



# **Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal**

*Christopher Moore*

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The birth of Jesus has been well chronicled, as have his glorious teachings, acts, and divine sacrifice after his thirtieth birthday. But no one knows about the early life of the Son of God, the missing years -- except Biff, the Messiah's best bud, who has been resurrected to tell the story in the divinely hilarious yet heartfelt work "reminiscent of Vonnegut and Douglas Adams" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*).

Verily, the story Biff has to tell is a miraculous one, filled with remarkable journeys, magic, healings, kung fu, corpse reanimations, demons, and hot babes. Even the considerable wiles and devotion of the Savior's pal may not be enough to divert Joshua from his tragic destiny. But there's no one who loves Josh more -- except maybe "Maggie," Mary of Magdala -- and Biff isn't about to let his extraordinary pal suffer and ascend without a fight.

## **Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal Details**

Date : Published October 13th 2009 by HarperCollins e-books (first published March 1st 2002)

ISBN :

Author : Christopher Moore

Format : Kindle Edition 468 pages

Genre : Humor, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fantasy, Religion, Comedy

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**Christopher Moore**

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# From Reader Review Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal for online ebook

## Jonathan says

[I'm considering taking down this review, as I'm not happy that my most "liked" review is a negative one. It's too easy to earn praise by casting stones.]

A book recommendation that I suffered through... not for charges of blasphemy, but for style. I can't stand this type of comedic writing with its obvious set-ups and zingers and formulaic irreverence. Douglas Adams wanna-be. This type of humor gets enough time between news items on NPR's "All Things Considered."

Bah!

Witness the last lines (paraphrased here):

"The 'H' in Jesus H. Christ stands for Hallowed . . . you know, 'Hallowed be thy name'?"

"Oh! I thought it stood for Harvey."

He saved that gem for the end of the book.

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## Stephanie \*Very Stable Genius\* says

Second time reading this book and it is still one of my favorites.

Christopher Moore weaves you through all of the major religions and all the while you are laughing your ass off. You can't say that about most religious books.....

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## Dan Schwent says

Lamb is the story of the missing years of Jesus, as told by his best pal Biff. That's all you need in the way of summary.

I was subjected to 12 years of Catholic school and mass every sunday for even longer than that so when I heard of the existence of a humorous book about Jesus' missing years, I jumped for it with all the lapsed-Catholic enthusiasm I could muster. Was I disappointed?

Most definitely not. In fact, I was the opposite of disappointed. Appointed? Anyway, this was my first Christopher Moore book and the measuring stick against which his others are... measured. Biff's a great character, the regular guy accompanying Joshua (aka Jesus) on his adventures. Jesus, of course, plays the ultimate straightman to Biff's jokes. From when Biff told Jesus he was going to marry his mother when they were little tykes all the way to the end, Biff makes what could be a fairly boring religious story into an odyssey of the hilarious.

While Moore tells the story in a humorous way, it's not as absurd as, say, a Douglas Adams book. Jesus

visiting the Three Wise Men and actually learning from them was a good way to fill those missing years. In fact, Jesus traveling to the Far East makes a lot more sense than a lot of stuff in the bible. Just sayin'.

The characters other than Jesus and Biff were pretty memorable. Mary Magdalene played a huge part in the story and the three wise men were all given a lot more to do than the Gospel writers originally gave them. Catch, the demon from Practical Demonkeeping, makes an appearance. Raziel, the title character from The Stupidest Angel, makes his first appearance here and is the catalyst of the plot, resurrecting Biff and Mary M to help him fill in the gaps.

I've owned four copies of this book, each destroyed or lost under suspicious circumstances. People I've loaned the book over the years still quote parts of it to me when we run into each other. It's just that damn good.

I can't put the hilarity of Lamb into words. It's easier if you just read it yourself. Five of the easiest star I've ever awarded, with the caveat that if you are humorless about religion, you might be extremely offended.

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### **Matthew says**

Good book - not great - especially when comparing it to other Moore books I have read. I enjoyed his Shakespeare satire better than the biblical satire - maybe because Shakespeare lends itself more to that.

Most of the stars I have given are for the beginning of the book and then the last third of the book. Jesus (Joshua) as a child and the retelling of the gospels from a different viewpoint were really interesting and it is obvious that Moore did his research.

The middle part of the book - where Biff and Joshua go in search of the wisemen kind of drug on and wasn't as interesting - but took up most of the book.

So, I can say if you are a die-hard Moore fan or you enjoy satire, give this one a go. Otherwise, proceed with caution!

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### **Nikoleta says**

?να ?κρως απολαυστικ? μυθιστ?ρημα, με ?ναν ?ρωα ο οπο?ος μπορε? να ?ταν απλ?ς ο κολλητ?ς του Ιησο? (Γ?σουα στο βιβλ?ο) αλλ? ?ταν αυτ?ς που εφη?ρε τον σαρκασμ? (κατ? τα λεγ?μενα του ιδ?ου). Και απ? σαρκασμ? βρ?θει το βιβλ?ο. Υπ?ροχες, κωμικ?ς, σαρκαστικ?ς ατ?κες, ευτρ?πελα και πολ? κ?φι.

Το ενδιαφ?ρον ε?ναι ?τι η ιστορ?α ε?ναι σφιχτοδεμ?νη και η πλοκ? σε κρατ? σε εγρ?γορση, οπ?τε ο αναγν?στης δεν υπ?ρχει περ?πτωση να βαρεθε?.

Τι ?κανε ο Ιησο?ς τα 30 χρ?νια απ? την γ?ννηση του μ?χρι τον χρ?νο που ξεκ?νησε το κ?ρυγμα του; Αναστα?νει σαυρ?κια, ταξιδε?ει, μπλ?κει σε αστε?ες καταστ?σεις και κ?νει πολλ?ς γκ?φες... Αυτ? που αγ?πησα πιο πολ? στο βιβλ?ο, ε?ναι ?τι με το να π?ρει ο συγγραφ?ας την ιστορ?α του Ιησο? και να την σατιρ?σει, το αποτ?λεσμα δεν ε?ναι καθ?λου γελο?ο, δι?τι επ? της ουσ?ας δεν ε?ναι σ?τιρα.

Κατ?φερε να ισορροπ?σει τα μεγ?λα νο?ματα που μας μεταφ?ρει με το χιο?μορ και το κ?φι.

Ε?ναι μ?α ιστορ?α γραμμ?νη με γν?ση και σοφ?α, η οπο?α μ?σα σε ?λο της το χιο?μορ, θ?τει μεγ?λα και αι?νια ερωτ?ματα. Αξ?ζει να παλ?ψει κανε?ς για μ?α ιδ?α; Αξ?ζει να αφ?σεις τα π?ντα π?σω και να προχωρ?σεις γυμν?ς για αυτ? που πιστε?εις, που ξ?ρεις ?τι ε?ναι αλ?θεια; Π?σο μπορε? να αλλοι?σει η θρησκε?α μ?α π?στη; Ε?ναι τελικ? οι θρησκε?ες τ?σο διαφορετικ?ς μεταξ? τους; Και το κ?ριο ερ?τημα ?λων, ποιος πραγματικ? νοι?ζεται αν θα φ?με τελικ? μπ?ικον; ?να απο τα ωραι?τερα βιβλ?α που δι?βασα μ?σα στην χρονι? (σ?γουρα πριν το ξεκιν?σω δεν το περ?μενα).

