complete text of the Gospel. It is a contemporary translation, *The Good News Bible* and avoids exclusivist masculine language. It is also careful to give the historical context of the



clash between Judaism and Christianity in the 1st century. It is also careful to offer nuances with its translation of 'The Jews'. When Jesus challenges the religious leaders, the translation used is 'the Jewish authorities'.

The narrative is spoken, to great effect, by Christopher Plummer. Since there is a great deal of dialogue in the

Gospel, many characters like John the Baptist, Mary at Cana, Peter or Philip have speaking parts. This is the case for the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, Martha and Mary. And, since so much of the Gospel is monologue by Jesus himself, much of the meaning has to be communicated by actor Henry Ian Cusick as Jesus.

Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and compassion

Mary appears twice in John's Gospel, at Cana and at the foot of the cross. At Cana Mary is seen as a dignified, very matronly figure.

In looking at the sequence in the film, we are back at Cana, a place that many of us have visited in our imaginations as we have listened to John's account. In *The Gospel of John* we have the familiar text word for word and it is visualised before our eyes. Mary is older. She is, at least, in her forties, an experienced mother. She notices the embarrassment for the wedding party with the wine running out. She knows and shares Jesus' compassion and concern and wants him to share her concerns for the bride, groom and guests.

Jesus' response is not one of lack of care or refusal. In fact, he wants to link this event with its symbols of water, wine, feast and celebration with his self-giving in Eucharist and on Calvary. He makes his kindly gift of wine a sign of the fullness of his gift of himself. Mary compassionately intercedes and is made a sharer in her son's gift – which he does in the fullness of time when she stands at the foot of the cross.

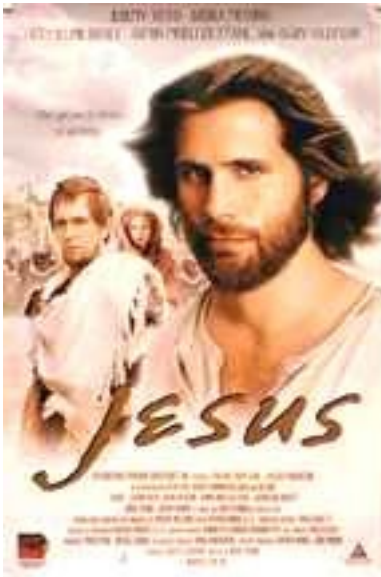
Blessed are the merciful. They shall have mercy shown them.

3. JESUS (1999)

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
you suffered in spirit with Christ on the cross;
stand by and strengthen us when we are called to share
the sorrows of the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Tuesday)*

The film

This made-for-television film is an attempt to make the Jesus' story contemporary and relevant. It was made for the 2000 millennium.



The striking feature of this Jesus is his humanity. Jeremy Sisto (only twenty four during filming) plays Jesus as a genial, very charmingly genial, man, prone to emotions including anger, but someone who is able to joke, to laugh heartily (and splash his companions at the fountain), to dance at the wedding feast of Cana and to be good company as well as a charismatic leader.

This Jesus is able to gauge people's reactions very well and can move seamlessly from humour to serious instruction or exhortation.

This is a breakthrough from presentations of Jesus which seem afraid to let him be seen smiling, let alone laughing. This film also works on the premise that Jesus is consciously aware of his divinity. Jesus is seen to pray, to refer matters to his father. The screenplay's overall ability to combine humanity with divinity should please theologians.

The film gives a great deal of attention to Mary, the mother of Jesus, played with dignity and calm by Jacqueline Bisset, a beautiful and mature woman. We see her at Nazareth with Joseph, who is kind with a touch of the crusty, when he wonders why of all women Mary was chosen, and keeps muttering 'angel?' We see her waking Jesus up and then giving him the gifts of the Magi. She goes on him in his mission, reassuring him when he has moments of anxiety or doubt. She also befriends Mary Magdalene (whose conversion experience and discipleship are accurately but unobtrusively developed). Mary accompanies Jesus in his passion and we see her in Pieta tableau.

Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, suffering in spirit with Jesus

Because this film is long, those who watch it have had a great deal of time to get to know Jesus and the qualities of his heart. The film is wide-ranging over human history to show how Jesus shares his sufferings with people of all ages and in all kinds of sadness, suffering and desperation. Satan shows him the future in the temptations in the desert and, at even greater length, in the agony in the garden. But Jesus offers to accept what the Father asks of him, to share his sufferings with and for others.

The film's length also gives us the time to get to know Mary and how much she resembles her son – and how much, in human terms, he learned from her. This can be seen in Jesus' call of Mary Magdalene, his forgiveness and

love for her. Mary brings home her son's love by sharing and discussing with Mary Magdalene so that they will find themselves at the foot of Jesus' cross. Why *Jesus* is such an emotional way of sharing Mary's sorrow as she shares the sufferings of Jesus at the foot of the cross and in the pieta image and the burial of Jesus is that the background music is that of Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Requiem*, the beauty and pathos of the instruments and voices drawing us into Mary's experience.

[Sister Gerardine FDN, when writing of a new perspective of reparation, highlights how true reparation is not simply a dwelling on making up to Jesus in our prayer and mortification but participating in repairing and restoring our world. In this film, Mary's following Jesus' example in befriending and restoring Mary Magdalene's dignity is true reparation.]

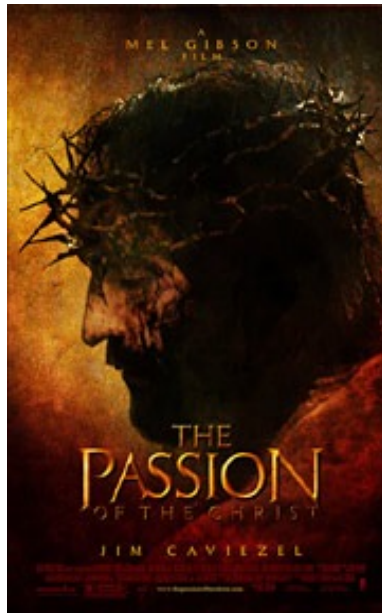
*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4. THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST (2004)

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
you suffered in spirit with Christ on the cross;
stand by and strengthen us when we are called to share
the sorrows of the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Wednesday)*

The film

The world and the film industry were surprised by the worldwide popularity of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* with Jim Caviezel as Jesus. It focused on the last twelve hours of Jesus' life and drew both on the Gospel texts as well as the writings of a German mystic favoured by Gibson, Anne Catherine Emmerich, who, from her prayer (her 'visions') gave detailed descriptions of what she saw of the passion. Gibson opted for Latin and Aramaic dialogue, wanting



the audience to focus on the visuals of Jesus' suffering.

The humanity of Jesus is often presented in a striking manner: Jesus working in Nazareth, the experience of deep

human pain in his agony, scourging, falling on the way to Calvary, the nailing and his experience on the cross. It is there in his dignity at his trial, his composure with Pilate and Herod. The film also highlights Jesus' human anguish of soul and sense of abandonment in his agony and on the cross, along with his profound surrender to the Father.

Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Reconciler and Peacemaker

Mary has a strong presence in *The Passion*. She appears as a woman in her 40s, striking rather than beautiful. She appears in two flashbacks. Her demeanour is serious. She says very little. With Mary Magdalene and John, she follows the passion and the way of the Cross without any of the histrionics that characterise a number of portraits of Mary, especially Pasolini's mother in *The Gospel According to Matthew*. At one stage, she wipes the blood of Jesus on the praetorium floor after his scourging. She kisses his bloody nailed feet. The bond between mother and son is suggested several times by significant eye contact rather than words. The request for John to take care of Mary is included. After Jesus is taken down from the cross, she holds him in a *Pieta* tableau.

The Mary who suffered with Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ* is one of the most empathetic Marys we can see on screen. She is fully present. She is attentive as she grieves. She has shared fully, seen symbolically in the *Pieta* presentation of Mary and the dead Jesus. St Paul says that Jesus reconciled all people through his blood and the cross. Mary has shared this reconciling experience and she will receive the title of Queen of Peace.

