

Frequently asked questions

When will the programmes be broadcast?

As is normal in television the dates and times of the broadcasts will not be confirmed until the beginning of March. However, we know that the first episode will be broadcast on BBC1 on Palm Sunday **16th March**, with the final episode on Easter Sunday **23rd March**. All the broadcasts will be in peak time on BBC1.

How does the series treat the gospel stories?

This series is an attempt to understand and retell the events of the last days of Jesus' life as they are recorded in the gospels. The story is told from three points of view : the religious authorities; the Romans; and Jesus and his disciples. All the key players are intimately characterised, with Jesus at the centre. The series starts with Jesus' prophetic entrance through the East Gate of Jerusalem. It follows him to his crucifixion. The last episode of the series deals in detail with Jesus' resurrection appearances and their impact on the disciples. Like the first disciples, viewers will be left trying to understand what has happened, and what it might mean.

Who is behind the series?

The series was commissioned by BBC Drama, and has been made by Deep Indigo Productions. The script was written by Emmy Award winner Frank Deasy (Prime Suspect, England Expects). The production team consulted with Christian and Jewish theologians at the pre-production stage, and were also advised by the BBC's Religion and Ethics studio. The producer was Nigel Stafford-Clark, who won BAFTAs for Warriors and The Way We Live Now. To hear Nigel Stafford-Clark speak in detail about the series visit www.churchesmediacouncil.org.uk/conference.

Who is in the cast?

Jesus is played by Joseph Mawle, who was seen in Persuasion and Clapham Junction. At 33 Mawle is the same age that Jesus was during the events of Holy Week. Other leading roles are played by James Nesbitt (Pilate) who has starred in Murphy's Law and Cold Feet, Darren Morfitt (Peter) who played Jesus in The Manchester Passion last year, Laura Fraser (Mary Magdalene) who appeared in A Knight's Tale and Kevin and Perry Go Large and David Oyelowo (Joseph of Arimathea) who appears in Spooks and The Last King of Scotland.

Why is the BBC making this series?

There was no "religious" motive in producing this series. Quite simply they were looking for a great story to tell in episodic drama. The story of Jesus is an iconic story that bears retelling in every generation.

What if people want to know more about Jesus?

The Christian Enquiry Agency is ready to provide encouragement and information for anyone who wants to know more about Jesus, or to take a step of faith. The website www.rejesus.co.uk will have a special section dedicated to enquiries following the broadcasts. We recommend that churches advertise this site, and general enquiries from members of the public are directed to this site.

Can I get a copy of the series?

The series will be available on DVD at a later date. Bible Society are producing a pack of educational materials to accompany the series for use in schools, churches and adult education. It is of course legal to record the broadcast for your personal use, but it is illegal to use that copy for public display.

Where can I get more information?

Information, resources and updates will be posted at: www.churchesmediacouncil.org.uk/passion.

Enquiries and suggestions about the Christian response to the series can be directed to: info@churchesmediacouncil.org.uk.



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Joseph Mawle as Jesus ©BBC

The Passion

2008

Palm Sunday 16th March - Easter Sunday 23rd March

During Holy Week 2008 BBC1 will broadcast The Passion, a dramatic re-telling of the last days of Jesus. The series will be shown in peak time and will be seen by many millions of people.



These notes have been prepared by a group representing many of the UK's major Christian denominations, brought together by the Churches' Media Council. They are intended to help churches and others to prepare for the series.



The Churches' Media Council is made up of representatives of all the major Christian churches in the UK, together with some of the larger Christian organisations. The task of the Churches' Media Council is to build a bridge of understanding between the Christian community and the media.

The Churches' Media Council also runs theMediaNet, an Association of Christians in Media. For more details visit www.churchesmediacouncil.org.uk.

Churches Media Council

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We commend these principles to the Christian community in approaching the series

We welcome this production

There's no need to debate whether or not the Christian community should welcome this production or not. We celebrate the fact that the story of Jesus is being retold for an audience of millions. We should resist the temptation to focus on details. Instead we welcome this production.

This is a BBC series

We don't wish to "claim" The Passion in any way as "our" series. We have not had any editorial input into the series, nor would we wish to. The story of Jesus is central to the Christian community – but it belongs to the world.

This is a work of drama

That may seem obvious – but it's important. This series wasn't conceived as an exercise in evangelism. It wasn't intended as a dramatisation of the gospel text. It springs from the story of the gospels, and the producers have used the gospels as their source. But this is a work of drama. So we need to judge it as a work of drama and not as a piece of theology.

Let's talk about Jesus

This is the story of the last few days of the life of Jesus. It will prompt believers and unbelievers alike to think about Jesus. This is probably not the moment to discuss the state of the church or the finer points of theology. Instead we should aim to keep the focus of our discussions on the person of Jesus.

Media enquiries

Media enquires about the series can be made to Michelle Osborn at the BBC Press Office on 0208 225 7283 or via michelle.osborn@bbc.co.uk.

To obtain pictures for press or publicity contact pictures@bbc.co.uk. Pictures will be available from the end of January.

If you would like to speak to a representative of the Christian community about the series please call

Andrew Graystone (Churches' Media Council) on 07772 710090 or Charis Gibson on 0207 7207 2117 or c.gibson@eauk.org who are acting as contact-points for the wider Christian community. They will be pleased to advise you. If your enquiry is of a local or denominational nature you may wish to speak to the relevant local or regional communications officer.

What is the national church doing?

- National Christian leaders have been briefed about the series. Many of them will take the opportunity of the broadcasts to speak out about the person of Jesus.
- The national press, both secular and religious, will be fully briefed about the series.
- A panel of "expert" speakers has been established to be available for media interviews etc. For details of this panel please contact Charis Gibson at c.gibson@eauk.org or 0207 207 2117.

What can a local church do?

Encourage people to watch it!

We suggest that local churches don't hold screenings of The Passion in churches and public buildings. The series is already being broadcast into almost every home in the country. It might be more useful to cancel some events to allow people to watch the series.

Feature the series in an Easter leaflet distribution

Many churches deliver leaflets inviting people to their Easter events and services. Why not make the connection with the BBC series?

Host a debate or discussion

Churches may want to hold debates, discussion groups or talks after the broadcasts in homes, pubs or coffee bars. In particular, the Easter Sunday episode dealing with the resurrection appearances is likely to be a good subject for discussion. For some it may be appropriate to discuss the evidence for the resurrection, or the historical reliability of the gospel texts. For others the question will be "what does Jesus mean to me?" or "what difference can his resurrection make in my life?"

Refer to the series in Easter sermons

The chances are that many people who come to church around Easter will also have seen some or all of the series. You may want to use the series as a springboard for Christian teaching and preaching.

Advertise a guest event

Many people are open to coming to a church service at Easter. You may want to advertise a guest event as part of your Easter programme – and make sure that anyone who brings their questions to church finds an appropriate welcome!

Contact your local media

You could notify your local radio station about the broadcasts, and offer spokespeople to take part in any discussion about the series. Most BBC Local Radio stations are already planning to feature the series in their programmes for Holy Week.

If you are going to hold an event, the local press may be interesting in covering the story. Make sure you give them at least a fortnight's notice. Most local papers will also sell advertising space. You could offer to write a column for the local paper for Holy Week, or offer an article in which prominent local figures say what Jesus means to them. The BBC will provide pictures to illustrate newspaper and magazine articles.

Encourage feedback to the BBC

The BBC is always glad to receive comments from viewers – both negative and positive. We hope that many people will want to offer feedback on this production. The address to write to is BBC Television Centre, Wood Lane, London W12 7RJ.

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