«?ρθα για να πω στον Σωτ?ρα ?τι ?ρθε η ?ρα να φ?γει»,

«Αλλ? δεν ξ?ρεις για πο?;»

«?χι».

«Κι αυτ? το χρυσάφ? πρ?γμα γ?ρω σου, αυτ? το φως, τι ε?ναι;»

«Η δ?ξα του Κυρ?ου».

«Ε?σαι σ?γουρος ?τι δεν ε?ναι η ηλιθι?τητα που ξεχ?νεται απ? μ?σα σου;»

«Σκαμπι?λ, φ?ρσου ευγενικ?, ε?ναι αγγελιοφ?ρος του Κυρ?ου».

«Μα, γαμ?το, Γ?σουα, δεν βοηθ?ει καθ?λου. Αν ε?ναι να? ρχονται ?γγελοι απ? τον ουραν?,

τουλ?χιστον να ξ?ρουν τι κ?νουν. Να ρ?χνουν τε?χη μ' ?να φ?σημα, να καταστρ?φουν π?λεις, α, δεν ξ?ρω – να φ?ρνουν ΟΛΟΚΛΗΡΟ το μ?νυμα μ?πως;»

Σελ. 97.

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## Jason Koivu says

Mel Brooks and Monty Python have been there, done that.

Christopher Moore retraces the steps of those comedy greats of the past in his *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*, a lighthearted take on what Christians call "the greatest story ever told."

Sure, it's a good story, but it's also rife with parody potential and humorists have been squeezing it for laughs probably since it was first told. That being the case, Moore's book travels a well-trodden path and so the laughs just didn't come for this reader. Certainly it was an enjoyable enough read. It wasn't until the end that I had to push myself to finish what was becoming an increasingly dry, straight up retelling of Jesus' crucifixion. Prior to that, Moore takes a few popshots at other religions during the son of god's trek through self-discovery and sometimes his aim is true.

*Lamb...* is quite a good book, and yet I may seem to be down on it. I blame hype. When you hear and read a great deal of praise for a writer, as I did for Moore, your expectations rise to an unreasonable height. I'm afraid mine were higher than he could reasonably obtain.

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## Kristen Boers says

Remember back in 9th grade when you wrote a wonderful, insightful papers for every assignment and then, eventually, you got cocky, got drunk on your own brilliance, got sloppy and lazy with self assurance? And, inevitably, your next paper would come back with a comment from your teacher that went something like

this "Accurate, and mildly interesting, but doesn't compare with your previous work...What happened?" This is what I felt like writing in my copy of "Lamb" about 120 pages in.

There's a really lovely forward to this book, inviting believers and non believers alike to enjoy the book, take what they need from it, disregard the rest. I should have liked to take the first 1/3 of the book and left the rest. The story's protagonist is not Christ himself, but his best buddy Biff, brought back from the dead by an angel of the Lord. The reason for Biff's resurrection is that the Powers that Be (Uh, God) has decided that the Bible doesn't really tell us enough of what happens to Jesus between the time He's born and around 30, when He becomes a big deal with His proclaiming to be the Son of God bit. So, Biff is brought back by the angel Raziel to write the Gospel According to Biff, giving us an insight to Jesus from the man who knew him best. What a great idea. It's such a great idea, that as a writer, I'm jealous and annoyed I didn't come up with it first. Anyone unclear as to why they've never come across a "Biff" in their readings of Leviticus or Matthew should note that the protagonist's real name is Levi. He's just called Biff. Just like Jesus Christ, who's name in Hebrew translates to Joshua. At first I thought this was a clever trick of Moore's, enabling the reader to see past what we already know about Jesus Christ by giving that character a new name. That was, of course, before I got to the chapter where Joshua and Biff are living in a desert fortress with one of the three Magi and seven Asian concubines. Yup. You read that sentence correctly. Incidentally, that's where it all went down hill for me.

The early chapters are full of clever twists on things we already know or think we know about the life of Jesus in 5 B.C. We meet a young Mary Magdalene, and surprise surprise, she does have a crush on the Boy Who Would be the Savior, but her story take a delicious turn I didn't see coming and won't spoil for you. We also meet Jes..um, Joshua's parents, Joseph and Mary, and get a little insight into the caprenter and the virgin who produced the world's most famous son. The world of Joshua and Biff is contextualized for us, made relatable, by modern day Biff, reminiscing not only on his childhood but trying to compare it to this strange world he suddenly finds himself alone in.

Then, with almost no warning, the innocent reader is thrust into a world of sex, drugs, and kung fu. My complaint is not with the sex, drugs, kung fu, meditation, yaks, human sacrifices, and bull violating but with the seemnig randomness in the story. It's like Moore got a little too comfortable with how well he was going and jumped the shark. I have no problem with the fact that theoretically Jesus, oh right, JOSHUA, would study with Buddhist monks except this...it doesn't fit in the story. Who cares iff it doesn't fit in history, this is fiction after all, but it doesn't fit in the narration.

As the book goes on, we touch in less and less with modern day Biff, losing our conduit to the world that is slowly but sreuly getting more outlandish and harder to stay connected with. And then BAM! There are the last four chapters, with the ending we all know, slapdashed on the page as if the author has to interest in them himself, so why should we? And then the books over. Arguably, that is the author's point. This book, Biff's Gospel, is about Joshua's life, not his death, and neither Moore, nor Biff, will give us the safisfaction of retreading every moment of the end, like some perverse literary "The Passion of the Christ." But to me, that is mute point. "Lamb" prides itself, from the first sentence, on shocking us with insight and irreverance for what most people think is the most mporant story of our time. The charm of the book, of Biff himself, is that he treats his pal like anybody else...well, not quite true. He treats Joshua as his best friend in the world, but not as the Savior. By repriving the reader of the true anguish at the death of a best friend, Moore looses something...His book had smarts and it had charm. What it's missing is heart. A more detailed ending could have given us that. Without it, the book was accuate and mildly interesting...what happened?

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**smalls says**

OK, I finished the book! Whoohoo! All in all, it was ok for me. I laughed a lot in the beginning...

some of my favorite lines were

"Revelations 2; Just When you thought it was safe to sin."

and "Actually , I thought I'd stay Josh. Your mother needs someone to look after her, and she's still a relatively attractive woman. I mean a guy could do worse."

My absolute favorite part was the lizard in the beginning. I laughed so hard! very fun and creative.

It got slow for me while he was visiting the wisemen. But I did laugh once in a while. Definately not as much as in the beginning.

The End...

