

# Director of 'The Star' aimed for fresh look at Nativity

Presenting the story of the Nativity from the perspective of the animals allowed the producers and director to see the well-known narrative from fresh eyes.

Timothy Reckart, director of "The Star," which opens Nov. 17 in theaters across the country, said, "We wanted to tell it in a way that that would pack a punch and pack the power of the first time that you've ever heard it."

In an interview for the "Catholic Baltimore" radio show, Reckart said, "We wanted to present it in a new way we've never heard before but in a way that also is very faithful to the Bible."

The movie features a donkey named Bo, who yearns for a life beyond his daily grind at the village. One day Beau finds the courage to break free and ends up befriending newlyweds Joseph and Mary. Mary's kindness soon sets Bo on the adventure of his dreams.

As a rule, the producers decided that if the Bible speaks to something, then they would stick with that. Although Scripture doesn't say anything about Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem on a donkey, that's a pretty traditional image we all have, so they picked up on that.

Reckart, a practicing Catholic, said that reading between the lines in Scripture and filling in the gaps became the producers' "creative sandbox."

Speaking of a scene where a confused Bo turns to prayer, he said, "It's an opportunity to show a character learning how to relate to God by imitating the saints. And you know that it's a really great moment in the movie for that reason."

He said the landscape for making religious movies in Hollywood changed after the release of "The Passion of the Christ." Few people expected Mel Gibson's epic picture, which used only ancient languages that would have been spoken in Jesus' time, to be a success. Those in the entertainment business found that movies that

attempted to capture aspects of faith from an authentic perspective resonated with viewers.

“What I think is different now is that Hollywood has clued in to that and they’ve realized that the only way to make these movies successful is for them to come from an authentic place,” and to hire producers, directors and actors who are particularly willing to support that vision.

He said he has always enjoyed Christmas movies but that many of them are not actually about Jesus. He saw an opportunity to fill that void with “The Star.”

Reckart said Mary and Joseph are presented in the movie as a couple with a sense of humor and points of conflict, not overly pious. “I wanted to find a delicate way to portray them as saints you know to portray their sanctity but to portray the human side of that thing,” he said.

The goal, he added, is to create not just films for children but films for families. “You just invest the movie with a lot of depth and then people will be able to tune in to whatever the level of depth that they’re capable of. So, I think a lot of the drama with Mary and Joseph is very relevant for parents for people who’ve been experienced that you know those months of anxiety leading up to the birth of a child.”

For the full interview with Reckart, listen to “Catholic Baltimore” on WCBM 680 AM Nov. 12, 9:30 a.m., with a rebroadcast at 6:30 p.m. Click below to listen to the program.

*[Top image: Joseph and Mary, along with Bo the donkey, Ruth the sheep and Dave the dove, prepare to enter Bethlehem. © 2017 CTMG, Inc. All Rights Reserved.]*