SON OF GOD
PG-13
138 Minutes
Rating: ★★★★ out of ★★★★★

Adapted from last year’s popular miniseries, THE BIBLE, SON OF GOD is the life story of Jesus of Nazareth, the greatest man to ever walk the earth. The film’s title accurately describes the film’s narrative arc: it is an attempt to encapsulate the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ life, nothing more and nothing less. For this, the film never apologizes. Those reluctant to trust Hollywood when it comes to dealing with matters of faith can, at least in this particular instance, allay their fears. Though it is not without its flaws, SON OF GOD is an earnest, generally reliable and often powerful adaptation of the Gospels from which it is derived.

SON OF GOD opens with a brief voiceover from the Apostle John which sets the stage—ancient Israel, suffering under the oppression of Roman rule, sprinkled with a few flashbacks to other famous Bible stories—and we are then introduced to Jesus of Nazareth as he introduces himself to Simon Peter, a simple fisherman toiling away on the Sea of Galilee. Stunned by Jesus’ miraculous power over nature, Peter asks his new master what they are going to do next. “Change the world,” Jesus says. And he does.

Jesus is played by Diogo Morgado, a relatively unknown actor who infuses his interpretation of Jesus with charisma and a sense of love for all of God’s people—which is to say, everyone. Morgado’s version of Jesus clearly wants everyone to be saved—even as the script suggests that many will not be (in and of itself a risky move for a mainstream film in our day). Morgado plays the role with ardor and gives it his all, but all the same his performance lacks a certain gravity and falls short of that delivered by Robert Powell in JESUS OF NAZARETH or James Caviezel in THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST. Even so, it is a respectful, empathetic portrayal that no actor could take on with complete success.

The film has a few other weaknesses, though none of them cause the film to fail. For instance, the movie is perhaps guilty of pandering to the politically correct crowd in giving Mary Magdalene a more prominent place in the screenplay than she has in the Scriptures. Moreover, the script and direction plough through the Gospels with such speed that there is no time to adequately construct certain scenes that should be savored rather than merely highlighted. Production values aren’t the best, and sometimes the scenery and exteriors are totally unconvincing (as with the Temple in Jerusalem, which is rendered very poorly and looks altogether fake).

But no movie about the life or Jesus or other events from the Bible is ever beyond criticism, and SON OF GOD gets more right than wrong by a long shot. Highlights include the iconic dialog between Jesus and the priest Nicodemus (in which Jesus says, “You must be born again.”), an intensely moving re-enactment of the Last Supper and the crucifixion, and a stirring adaptation of the Ascension.

It goes without saying that SON OF GOD doesn’t measure up to the Bible; no movie will ever do that. But as a supplement to the Scriptures, and possibly a vehicle by which believers may introduce nonbelievers to the Christian faith, the movie works wonderfully well. SON OF GOD isn’t the best overall movie about Jesus available, but it is a good one, and a film I would heartily recommend to anyone and everyone.