



DISCERNING THE KING, LONG BEFORE HIS COMING

MESSIAH, A NEW EIGHT-PART DOCUMENTARY FILM SERIES, EXPLORES HOW THE PROPHECIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ARE FULFILLED IN CHRIST – AND HIS CHURCH

BY GERALD KORSON

AFTER MILLENNIA OF PREPARING HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE PATRIARCHS, PROPHETS, THE LAW AND HIS COVENANT, GOD SENT HIS ONLY SON, JESUS CHRIST, TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION AND TO REDEEM US THROUGH HIS CROSS AND RESURRECTION.

THE STORY OF JESUS HAS BEEN TOLD IN FILM NUMEROUS TIMES, FROM MOTION PICTURE EPICS THAT KEEP CLOSE TO THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES TO MODERN REINTERPRETATIONS THAT STRIVE TO MAKE JESUS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO CONTEMPORARY BELIEVERS.

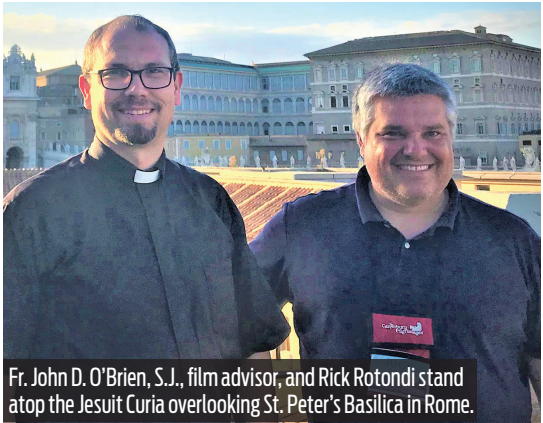
NOW COMES *MESSIAH*, A NEW EIGHT-PART DOCUMENTARY SERIES DUE FOR RELEASE THIS FALL. FILMED ON LOCATION IN THE HOLY LAND, IN ROME, AND IN THE UNITED STATES, IT IS PRODUCED AND MARKETING FOR USE IN CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, AND PRIVATE HOMES.

"He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole ... yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:3-7). Photo credit: Ecce Homo by Anthony Ciseri, with enhancements by Chris Pelicano. Image courtesy Cenacle LLC.

SO WHY MAKE ANOTHER JESUS FILM?

WHAT MORE IS THERE TO SAY ABOUT CHRIST?

“In one sense *Messiah* doesn’t say anything new. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” said Rick Rotondi, creator and executive producer of the series, referencing the Letter to the Hebrews. “Two thousand years ago, Jesus revealed Himself fully to His apostles. In a project like *Messiah*, all any artist or filmmaker can hope to accomplish is to mine the riches of this revelation once given to the saints.”



Fr. John D. O'Brien, S.J., film advisor, and Rick Rotondi stand atop the Jesuit Curia overlooking St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Although Christ remains the same, Rotondi added, “Every generation must discover Christ afresh. There are truths about Christ we tend to forget. We’ve forgotten the astounding ways in which Christ fulfills the Old Testament.

“I hope *Messiah* changes that,” he added.

WHAT MESSIAH BRINGS TO THE FOREFRONT

Due for release in the fall, *Messiah* guides viewers through the Old Testament covenants and prophecies beginning with the Exodus event and reveals how these prophecies are fulfilled in the person of Christ — and the Church he established.

Filmed on locations in the United States, the Holy Land, and Rome, *Messiah* uses beautiful images and music, narration, voice actors, and expert interviews to convey how the Church fulfills the messianic prophecy as a “light to the nations.” Designed for presentation in churches,

schools, and private homes, the new series is a catalyst for catechesis and discussion.

Leonardo Defilippis, who serves as the series’ host, has evangelized through stage and film presentations on the Gospels and the lives of the saints for nearly four decades. He calls *Messiah* “a very profound work.”

All Christians are taught that Jesus is the Christ, the “anointed one” of God, Defilippis said, but *Messiah* shows how He is the priest who builds God’s true Temple, which is the Church.

Unfortunately, “so many Christians do not recognize Him and slip away due to their lack of faith and lukewarm spirit,” he explained. “This is the state of the world and of our very beings most of the time.”

