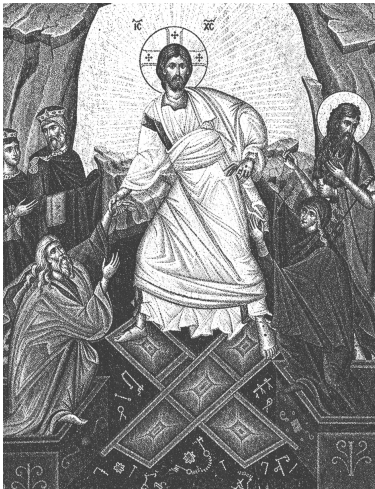


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## ***Truly, He Is Risen!***

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Jesus did not remain in death's power. The wounds that his body had received from the iron of the nails and spear offered no impediment to

his rising again. After his resurrection, he showed himself whenever he wanted to his disciples. When he wished to be present with them, he was in their midst without being seen, needing no entrance through open doors. All these occurrences, and whatever other similar facts we know about his life, require no further argument to show that they are signs of deity and of a sublime and supreme power. – St. Gregory of Nyssa ❖

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## **If Christ Is Risen, Why Do We Still Die?**

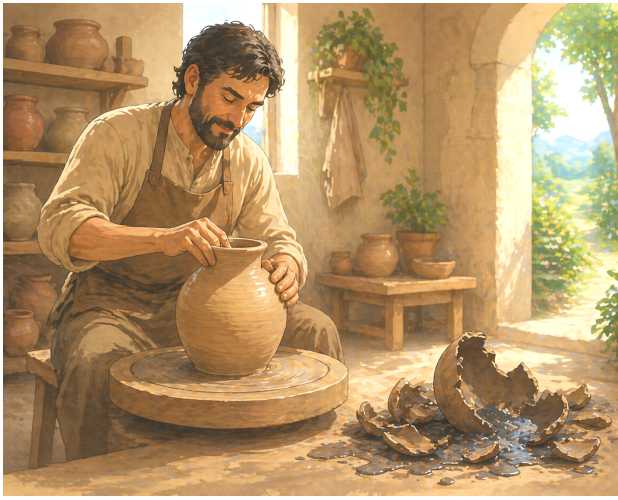
*Archpriest Pavel Velikanov*

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**If death has been defeated, why do people still die?** Christ did not simply raise the dead—this had happened before, through the prophets and even during His earthly ministry. But those who were raised returned to this life only to die again. What took place in Christ is altogether different. After His Resurrection, He does not die. His human nature passes into a new mode of being in which death no longer has any place.

Saint Basil the Great offers an image that helps us understand why we still pass through death. Imagine a potter who lovingly fashions a beautiful vessel. An enemy, out of malice, pours molten lead into it. The vessel can no longer be used, and the lead cannot be removed. What can be done? The potter breaks the vessel and remakes it—this time free from the impurity. The “lead” is sin, which has penetrated and distorted human nature. Only through death is a person fully freed from it. That is why we still die. Yet for us,

death is no longer the end of life; it becomes a passage—from one mode of being to another.



The risen Christ is the first in whom God’s intention for humanity—to grant immortality—has been fulfilled. When we say that He has “conquered death,” we mean that He has overcome it in His human nature, opening this same path for us.

**How do we know that Jesus Christ truly lived and rose again?** Could it all have been invented? There is substantial historical testimony to the existence of Christ. Ancient authors such as Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Suetonius refer to Him as a real historical figure. Even apocryphal texts—though not recognised as Scripture—serve as literary witnesses to the early memory of Christ.

Yet for Christians, the Resurrection is not merely a historical claim. It is the very foundation of faith. As the Apostle Paul writes: *“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:14).

Without the Resurrection, everything that followed—the descent of the Holy Spirit, the apostles’ preaching, the growth of the

Church—would be inexplicable. Over two thousand years, no convincing evidence has been produced to show that the Resurrection did not take place. There is also a striking psychological witness. After Christ’s death, His disciples were disheartened and afraid.

