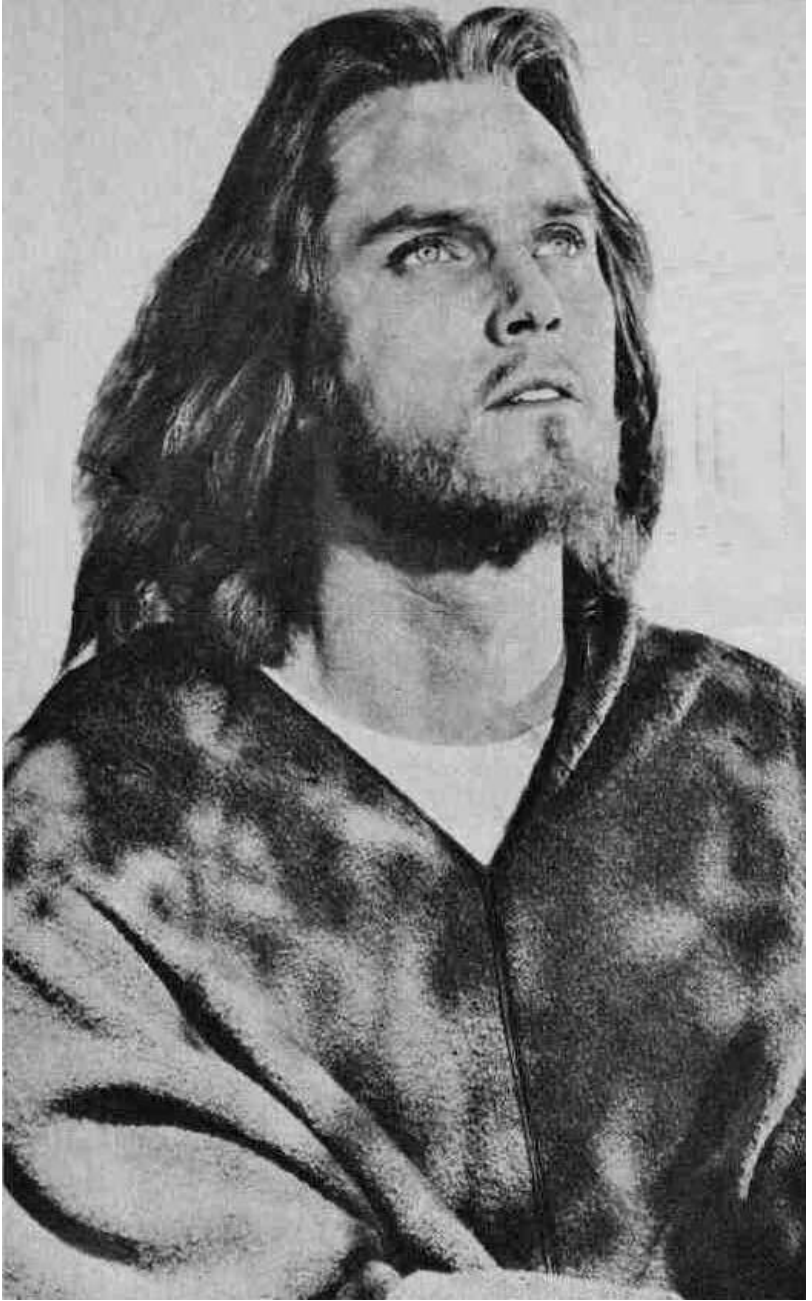


KING OF KINGS



Jeffrey Hunter as the "King of Kings."

EASTER, commemorating the Resurrection of Christ, is a fitting and happy choice of time for the general release of *King Of Kings*. With the Trial, Crucifixion and Resurrection as its stirring climax, the film is devoted to the life of Jesus and includes sequences that stress the political climate of the times.



Director Nicholas Ray rehearses the final details of the scene of the Last Supper. Jeffrey Hunter is in the white robe. Peter and John are on his left. Judas (played by Rip Torn) is in the centre.

Says director Nicholas Ray, "No story of Jesus could be convincing without understanding the influence of Roman domination during His mission on earth." To establish this, the film presents a prologue showing Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C. during which he crucified 10,000 Judeans to illustrate the supremacy of Roman might.

