

HER FAMILY / HIS

Reviewing Family Entertainment

By Suzanne and Chris Shoemaker

HERS:

In the entertainment world, April is a time of transition. It is the end of the awards season, the basketball play-offs, series sign-offs on television, and low-budget, family films in the cinema, screen 'place holders' until the blockbusters of the summer. This April is no exception except that TV icons like *Friends* and *Frasier* are taking final curtain calls for their landmark work, the Oscars were in February, basketball season is mixed with Court TV, and the family film is *The Passion of the Christ*, an ancient language, subtitled, religious-themed box office phenomenon that is breaking box office records. Change seems to be in the air.

After hearing the controversy and debate on Mel Gibson's film sensation, my husband and I decided to see the movie and come to our own opinion. We invited our fourteen year-old son to join us and his first response was, "No, thanks! From what I've heard it will be too violent for me." When the Sunday afternoon movie time approached we invited him again and told him he could leave if he became uncomfortable. He decided he had nothing to lose and we went to the film together.

What did we all experience? A remarkable story, told in brutal honesty with skilled artistry. *The Passion of the Christ* is a visualization of the most fundamental concept of Christianity, the suffering for the sins of mankind. Mel Gibson used his gifts as a filmmaker, his soul-anchored belief in Christianity, and his pure truth as an artist to confront an audience with what seems like an overwhelming cruelty of mankind set against the purity of pure faith. I cried, I reflected, I introspected and I transcended past the pastel, foil-wrapped candy, grocery store idea of Easter to the depth of this season. April marks the passage from winter to spring, a time of rebirth. *The Passion of the Christ* witnesses rebirth from true suffering, true suffering from unimaginable pain and Jesus' ascendance to savior.

My son did not leave the film because of its' violence although the story is graphically violent. No one in my family left the film blaming the Jewish people for Christ's suffering, the fact that power corrupts is not culturally-based. As a family, we spent the next four hours discussing sin, the wisdom of history, Christian symbols, parables, metaphor and the meaning of faith. Mel Gibson's sermon-film gave my family a portal to a dialogue confronting our own faith- whatever it may be. What a wonderful gift for any film to give an audience-*The Passion of the Christ* is truly a remarkable film for families that fans the flames of change and fuels a roar of energy that should carry us through April and well past the mindless block-busters of the summer.



HIS:

The Passion of the Christ is worthy of all its recent scrutiny; a film worthy of serious discussion and, if you are open to it, a post film talk with your teenager.

If you are like us, your parental dilemma may extend to whether or not it is indeed appropriate to take your child to this arresting film in the first place. At first blush, we questioned the film's mature theme and graphic nature. But hadn't we all heard and imagined the story of *The Passion* so many times before?

Perhaps our decision to allow our son to attend was made a bit easier because he is a 14 year-old teenager. Although he's not old enough to drive or vote, he has a keen intellect, and he, like most teenagers, can certainly think for him self. And also, like many other

teenagers, he is a sensitive soul – what to do?

As parents, we want to do right by our children. We want to protect their world from unnecessary pains and evils, yet we want to engage their minds and challenge their spirits from the monotony of a certain pop-cultural blandness that often prevails at a click of the remote. We agreed that our son could leave the film at a moment's notice whenever the violence became too graphic or the action too real. He stayed through the film's duration. I'm glad he did.

Mel Gibson creates a cinematic piece of art for the world to share. Whether you are a Christian or not, you will want to experience Jesus' trial and ascendance to Heaven as directed by Gibson. Be warned: it is unflinching, brutal, and bloody. How could this stage of Jesus's life be otherwise? Yet be consoled, for *The Passion* also is merciful, courageous, faithful and by the film's end, hopeful.

The film's production values and acting performances are superb and Oscar caliber through and through. The script is sparse and the dramatic action expansive. The simultaneous task of hearing the Aramaic language while reading English subtitles quickly grows seamless.

According to *The Passion*, the indictment of who is to blame for Christ's crucifixion rings clear: we, meaning mankind, all are guilty. No one person or group was depicted as singularly responsible for his death.

The film presented a special opportunity to share a deeper level of discussion with our son – upon leaving the theater, we three fell silent and contemplative. We hustled to a nearby café to share the immediate impact of the film's portrayal and depiction of a sacred and familiar story we believed we knew. We agreed we witnessed a story we didn't know well enough.

Personally, the film's true surprise was the internalized pain and suffering endured by Jesus's mother, Mary. Her spiritual mortification was heart wrenching to watch. She stays by her son from his capture until his last mortal breath – certainly a spiritual trial beyond what any of us are ever likely to endure. Actress Maia Morgenstern's depiction of Mary's steadfastness and devotion to her son is truly inspirational. This relationship keeps us grounded to the human scale of *The Passion*.

I think my son, and myself, are the richer for having seen *The Passion*. I would not recommend parents take children younger than teenagers – the screening I attended was shockingly full of pre-teens. Make yourself available for a debriefing of this extraordinary film – both you and your children will share and learn from a profound experience.