

THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

Your Gateway to Music and More from a Christian Perspective
Slow down as you approach the gate, and have your change ready....

Jesus, Mary and Joey

Stars: Vincent Pagano, Marley Shelton, Jennifer Esposito, Olympia Dukakis, Jason Gedrick, Stacy Keach, Tess Harper, Judith Scarpone and John Capodice with cameo appearance by Charles Durning

Director/Scriptwriter: Vincent Pagano

Music: Donald Markowitz

Federal Hill Pictures/Panorama

Rated PG 13

Running Length: 105 minutes

Here is a gentle tale of what happens when Joey, an easy-going, non-committal guy (Vincent Pagano) meets Mary (Marley Shelton), a gal with religious convictions and decides to do something about his life. And then again, it might be because a mysterious stranger keeps appearing to him, in fact, Joey thinks he once ran the man down, but he vanished. Filming was down in Providence, R. I. and the Federal Hill area. Italian family life is shown fondly through Vincent Pagano's dialogue, Bernd Heinl's cinematography and Donald Markowitz's music score..

The story has Joey living at home with his parents (Angelina Vitello and John Capodice), plus eccentric grandmother (Olympia Dukakis), hairdresser sister Frankie (Jennifer Esposito) and hypochondriac brother, Mikey (Mike Pagano). It's a more or less peaceful existence with Mom the only one going to Mass on a regular basis. Enter someone from childhood, Mary (aka "Scary Mary") who is back in town and lovelier than ever. Joey and his friend Tony (Jason Gedrick) both fall for Mary, but she clearly prefers Joey. As the friendship deepens, we see that Mary's faith comes from a childhood miracle that cured her of cancer. She now works with children. Her parents (Stacy Keach and Tess Harper) think Joey isn't good enough for Mary, but Mary doesn't believe them. Joey has to find his own convoluted way to a comfortable place in religion.

Jesus, Mary and Joey pokes gentle fun at religion and the casting of Dan Lauria as the local priest is quite good. Lauria is known for tough guy roles, and here has to be patient enough to answer questions, plus deal with Grandma. The banter between the characters flows evenly and draws the audience into their lives. You feel as though you know them, they could be neighbors or even relatives. We see that Joey is comfortable with his male friends until he has to make choices about Mary. Frankie, Joey's sister, once did a terrible wrong to Mary and now has to own up to it. Joey's father is a butcher, and has to deal with the owner of his store who comes on like a bush league thug.

Humor is provided by the banter between Jason Gedrick's "Tony" and everyone he meets. Tony hasn't met a girl he didn't like and his choices are always questionable. Jennifer Esposito's "Frankie" considers herself a "hair engineer," in a world where the only thing that matters is hair. When Joey decides to be a born-again Christian, his family is taken aback. Joey's brother, Mikey imagines he has the disease of the week and there is always Grandma to cope with.

The question in this film is: can a person let go of their life and turn it over to God? This takes courage, it's like walking on ice without looking down. Mary thinks Joey can do it, but does Joey think he can? Religion is all around him, but he hasn't really "gotten" it. Religion becomes a once-a-week thing and that is comfortable until you start to examine it and see if it really fits you. Vincent Pagano's script shows that it can. Here are characterizations that are well-defined and well-acted. The audience can feel as though they are part of this community and take a sense of what-happens-when-God-is-in-your-life with them. That's what filmmaking is all about. Letting your story linger with people and the question of "what if?"

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