I was nervous reading the part during His ministry. Being a Born Again Christian, I knew this could be difficult. I did struggle with a few things, and to me they were important. Well, at least two things. First, the scorging, "At least it wasn't a Roman scourge they lashed him with. He took thirty nine lashes, but it was just leather, not the lead -tipped whip that the romands use. "

A cat of nine tails was used with other devices. It was the Romans scourging so it was a roman scourge.

Pieces of glass and metal shards are embedded in the leather strips, and they rip through the flesh. Important to me because I want others to know how bad the penalty for our sins was.

Second part was the crusificiton, the poisen. This is a fictional work. But Mr. Moore did do a lot of research for this book as well. And I always have to take a stand on the belief of the real death and resurection of Jesus. I found myself praying that the book wouldn't go that route. But it did, and you are lead to believe that he drinks it. Thankfully Moore didn't let the ending be the poisen.

Now that that is said, I would like to say that I loved that no matter how raunchy the book got, or made me shake my head, the ending was still sad. His followers didn't get it, didn't want to believe it even. It ripped them to shreds inside. With how the book was going,I kept expecting humor in the crusifiction, but it was well done emotionally. If there was a poisen that could work like that, I would have wanted to try it to save Him too. It is too much to fathom that the person you have been friends with for even the time that the real diciples were with Him, was going to have to bear that torture, and then to understand He was coming back, and that it was being done to save the world, I wouldn't have gotten it either. Because of the Bible, those who believe have hindsight. I really appreciated that Moore stayed true to at least the tragedy and pain that His friends had to wittness.

Jesus swearing as a kid, didn't seem to bother me quite as much as it did as He aged. Once the book got to the part that is written, it was much harder for me to find the humor in certain things. But there were some. Like when Biff talks about his mom and Joshua says, "she still plagued with demons?" Lines like that cracked me up.

Thanks for letting me read the book. It was interesting and at times fun. I will still reccomend it to one more of my friends who I know can handle it as a Born Again believer. But it is definately a book I have to be careful of recomendations. Only because so many "Christians" that I know would have a fit reading this book.

But I did pass it on to a friend of mine, who is a christian, but who also has a great sense of humor.

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**Kemper says**

The last ten years have mutated my views on religion. I went from a vague agnostic live-and-let-live attitude to a full blown distrust and dislike of mass worshipping of mysterious deities. When it wasn't being used as an excuse to murder people who believed different things, then it was being used to deny basic scientific concepts or prevent consenting adults from marriage based on gender. Overall, I'd become convinced that humanity was far too stupid to use religion as anything but yet another system to justify telling someone else how to live.

So naturally, one of my favorite novels of the last ten years is a funny and touching book about the life of Jesus.

Yeah, it was that kind of decade.

The story is told by Jesus's best friend, Biff. Actually, Biff quickly explains that Jesus was known as Josh back in the days when they were kids in Nazareth. Biff knows there is something special about Josh from the moment they meet, and he adopts a life-long role of dealing with the practical matters that the naive Josh tends to overlook. When teen-aged Josh decides to track down the wise men who attended his birth to see what they can teach him about how he should become the Messiah, Biff knows he has to go along to protect Josh from an evil world.

Together, they travel across Asia, invent sarcasm, learn alchemy, discover coffee and become kung fu experts as Josh prepares himself to one day return home and fulfill his ultimate destiny.

It's no surprise that Christopher Moore could write a very funny book about the life of Jesus. What is surprising that he's able to make it so touching that even a cynical non-believer such as myself could be moved by it. By focusing in on the basic love-thy-neighbor concepts that Josh fiercely preaches, Moore wrote a warm reminder of what Christianity is supposed to be about.

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## **Kim says**

### What I remember from CCD:

- It was Tuesday nights and that meant that I missed *Who's the Boss*
- All the really obnoxious cheerleaders went to my church (Our Lady of Perpetual Help-OLPH!)
- I had to go to CCD so I could get confirmed or I couldn't get married in a church (so I was told every time I tried to feign an illness or a menstrual cramp)
- We would be ushered into the school/rectory thing where we had to choose 3 colored rings which represented 3 different 'classes' we would attend... things like 'Sacrifice and Abstaining during Lent 101' and 'Abstinence - Just Do It' and I would pick my colors hoping that I would get the class that the Michael J Fox look-alike was teaching
- Sometimes we were given juice

### Things I didn't learn from CCD

- What CCD actually stood for
- How to get married in a church
- How to be cool



- Anything about Christ

So, forgive me if I'm enamored by this book. You can all roll your eyes as much as you want and call it cutesy and a Tom Robbins rip off (never read him, probably never will) and say that the jokes grew old fast and that you were bored and yadda yadda yadda.

My 'real' teachings of Christ came from a college Western Civ course, taught in one of the oldest churches in Boston by a professor who kicked Genesis's ass up and down the pews at 8am every Monday and Wednesday morning.. (Thank you, Professor Coffee, I ♥ you) and numerous viewings of Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* where I had to badger my husband with 'Now, who is that again?' and 'Willem Defoe is a pretty hot looking Jesus.' (Thank you, Maurice...now Judas will always be Harvey Keitel who will always be *The Bad Lieutenant* to me)

Here... this book, this work of fiction, will probably replace all of that... well, almost all (never you, Professor Coffee, never you) because it brought a sense of humanity and some laugh out loud scenes that I probably would have never associated with the whole Christian teachings and what have you. (Apparently, I missed that class)

Biff and Josh's friendship rivaled any literary friendships that I've encountered and while I was expecting to LMAO, I wasn't expecting to want to scoop both of them up and hug them. And then hug them some more. I mean, I *know* how this story ends, okay? I'm not that daft... and yet.. I was still sniffing and trying to swallow past the lump in my throat.

Many seem to have lost interest with Biff and Josh's journey searching for the Magus, I can see this, though it wasn't the case with me... I loved how they grew from each stay learning about the Tao and Confucius and Buddha-- and how I had to struggle along with Josh as he tries to figure out this whole Messiah bit that he has to live up to. I especially love the scene with the Yeti. Wow.

*"The mountain people. They killed the yeti because they couldn't understand a creature who wasn't as evil as they were."*

*"The mountain people were evil?"*

*"All men are evil, that's what I was talking to my father about."*

*"What did he say?"*

*"Fuck 'em."*

*"Really?"*

*"Yeah."*

*"At least he answered you."*

*"I got the feeling that he thinks it's my problem now."*

*"Makes you wonder why he didn't burn that on one of the tablets. 'HERE, MOSES, HERE'S THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, AND HERE'S AN EXTRA ONE THAT SAYS FUCK 'EM.'"*

*"He doesn't sound like that."*

(If you've already started guffawing and/or rolling your eyes, this probably isn't for you.)

