

## Film for thought –Son of Man.

In John 12:32 Jesus said: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

The Jesus film genre is plentiful: Barrabbas, Behold the man, Golgotha, The crown of thorns, King of Kings, Jesus Christ Superstar (twice), Jesus of Nazareth, The miracle-maker, The gospel according to Matthew, Jesus of Montreal, Godspell, The gospel of John, The Bible, The greatest story ever told, Ben Hur (twice), He who must die, Jesus (twice), Life of Brian, The master and Margareth, The Messiah, The Milky way, The Nativity story, The nativity, Pale rider, Quo Vadis, The robe, Salome, The last temptation of Christ and The passion of the Christ, to name just a few!

And there is “Son of Man” in which the State of Judea is transported to modern day South Africa by English film and theatre director Mark Dornford-May who also directed “U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha”.

The Hebrew expression "son of man" appears 107 times in the Hebrew Bible, the majority (94 times) in the Book of Ezekiel. It is used in three main ways: as a form of address (Ezekiel); to contrast the lowly status of humanity against the permanence and exalted dignity of God and the angels; and as a future eschatological figure whose coming will signal the end of history and the time of God's judgement. In the book of Daniel, chapter 7 tells of a vision given to the prophet Daniel in which four "beasts," representing pagan nations, oppress the people of Israel until judged by God. It describes how the "Ancient of Days" (God) gives dominion over the earth to "one like a son of man," who is later explained as standing for the people of Israel.

In the New Testament Jesus chose this title for himself. He was coming to judge the corrupt nations. But how would he do that? Not in the way people thought or hoped...

In this film we see a faithful re-telling of the Jesus story. But, for me, what shocks, is the contemporary spin. I ended up thinking: “Would it really end like this for Jesus today?”

Whilst many of the cast of hundreds were taken from the local townships, Dornford-May works in this film with his South-African-based Dimpho Di Kopanec performance troupe. In the book “Cinema Now” we read: “Son of Man was a group effort unlike anything in the film world today. It was formed several years ago, after Dornford-May and his musical director, Charles Hazelwood, mounted successful theatre productions at the Queen’s Theatre in London, starring South African performers reinterpreting classic European stories through regional dance and song.”

Upon seeing this film people often say: “But Jesus wasn’t black” and this is true. However, the film does well to remind us that he wasn’t a blond haired, blue-eyed Swede suitable for shampoo and conditioner commercials either.

Roger Ebert says of the film: “It doesn’t strain to draw parallels with world events because it doesn’t have to.”

The Telegraph said it was “vivid, thrilling, awe-inspiring”.

Time Out magazine said: “Combining the stark and the lyrical – a riveting, moving experience.”

Dornford-May, the director, said: “Filmmaking is like playmaking only you get more fresh air.”

I think this film is a breath of fresh air in the Jesus genre and the angels are adorable!

Neil Durling.