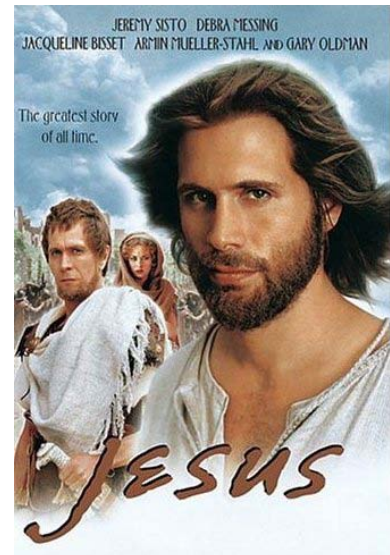


JESUS

US, 1999, Roger Young



At first, *Jesus* (directed for American television by Roger Young) might seem like a throwback to the 1960s, another attempt at 'realism'. However, it benefits from the influence of the stylised images of Jesus during the 1970s. This is immediately evident as the film opens with contemporary battle scenes which startle the viewer. In fact, it is a dream (or vision) that Jesus has, a kind of recurring dream that takes him into the future, showing the sin and evil of the centuries for which he must sacrifice his life. The most striking use of this stylisation is in the sequence of the temptations in the desert. Jeroen Krabbe plays Satan dressed in a suit and, again, offering Jesus tempting modern visions of power that resonate with a contemporary audience. This is repeated in greater detail during the agony in the garden sequence. It is an attempt to make the Jesus' story relevant. This is the final message of the film as Jesus emerges from the upper room into the 21st century, dressed in ordinary casual clothes, greeting children.

The other feature of *Jesus* is his humanity. Jeremy Sisto plays Jesus as a 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 is a breakthrough from presentations of Jesus which seem afraid to let him be seen smiling, let alone laughing. This film works on the premise that Jesus is consciously aware of his divinity, so the screenplay's ability to combine humanity with divinity should please theologians.

The television style, with plenty of close-ups of Jesus. Sisto adopts a quiet tone, almost underplayed at times, as in the scene where he is left alone with the woman taken in adultery. While the passion narratives are dealt with in a familiar way, the end of the film with the risen Jesus going out to our world makes quite an impact.

The screenplay also gives a great deal of time to the Roman background of the times with Pontius Pilate (Gary Oldman) centre screen along with G.W. Bailey as a smiling but sinister courtier and adviser. He provides a great deal of background information.