I knew some of the mainstays of the story... when Josh raises Lazarus:

*"Simon, get your leprous ass out here," Joshua commanded.*

*"But, I'm.... I'm all icky."*

Or when he foretells of his betrayal and death to his disciples:

*Someone will have to carry on the church when I'm gone, and I'm going to be gone soon. In the spring we'll go to Jerusalem for the Passover, and there I will be judged by the scribes and the priests and there I will be tortured and put to death. But three days from the day of my death, I shall rise and be with you again.".....*

*...We looked not at each other, and neither at the ground, but at a place in space a few feet from our faces, where I suppose one looks for a clear answer to appear out of undefined shock.*

*"Well, that sucks," someone said.*

And the scene with the moneychangers in the Temple? Almost as powerful as Willem kicking ass... almost.

Alrighty then... this isn't supposed to be anything but a story and I really have to thank Mr. Moore for making my day. And if any of you doubters want to debate this..... Look! Is that a seagull?!  
;)

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## **Shannon (Giraffe Days) says**

**\*\*some spoilers\*\***

Lamb starts with one of my favourite quotes, which sets the scene very aptly: "God is a comedian playing to an audience that is afraid to laugh" (Voltaire). A deceptively slim-looking book (but one that is absolutely heavenly to hold - no pun intended - with its glossy floppy cover and delicate leaves), Lamb is, as the title says, the (fictional) story of Christ's childhood as told by his best friend Levi who is called Biff.

Now, Moore doesn't mention Monty Python anywhere, but I'd wager he's seen Life of Brian. Whether he liked it, got it or appreciated it, I couldn't say, but it's a possible inspiration. It doesn't have the clever wit or irony, or the sheer genius of Brian, but it does have the irreverent humour. That aside, Lamb is a great story, made up but oddly plausible.

Keeping to the "known" facts and not interested in questioning your faith in any grand or cynical way, Lamb is told by Biff, resurrected today by an angel so he can write down his version of events. Given the gift of tongues, Biff writes it in contemporary American idiom, which saves the story from being dry and boring. He claims to have invented sarcasm, and encourages Joshua (later Jesus) to have a sense of humour. The best bit about this book, though, are the adventures the two friends have.

At about 13, they set off to find the three Wise Men who had been there at Joshua's birth, in order for Joshua to learn how to be the Messiah. They spend years in a cave-like fortress in Afghanistan with Balthasar, more years at a Buddhist temple in the mountains with Gaspar, and yet more time in India in nooks in a cliff with the seagulls learning from Melchior. They learn Confucius from Balthasar, Biff learns about poisons and alchemy from Balthasar's Chinese concubines, and they encounter a very hungry demon. They meditate and study Buddhism from Gaspar (as well as kung-fu and "Jew-do" because Joshua doesn't want to hurt anyone)

and encounter the last Yeti; and rescue children from the Hindu god of destruction, Kali, before finding Melchior, who teaches Joshua how to fit himself inside a wine bottle and multiply food - which comes in handy later, that's for sure - while Biff learns the Kama Sutra.

Biff is the perfect counter-point to the more serious, naive and well-meaning Joshua, whose mother brought him up from birth to believe his father is God, not her husband Joseph. Although Moore admits it's hard to write a story set in this time and place because of the lack of knowledge of the period, he does an admirable job and it's entirely believable. I did find it a slow read at times, but I definitely found myself laughing as well. It also gave the best explanation of the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, that I've ever heard, and suddenly it makes more sense. More to the point, though, it makes Joshua - Jesus - more human, and thus more sympathetic. That matters to me, though it might not to other people.

It got so that I found myself really caring for this character, and the others - especially Maggie (the Mary Magdalene), their friend from childhood. The final scenes, when you're suddenly reminded of how the story ends, creep up on you and settles like a lump in your throat, and I totally felt for Biff and understand why he did what he did at the end - though interestingly enough, despite all he'd seen Joshua do, and despite the fact that he had always believed in him, he did not believe Joshua could really bring himself back from the dead. And so, in the end, he did not have faith. A slight irony.

Despite Biff's silly humour and the occasional fart joke, Lamb is written with maturity, compassion and skill. The setting, landscape and supporting characters immerse you in the story, the period and the upheavals. More to the point, it's a nice (comforting) thought that Jesus might have had as good and loyal and silly a friend as Levi who is called Biff.

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## Susana says

*(review in English below)*

Gosto muito de "histórias alternativas", sejam da História propriamente dita ou mesmo de contos de fadas (como por exemplo a série *Era Uma Vez* ou o filme *Maléfica*), sobretudo aquelas que nos dão uma explicação original para os personagens - reais ou fictícios - serem como são - ou foram.

Aplicando isto a um dos personagens mais interessantes e polémicos (na minha opinião) da História - Jesus Cristo - e polvilhando com uma dose generosa de humor, temos uma receita quase infalível.

Tal como o autor explica no final desta edição, a ideia para escrever este livro veio do facto de não haver praticamente registos relativos à vida de Jesus até aos 30 anos. Foi "só" fazer alguma pesquisa histórica (incluindo uma viagem a Israel, descrita na Nota Final) e deixar a imaginação (e os dedos) trabalhar.

Há muitas cenas divertidas neste livro, mas a preparação do Sermão da Montanha é impagável!

E também há filosofia, e romance, e drama.

Recomendado a toda a gente (com mais de 18 anos!...)

*I really like "alternative stories", either related to real History or even to fairy tales (e.g. the TV series Once Upon A Time or the movie Maleficent), specially those which give us an original explanation for the way*

*characters - real or fictional - are.*

*Apply this concept to one of the most interesting and controversial (in my opinion) historical characters - Jesus Christ - and sprinkle a generous dose of humour and you get an almost foolproof recipe.*

*As the author explains in the end of this edition, the idea to write this book emerged from the realization that there are almost no records concerning Jesus' life until he was 30 years old. He "just" needed to do some research (including a trip to Israel, which he describes in the end of the book) and put his imagination (and fingers) to work.*

*There's a lot of funny scenes in this book, but the preparation of the Sermon on the Mount is priceless!*

*And there's also some philosophy, and romance, and drama.*

*I recommend it to everyone (over 18!...)*

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## **Lance Greenfield says**

This is an hilarious take on the missing years of Jesus, known as Joshua bar Joseph in this account. The four gospels which made it into the New Testament miss three decades of the Messiah's life. Only two of them say much about his birth, one describes a brief episode when Jesus was about twelve where he spends some time in discussion with the elders in the synagogue, but they largely concentrate on the short years of his ministry leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Lamb is an account which is written by Levi, known as Biff, who is Joshua's best friend throughout his life.

There are so many funny stories within the whole, and it would just spoil it for you if I were to repeat them here. You really have to read the book to find out.

However, I just can't resist telling you that Joshua takes his time to refine his magic to the level that he can perform the miracles of his latter years. For example, the first resurrection that he performs is very short-lived (excuse the pun), but the Roman soldier lives long enough to identify his real murderer and free Josh's step-dad, Joseph.

There are lots of quotes from books that you've never heard of if you have read the Bible, such as Amphibians, Dalmatians and Excretions.

