# Shooting Jesus, Week 2: Silent Saviour

## Welcome to SHOOTING Jesus – Cinematic Saviours

Cinema emerged as an art form at the end of the 19th century with numerous pioneers each moving things forward. Some of the more important characters are Louis Le Prince whose "Roundhay Garden Scene" (shot in Leeds) is the earliest known film, Another landmark is 1895 when France's Lumière brothers became the first people to put on a movie show for a paying audience. Either way the first Jesus films were only 2 years away. The earliest known Jesus films then are:

*Earliest known Jesus films**La Passion du Christ* (Albert ‘Lear’ Kirchner, 1897)

*The Höritz Passion Play* (Mark Klaw & Abraham Erlanger, 1897)

*The Passion Play* (Siegmund Lubin, 1898)

*The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (Henry C. Vincent, 1898)

*La Vie et la passion de Jesus-Christ* (Georges Hatot & Louis Lumière, 1898)

*Christ Marchant sur les flots* (Georges Méliès, 1899)

Biblical films were popular with filmmakers for various reasons including:

* Spectacle
* Ready-made audience
* Respectability for emerging art form
* A tool for evangelism
* Christian Instruction

Some key points about the major Jesus films of the silent era:

### *La Vie et la passion de Jesus-Christ* (Georges Hatot & Louis Lumière, 1898)

* Oldest extant Bible film
* Sets borrowed from a nearby theatre and pop up in other early Lumiére films
* Low key portrayal of the raising of the widow of Nain's son
* Shadows from the crucifixion fall upon on the wall behind the cross

***La Vie du Christ* (Alice Guy, 1906)**

* Alice Guy was the first director of dramatic films as opposed to "*Actualities*"
* More naturalistic acting and portrayal of supernatural
* Stronger focus on women
* Early use of continuity editing

***The Life of Passion of Jesus Christ* (Ferdinand Zecca, 1907)**

* Evolving series of Pathé films from 1899 to 1914
* Hand-coloured scenes
* Striking portrayal of heaven and the angelic host
* Pathé were one of the more prestigious filmmakers. Their reputation was based partly on the excellence of their sets.

***From the Manger to the Cross* (Sidney Olcott, 1912)**

* More human and lifelike Jesus than seen before
* Draw of being filmed on location adds a travelogue element
* "No film that was ever made called forth such a storm of protest" actor Robert Henderson Bland
* "Silent scenes of Jesus in prayer"

***The King of Kings* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1927)**

* Of ~50 films DeMille's had made by this stage only one had been a biblical film
* The director's name would go on to become synonymous with the biblical epic, through films such as *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956).
* Starts with Mary Magdalene in a gold coiled bra, a sign of a more showbiz approach to the Jesus film
* At 51, H.B. Warner is one of the oldest actors to play Jesus
* DeMille later claimed "more people have been told the story of Jesus of Nazareth through The King of Kings than through any other single work, except the Bible itself"