They returned to their former lives—“I am going fishing,” says Peter (John 21:3). Everything seemed finished. And yet, suddenly, these same men begin to preach boldly, without fear of persecution or death. What could account for such a transformation, if not an event of overwhelming reality? Their message was simple: *Christ is Risen!* And they were prepared to die for it.

**If Christ has shattered the gates of hell, why does the Church still speak of it?**



In the Paschal hymns, we hear that Christ “has destroyed the gates of hell.” This does not mean that hell has ceased to exist. Rather, it means that its dominion has been broken. Before Christ, humanity faced a clear divide: you were either alive, or you were in hell.

This is why earthly life was so immensely valued by the Jewish people—they understood that beyond it, nothing awaited but suffering. But Christ introduces a new dimension. He becomes the First to breach this boundary, entering hell and emerging from it into a transformed mode of existence—and not alone. He brings out with Him those who awaited His coming. By His descent into hell, He breaks its monopoly over the human soul. Hell is not abolished, but it is no longer inescapable. A way out has been opened.

### **If Christ came to save us from sin, why do people still sin?**

Before Christ, humanity lacked a clear measure of what it means to be truly human. There were the commandments given through Moses, but these largely restrained what was already destructive: do not steal, do not commit adultery.

They set limits, but they did not yet heal. Why, then, do people continue to sin after Christ? For the same reason that a musician, even knowing how music should sound, can still play out of tune. No one can force him to play well—not even God, who has given us freedom.



In the language of Christian ascetic teaching, the root of sin is ignorance of God—not simply intellectual ignorance, but a lack of living knowledge. When a person comes to know God as the One most deeply loved and desired, sin begins to lose its hold. One may still stumble, but no longer lives in conscious opposition to God.

Sin is often reduced to the breaking of moral rules. Yet a person may outwardly keep every rule and still be inwardly corrupt. Christ has indeed freed humanity from sin—but this freedom requires our response: the willingness to receive God and to follow His will.



### **The Church speaks of a universal resurrection. What will it be like?**

No one knows. Any attempt to imagine it will fall short. Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra offers a helpful insight. Reflecting on the risen Christ, he asks: “What kind of body did Christ have after His Resurrection?” He answers that Christ appeared bodily to His disciples not because He was bound by His resurrected body, but because He chose to reveal Himself in a way they could recognize.

The risen Christ—and His body—exist in a reality that is not accessible to us in this life. We cannot fully grasp it now. We will understand only when we ourselves are raised.

A similar intuition appears in the final book of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. When the characters enter the "real" Narnia, they find something strangely familiar: it resembles the world they knew, yet it is more real, more vivid, more alive. Everything is the same—and yet more truly itself. They are invited to go "*further up and further in.*"

This suggests not a static existence, but a living, ever-deepening reality. What is precious to us here is not lost—it is transfigured. Why did God have to come into the world and suffer on the Cross?

The answer can be very simple. When a person asks God, "*What have You done to overcome evil, sin, and death?*" The Christian answer is not an argument, but a Person—Christ crucified. What more could be done for the world?

Here lies what sets Christianity apart: the immeasurable love of God. For our very existence—for our freedom to choose, even to choose wrongly—God pays not with something external, but with His own life. ❖

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## Some Religious Movies

*Robert Klein*

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During the Easter seasons of my childhood, local television stations and national networks would run Bible-based religious movies. Back in the days when there were no more than five TV channels, the broadcasting of these Hollywood epics would be events. Usually all the kids in the neighborhood would be invited over to the one family home that possessed a color TV. (Most families had

black-and-white TVs because color TVs were expensive, and not all television programming was in color anyway.)



The tradition of showing Biblical movies during the Pascha season continues today, replicated on the many downstreamers and cable networks. But how do the old Hollywood classics hold up today? The first thing to remember is that no matter what the individual members of the movie industry may have believed or how they behaved, religion was treated seriously on the screen. Hollywood knew back then that movies that mocked, scorned, or doubted Christianity or Judaism simply could not be made.