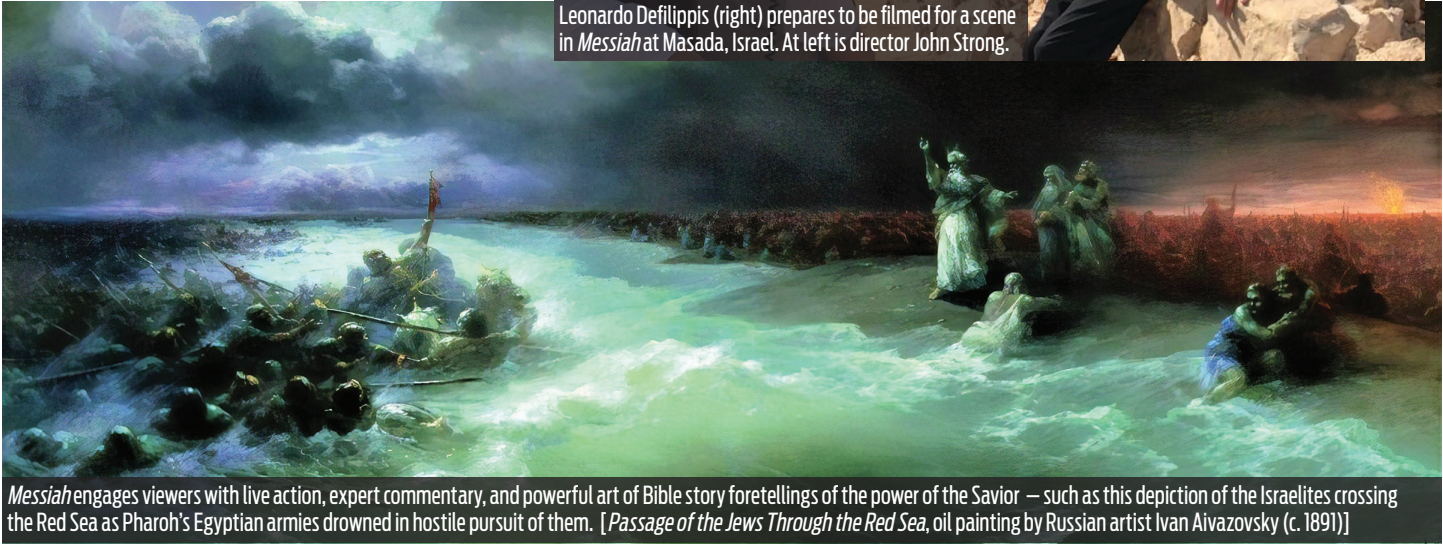
Defilippis said it’s easy to see why people stray from the Church, and it can be summarized in one word: sin. “We leave Jesus because we constantly reject His very person and follow the way of the world,” he said.

But *Messiah* “reminds us that He is the true liberator, and it is all clearly proclaimed through the history of salvation,” he added. The film thus points viewers toward “the reality of the kingdom of God, heaven itself.”

Catholic novelist and co-producer Bud Macfarlane agreed with the evangelizing potential of *Messiah*. “No viewer will ever experience Mass the same way again,



Leonardo Defilippis (right) prepares to be filmed for a scene in *Messiah* at Masada, Israel. At left is director John Strong.



Messiah engages viewers with live action, expert commentary, and powerful art of Bible story foretellings of the power of the Savior — such as this depiction of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea as Pharaoh's Egyptian armies drowned in hostile pursuit of them. [*Passage of the Jews Through the Red Sea*, oil painting by Russian artist Ivan Aivazovsky (c. 1891)]

because the series places Old and New Testament readings into a world-historical and supernatural perspective,” he said.

CHALLENGES AND BLESSINGS

Filming in Rome and the Holy Land often came with tight restrictions that presented special challenges. Sometimes authorities allowed the crew just an hour to stage and film a scene; other times guards were unexpectedly tolerant of their presence at particular locations. The project, however, seemed to be blessed at every turn.

“We saw one mini-miracle after another while on this set,” said director John Strong. “We went to impossible lengths and got the footage we desired.”

