

## INTRODUCTION

You know the Christmas story inside and out. You know the flow of events, the cast of characters, the intimate details, and even the ancient prophecies that foretold it all. You know many of the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and mistakes that many people have about the story. You started learning the story before you could even walk or talk. And every year, you hear the story again.

Your challenge as a youth leader tasked to teaching that familiar story to teenagers once every year is to find a way to make the familiar into something exciting, insightful, or even interesting. You need to find something, ANYthing, to bring to the surface the phenomenal wonder and mystery of the Christmas story.

I have some great news for you! Coming in December is a movie that will make Christmas more than “meaningful” for you and your young friends.

I know what you're thinking. “Not another Christmas movie! Puhleeze tell me this isn't just another Christmas movie.” Okay. *The Nativity Story* isn't just another Christmas movie. Seriously. This is the work of a major Hollywood studio. The mainstream movie industry hasn't created a film like this in maybe 50 years. Top-notch talent has been involved in every phase of production of *The Nativity Story*. The screenplay isn't a typical and predictable retelling of the Christmas narrative; instead it is an engaging recreation of the events from so long ago.

The filmmakers are bringing an unprecedented level of commitment to ensure the authenticity of *The Nativity Story* as well as the film's look. Director Catherine Hardwicke, a former production designer, was adamant that every detail—from the locations, to the sets, to the props—look and feel authentic. Hardwicke, writer Mike Rich, and production designer Stefano Ortolani spent countless hours researching the era.

“We got the script into the hands of as many historians and theologians as possible,” says screenwriter Mike Rich. “They have all helped elevate the authentic look and feel of this film from a standpoint of culture and tradition.”

Because the actual locations of Bethlehem and Nazareth have become fairly modernized over the years, the production decided to shoot in the village of Matera, Italy, which has been virtually unchanged for centuries (and was previously used as a location for *The Passion of the Christ*). Additionally, the production journeyed to Ouarzazate, Morocco where it shot scenes involving Herod's castle and the

temple of Jerusalem at the same locations used in such films as *Gladiator* and *Kingdom of Heaven*.

#### The Christmas Opportunity

There is something special about the Christmas holiday. For obvious reasons, Christians consider Christmas as one of the most “holy” of “holy days” (which is where the word “holiday” comes from), and take a dim view of the ever-increasing commercialization and trivialization of the season.

Irreligious people also revere Christmas. Christmas traditions and music are strong triggers of family memories, togetherness and love. The story of a child born to save the world is compelling in its mysterious simplicity.

Everyone gets the Christmas spirit.

Recognizing this as an opportunity, youth leaders and churches work hard every year to communicate “the real meaning of Christmas” to as many people as they can reach. Christmas plays, live manger scenes in front of the church, Christmas concerts,

Christmas parties, caroling, and other special events clog the church's December calendar.

The last thing you need is yet another Christmas event. That's exactly why this material is designed to fit in with what you are already doing with your young friends during December. You'll find three sessions with background information that you can use in your regular weekly meetings. The sessions are designed so that the first two take place before you take your group to see *The Nativity Story* in the theater, and the third is a follow-up to that experience after the movie.

*The Nativity Story* is an opportunity that you should take advantage of. It has everything going for it—excellent production values, excellent spiritual value, excellent momentum-of-the-season value—all you have to do is plug in the dates on the included timeline, use the three sessions, and see how God uses your efforts to bring glory to Himself. What could be easier?