

Tyler Perry's A Madea Christmas (2013)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour 45 min.

Our Advisories Violence 3; Language 0; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star ratings (1-5): 2.5

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3.28.

This prolific Atlanta-based African American filmmaker again (I think this is the 8th Madea movie) blends piety, naughtiness, his saucy character with a swift, sharp tongue (Madea), and a touch of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* This time, of course, it's the black niece of Madea, Eileen (Anna Maria Horsford), who is upset over the marriage of her daughter Lacey (Tike Sumpter) to the white man whom she first thinks is a hired farmhand, Connor (Eric Lively), because at the beginning of the film Lacey has not told her they are married. Connor's parents, Buddy and Kim, who look like they belong at a Klan rally or lynching, become Madea's allies, they having approved of the match before Eileen learns about it at the Christmas gathering. Played by Larry the Cable Guy and Kathy Najimy, the pair are hilarious scene-stealers. Unlike a certain member of *Duck Dynasty*, they have overcome the prejudices of the culture in which they were brought up.

Some of the film's corn and dialogue make you wince, but much of it is great fun (and some of it a bit raunchy for children, especially Madea and Buddy's). Highly amusing is Madea's cockeyed retelling of the Nativity story to Lacey's middle

school class daring her to arouse their interest, followed by her tying to a large cross decorated with a string of Christmas lights the pesky girl who irritates her—some unwitting theology that cradle and cross do go together.

The plot is preposterous—Lacey's school is canceling the annual Christmas Jubilee, so she arranges for an old high school day flame to secure a corporate sponsor, but after the papers are signed, they discover in the fine print a clause that forbids the mention of Jesus in the pageant. And there is also a subplot about the cherub-faced boy Bailey (Noah Urrea), bullied at school and at home by his father, but this is justified by the terrific song that the boy belts out at the Jubilee, and it isn't spoiling anything to reveal that the carol is about Jesus.

The film has been savaged by almost all of the critics except for 3 in Metacritic.com, but most of the former are judging the film on art, not on sentiment and the number of laughs enjoyed by those willing to forgive Perry his unbelievable plot. As mentioned above, the scene of the wacky Madea tying the unruly girl to the cross, the crown of thorns represented by the Christmas wreath placed on her head, is hilarious and right on Nativity theology. In real life she probably would be brought up on charges of child abuse, but this is Tyler Perry's world where we can cut him some slack. Even the obvious message that intolerance is not confined just to one race is a good one to remember during this season in which we celebrate the birth of the one who came to break down all human-made barriers that keep us apart.

The full review with discussion questions will be included in the January 2014 issue of Visual Parables, scheduled for posting early that month. To subscribe to the publication go to the Store. A year's subscription will gain you access not just to this issue (which has far more features in it than just film reviews and guides), but also to issues as far back as Summer 2006.