The description of how Biff and Josh spend a whole week writing the speech that has become known as The Sermon on the Mount, is so very funny. Not for what was eventually included, but for those groups who were left out, such as the wankers and the dumbfucks.

Believe me, that is not the funniest part of the book. The adventures that the two of them have in the years between their childhood and the period described by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are great. Moore is very creative.

The only small criticism that I have of the book is that there were times when I felt that it was too long. However, I have to admit that when I finished the final page, I would have liked more.

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## Aaron says

Christopher Moore is a sick, sick fuck. And I mean that in a good way.

I found a copy of this wonderfully hilarious novel at the Champaign Public Library Book Sale and decided that I ought to own a copy. It holds up well on a second read and served to fill a nostalgia for Kurt Vonnegut, whose death I may not ever get over. This book is very reminiscent of Vonnegut in its plotting and style and wisecracks and it certainly filled a hole. I've read everything Vonnegut ever wrote and I was more than a little depressed that my days of reading new works by one of my favorite authors had come to a close. This book alone marks Christopher Moore as the leading contender for that particular throne. If not Vonnegut, then Douglas Adams.

*Lamb* tells the story of Jesus Christ, chronicling the missing years from 12 through 30 that the Bible itself fails to enlighten us on. It's very funny and more than a little blasphemous, but it's also firmly grounded in theology. Moore doesn't make any shit up here. He merely expounds on the details the Bible has left out.

Basically, Levi who is called Biff is resurrected by an angel of the Lord centuries after his death so that he can write a new gospel (we later come to find out that Mary Magdalene has been resurrected to write one, too). Holed up in a seedy motel with the angel Raziël, himself addicted to professional wrestling and soap operas, Biff writes his side of the story on hotel stationery. Biff was Christ's only companion during the missing eighteen years, so he's pretty much the authority on this subject. Through Biff's writings, we learn that he and Jesus (here named Joshua, due to Hebrew translation) spent many years traveling the world in search of the three wisemen, hoping that they can help Joshua understand exactly what it is Joshua is supposed to be doing. They battle a vicious demon with Balthazar. They encounter a Yeti with Gaspar. They study Buddhism with Melchior. And through all of this, Joshua creates a new ministry that seems to totally contradict the one started by his father.

Along the way, we learn how all of the apostles came to stand at Jesus's side. We learn what bunnies and chocolates have to do with Easter. We discover how to tell the difference between a legitimate vision of The Virgin Mary and just a face in a pile of cow dung. We meet some ninjas. We stand face-to-face with the blood-thirsty goddess Kali. And we also get treated to a rough draft of The Sermon on the Mount (apparently Jesus really wanted to bless all the dumbshits, but got vetoed).

This book is highly recommended.

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## Becky says

I should probably start this review by saying that I found this book in what I now think is probably the most inappropriate place possible.. the Young Adult section of my town library. I'd wanted to read this for a long time, but whenever I browsed the Moore books in the adult section, it was never to be found. I always figured, "Eh, someone probably has it checked out... I'll snag it next time." Oh, silly me. I was foolishly thinking that my library would shelve a mature book full of extremely adult humor, sex and fart jokes, sodomy, sex, alchemy & magic (AKA "The Occult"), sex, abominations, bestiality, group sex with tiny

Chinese women with names like "Divine Dance of the Joyous Orgasm", cursing, fantasies about sex and dreams of having sex when not having any, in the adult section. I was mistaken. Apparently the word "childhood" in the title qualified this as YA.

But here's what I find most interesting... Either the kids who've checked it out are wise enough to keep their mouths shut to their parents about what their reading material contains, or this book looks boring enough that not a single kid has actually read it.

I live in a pretty Christian area. It's no bible belt, but people here take God seriously. I'd never even heard of some of the religious dietary restrictions that people practice here. Not that I'm saying that's a bad thing, just that it was new to me to order meat on a Friday and get a I-Pity-Your-Immortal-Soul look. Something to get used to, you know? So anyway, I say this to point out that had any one of the kids who may have read this book actually tipped their hand, there would be outrage. Mass outrage. Because not only should this book have a NC-17 rating (if ratings were given, which I would very much disagree with), it turns Jesus's short life, and the nature and origins of the Christian religion on it's head, and could make many people very angry. This book practically begs to be banned... at the very least challenged.

So of course I loved it. :D

I want to rub elbows with Christopher Moore, if only so that I can try to steal some of his Funny. I was giggling like mad through big chunks of this book, and in places where the action dragged a little, the humor kept everything moving right along.

Biff is the kind of person that everyone wants around. He's hilarious and stupid, and hilarious because he's stupid. But he's not REALLY stupid, he's just not exactly head of his class, or the brightest bulb on the tree. His goal in life was to be a professional mourner, or failing that, a village idiot. Biff, sadly uncredited, created sarcasm. Where would I be without him?? I'd have no way to communicate at all! I'd have to grunt and point at things.

The story starts with Biff watching Joshua (aka Jesus) healing a poor lizard in his mouth after his younger brother brained it with a rock. He then gives it back to the brother, who brains it, J heals it, and the cycle continues. Starting off on a properly blasphemous foot, yeah? We follow J and Biff as they both meet and love Mary Magdalene, learn stonemasonry, witness a murder, try to raise the dead and have many adventures and acquire much learning. Much of this learning comes from ancient Chinese philosophy and Buddhism, so there was a lot of meditation and sitting and thinking and sitting. And sitting. The story ends, of course, with the crucifixion, which brought a tear to my eye, even though it was not drawn out or graphic or gory. It was just that, reading that section, you could feel Biff's love and devotion and agony for Joshua, and my empathy nerve kicked me in the tearduct. (It does that.) Moore is generally known for writing humor and satire and generally funny/quirky/absurd stuff, but here he showed off his ability to make the reader wish they had a time machine to stop the torture and death from happening. If you believe that it did happen, of course. I'm down with Jesus being a real person, I'm just not sure about the "Son of God" part.

Anyway, here are some quotes (by no means all of them) that had me cracking up:

1) Back story: Biff is frustrated trying to learn to speak hip-hop from MTV.

*"Why is it that one can busta rhyme or busta move anywhere but you must busta cap in someone's ass? Is 'ho' always feminine, and 'muthafucka' always masculine, while 'bitch' can be either? How many peeps in a posse, how much booty before baby got back, do you have to be all that to get all up in that, and do I need to be dope and phat to be da bomb or can I just be 'stupid'? I'll not be singing over any dead mothers until I*

*understand."*

2) Back story: 10 year old Biff loves Joshua's mom, Mary, whom people think is crazy.

