

Florida Passion Play shows the important story of Jesus

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5109>

I have just returned from Wauchula, Florida, after my annual trip to see the Story of Jesus Passion Play. This is the fourth year that I have attended, and even after seeing the play a total of eight times, it is just as fresh and enriching as it was the first time I saw it.

Michael Graham, the writer and director of the play, along with board members, cast and crew have produced the play nearly every year for the past 23 years. These are all dedicated people, many of whom have been with the play since it began. Every year has come with its own set of problems, and this year was no exception.

Each year the massive set (which is almost as wide as a football field is long) must be constructed, and each year it must be torn down and placed into storage, including the lighting and sound equipment. Sometime last summer, thieves broke into their storage building and stole thousands of feet of copper wiring. Even the power cords were cut off of their equipment. Since the theft was not discovered until January, it left the crew scrambling to replace and reconstruct the complicated network of video and lighting feeds.

This year, Graham nearly lost several key persons due to serious illness and other personal tragedies, but God was faithful in providing all that was needed for another season. One of them had survived two bouts with cancer and an open heart surgery, but she was back, enthusiastically doing something she said that she loved.

There was a noticeable increase in the number of cast and crew (around 300) this year, and even though many are struggling financially from the poor economy that has hit Florida, they found the time to give to the play. One family drives from Atlanta each year to participate.

The Story of Jesus is an extraordinary play. From the first time I saw it, it was obvious that this was not simply a stage production. This play carries a strong message about the life of Jesus. It is packed with emotion, and brings the audience to a deeper understanding of who Jesus really was. Despite its namesake, the play does not present the storybook image of Jesus that so many of us are accustomed to.

The very first thing you will notice about Jesus is how truly human he was. Jesus has a very undeserved reputation as a stoic, but in this play He is anything but that. He laughs, he cries, he shows an unmistakable love for children, and enormous sympathy for the sick. He shows anger for the disrespect shown for His Temple, and contempt for the hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin. He knows that He is the Son of God who is on a mission, but still finds time to sit down with children to tell them a story.

The play is written for people of all ages, although they suggest that young children be taken out during the flogging and crucifixion scenes. They were brutal, but that is what Jesus endured.

I decided to become a part of the play four years ago after Graham told me how desperate they were for a theater of their own. Because they are in a small town, there are very limited facilities available for the play. Since the beginning they have used a rodeo arena at the county fairgrounds, which has served them well, but it has never been an ideal location. It requires nearly two months to build the set, but often they have only 48 hours to remove it from the arena. They begin tearing down the set within minutes after the last performance.

A local family has donated 40 acres of land for the theater, and I have begun its design, but the play needs funding to make its construction possible.

Regardless of whether the theater is ever built or not, the show will go on. Next year, however, will be different, because next year's play will be the Story of Noah. The Story of Jesus will return in the 2013 season, and the plays will alternate from year to year after that.

The Story of Noah will be done to the same standards as the Story of Jesus. Graham has given me some details about the play, which I can't write about now, but suffice it to say that this will not be your average Noah story.

The Story of Jesus is unlike any other Passion play you have ever seen. It is important to perpetuate it because there are so many who are trying to redefine who Jesus is now, and who he was when he walked on this earth two thousand years ago. Some say he was just a mythological figure. Muslims attempt to portray him as a simple prophet who was just a man. But if you want to see who he really was, go see The Story of Jesus.

©2011 Randy W. Bright

Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972, rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net or www.churcharchitect.net.

This entry was posted on Thursday, April 21st, 2011 and is filed under [Columns](#).