

## FEATURE

## Animation brings Jesus' times to life on TV

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The story of Jesus as seen through a child's eyes makes for fine Easter-evening viewing in "The Miracle Maker," airing Sunday, April 23, from 7-9 p.m. on ABC.

For the most part, this quality production uses exceptional three-dimensional clay animation, switching to traditional cell animation when, for example, Mary recalls in flashbacks Jesus' birth and his teaching in the temple at age 12.

Framing the story of Jesus' life from age 30 on is the character of a sickly young girl named Tamar (voice of Rebecca Callard) who observes Jesus (voice of Ralph Fiennes) preaching in her village. Her parents (voices of Julie Christie and William Hurt), meanwhile, become desperate as her condition worsens.

A compassionate Jesus prevents Mary Magdalene (voice of Miranda Richardson) from being attacked and draws followers not only for the miracles he performs but also by his use of such parables as the Good Samaritan to illustrate how we should love one another as God loves each of us.

Particularly well done is the scene in which Jesus joyfully accepts baptism by John the Baptist (voice of Richard E. Grant). Although his detractors claim Jesus' power comes from the devil, Tamar's father comes to believe the opposite and leads him to her deathbed, where Jesus restores her life to the awe of the villagers.

Upon hearing Herod has beheaded John the Baptist, Jesus weeps and heads with his apostles to Jerusalem. After raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, Jesus faces his own imminent agony and death, sadly telling Peter and Judas at the Last Supper that he is aware they will be-



ABC/CNS

A full-length film using the latest in 3-D clay animation tells the story of the life of Jesus Christ. "The Miracle Maker" is set to air on ABC Easter Sunday, April 23.

tray him that very night.

The highly dramatic crucifixion scene is followed by Mary Magdalene's discovery of the empty tomb, after which the risen Jesus appears to her and others. As the people rejoice in salvation, little Tamar proclaims, "He is with us forever!" Directed by Stanislav Sokolov and Derek Hayes, the film embodies simplicity, drama — and joy in the Good News.

Unlike some films in which Christ is depicted as solemn to the point of being unapproachable, here Jesus radiates warmth, and adults and children alike are drawn to him. The childlike perspective

of Tamar should appeal to youngsters in the viewing audience and lends a freshness to the story's familiar trajectory.

Another plus is the film's success in conveying both the human and the divine in Jesus without sounding preachy. A fluid pace alternates Christ's preaching and parables with events in the Savior's life.

Sudden switches from clay to cell animation are distracting and, while the clay facial expressions are remarkable, body movements seem a bit jerky in spots.

Two years in the making in Russia and Wales using top-grade vocal talent, "The Miracle Maker" is recommended viewing

on the church's most important feast day, the Resurrection.

Also scheduled for network television broadcast during the week of April 23:

"Ben-Hur" (1959) — Sunday, April 23, 4-8 p.m., TCM. Director William Wyler's classic Hollywood epic follows the Jewish prince of the title (Charlton Heston) after he's betrayed by his boyhood Roman friend (Stephen Boyd) and subjected to much misery until finally achieving retribution for all his suffering. The narrative's conventional melodrama is transformed by the grand scale of its spectacle, especially the chariot race, and by the stirring performances of its principals, who manage to overcome the story's clichés and stereotypes. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification of the theatrical version was A-1 — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating was G — general audiences.

"The Song of Bernadette" (1943) — Saturday, April 29, 8-11 p.m., TCM. Durable adaptation of the Franz Werfel novel about Bernadette Soubirous (Jennifer Jones), the French schoolgirl who in 1858 saw apparitions of the Virgin Mary at a grotto near Lourdes. News of the vision is initially discredited by Bernadette's stern pastor (Charles Bickford), the town prosecutor (Vincent Price) and an envious teacher (Gladys Cooper). The story of a young girl's faith withstanding the disbelief of her elders is made dramatically convincing by a fine cast, evocative photography and largely unsentimental treatment. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification of the theatrical version was A-1 — general patronage. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America.

Pare is director of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

## Boxing, wrestling in film fare

NEW YORK (CNS) — Following are recent capsule reviews issued by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

## 'Price of Glory'

Hackneyed drama about a has-been Mexican-American boxer (Jimmy Smits) who pushes his three gifted sons — with dire results — to achieve the championship-boxing status he could not. As directed by Carlos Avila, the film's performances are weak and the clichéd plot offers no new insights into the wearied story of a bitter father living vicariously through his sons. Some violence, brief drug use and fleeting rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## 'Ready to Rumble'

Mindless comedy in which a dissolute ex-wrestling champ (Oliver Platt) is persuaded by two adoring, brainless fans (David Arquette and Scott Caan) to try to recapture the title. Director Brian Robbins simply magnifies the body-thrashing sound effects, piles on putrid toilet humor and unleashes a slew of loud, lowlife characters in a vulgar, dumber-than-dumb comedy. Exaggerated wrestling violence, implied sexual encounters, brief nudity, gross toilet humor, occasional profanity and an instance of rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly

cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## 'Rules of Engagement'

After a Marine rescue mission at a foreign embassy leaves civilians dead, the decorated colonel-in-charge (Samuel L. Jackson) faces a court-martial for murder and persuades his retired Marine buddy (Tommy Lee Jones) to defend him. Director William Friedkin's feel-good film blends action with fiery courtroom exchanges in superficially exploring the harsh reality of life-and-death decision-making under fire. Some gory military violence, intermittent profanity and frequent rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

## '28 Days'

Pedestrian seriocomic in which a successful writer and notorious party girl (Sandra Bullock) is sentenced to rehab for driving under the influence and must come to terms with her addiction to alcohol and her cynical outlook on life. As directed by Betty Thomas, the cinematography is creative, but the shallow film fails to capture both the real pain and humor of recovery, while the few honest moments are lost in melodramatics. Substance abuse theme, implied sexual encounters, some crass language and an instance of rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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