*...I think that when I'm a man, and your father dies, I will take your mother as my wife."*

*Joshua made a face now as if he had bitten into an unripe fig. "Don't say that, Biff."*

*"I don't mind that she's mad. I like her blue cloak. And her smile. I'll be a good father, I'll teach you how to be a stonemason, and I'll only beat you when you are a snot."*

*"I would rather play with lepers than listen to this." Joshua began to walk away.*

*"Wait. Be nice to your father, Joshua bar Biff" -- my own father used my full name like this when he was trying to make a point -- "Is not the word of Moses that you must honor me?"*

*Little Joshua spun on his heel. "My name is not Joshua bar Biff, and it is not Joshua bar Joseph either. It's Joshua bar Jehovah!"*

*I looked around, hoping that nobody had heard him. I didn't want my only son (I planned to sell Judah and James into slavery) to be stoned to death for uttering the name of God in vain. "Don't say that again, Josh. I won't marry your mother."*

*"No, you won't."*

*"I'm sorry."*

*"I forgive you."*

*"She will make an excellent concubine."*

*Don't let anyone tell you that the Prince of Peace never struck anyone. In those early days, before he had become who he would be, Joshua smote me in the nose more than once. That was the first time.*

3) Back story: Joshua cannot know a woman (in that way), so Biff tries to teach him about the sin of fornication by proxy.

*Back out at the front of the inn I shopped for my teaching assistant. It was an eight-harlot inn, if that's how you measure an inn. (I understand that now they measure inns in stars. We are in a four-star inn right now. I don't know what the conversion from harlots to stars is.)*

*... Harlot is selected, and brought into a stall, with Joshua in the next stall, listening ...*

*"How does her body feel? Do you feel sinful? Is it like Satan rubbing against you? Does it burn like fire?"*

*"Yeah, you got it. That pretty much has it."*

*"You're lying."*

*"Oh wow."*

*Then Josh said something in Greek that I didn't catch all of and the harlot answered, sort of.*

*"What did she say?" Josh asked.*

*"I don't know, you know my Greek is bad."*

*"Mine isn't, I couldn't understand what she said."*

*"Her mouth is full."*

*Set (the harlot) raised up. "Not full," she said in Greek.*

*"Hey, I understood that!"*

*"She has you in her mouth?"*

*"Yeah."*

*"That's heinous."*

*"It doesn't feel heinous."*

*"It doesn't?"*

*"No, Josh, I gotta tell you, this really is -- oh my God!"*

*"What? What's happening?"*

*"She's getting dressed."*

*"Are you done sinning? That's it?"*

*The harlot said something in Greek that I didn't understand.*

*"What did she say?" I asked.*

*"She said that for the amount of money we gave her, you're finished."*

*"Do you think you understand fornication now?"*

*"Not really."*

*"Well then, give her some more money, Joshua. We're going to stay here until you learn what you need to know."*

*"You're a good friend to suffer this for me."*

*"Don't mention it."*

I think that's enough to be getting along with. This is the kind of stuff that just had me cracking up. If you aren't the squeamish or easily offended type (and sorry if you are, for all the above stuff), you should read this. It's worth it. :)

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## **Lori says**

Listened to this on audiobook during a recent road trip. This book reminded me of a Saturday Night Live skit: great concept that somehow wasn't as good in the execution. It's highly irreverent and very funny. The first third is also thought-provoking and quite sweet. I really enjoyed the depiction of Joshua (Jesus) as a child, trying to come to grips with his abilities, with whether or not he really is the son of God and what, exactly, that means for him and for his people. Also loved the friendship between Biff, Joshua and Maggie (Mary Magdalene) as childhood pals, teasing and protecting each other, secure in their places in a tight Jewish community even while they bump against its strictures.

I liked the author's idea of exploring Jesus' young-adulthood, the part of his life that is a big blank in the Bible. Joshua and Biff leave home to explore other places and cultures, with Joshua taking ideas and teachings and wisdom from those other places and cultures and incorporating them to form his own gospel. Joshua grows into a man and comes into his own on this physical and spiritual journey. But this is also where the book became too ridiculous for me to suspend belief and remain immersed in the story. Chinese concubines? A cartoon-like demon? Sasquatch? I felt stuck in a roadrunner/Wily Coyote episode. Fun to read, naughty and funny, but I missed the thoughtful undertone of the beginning of the book, and I increasingly wondered why Biff remained unaffected by all of his time and shared experiences with Joshua. Biff was the ultimate loyal friend, sure, but he remains a caricature--a horny wisecracker. Likewise all of the other apostles--the depictions are funny, but they remain totally flat and buffoonish. I wanted them to really feel something, to question, to show emotion beyond their one-word stereotypes (the village idiot, the fanatic, the penny pincher, the surfer...). It felt like the author got tired and resorted to goofball humor rather than trying to tackle a more serious effort to explore the different reasons these men took up with Joshua and what they may or may not have believed and understood about the ministry they helped create.

The ending was also a letdown. The author seems overwhelmed by how to handle the known story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Biff's lack of dimension really comes out here, as the narrative degenerates into Biff's desperate, frantic chase to prevent Joshua from killing himself. It felt like the author didn't quite know what to do with Biff once he arrived at the end of Jesus' life and what he does decide to do to tie it up was disappointing.



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## Chris says

If you've been following my reviews over the last few years, I don't see any reason why I should have to put a caution into this, but here it is: if you're not interested in speculative fiction, open to the reinterpretation of the life of Jesus, speculation on the gaps in the gospels and the possibility of pan-religious values having been vital to the formation of Christianity, then you should probably not read this book. Nor should you really be using the internet - there's just too much nasty "Free Thinking" out there. Take your hands off the keyboard and back away slowly.

Okay, that'll weed out the wusses. Although, as I think about it, perhaps those are exactly the people who should be reading this book. I'm sorry for all the nasty stuff I said - come on back!

Each time I read this, I love it more. For one thing it's Moore's best work, without question. Not only is it blindingly funny, which is a hallmark of Moore's style, but it's also thoughtful, philosophical, and is supported by obvious research. Because he's dealing with real places and real people, Moore has made sure that his depiction of first-century Israel is as accurate as he can make it. It's all there in the details about the lives of the characters, the struggles they go through and the understandings they come to. Without hours of research as its foundation, the book would have failed almost instantly. Moore didn't have to do it, but it is a great sign of his character as an author that he did.

This is also by far my favorite interpretation of the life of Jesus. It is the Gospel According to Biff, the best friend of Joshua bar Joseph, the man who would one day be called Jesus Christ. Of course, when Biff met him, the young Son of God was occupying himself by resurrecting lizards after his brother smashed their heads in. But they grew to be fast friends, and everywhere that young Joshua went, so went his buddy Biff.

The best way to describe Biff would be Jesus' Sidekick. He's a troublemaker, sarcastic, and far too prone to succumb to temptations of the flesh. But he's clever and resourceful, and mindful of his friend's mission on this earth. He's young Joshua's best friend in every way, so when Josh goes searching for the three Magi who attended his birth, Biff knows he has to go with him. The way to finding Joshua's destiny will be long and hard, and Biff knows that his friend needs him.

