

# The Amazing Spider-Man (2012)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 2; L- 1; S/N-3 . Running time: 2 hours 16 min

*Why do the wicked renounce God,  
and say in their hearts, 'You will not call us to account'?  
But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief,  
that you may take it into your hands;  
the helpless commit themselves to you;  
you have been the helper of the orphan.  
Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers;  
seek out their wickedness until you find none.  
The Lord is king for ever and ever;  
the nations shall perish from his land.  
O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek;  
you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear  
to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,  
so that those from earth may strike terror no more.  
Psalm 10:13-17*

*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be  
required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even  
more will be demanded.  
Luke 12:48b*

We now have with Marc Webb's *Poised* and ready for action. film an alternative Spider-man universe to the one in the series begun by Sam Rami back in 2002. Fans might well be torn between the two; Webb's (don't you love that name?) being an excellent film with good character development and a satisfying mixture of humor, romance, and drama. There are

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similarities, but also major differences.

As in the 2002 film Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield) is an outsider at his high school, where he is bullied by bigger guys. He apparently uses the camera we see in his hand to take pictures for the school newspaper. In this remake he is a high school student throughout the film, not graduating and selling Spider-man photos to The Daily Bugle, as in the first film. There is no best friend Harry Osborn nor even Mary Jane Watson, either. Instead, Parker is a loner drawn to fellow classmate Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone), who at first is cool to him, but then reciprocates his feelings. There is, however, Aunt May and Uncle Ben, wonderfully played by Sally Field and Martin Sheen—and we catch a brief view of Parker's father and mother in a flashback to when Peter was a four year-old. For an unrevealed reason they leave their son with his aunt and uncle before taking off on a mysteriously urgent mission, during which they die in a crash.

When Peter discovers his father's old leather briefcase, he finds a file filled with equations and notes from the elder Parker's cross species genetic experiments. This leads him to the headquarters of a scientific company named Oscorp where the one-armed Dr. Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans), his father's former partner, heads an elaborate laboratory in which experiments on spiders and lizards are being conducted. We are supposed to believe that classmate Gwen works there, heading the internship program—yeah, they even give her the keys to the place. (Well, this is a comic book-based tale.) Peter, of course, will be bitten by one of the spiders bringing on his painful transformation, and Dr. Connors will inject lizard serum into the stub of his arm in the hope of being able to regrow it in the manner of lizards that are able to sprout new tails. Uncle Ben will be killed during the aftermath of a robbery that Peter could have prevented, leaving the young man guilt-ridden as he tries to find his way in a world in which

he will become far more of an outsider than he had ever been before.

Peter's character and relationships are developed even more in the new film. His relationship with Uncle Ben is close but troubled. When the boy discovers he has great power and he humiliates the bully who had been picking on him at school, Uncle Ben expresses his disappointment that Peter would seek vengeance. Later he tells him, "If you can do good things for other people, you have a moral obligation to do them" —a little more wordy version of "With great power comes great responsibility," but sound advice.

There are numerous humorous moments to offset the angst and extraordinary action sequences. Now able to cling to walls and ceilings, Peter appears one night at the window of Gwen Stacy's bedroom. "How did you get up here?" she asks. When he replies, "The fire escape," she remarks, "That's twenty stories." "Your doorman's intimidating," he replies. Then there is the battle between the Lizard and Spider-man at school when they fight their way through the school library. The librarian, listening to music through headphones, has his back turned to the action, thus blithely missing all of the mayhem. Peter's initial dismay concerning his powers—he inadvertently twists the handles off a water faucet and the bathroom door before learning to draw in his great strength—is followed by exuberance when he dashes about on his skateboard and swings from the rafters of a deserted building, and still later swings wildly among the sky-high towers of the city.

Despite all that has happened to him, Peter Parker is still a teenager. This is something the filmmakers understand well as they appeal to the teenager in all of us. I loved the old series and will not discard it, but I am already looking forward to the sequel to this one. I will treasure both versions, the analogy being that I love the three synoptic gospels as well as the gospel of John. When John wrote his gospel he included some of the same incidents recorded in the

earlier gospels, but revamped the chronology and added incidents and lots of blocks of dialogue known only to him. And so now we have two “Gospels of Spider-man.” That’s good news for both Marvel fans and the rest of us.

**Note:** Discussion questions are available with this review for those subscribing to the Visual Parables journal. The journal also includes many extras—book reviews, the use of films for church seasons, a lectionary related column, and more. Hundreds of old reviews are also available in the subscribers; section. Check out the [sample issue](#).