So these movies are serious, if sometimes hackneyed, attempts at reverence:

**The Ten Commandments (1956)** – This is the Number One classic Hollywood religious epic, the one considered the standard by which others are judged. The ABC television network has shown *The Ten Commandments* at Easter nearly every year since 1965, and it consistently

pulls in millions of viewers. (As an anecdotal illustration of its popularity, the TV viewing room at the Salvation Army shelter in downtown Atlanta has standing-room-only conditions twice a year, once for the Super Bowl and once for The Ten Commandments.) The epic was director Cecil B. DeMille's last film and the star-making breakout movie for actor Charlton Heston. DeMille was the man responsible for bringing the movie industry to Hollywood and was a silent film innovator, but he was already considered old-fashioned by the time sound rolled in. And it's true, The Ten Commandments is melodramatic, the acting is stilted, and the screenplay takes poetic license with the story of Exodus, but the cast, cinematography, sets, and costumes are outstanding. The special effects are amazing, especially the parting of the Red Sea. It's hard to believe the effects – both practical and in-camera – were made long before CGI had been invented. The Ten Commandments is a spectacle the whole family can enjoy.

**Ben Hur** (1959) – Some say this, and not The Ten Commandments, should be Number One. Ben Hur had been a best-selling 19th century novel that was turned into a popular stage show that toured the country for decades. (On-stage shipwrecks and chariot races with horses on treadmills were spectacles for the masses in the 1890s!) It had already been filmed as a silent picture in 1925, but three decades later, Ben Hur was ready for a remake. Once again Charlton Heston took the lead, directed by the great William Wyler. Wyler, a stickler for endless retakes (and a second unit director on the original Ben Hur), brought intelligence and verisimilitude to the script and acting of

this wide-ranging epic. The movie's grand scene was the chariot race, directed by stunt legend Yakima Canutt, filmed with real danger, and full of live-action effects and crashes galore, some of them unintended but remaining in the final cut. Ben Hur swept the Academy Awards that year, being nominated for a record-breaking 12 Oscars, and winning 11, including Best Picture, Actor, Director, Supporting Actor, Special Effects, and Cinematography. Another decent family movie to watch.

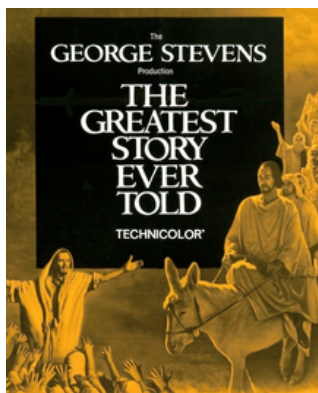


**The Robe** (1953) – Richard Burton brings gravitas to one of the first wide-screen color epics, meant to draw people away from their televisions.

Unfortunately, that doesn't impress audiences nowadays and doesn't come across well on a small screen, leaving only the simple-minded and overly reverent script to contemplate. This was one of my favorite movies when I was younger, but now it induces a cringe. You might watch it to catch two actors in particular. Victor Mature, who plays the slave Demetrius, famously said of himself, "I'm no actor, and I've got 64 pictures to prove it." Jay Robinson, who plays the mad emperor Caligula, screeches his way through the script, chewing the scenery and recalling Shakespeare's quotation about overacting that "out-herods Herod." A movie that means well, and can be uplifting, but is really kind of silly.

