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Work on BYU's Messiah Documentary Continues

The filming for the Messiah documentary has been completed, and the important work of editing has begun. Team members had traveled to Israel, Egypt, and Denmark to film the visual backdrop for the nine-part film as well as to capture the hosts' comments that will introduce a wide array of topics in the documentary. Those hosts included Gaye Strathearn (assistant professor of ancient scripture), John Tanner (professor of English), Andrew Skinner (professor of ancient scripture), and Kent Brown (professor emeritus of ancient scripture).

The director of the filming effort, Sterling Van Wagenen, cofounder of the Sundance Film Festival, was enthusiastic about the footage that the team gathered, including spectacular shots around the Sea of Galilee. "In places, it was a challenge to find the right angle for the cameras and to place our hosts in a physical context that tied to the topic. But we succeeded marvelously. We found cooperation wherever we went."

Tanner, also BYU's Academic Vice President, said "the opportunity to visit again the places where the Savior taught and then to interact with colleagues on camera was a rare treat."

Strathearn, who went to Copenhagen with the team, felt that the opportunity to be filmed near the original Christus statue was "a privilege that comes only once in one's life."

Brown judged that "our footage for this film is better and more interesting than any I have seen in a documentary film devoted to Jesus. The project has been enhanced by this recent filming trip. And the filming team is simply the best that a person can assemble."

Skinner, the former executive director of the Maxwell Institute, was particularly touched by "the opportunity to bear witness of the Savior in places that He knew and traveled."

During December 2008, fifty scholars were interviewed on camera answering important questions not only about the current state of New Testament scholarship but especially about the Savior's life and on-going ministry.

The documentary is backed by the BYU administration and the Maxwell Institute,

in partnership with Religious Education, BYU Broadcasting, and the Department of Theatre and Media Arts. The series was conceived by S. Kent Brown, former director of the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies and FARMS, largely in response to the impressively produced 1998 PBS documentary series *From Jesus to Christ*. Although that series offered good information about Jesus and his times, its editors began from a viewpoint of non-faith. Brown judged that a documentary series that rests on the broader range of LDS scripture, paired with insights from modern prophets and apostles, will offer to Latter-day Saints, particularly college-age individuals, a more complete picture of the Savior, his times, and his notable achievements.

The project will also include a Web site where the resources used in the television broadcast (the standard works, statements of modern prophets and apostles, and historical records) can be accessed to allow viewers to explore further beliefs and doctrines about Jesus Christ. ♦

INSIGHTS

Paula W. Hicken, Jacob D. Rawlins, *Editors*

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