Most audiences should be satisfied with the portrayal of Mary. Those who find some of the cinema representations of the past too much like holy cards or plaster statues will appreciate this more biblically-grounded

Mary. Blessed are the Peacemakers, they shall be called God's children

5. THE NATIVITY STORY (2006)

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
you are bound forever in a mother's love for your Son;
bind us all who call you mother
in life and death to the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Thursday)*

The film

Spirituality is the foundation of piety and devotion. Spirituality is a way of life in prayer and action. The Nativity



Story was not intended as a spiritual cinema work. But much of it will work this way. Some devotions separate out particular aspects of Mary's life. By telling a story of Mary in the year before Jesus' birth, a credible story imagining what that year might have been like, the film gives us Mary as a person. Mary is presented in real situations, difficult situations of poverty, hardship and taxation. She is presented in an almost impossible

situation, her pregnancy outside marriage and the consequences for her and Joseph amidst her own people.

We see her developing as a girl, a young woman of surrender and faith – which culminates in joy in the birth of Jesus. The film ends with her Magnificat prayer but not the promise of an easy happy ending as she escapes with Joseph into Egypt.

The screenplay is well-grounded in the biblical texts, both the heritage of the Old Testament as well as the text and spirit of the Gospel infancy narratives. This gives the film an advantage over narratives which limit the perspective to a literal reading of texts and rely on piety traditions for visual presentation.

[STUDY GUIDE: in conjunction with the release of the film, a study guide, written by Sr Rose Pacatte FSP, has been published by Pauline Media, Boston.]

*Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, true to God's call
us join in your thanks and praise
for the riches made known in the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Friday)*

6. Son of Man

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
you offer your hymn of thanksgiving to the Father;
let us join in your thanks and praise
for the riches made known in the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Friday)*

The film

From South Africa, *Son of Man*, 2006, is a contemporary rendering of the Gospel story, spoken and sung in Xhosa and English. It opens the way to what many small groups were doing in the 1990s with their video cameras, making the Jesus story relevant to their own cultures.



There are many angels in *Son of Man*, most of them adolescents or young boys – with suggestions of feathers on their backs. It is interesting to see how easily angels can appear in this kind of African context, a context of myth, lore and song, a far cry from Western logic and reason for everything. The angel speaks the text of the annunciation in some detail.

There are close-ups of Mary (this happens frequently throughout). She is puzzled. However, at the end of the angel's speech, she breaks out into a beautiful aria of The Magnificat (sounds of shooting in the background) which continues into the transition of seeing her pregnant, with Joseph, walking along the beach and arriving in a village where men with megaphones are summoning the population to register. The scene is still chaotic with military chasing citizens. Mary and Joseph are offered a stable-room.

The re-imagining of the nativity is delightfully local. Young children wander about, goats and goatherds, music and whistling and a chorus of angels chanting about the sun rising from the mountains – 'today we are united, one people'. Then the baby appears. Mary hums. Joseph looks on. A Gloria breaks out with angels sitting on the rafters. A child brings the gift of a young goat. Mary cuddles and plays with her son.

Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, lowly listener to God's word

There have been many visualisations of the Annunciation to Mary on screen. Looking at the interpretation in *Son of Man*, we have an opportunity to reflect on Mary as perceived by a different culture. Mary here is imagined as South African, as a large tribal woman, a lowly woman, poor in spirit. As Mary was in her own time, dominated by the Roman presence, so this Mary is fearful of the foreign authorities. Luke sees the Annunciation to Mary as a sign of hope that a saviour will come and free the people. This is clearly the case in *Son of Man's* Annunciation scene.

Mary takes refuge in a school. In the classroom are those little South African bewinged angels, a symbol of God's loving presence. Mary listens to the word of God. She is the handmaid of the Lord, lowly as Jesus will be as the Servant who does not lord it over anyone but lives in

solidarity with his suffering people. This will be a later keynote of this film.

