



**Babette's Feast**

## Movies you can use

There are several foreign language films that have been used widely in church and film discussion circles. I thought I would highlight the main ones. I note that in terms of classification the government site is helpful in terms of providing the classification and also reasons or outline of the areas that have determined its classification: <http://www.classification.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Babette's Feast** (Denmark, 1987, G) Set in 19th century Denmark, this somewhat disarmingly simple story is based on a story by Karen Blixen, who became well known for her book *Out of Africa*. *Babette's Feast* is the story of a meal organised by Babette a 'refugee' from France, who is the housekeeper and cook for two sisters who live in a puritan community in a remote setting in Jutland.

The sisters have the oversight of the religious community founded by their father and he is often referred to in glowing and saintly terms, but the community is struggling with ageing and health issues. The community keeps a fairly rigid lifestyle, including usually avoiding enjoyment of any food — it is just 'fuel' to keep going. After coming into some money Babette decides to provide a meal for the community in appreciation for their taking her in.

The movie is also a story about a different era of perhaps unrequited love, and following what you believe God has called you to do. A gentle film, though one that is often considered to mark the beginnings of new interest in exploring the use of film in church circles.

**Jesus of Montreal** (Canada, 1989, M) This is a film based around a group of actors putting on a passion play which achieves controversy due to its more radical interpretation of the life of Christ and its confrontation with the authorities of the modern time (part of the official church). This has some famous analogous scenes as the life of one of the actors Daniel begins to mirror elements of the life of Christ.

There is an especially contemporary scene related to the temptation of Christ by the devil. While the film has a theologically liberal base, adult viewers can certainly use this to look at biblical themes, and one can have a vibrant discussion about who Jesus really is.

**As It Is In Heaven** (2004, Sweden, M) This movie struck a chord with Western audiences and in Australia ran in one small Sydney theatre for nearly two years. It is a simple story of a famous conductor coming 'home' to rest and recover, who then becomes caught up in helping a church choir learn to sing.

This could have been a bit like *Sister Act*, but instead of a comedic foundation, it focuses on some real and sometimes disturbing issues in the not-so-pious and fragile community.

It should be noted that while religious, the theological premise is essentially humanist, as it focuses mainly on the people's responses in terms of finding their own way and even the conclusion reached while 'spiritual' is more aptly centred around the idea of earthly nostalgia

than 'as it is in heaven', that is to the glory of God.

**Adam's Apples** (Denmark, 2005, MA) This poignant story features the now well-known Danish actor Mads Dittmann Mikkelsen (the villain in *Casino Royale*) as Ivan Fjeldsted, a pastor in a remote area who takes in former prisoners who are required to spend a certain amount of time following the conclusion of their sentence in community service.

The latest arrival is Adam Pedersen, a former leader of a neo-Nazi leader gang. Each person at the church community has to choose a goal or task to undertake that will help with their rehabilitation and in an attempt to get the meddlesome pastor of his case, Adam finally resolves that he will bake an apple pie (there is an apple tree in the churchyard).

While a seemingly simple task, it becomes fraught with difficulty and also issues arise with other prisoners, Adam's past connection and also Ivan's own tragic past. One book of the Old Testament features firmly in the discussions and also theme, but I will leave this to you consider. This is an adult film for its themes, but can richly reward a discussion about God's grace, providence and questions about good and evil.

**Letters to Pastor Jaakob** (Finland, 2009, PG)

In a similar theme to *Adam's Apples*, Pastor Jaakob finds himself with Leila, a recent, though unwilling paroled prisoner who is now designated to undertake long-term community service. Jaakob has a unique ministry for today — no technology here.

He is blind and receives mail from people asking for advice and prayer. He needs an assistant to read the letters and write a response. His responses are typically scriptural references and a blessing. Needless to say some issues arise for Leila who finds the whole situation frustrating and odd, but God's love abounds.

This is an amiable and reflective film, that helps the viewer to consider the mercy and grace of God.

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