

# ***THE NATIVITY***

**A major new drama series for Christmas from BBC1**

## **Briefing from the Church and Media Network**

***In the week before Christmas 2010 BBC1 will broadcast The Nativity, a dramatic re-telling of the Biblical stories of the birth of Jesus. The series will be shown in peak time and will be seen by many millions of people.***

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **When will the programmes be broadcast?**

As is normal in television the dates and times of the broadcasts will not be confirmed until ten days before the transmission. However, we know that the series will air in four episodes of 30 minutes each. They will be shown before 9pm in the days before Christmas. All the broadcasts will be on BBC1.

#### **How does the series treat the gospel stories?**

This series is a serious attempt to understand and retell the events and relationships of the Nativity as they are recorded in the gospels. The story focuses on the relationship between Mary and Joseph, and the way they deal with the news of the birth of Jesus. The gospel accounts have been “fleshed-out” in a moving and thoroughly credible way. Church leaders from a range of denominations have been given a preview showing of the series, and were universally enthusiastic about it. Like the characters involved, viewers will be left trying to understand what has happened, and what it might mean.

## **Who is behind the series?**

The series was commissioned by BBC Drama Wales, and has been made by Red Planet Productions in conjunction with Kudos. The production team consulted with Christian theologians and advisers at the pre-production stage. The writer was Tony Jordan, who is one of the leading figures in popular TV drama. To hear Tony Jordan speak in detail about the series visit the audio section at [www.churchandmedia.net](http://www.churchandmedia.net).

## **Who is in the cast?**

Andrew Buchan plays Joseph; Tatiana Maslany plays Mary and Peter Capaldi plays Balthasar. Jack Shepherd (Wycliffe) is Melchior; Obi Abili (The Take) is Gaspar and Art Malik (Agatha Christie: Poirot, Holby City) is Nicolaus; Vincent Regan (Clash Of The Titans) plays Herod; John Lynch (Mo, Bleak House) plays Gabriel; Claudie Blakely (Lark Rise To Candleford) is Anna; Frances Barbour (Agatha Christie: Poirot, The Street) is Elizabeth; Neil Dudgeon (Life Of Riley) plays Joachim; Al Weaver (Five Daughters) is Thomas the Shepherd.

## **Why is the BBC making this series?**

There was no “religious” motive in producing this series. Quite simply they were looking for a great story to tell in episodic drama. The story of The Nativity is an iconic story that bears retelling in every generation.

## **What if people want to know more about Jesus?**

The Christian Enquiry Agency is ready to provide encouragement and information for anyone who wants to know more about Jesus, or to take a step of faith. The website [www.christianity.org.uk](http://www.christianity.org.uk) will have a special section dedicated to enquiries following the broadcasts, featuring pictures from the series. We recommend that churches advertise this site, and general enquiries from members of the public are directed to this site.

## **Can I get a copy of the series?**

The series will be available on DVD at a later date. It is of course legal to record the broadcast for your personal use, but it is illegal to use that copy for any kind of public display.

## **Where can I get more information?**

**Media enquires** about the series can be made to Ruth Neugebauer at the BBC Press Office on 0208 576 7118 or via [ruth.neugebauer@bbc.co.uk](mailto:ruth.neugebauer@bbc.co.uk).

To obtain **pictures** for press or publicity purposes contact Melanie Stungo via [melanie.stungo@bbc.co.uk](mailto:melanie.stungo@bbc.co.uk).

If you would like to speak to a **representative of the Christian community** about the series please call Andrew Graystone of the Church and Media Network on 07772 710090 or [andrew@churchandmedia.net](mailto:andrew@churchandmedia.net). Andrew is acting as a contact-point for the wider Christian community.

## What could a local church do?

### **Encourage people to watch it!**

We suggest that local churches *don't* hold screenings of *The Nativity* in churches and public buildings. They may be illegal. In any case the series is already being broadcast into almost every home in the country! It might be more useful to *cancel* existing events to allow people to watch the series.

### **Feature the series in a Christmas leaflet distribution**

Many churches deliver leaflets inviting people to their Christmas events and services. Why not make the connection with the BBC series?

### **Host a debate or discussion**

Churches may want to hold debates, discussion groups or talks after the broadcasts in homes, pubs or coffee bars. For some it may be appropriate to discuss the evidence for the events, or the historical reliability of the gospel texts. For others the question will be “what does Jesus mean to me?” or “what difference can his birth make in my life?”

### **Refer to the series in Christmas sermons**

The chances are that many people who come to church around Christmas will also have seen some or all of the series. You may want to use the series as a springboard for Christian teaching and preaching.

### **Advertise a guest event**

Many people are open to coming to a church service at Christmas. You may want to advertise a guest event as part of your Christmas programme – and make sure that anyone who brings their questions to church finds an appropriate welcome!

### **Contact your local media**

You could notify your local radio station about the broadcasts, and offer spokespeople to take part in any discussion about the series. Most BBC Local Radio stations are already planning to feature the series in their programmes for Christmas.

If you are going to hold an event, the local press may be interesting in covering the story. Make sure you give them at least a fortnight's notice. Most local papers will also sell advertising space. You could offer to write a column for the local paper for Christmas, or offer an article in which prominent local figures say what Jesus means to them. The BBC will provide pictures to illustrate newspaper and magazine articles.

### **Encourage feedback to the BBC**

The BBC is always glad to receive comments from viewers – both negative and especially positive. We hope that many people will want to offer feedback on this production. The address to write to is : BBC Television Centre, Wood Lane, London W12 7RJ.

## How to approach the series

These are the principles we would like to commend to the Christian community in approaching the series.

**We welcome this production**

There's no need to debate whether or not the Christian community should welcome this production or not. We celebrate the fact that the story of Jesus is being retold for an audience of millions. We should resist the temptation to focus on details. Instead we welcome this production.

**This is a BBC series**

We don't wish to "claim" *The Nativity* in any way as "our" series. We have not had any editorial input into the series, nor would we wish to. The story of Jesus is central to the Christian community – but it belongs to the world.

**This is a work of drama**

That may seem obvious – but it's important. This series wasn't conceived as an exercise in evangelism. It springs from the story of the gospels, and the producers have used the gospels as their source. But this is a work of drama. So we need to judge it as a work of drama and not as a piece of theology.

**Let's talk about Jesus**

This is the story of the birth of Jesus. It will prompt believers and unbelievers alike to think about Jesus. This is probably not the moment to discuss the state of the church or the finer points of theology. Instead we should aim to keep the focus of our discussions on the person of Jesus.

## The Church and Media Network

*The Church and Media Network is made up of representatives of all the major Christian churches in the UK, together with some of the larger Christian organisations. The task of the Church and Media Network is to build bridges of understanding between the Christian community and the media. The Church and Media Network also runs theMediaNet, a network for Christians and others who work in media. For more details visit [www.themedianet.org](http://www.themedianet.org).*