The main part of the book has to do with Biff and Josh's search for the Magi, to learn from them how Josh can be the Messiah. On their way they face demons, death and certain temptation, but also wisdom and experience from the wisest men in Asia. From Balthazar in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan, Joshua learns of the Tao, contemplating its Three Jewels - compassion, moderation, and humility. He learns about suffering and mercy and kindness and the effects they bring.

Biff, on the other hand, learns about the ways in which eight Chinese concubines can make life a wonderful place, night after night. He learns how to make potions and explosives, how to cast metal and read Chinese. He learns vital skills that the Messiah cannot - or must not - know.

From there they go to China, to a monastery high in the cold mountains to study with Gaspar, a monk of the Zen school. From Gaspar, Josh learns stillness and mindful breath, compassion for all things and, oddly enough, how to turn invisible. He discovers the divine spark that exists in all things, a holiness that no one can claim or take from you. He also learns what it's like to be the only one of his kind, and foreshadows the tragic end that can bring.

Biff, of course, is learning kung fu and how to break bricks with his head.

Finally, they go to India to seek out Melchior, an ascetic yogi and the last of the wise men. Joshua here learns about sacrifice and blood, and the horrors that are perpetrated in the name of religion. He discovers the injustice of denying the Kingdom of God to anyone, Jew or Gentile, and the futility of trying to teach yoga to an elephant.

Biff, for his part, manages to put together a truly spectacular version of the *Kama Sutra*.

Don't get me wrong - while Biff is certainly more earthly than his friend, he is also devoted to both Joshua and his mission. He is Josh's anchor to the real world, always reminding him of his mission and making sure he doesn't take himself too seriously. Biff, in this rendition of Jesus' story, is a necessary element in the ultimate teachings of Christ.

As he admits in his afterward, Moore has tackled a very tough subject here, one that he knows is likely to rile people up. Jesus is one of those characters that is very set in peoples' minds - he is the tall, beatific figure with a gentle voice and blue eyes who glides around in robes followed by insightful and worshipful men.

He certainly never ate Chinese food on his birthday, nor did he get hopped up on coffee or learn kung-fu. He's never had a sarcastic best friend who was willing to risk damnation to describe what sex was like to the young Messiah, who was pretty sure that he wasn't allowed to know women. We haven't seen Jesus get frustrated and yell at his disciples because they didn't get the message he was trying to send, or be torn between what he has to do and what he wants to do. The Jesus in this book is an excellent meld of the human and the divine. He has the miracles and the powers, but his mind is human. He knows that he's the son of god, but he feels like just a regular guy who's been tapped to save humanity from itself. It's a very difficult situation to be in, and Moore does a really good job of getting us to understand that.

More importantly, the life of Jesus hasn't been this *funny* before. This is the kind of book that will piss off your family or co-workers, because you'll want to read out passages from the book every five minutes, but you won't get it out right because you'll be laughing too hard. The way the book is set up, Biff has been resurrected by the angel Raziel in order to write a new gospel. Unfortunately, he's been resurrected in the modern age, about two thousand years too late to help his friend avoid the awful, horrible sacrifice that he knows he has to undergo. So he writes in the modern American vernacular, assuring us that while the words may not be a direct translation of first-century Hebrew, Latin, Aramaic, Chinese or any of the other languages they encounter, the *tone* is accurate. And the tone is comedy, all the way through.

Of course, the comedy kind of drops off as the book races towards its unpleasant end, which is where my troubles with Moore as a writer usually lie. He tends to write endings that are abrupt and unfulfilling, as though he just wants to finish writing the book so he can, perhaps, get on with the next one. Even though we *know* how this story ends, it still feels rushed. Biff's attempts to save his friend from horrible death make sense, but I would like to have seen them drawn out a bit more. I have a feeling that Moore could have added another hundred pages without breaking a sweat - and I wish he had.

The best thing, though, is that Moore treats his characters with the utmost respect. Nothing that Jesus does in the book is out of character for him, insofar as we know his character. And Biff is more than just a goofy friend of the Messiah - he is the reminder and the anchor of Jesus' humanity. I'm not a Christian - I don't claim any religion, in fact - but this version of Jesus would be one that I might be willing to give some time to.

It's a brilliant book, in my top ten....

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## **Lyn says**

This book is funny as HELL!

Though funny and most definitely irreverent, Lamb is a story about the Son of God and his times here on Earth amongst people, told from the perspective of Biff, Joshua's (Jesus) childhood pal and Moore fills up the lost thirty some odd years from the gospels. Biff is the Jewish lothario Forrest Gump of Biblical stories and Moore uses Biff's narrative as a vehicle to explore the ancient world, often with laugh out loud results.

Religion.

There are plenty of people who will never read this book but will nonetheless be very offended by it. However, though it is an absurd comedy, it is like *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* and *The Lost Years of Jesus: Documentary Evidence of Jesus' 17-Year Journey to the East* in that it treats Jesus as a miraculous and gentle though powerful superhuman, and somewhat ironically, like the Kevin Smith film *Dogma*, affirmatively casts him as the Son of God.

Though Moore makes up the earlier parts, he tells the last months of Jesus' life fairly straight from the gospels, though from Biff's perspective. Moore states at the end of the book in a well crafted and sincere sounding address to his readers that although he did thoroughly research his book, especially as to historical accuracies of the time and place of Christ's time, it is a work of fiction, maybe not even rising to the level of the "historical fiction" genre. Simply stated, he made up the story, and he was never attempting to influence or change anyone's faith.

He also makes the astute comment that "if one's faith can be shaken by stories in a humorous novel, then one may have a bit more praying to do".

Certainly, there will be many who would not read this, and still some others that may get started and cannot finish for reasons of reverence and guilty ideas about blasphemy.

I remember years ago when *The Last Temptation of Christ* came out and everyone made such a big deal about it. Truth be said, it was the publicity that drew me to go see it and I was a little thrilled to walk through a picket line. A Presbyterian minister and two younger people with him stopped me and asked me some questions about why I wanted to go see the film. They were not fire and brimstoners, but seemed like nice folks who were sincerely offended by what they understood as an attack on their faith. I asked them one question: "Have you seen the film?" Of course, they had not. I also remember that during the film, there seemed a slow but somewhat steady exodus of people from the theater, until about halfway through, when only the stolid and curious were left. In that film and this book, I guess I can see why some would be offended, but I am not, my faith is not at all shaken by a liberal, interpretive, and in this sense, irreverent and humorous artistic license.

In the end, this is an entertaining, well written book, funny and yes, irreverent, but also without any overt attacks on faith. Told with warmth, Moore also focuses on parts of the faith and teachings that could draw a believer closer.

