# Shooting Jesus, Week 3: God for a Golden Age

## Welcome to SHOOTING Jesus – Cinematic Saviours

As the era of talking pictures began the recent success of DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927) loomed large but various factors (the Depression; the instigation of the Hays Production Code; the impact of WWII) meant that the major studios were reluctant to try and reproduce its success, initially at least. Meanwhile, Jesus films were continuing to be made abroad and even by independent church groups at home. At the same time the Roman-Christian genre spawned some huge hits meaning it was only a matter of time before Jesus was, once more, going to star on the silver screen.

### International Jesus films

* *Golgotha* (Julien Duvivier; **France**; 1935)
* *The Life and Passion of the Christ* (Mohamed Abdel-Gawad; **Egypt**; 1938)
* *Jesus de Nazareth* (José Díaz Morales; **Mexico**; 1942)
* *El Martir del Calvario* (Miguel Morayta; **Mexico**; 1952)
* *Il figlio dell’uomo* (Virgilio Sabel; **Italy**; 1954)

**Church-based productions**

* The Great Commandment (Irving Pichel; 1939)
* No Greater Power (John T. Coyle; 1942)
* I Beheld His Glory (John T. Coyle; 1952)
* Day of Triumph (John T. Coyle & Irving Pichel: 1954)

### Roman-Christian Epics (America)

* *Ben-Hur: A Tae of the Christ* (Fred Niblo & Charles Brabin; 1925)
* *Last Days of Pompeii* (Ernest B. Schoedsack & Merian C. Cooper; 1935)
* *Quo Vadis* (Mervyn LeRoy; 1951)
* *Salome* (William Dieterle; 1953)
* *The Robe* (Henry Koster; 1953)
* *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (Frank Ross; 1954)
* *The Silver Chalice* (Victor Saville; 1954)
* *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler; 1959)

### Italian Peplum

* *Quo vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni: 1913)
* *La spada e la croce* [The Sword and the Cross] (Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia; 1958)
* *Erode il grande* [Herod the Great] (Viktor Tourjansky, 1958)
* *Il grande pescatore* [The Big Fisherman] (Frank Borzage, 1959)
* *Ponzio Pilato* [Pontius Pilate] (Gian Paolo Callegari & Irving Rapper, 1962)
* *Barabba* [Barabbas] (Gian Paolo Callegari & Irving Rapper; 1961)

## Key golden era Jesus movies

### *King of Kings* (Nicholas Ray; 1961)

* Produced by Samuel Bronston and it was marketed as a "Samuel Bronston picture"
* Major sub-plot pits Jesus, the new "Messiah of peace", against Barabbas the "Messiah of war"
* Jesus' message presented as one of "Peace, love and the brotherhood of man"
* Film ruined by clashes over artistic vision for the film. Jeffrey Hunter played Jesus but his original vocals were redubbed to be more weighty

### *Greatest Story Ever Told* (George Stevens; 1965)

* Director George Stevens best known for his Christ-figure western *Shane* (1956)
* Shot not in the Middle East, but in the wide open landscapes of Utah
* Contrasts the bright, open, simple countryside exteriors with the dark, opulent city interiors
* Jesus played by Swedish actor Max von Sydow, known only on the art-house circuit

### *Il vangelo secondo di Matteo* (Pier Paolo Pasolini; 1964)

* Director Pier Paolo Pasolini was an outspoken Marxist and atheist, albeit one with "a nostalgia for a belief"
* Jesus (played by a 19 year old Spanish student) is portrayed as a revolutionary marching round the countryside gathering followers for his movement and criticizing the establishment
* Diverse soundtrack mixes high, classical music with grassroots styles
* Simple black and white photography based on static close-ups of faces, especially reaction shots