

What Are We Watching?

Film, Faith, and the Stories We Tell

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We live in an age saturated with stories. Where once we gathered around a fireplace or pulpit to share the narratives that shaped us, today we more often gather around the television. Yet storytelling, however it comes to us, remains a profoundly spiritual act. It reveals who we are, what we long for, and what we believe about the world. For Christians, this offers not just entertainment, but an invitation: to listen thoughtfully, to discern wisely, and to trace the thread of grace woven through the tales our culture tells.

Few television programmes have captured the imagination of churchgoers quite like *Call the Midwife*. Set in the shifting world of 1950s and 60s Poplar, its quiet power lies not just in its compelling characters or historical detail, but in its attention to the sacred in the everyday. Here we find not superheroes or saints, but ordinary women – nurses, nuns, and mothers – serving, struggling, forgiving, and healing. The presence of the Church is not background dressing; it is lived experience. The nuns of Nonnatus House pray, tend, mourn, and hope with those they serve. Their faith is not a decorative relic of a bygone age, but the heartbeat of their vocation. Each episode offers glimpses of grace: in a child born into poverty but welcomed with joy; in a family reconciled against the odds; in the dignity afforded to those whom society overlooks. There are moments of doubt and conflict, too. But through it all runs a deep conviction that every life matters, and that love, when it is real, costs something.

Very different in tone but equally thoughtful is *The Crown*, that sprawling portrait of the modern monarchy. Whether one watches it for its historical insight or dramatic flair, it presents a fascinating meditation on duty, identity, and belief. Faith, though understated, is never far from the surface. Queen Elizabeth II, portrayed across the seasons as dignified and reserved, is shown as a woman for whom public life is inseparable from private conscience. Her real Christmas broadcasts, recreated for the show, frequently reflect on Christian themes: reconciliation, service, the light that darkness cannot overcome. In one particularly poignant episode, she wrestles with whether to forgive her uncle, the Duke of Windsor. The decision is framed not as political, but deeply moral; what does faith require in such a moment? Compassion? Justice? Both?

If *Call the Midwife* reveals faith through vocation, and *The Crown* through conscience, *The Chosen* gives us something still more direct: the Gospels, brought to life with fresh imagination and reverence.

This remarkable series, produced outside of mainstream networks and funded largely by viewers, follows the life of Jesus through the eyes of those who knew him. It does not seek to sensationalise Scripture, but to enrich our understanding of it. In the hands of its creators, Jesus is not distant or ethereal but human, joyful, and present. He laughs with his disciples, weeps with the grieving, and listens to the lonely. There is a humility in its storytelling. Mary Magdalene's healing is not over in a flash, it is revisited, remembered, and wrestled with. Peter's pride and doubt are not flaws to be hidden but places where grace can enter. In this way, the series becomes more than a depiction, it becomes a form of devotional encounter.

Christians are sometimes told to be wary of modern media, and there is wisdom in that. Not all content is nourishing. Not every story is one we should dwell upon. Yet to retreat entirely is to miss the chance to recognise God at work in the wider world. Just as Paul quoted pagan poets to make a Gospel point, so we too can find truth in unlikely places. To watch as a Christian is not merely to avoid what offends, it is to engage with love and attentiveness. We can ask:

- What does this story say about what it means to be human?
- Where do we see echoes of hope, of redemption, of grace?
- How might this prompt us to prayer, to reflection, or to action?

In many ways, our faith is shaped by the stories we choose to tell, and the ones we choose to listen to. When we allow our watching to become a form of reflection, we may find that the Spirit speaks not only through Scripture, but also through the glimmer of truth in the world's better tales. In the end, all good stories borrow something from the greatest one: a story of love that crosses boundaries, of light that cannot be overcome, of a God who does not stay distant but walks beside us. It is the story of a child born in obscurity, of a life poured out in love, and of a kingdom not of this world but coming ever nearer.

And so, next time you press play, ask yourself: what am I watching? What story am I being told? And what does it have to do with God?