**King of Kings** (1961) – Two lives of Christ were released within four years of each other, *King of Kings* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, so people constantly confuse the two. *King of Kings* is larded with a fictional sub-plot that shows Judas Iscariot as a revolutionary comrade of Barabbas, planning an uprising to coincide with Jesus’s arrival in Jerusalem. The cast is impressive, with Irish stage actress Siobhan McKenna as Mary, tough guy Robert Ryan as John the Baptist, method actor Rip Torn as Judas, and the sonorous voice of Orson Welles as narrator. Jesus is played by a blue-eyed and blond Jeffrey Hunter (today known as the original Captain Pike in *Star Trek*), so some cynics of the time said the movie should have been titled “I Was a Teenage Jesus.” However, Hunter does a good job in a difficult role. The best scene is the Sermon on the Mount, and as directed by auteur Nicholas Ray it shows Jesus walking among the crowd, mingling and interacting as he preaches his sermon in a folksy and unpretentious manner. An *okay* movie.

**The Greatest Story Ever Told** (1965) –



Director George Stevens made comedies in the 1930s, but he was traumatized by his experiences in World War II, so that after returning to Hollywood, he made only serious movies.

Filming the life of Jesus was his dream project, which he’d worked on for years before the cameras rolled.

Shot in the American southwest, so that the backgrounds are grand desert vistas, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is beautiful because Stevens framed every shot like a painted masterpiece. Unfortunately, every shot is static and seems to last forever. This is a l-o-n-g and slow movie. For instance, the rising of Lazarus is shot from a long distance, so that we in the audience are waiting for something to happen, but all we can see is the reaction of the faraway crowds who have their backs to the camera. However, two scenes are effective: The temptation in the desert, with Donald Pleasance as the Adversary, is eerie and haunting, while the healing of the lame man, played by Sal Mineo, is dynamic, cinematic, and genuinely moving. Swedish actor Max von Sydow (later to be famous as *The Exorcist*) does justice to the role of Jesus, as do future television greats Telly Savalas as Pilate and David McCallum as Judas.

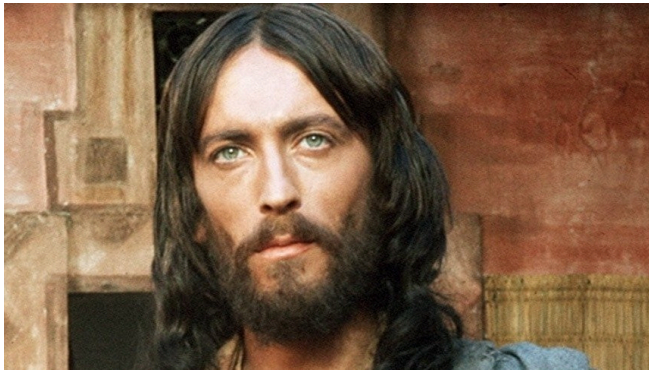


Unfortunately, much of the casting is gimmicky – comedian Ed Wynn as a fictional villager, Shelley Winters

as the woman with the issue of blood, Charlton Heston (again!) as John the Baptist, Pat Boone as the angel at the tomb, and most notoriously, John Wayne as the centurion at the crucifixion.

However, the soundtrack is magnificent for listening, but bombastic for a movie. All in all, a good movie that will put the kids to sleep.

**Jesus of Nazareth (1977)** – This is a two-part TV series directed by film master Franco Zeffirelli. It features a great international cast, including Christopher Plummer, James Farentino, Anne Bancroft, Michael York, Peter Ustinov, and Laurence Olivier (but not Charlton Heston!), and a well-written script by novelist Anthony Burgess. Robert Powell's calm and compassionate Jesus is considered by many critics and reviewers to be one of the most moving and biblically accurate portrayals of the Saviour.



Some of Jesus's miracles are omitted from the series, and the Annunciation just shows Mary, played by the ethereal Olivia Hussey, talking to someone offscreen, so that we neither hear nor see Gabriel.

However, the healing of the paralyzed man is graphic and wonderfully done. The script – like that of most of the other films listed here – fills gaps in the New Testament story with some fictional characters and elements, but these are intelligently done and not distracting. The series is good at showing contrasts between characters, such as the conflict between John the Baptist and Herod, or the imagined but logical rift between Peter, the simple working man, and Matthew, the tax collector and Roman collaborator.

