

PV filmmaker explores Jesus' youth in Egypt

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The Arizona Republic

Aug. 24, 2007

Paul Perry has scoured the sands of Egypt, steered ancient catacombs and grilled historians in search of answers to one of history's major questions:

What happened during the childhood of Jesus Christ?

The Bible holds only a few verses about Jesus' early life with his family, including a flight through Egypt to escape a massacre of children ordered by Judea's King Herod.

For Perry, who lives in Paradise Valley, this gap in history prompted his own journey. Two years ago, Perry released a two-hour film chronicling the child Jesus through Egypt.

Now, a short version of the documentary is set to debut Monday at AMC Theatres at Desert Ridge Marketplace. It will be the first viewing in a West Coast theater, Perry said.

Jesus: The Lost Years was first unveiled in New York early this summer and runs 85 minutes with some subtitles. The film is a recount of Perry's six-week travels in Egypt. Through guidance from local curates, worshipers and Pharaonic shrines, he unearths ancient accounts believed to have happened in young Jesus' life.

"Jesus is hands down the most influential person in world history, but very little is known about him," Perry said.

Picked up this year by distributor PureFlix Entertainment, the film's DVDs are expected to be released next month in Phoenix and eight other cities, Perry said.

"Jesus was with us 33 years, and the Bible only covers three of his years," Perry said. "The rest of it is this big dark area."

Departing from Israel's border, Perry and his crew - including archaeologist John de Bry - traversed hundreds of miles not once, but twice.

Their aim? To follow an ancient trail channeled by the Holy Family across the Sinai Desert nearly 2,000 years ago, fleeing from Herod's vow to kill all baby boys in Bethlehem and eliminate a foretold King of the Jews.

"Jesus left a trail of miracles that were followed like bread crumbs by King Herod's soldiers in hot pursuit," Perry said.



"Jesus was the most influential person in history," says Paul Perry (pictured in Egypt), Paradise Valley author and director of *Jesus: The Lost Years*. Perry recounts his six-week Egyptian journey in the 85-minute documentary.

Perry collected more than 30 stories from a mixture of sources, from the discovery of stones believed to contain Jesus' footprints, to miracles performed by Jesus as a child.

"What I found truly surprised me," Perry said. "Jesus was not an abstract deity, like those found on the walls of Pharaonic (Egyptian) temples."

Many findings are rooted in the Coptic Orthodox church, a Christian entity comprising a small portion of Egypt's religious population, Perry said. Most Egyptians are Muslim.

"The (Coptic Christians) have collected stories and matched up places with events of the life of Jesus," he said. "As a result, they have the trail."

Perry said the Islamic community, which views Jesus as a prophet, also provided accounts.

"(Jesus) has meaning to both religions," Perry said. "This trail is one of the things that link the Muslims and Christians together."

While he swears by the trail now, Perry had his moments of doubt.

Everything changed during a visit to Asyut, Egypt, where the Holy Family's journey was believed to end. A photo taken there of the Church of St. Mark revealed an odd "orange spray of light." After Perry showed it to local religious experts, it was declared an "official vision."

"I feel as though that vision I photographed was an answer to my prayer," he said. "This trail is real."

While skeptics have demanded proof beyond the oral accounts and non-Biblical writings, Perry said he is going with what he feels is the best available evidence.

"We have to accept this second-source material," he said. "The only way you can find this information is through oral tradition, which has been handed down, and writings that didn't make it into the Bible."