"I believe," says Nicholas Ray, "that for millions of people Jesus is far greater than any hero they have ever seen on the screen. In portraying Him in our film, we were constantly aware of the tremendous challenge in making the events of His life universally believable, so that the individual, regardless of the degree of his faith, would be convinced, re-convinced or reassured that Jesus did live and that His life has great meaning to all of us today."

Philip Yordan's script has offended some by making Barabbas the leader of a

Judean revolt, but that was done to stress the conditions under which men were living—conditions which can be paralleled in modern history. The script emphasises the differing reactions to the Roman tyranny of three of its chief characters: Barabbas (Harry Guardino) and Judas (Rip Torn) fighting with physical force, and Jesus (Jeffrey Hunter) seeking a spiritual solution.



Nicholas Ray, director of "King Of Kings."

"With a film of this importance," says Nicholas Ray, "it would be impossible to hope that its producers can be in

complete agreement with every one of the millions of people whose lives have been profoundly influenced by Christ. But in each scene I was primarily concerned with capturing the spiritual meaning of the events of His life and relating them to today. That was our greatest purpose in telling this story of Jesus—making His existence a living reality for the people of the modern world. This was partly attempted by avoiding the cliché-rendering of any of the great moments in the life of Christ. We tried this not only visually, but also in the way Jeffrey Hunter speaks each of the scriptural lines as though they were being said for the first time."



In the spectacular battle of the Antonia Fortress, Judean rebels storm the Roman stronghold in a desperate attempt to win their freedom from the oppression of the occupying power.

Nicholas Ray directed Jeffrey Hunter four years earlier in *The True Story Of Jesse James*. Although Hunter didn't have the principal male role, Ray found himself wanting to lavish more attention and time on his performance. He noticed

a quality of genuine gentleness in his conduct with people that he recalled when they first began discussing the role of Jesus. Ray was particularly impressed by his exceptional eyes—as were the majority of critics in reviewing *King Of Kings*. Their striking sincerity and disarming quality are evident in the first shot in which Hunter appears. This is the delicately handled scene where he is one of a crowd being baptised by John the Baptist (Robert Ryan), who has only to look into the eyes of the stranger to know that at last he has come face to face with the Messiah of whom he has been preaching.



“Truth is not on trial here, but a man, named Jesus, from Nazareth” . . . argues Lucius (Ron Randell) to Pontius Pilate (Hurd Hatfield)

Widely acknowledged as one of the film's highlights is the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount. The three chapters

of St. Matthew's Gospel that provide the only written record do not suggest the visual circumstances. Left to provide their own setting, the producers felt that Jesus would have delivered it not as an oration, but as He taught in the synagogues, allowing His listeners to ask questions. It is unlikely that He could have talked intimately to 7,000 without moving among them, so the producers broke with the tradition of presenting Him as a majestic figure on the crest of a hill and showed Him wandering among his audience.



“Woman, who are they who have condemned you?” . . . asks Jesus as He reaches out His hand to help the fallen Mary Magdalene (Carmen Sevilla) to her feet.



"I want the head of John the Baptist!" whispers Salome (Brigid Bazlen) to a horrified Herod Antipas (Frank Thring).

King Of Kings has also broken with tradition in regard to the staging of the Last Supper. It was felt that to have Jesus at the head of a long narrow table would impair the spirit of intimacy implicit in His words on that occasion. A cross-shaped arrangement was disregarded because of its too obvious use of Christian symbolism. The final choice was a Y-shaped grouping of small tables, from the head of which Jesus could easily pass bread and wine to each devoted follower, as required by ritual.

Also breaking from tradition is the

portrayal of the disciples. They are not the bearded patriarchs so common in artistic representation, but mainly young men in their 'teens and early 'twenties.

King Of Kings, a Samuel Bronston production for M.G.M., is filled with visual delights, and there are effective contrasts between the simply told incidents in the life of Jesus and the spectacular scenes of battle and riotous living so typical of the times in which He lived. In *King Of Kings* the vast technical resources of the modern cinema, bringing colour and the Super Technirama screen into full use, have been employed to tremendous effect.

"I have always been concerned with youth and their struggles for belief and understanding," says Nicholas Ray (whose other films include James Dean's *Rebel Without A Cause*). "I will be quite satisfied if *King Of Kings* can establish the fact that the story of Jesus and the people first attracted to His teachings is a story about, and for, young people."

The main characters in the film and the setting for the Sermon on the Mount were pictured in our December issue.

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