People worldwide who have watched Jesus of Nazareth over the past 50 years have reported that their faith has been either ignited or renewed by the viewing. Even the actor Ernest Borgnine, who played the centurion, claimed for the rest of his life that he had experienced a profound spiritual awakening while filming the crucifixion scene.

**The Passion of the Christ (2004)** – The direction of this film by Mel Gibson is masterful, the role of Jesus by Jim Caviezel is powerful, the dialogue is in ancient languages with sub-titles, and the cast, the setting, and the costumes are all excellent ... but, let's face it, the movie is bloody, brutal, and shocking. It also has non-Biblical scenes inspired by the writings of a 19th century mystic. Not family entertainment, and probably not entertainment at all. It leaves you sobered yet reeling.

And finally, **Hail, Caesar!** (2016) – No, this isn't a religious movie, it's a Coen brothers comedy about Hollywood in the 1940s or 1950s, but among its outlandish sub-plots is one that shows how seriously the movie industry treated the subjects of faith and religion in those days (even if the religious movie they were making is laughably bad). An Orthodox priest is a character in one scene, and he isn't mocked, but treated with dignity. A funny movie for adults, but not for kids.

Are there any religious movies that you love, but that I've neglected to mention?

Let me know. ❖

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## From “Rescuing the Art of Ecclesiastical Embroidery”

Mary Lowell

*“And all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, both of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen.” (Exodus 35: 25)*

Important to Orthodox Christians and to all Christians, as well as world art, is the long history of ecclesial embroidery that is contiguous with the work of artisans who adorned the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and wove the vestments for the High Priest Aaron.

Very early, the Church took up the sacred work of skilled needlework artists described in the books of Exodus, Sirach and Proverbs. The oldest extant piece of church embroidery with a facial image dates from 4th century AD, though we can surmise that earlier pieces have perished. Pictorial embroidery in the Byzantine Era developed into a form of high art along with iconography and church architecture. Embroidered icons had many uses. Besides the epitaphios carried in Holy Week processions, fabric rendered iconography had a portability that made it ideal for holding services near battlefields and for evangelistic missions to pagan territories. Entire iconostases were created out of textiles that could be rolled up for ready transport.

Byzantine embroidery was also prized in Western Europe as shown by the so-called Dalmatic of Charlemagne purported to be commissioned or given as a diplomatic gift for Charlemagne’s coronation in 800. The work, now stored in the Vatican treasury, is actually a patriarch’s sakkos (tunic) that Constantinopolitan artists

created in the 14th century. On the front of this fabulous garment, Christ Enthroned is embroidered in silk and gold threads. He is encircled by angels above His head and saints, kings, patriarchs, bishops, monks and nuns at His feet. On the back of the sakkos the Transfiguration and Ascension are depicted. (view [here](#))



*Epitaphios of Thessaloniki detail of angels grieving (photograph copyright by Corbis Images)*

Ecclesial embroidery is still essential to and inseparable from the majesty of Orthodox temples and the divine services of the Church. Vestments of hierarchs and priests, epitaphios, chalice veils, altar cloths, banners, and podia for icons are among the many ceremonial pieces where embroidery is used. Most of this work is now machine executed, both because there are few teachers with an educated knowledge of the art and because there are few women who choose a vocation in pictorial embroidery.

Olga Fishchuk is a practicing ecclesial artist living in Kiev together with **Hexaameron**, a non-profit organization has devoted herself to leading a group of American needle workers in this ancient tradition that so few artists still practice.

“Nowadays, very few people, mostly found in Russia and the Ukraine, master and practice this painstaking and time consuming hand work. Fast and cheap machine embroidery is replacing unique hand work all over the world. Therefore, it is of great importance to support, develop and spread the art of ecclesiastical pictorial embroidery in ancient style.”

