

Jesus, Son of Man

Director's Note

Somewhere circa May of 2020, while preparing to pack up my entire bookshelf in my humble Harlem abode, I instinctively reached for *The Collected Works* of Lebanese American poet & artist Khalil Gibran. Like most people around the world at that time, I was in need of both hope and inspiration. And because I remember experiencing such feelings while reading Gibran's work in college, he seemed a most befitting antidote to assuage my Covid blues.

It was while holding his collected work in the palm of my right hand that I suddenly noticed yet another stirring selection just sitting upon my bookshelf, waiting to be summoned. It was Irish author Colm Tóibín's *The Testament of Mary*, which I happened to see front row center on Broadway starring Fiona Shaw (though it played only 16 performances).

I should have known *years* ago that these two works were calling out for one another, yearning for connection; as well as the fact that I should be the one to join them. After all, it was in **2011** that I first read *Jesus, the Son of Man*; it was in **2012** that *The Testament of Mary* was first published as a book; **2013** when its stage adaptation played on Broadway; and it was in **2014**, while performing in Branson, MO, that I read Tóibín's text in full.

Nevertheless, the moment I held both books together two years ago this May, the air around me altered; it became lighter somehow, more fragrant, and my gut was sounding the alarm that something *consequential* was in my hands; something that could possibly fulfill a century's old idea birthed in the mind and spirit of one of the world's most prolific writers. And since that fateful day in the spring of 2020, I have been manicuring the manuscript for what you're about to witness, which is now complete with an incredible company of actors and authentic period costumes on loan from **Simon Moody**.

Moreover, I have stripped Gibran's source material down to less than half of its original content, narrowing the focus of what I believe to be the book's greatest themes: *motherhood*, *loss*, and *the humanity of grief*. Likewise, I have centered the narrative through the eyes of **The Mother Invisible**, who – while not directly spoken for in Gibran's original text – is the blatant vessel through which this ancient world *must* be conveyed.

As such, the show is set in her real-life resting place in **Ephesus, Turkey** – where her sanctuary and garden still remain today (and where Tóibín's *Testament* is set) – not too far from the Temple of Artemis, which Tóibín imagines is the only safe space for Mary to worship while in exile, as if *protected* by the virgin Greek goddess within the sanctity of her wondrous walls.

It is through this mystical connection also that this production has been visually conceived. **Navroz Dabu**'s set is almost like a portal or stargate of sorts, and all along its border are replicas of ancient stone reliefs depicting figures (mostly goddesses) who were once as famous as Mary – whose names were once called out for in pain and desperation; joy and worship; trauma and sacrifice.

And with these ancient avatars looming high above her, Mary must embark upon a quest of total realization; accepting, for better or worse, her place in global history; and how her very flesh and blood helped *literally* change the world.

ALITHOS ANESTI,

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