What distinguishes this Annunciation from others is Mary's response. As one of the poor in spirit, she breaks into song (as Jesus would do later in glorifying his Father). She sings the hymn Luke puts into Mary's mouth, the hymn of the lowly and listeners to God's word, The Magnificat.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

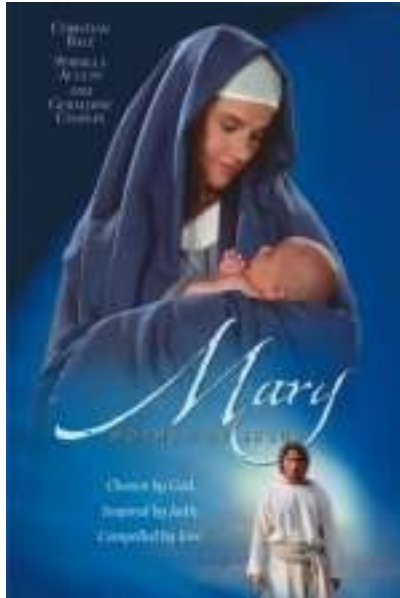
7. MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS (1999)

*Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
your love is stronger than death;
make ours strong by leading us
to the heart of your Son.
Amen. (Saturday)*

The film

Mary, Mother of Jesus is a Mary film made with the millennium in mind. It was screened on American television in 1999.

The initial focus is on Mary in Nazareth, the annunciation, the visitation, Joseph's acceptance of her pregnancy, the census in Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus (with both shepherds and the Magi who have met Herod and then avoid him), the massacre of the innocents and the flight into Egypt. Mary, it should be said, is what they call 'feisty', a strong-



mindful girl who defies the Romans, witnesses the death by stoning of a woman caught in adultery, speaks her mind to Joseph, a strong role model for her son.

In Nazareth, there is some inventive storytelling. Mary tells her son the story of the Good Samaritan and, later, he will tell her that he knows how to teach with the stories she told him. As Joseph dies, he tells Mary, 'Everything he is - you made him what he is'.

The Passion is presented briefly and rather quickly. Jesus speaks to his mother, after riding the donkey into Jerusalem, about the journey that both he and she have been travelling. After the nailing, there is the brief word from John 19 entrusting Mary to John's care. When he is taken down from the cross, his mother cradles him. After the resurrection, he appears to his mother, distant and on a roof where he appears glorified.

Mary, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, grieving yet comforted

With *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, a film fully about Mary, there is much more scope to look at Mary, her life according to the Gospels and her life as creatively interpreted by the screenwriters.

Jesus was a man of sorrows. He experienced criticism and rejection, as well as betrayal by friends. He was saddened at the fate of Jerusalem but he also experienced support and comfort, especially from his mother. Mary was like her son in her experience of sadness and grief. There was the consequence of her conceiving Jesus (something for which, as several of the films highlight, she could have been stoned) and having to tell Joseph and experience his first reaction of shame and rejection. The journey to Bethlehem was hard, being in the stable and then having to escape to Egypt. Her letting Jesus go on his mission and then sharing

his pain and suffering mean that Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is a woman of sorrows.

The visitation story combines both grief and comfort. Mary is bewildered by her pregnancy and leaves to spend some time with Elizabeth. Elizabeth's faith and her joy in her own pregnancy provide Mary with support and energy to return to Nazareth, speak to Joseph and fulfil her call to be the mother of the Saviour.

Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

DVD references:

All these films are available on video, perhaps not in all shops, but, at least, via Amazon.

The Miracle Maker. Chapter 3 (after 1 minute, 25 secs.)

The Gospel of John. Chapter 3

Jesus Part 2, Chapter 7 (after about 9 minutes is the crucifixion);
Chapter 8, the first two minutes have the Pieta and Mary at the burial

The Passion of the Christ. Chapter 8, the Marys at the scourging;
Chapters 10 and 11, the way of the cross;
Chapter 13, the Marys arrive at Calvary;
Chapter 14, Calvary;
Chapter 15, the taking down from the cross

The Nativity Story. Chapters 14, 15

Son of Man Chapter 1 (after 3 minutes, 30 secs)

Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Chapter 4: Nazareth and preparations for her visit to Elizabeth; Chapter 5: The Visitation

Note: it is always possible that a DVD from a different region may have different chapter numbers.