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## Algernon says

Lamb is not the first revisionist and humorous retelling of the Biblical stories I've read/watched, but it may be the best one of the lot. Among my favourites are the movies *Dogma* by Kevin Smith and *The Life of Brian* by the Monty Pythons, the novel *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. What puts *Lamb* above the crowd for me was the surprising fact that this is not actually a lampooning of religion but a genuine attempt to capture the spirituality and the fervour of the original Gospels. It is also a proof that, despite claims from *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* fans, the *Life of Jesus* remains *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, able to capture the imagination and the hearts of readers two thousand years after it was first copyrighted. As to why Moore has chosen comedy in order to tackle such an important subject, the answer may be found in the Voltaire quote he has put on the first page of the book:

*God is comedian playing to an audience that is afraid to laugh.*

In the dispute between the theories that we are put on Earth to learn about suffering or that we are supposed to enjoy the brief time in the sunlight, Moore votes emphatically on the later.

There's a framing story of sorts, presenting Raziel, the stupidest angel that fans of Moore might recognize, being sent back to Earth to resurrect the Levi named Biff and to supervise him as he writes down his recollection of the years spent as Joshua's best childhood friend and faithful companion during the lost years – the thirty odd years between the birth and the start of preaching. In order to focus solely on the project the angel locks himself with Biff inside a modern motel room with only a television set for entertainment. (*It's like that now. Talk shows featuring the screaming ignorant, soap operas, and wrestling. And the angel guards the remote control like it's the Ark of the Covenant.*) The setting serves a double scope in underlining the shallowness of popular entertainment and the need of the younger generations to be presented with adequate role models. Raziel dreams of becoming Spiderman and righting all the world's woes while jumping from rooftops in bright red leotards, yet Biff muses:

*What hero could touch these children anyway, with their machines and medicine and distances made invisible?*

For Biff the answer can be only one, his childhood friend Joshua, the boy who conquered his young heart in the dusty street of Nazareth:

I don't know if now, having lived and died the life of a man, I can write about little-boy love, but remembering it now, it seems the cleanest pain I've known. Love without desire, or conditions, or limits – a pure and radiant glow in the heart that could make me giddy and sad and glorious all at once.

Biff and Joshua are inseparable urchins when we first meet them, they complete each other with Biff's exuberance and irreverence playing up to Joshua's straight man seriousness, allowing Moore to put the words of wisdom in the mouth of fools while preserving (most of the time) the reverence due and the dignity inherent in the Son of God. Biff is lecherous, assertive and impulsive where Joshua is idealistic, self-doubting and contemplative. They complete each other like the Chinese ying and yang symbols, but I am getting ahead of the story, it will be some years before they reach China.

The plot in the opening chapters and in the last chapters is surprisingly close to the original Gospels, and the setting is convincing and rich in details, not only geographical, but also political and ethnographical, showing us how serious was the author in his research for the novel (Moore went to Israel to get a better impression of the country and of its people). The point where the novel diverges sharply from the established Gospels is in the theory that Joshua needed to learn how to become a Messiah and so he set out in search of knowledge from the three wise men that have reportedly showed up at his birth. Biff and Joshua leave Nazareth, after some trouble with the Roman occupiers and after some romantic complications with Maggie (aka Mary Magdalene, who starts by delivering the memorable one liner: “So, have you two been playing with any snakes lately?”), and head eastward into the great unknown. For twenty years the duo will travel from one wise man to another, apprenticing themselves first to Magician Balthasar who keeps a demon locked in his mountain fastness and prolongs his life by sleeping with beautiful young maidens. Biff offers to give Balthasar a helping ‘hand’ in dealing with the young ladies.

*The three jewels of the Tao: compassion, moderation, and humility. Balthasar said compassion leads to courage, moderation leads to generosity, and humility leads to leadership.*

The next of the wise men lives also on a sacred mountain, close to the Great Wall of China. The lessons of Gaspar deal with the wisdom of Buddhism, but they also teach an early version of Shaolin style kung-fu to the duo, and gives Joshua an opportunity to learn about mercy and tolerance towards others, towards strangers and towards diverging opinions. An episode with a Yeti is among the most humbling and emotional passages in the novel. Of course, Biff goes his own way and still gets in trouble with women even when locked in a monastery with only a hairy yak for company.

The last Magi is to be found in India: Melchior is Hindu yogi who teaches the value of renouncing the materialistic world and releasing the power of the mind, including how to make yourself invisible and how to multiply a grain of rice or a loaf of bread. Biff has his own separate lessons, studying the Kama Sutra page by page with a temple prostitute. (“Park your elephant in the back!” is though not one the positions he missed by two pages stuck together; you need to read the novel for the actual relevance, I’m not going to spoil it for you). This section of the picaresque oriental adventures of the duo also touches on poverty, the social destructive caste system and the danger of worshipping blood thirsty deities who demand human sacrifices (Kali).

I may have gone too fast through the twenty years Biff and Joshua spent travelling, learning and having wonderful adventures, so I will let the author put the whole journey in perspective. From the afterword: *My sending Joshua and Biff to the East was motivated purely by story, not by basis in the Gospel or historical evidence. While there are indeed astounding similarities between the teachings of Jesus and those of Buddha (not to mention those of Lao-Tzu, Confucius, and the Hindu religion, all which seem to have included some version of the Golden Rule), it’s more likely that these stem from what I believe to be logical and moral conclusions that any person in search of what is right would come to, e.g.: that the preferable way to treat one another is with love and kindness; that the pursuit of material gain is ultimately empty when measured against eternity; and that somehow, as human beings, we are all connected spiritually.*

I’ve left out the last part of the novel, the one dealing with Joshua’s return to Israel, gathering around him some trusted followers and putting in practice the lessons of the East, demonstrating he has finally learned how to be a Messiah. I decided on this not because it is not as important or as well rendered as the rest of the novel, but because the events and the characters should be familiar to most readers from the New Testaments. Moore manages to make the 15 Apostles (according to Biff) human and funny and vulnerable and earnest, infusing fresh blood in a story that has been twisted and turned around already by various branches of later Christianity according to their own political agendas or deep seated prejudices. Moore’s

Joshua inspires me on the one hand not to reject religion out of hand, and on the other to think for myself and liberate my mind ( *Any freedom that can be given can be taken away.* )

Some readers might still feel outrage at the irreverent and unorthodox treatment of the events in the New Testament and about a new Gospel aimed at the 21st century audience. To them I offer the last quote of Biff, following one of his particularly risqué repartees (fans of Monty Python might recognize the reference):

*Joshua and Judah were still staring at me as if they'd both been smacked in the face with a large fish. "What?" I said. "How long have you guys known me? Jeez. Grow a sense of humor."*

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## Will Byrnes says

**Christopher Moore** - image from SFGate

Jesus, the missing years, as told by his best buddy, Biff. This a very entertaining, laugh-out-loud funny book, at times. It is clear that there is real content under the yucks. Where did JC go between the time he dazzled the intellectuals at the temple at twelve and when he returned at thirty to do his messiah thing. Asia figures prominently, Buddhism, an Asian aesthetic. You might want to dust off your Lao Tzu, Kama Sutra, Bhagavad Gita, and sundry others. It is actually quite interesting, as is the author's characterization of Mary Magdalene (Maggie), John the Baptist and the disciples. I found at times that I was getting bored, but stuck with it. Recommended.

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal, Twitter and FB pages

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