Defilippis found himself deeply inspired while filming in the Holy Land. “I had the privilege to see a window into heaven many times,” he said. At the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, he was moved to drop to his knees in silent prayer. “At that moment it hit me that this is one of the most significant places in all of creation,” he explained.

ANTICIPATING PROFOUND IMPACT

Rotondi said he hopes viewers will be affected profoundly by *Messiah*.

“One of the takeaways I hope people obtain from *Messiah* is that God is faithful to His promises,” he said. “To see how God’s promises to Abraham and Moses and David come to fruition in Christ fills us with awe and should give us confidence that God will fulfill His promises to us.”

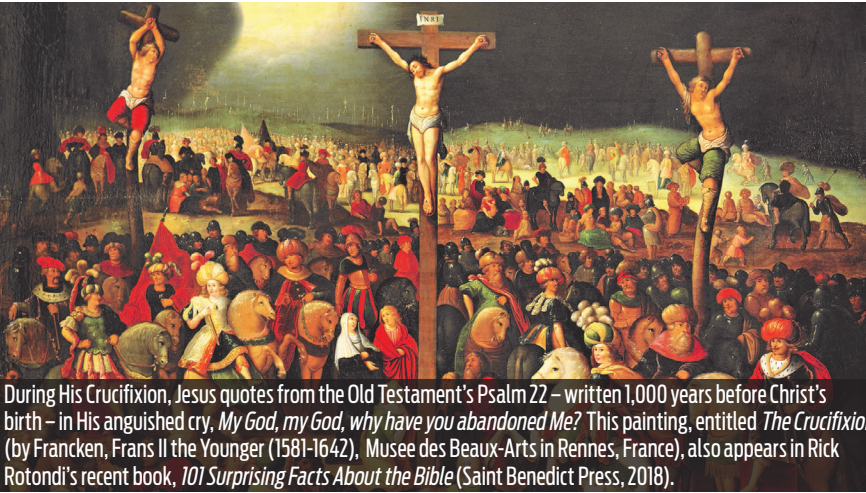
Another hoped-for takeaway is that the Church on earth is the Kingdom of God and the Lord’s Temple, tasked with carrying out Christ’s work of salvation.

“We don’t often get to enjoy this glorious image of the Church today, but it’s a true one,” Rotondi said. “Despite the Church’s sins and wounds, despite corruption, sin, and timidity in her human members, the Church is the living and active presence of Christ in the world. The Church is the Mystical Body of the Messiah, extending His dominion through time and space, putting all things under His feet.”

For more information about the film’s September 2019 release, visit SeeMessiah.com.

GERALD KORSON

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During His Crucifixion, Jesus quotes from the Old Testament’s Psalm 22 – written 1,000 years before Christ’s birth – in His anguished cry, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned Me?* This painting, entitled *The Crucifixion* (by Francken, Frans II the Younger (1581-1642), Musee des Beaux-Arts in Rennes, France), also appears in Rick Rotondi’s recent book, *101 Surprising Facts About the Bible* (Saint Benedict Press, 2018).

NOT OF THIS WORLD

Rick Rotondi on his inspiration for *Messiah*:

On March 16, 2016, I attended a General Audience in St. Peter’s Square. I was seated close to the papal dais, so after the address I could present Pope Francis with a video series, *Doors of Mercy*, I’d helped develop for the Jubilee Year.

As I enjoyed my “pope’s-eye view” of the pilgrims and heard them addressed in close to a dozen languages, I was moved by the reality of Christ risen and present with all of us gathered in His name. Before our eyes, Christ was assembling His people. He was enlightening the nations. Rome, the empire which had put Him to death and persecuted His Church, was in a very real sense under His feet.

I began to understand Christ’s kingship in a new way. I wanted to share that understanding with others and express it artistically.

In proclaiming Jesus as Messiah, the apostles and first evangelists had to overcome the scandal of the Cross. How is the apparent failure of the crucifixion compatible with a Messiah who will establish a kingdom and conquer His enemies? Two thousand years later, we can respond to this challenge in ways the apostles and evangelists could not. Jesus does not rule an earthly kingdom. But Jesus does rule a kingdom that spans the globe, that has gathered its people and overcome its enemies — including persecution, corruption, and laxity — again and again.

We can see it before our very eyes. That Kingdom is the Church.

