



The Gospel According to Jesus Christ

By Jose Saramago

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A wry, fictional account of the life of Christ by Nobel laureate José Saramago

A brilliant skeptic, José Saramago envisions the life of Jesus Christ and the story of his Passion as things of this earth: A child crying, the caress of a woman half asleep, the bleat of a goat, a prayer uttered in the grayish morning light. His idea of the Holy Family reflects the real complexities of any family, and—as only Saramago can—he imagines them with tinges of vision, dream, and omen. The result is a deft psychological portrait that moves between poetry and irony, spirituality and irreverence of a savior who is at once the Son of God and a young man. In this provocative, tender novel, the subject of wide critical discussion and wonder, Saramago questions the meaning of God, the foundations of the Church, and human existence itself.

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The Gospel According to Jesus Christ By Jose Saramago Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Like other earthy fictionalized accounts of the life of Jesus, this loose interpretation of the Gospel provoked an outcry: published in the author's native Portugal, it was subsequently withdrawn from consideration for the 1992 European Literature Prize. Saramago (*The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*) explores the psychological motivations that led Jesus to become a prophet. Joseph overhears a conversation that allows him to save his fledgling family from the slaughter of the innocents. Because he lacks the courage to warn others in Bethlehem, God turns him into a spiritual pariah and, as part of God's justice, he is mistakenly crucified. Tormented by his earthly father's guilt, Jesus leaves his family, wanders around in the wilderness with a freethinking Devil, is told of his destiny by God, performs some miracles and, in a fast summing up, ends up dead. Saramago, who takes some pointed digs at both the Catholic church and monotheism generally, seems too uneasy with his material to enjoy his tongue-in-cheek portrait. The work is frequently static and halfhearted, a far cry from the riveting passages of the New Testament, and though often amusing (his conversations between Jesus, God and the Devil may remind Anatole France aficionados of *Revolt of the Angels*), the work never achieves the irony the author seems to have intended.

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From Library Journal

This thoughtful, provocative study of Jesus' self-understanding as both son of God and an all-too-human family member caused debate in the Portuguese parliament and is likely to generate discussion here. Saramago reveals a deep knowledge of scripture, theology, and Christian history, but his true gift may lie in evoking the physical world. Christian writers have often downplayed the earthier aspects of the Incarnation, but here Jesus is "identified as a shepherd by the smell of goat." God says that it is "dissatisfaction, one of the qualities which make man in My image and likeness," which led him to desire a son on Earth. "There will be a church," God tells Jesus, giving a lengthy martyrology as evidence. Jesus dies as do many of us, lamenting "a life planned for death from the very beginning." For serious religious collections.

- Kathleen Norris, *Lemmon P.L., S.D.*

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From [Booklist](#)

As provocative as *The Last Temptation of Christ* and already as controversial in its native Portugal, this fictional life of Jesus is as haunting as a dream and as real as a baby's cry. From the opening scene, in which an angel, dressed as a beggar, comes to announce the birth of Jesus, to the last moment of Jesus' life when the voice of the Lord seems to mock him as Jesus' blood drips into a bowl, Saramago mixes magic, myth, and reality into a potent brew. Among the most eyebrow-raising depictions in the book is that of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute to whom Jesus surrenders his virginity in a scene that is both erotic and tender. More than his mistress, Mary becomes the catalyst that allows Jesus to see the world in a new way. With little paragraphing and no quotation marks, the text is at times difficult to follow. But there is method to Saramago's formlessness. This is a book that can't be read quickly. The typographical density forces us to reread sentences and conversations, and in the course of rereading, we find multiple levels of meaning in the narrative, leading us in turn to ponder the larger questions Saramago's tale elicits. *Ilene Cooper*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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