Find out more about Olga’s work to save this dying liturgical art at the Orthodox Arts Journal website and Hexameron.org

<https://www.hexameron.org/>

[orthodoxartsjournal.org/rescuing-the-art-of-ecclesial-embroidery/](https://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/rescuing-the-art-of-ecclesial-embroidery/)

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## St. James Lending Library

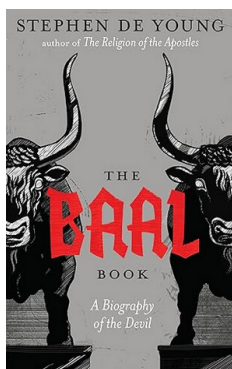
The St. James Church Library continues to acquire new books for its collection, including those reviewed here. Feel free to browse the shelves and check out what appeals to you. 📖

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### The Baal Book: A Biography of the Devil

by Stephen De Young

Reviewed by Robert Klein



The Baal Book, with its sensationalized (almost click-bait) subtitle A Biography of the Devil, is not so much a story of the diabolical as it is a deep dive into how some passages of Holy Scripture were written as corrections

to the pagan worship of Baal the storm god. What we know of Baal outside of the Bible is found in some ancient literature dug up almost a century ago in what is

today Syria. Baal – usually pronounced in English as the one-syllable bale but more properly pronounced as the two syllable bah-all (as in bah humbug) – was a god of the neighbors of ancient Israel.

The worship of Baal made inroads into the beliefs of the Chosen People, and was constantly denounced by the prophets.

The epic of Baal found in the archeological digs depicts him as a rebel god who defeats the father of the gods and then conquers and rules over the land of the dead in the underground.

Father Stephen De Young asks whose story does that sound like? He then points out that the Bible correctly depicts Lucifer as an angel who unsuccessfully rebels against God and whose rule in Hades is due to his defeat, not his victory. Thus the Scriptures subvert and rewrite the story believed by the pagans and known to the Israelites. When reading The Baal Book, it helps to have a Bible at hand, as Fr.

Stephen summarizes the passages that denounce and revise the evil one’s story but doesn’t quote them at length.

The Baal Book takes its place on our shelves alongside Fr. Stephen’s other works, including Apocrypha, Saint Paul the Pharisee, The Whole Counsel of God, and the provocatively titled God is a Man of War. With his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies, Fr. Stephen is erudite and well-grounded in his knowledge of the Scriptures, but he is also a popular writer whose books target laymen rather than fellow scholars. (He is also a great speaker; if you don’t attend the various retreats and seminars at which he lectures, you can catch his Ancient Faith Radio podcasts.)

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# Minestrone Monastico

From "Twelve Months of Monastery Soups" by Victor-Antoine D'Avila-Latourrette

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## Ingredients

- 6 cups water
- 2 carrots
- 2 potatoes
- 1/2 cup green beans
- 1 celery stalk
- 1/2 cup dry white beans
- 1 onion
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 cup macaroni
- tarragon, minced
- salt and pepper to taste
- grated Parmesan cheese

## Directions

1. Begin by washing and peeling the vegetables, then dicing them into small pieces, though the dry beans should remain whole. Pour the water into a substantial soup pot and introduce all the vegetables, including the beans, while reserving the onions. Allow the mixture to simmer gently over medium heat for one hour.
2. In a large frying pan, sauté the onions in a portion of the olive oil. Once they have reached a lovely golden hue, remove them from the heat.
3. Incorporate the golden onions into the soup along with the wine, the remaining olive oil, macaroni, tarragon, salt, and pepper, continuing the cooking process for another fifteen minutes. Cover the

pot and permit the soup to rest for ten minutes. Serve while hot, accompanied by a side of grated Parmesan cheese.

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## During the Summer of 2026

St. James Orthodox Church will be collecting:  
**NEW or GENTLY USE Kids Clothing**  
Bring Items to the Donation Tote Bin Located  
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([sovereigncookies@gmail.com](mailto:sovereigncookies@gmail.com))