

Moved by Movies with Biblical Basis

By Emily McFarlan Miller—April 3, 2013



Matt Bilen, cinematographer and composer for "Father of Lights," answers questions Tuesday night about the film at opening night of the Imago Film Festival. | Emily McFarlan Miller~Sun-Times Media

ELGIN — Terrence Wandtke knew people finally would understand what kind of film festival the Imago Film Festival is when he had to ask himself, watching about 70 films

submitted to the contest this year, "Where is the church? I haven't seen a church."

"That's the kind of thing we've been looking for," said Wandtke, director of the faith-based independent film festival.

And those are the kind of short films Imago will screen all week leading up to Saturday's red carpet event, when it will announce and repeat this year's winners.

Those screenings start at 7 p.m. every night through Friday, and the red carpet event is at 6 p.m. Saturday — all at the Alice and Edward Thompson Center on the Judson University campus, 1151 N. State St.

Wandtke told the three dozen moviegoers who came Tuesday to the opening night of the festival that the idea for Imago came to him and "Father of Lights" filmmaker and fellow Judson professor Darren Wilson about 10 years ago, after the success of "The Passion of the Christ."

Hollywood is having a similar moment now after the Easter Sunday finale of the History Channel miniseries "The Bible."

Then, as likely will happen now, major movie studios and even independent Christian filmmakers rushed to release a number of films that Wandtke said felt like “comfort food for Christians.” Those films ended in an altar call, or Jesus was a main character, he said.

Instead, he wanted to encourage films that “aspire to something like a biblical basis,” that showcase “the kinds of things we might encounter in the Bible,” he said.

“And the things we encounter in the Bible aren’t exactly comfort food. ... Sometimes the stories we need to hear aren’t the stories that make us feel better,” he said.

Christian filmmakers

At Imago this year, that includes speakers such as Ralph Winter — producer of the “X-Men,” “Fantastic Four” and “Star Trek” films — who will speak before screenings Friday on “The Power of Story.” Dean Batali — a writer for TV shows including “That ’70s Show,” “Buffy, The Vampire Slayer” and “The Adventures of Pete and Pete” — will speak Saturday on “The Angry Christian Artist.”

Both are “Christian filmmakers who are working squarely within the industry,” Wandtke said. That’s a contrast to last year’s emphasis on independent filmmakers, including a pre-release screening of “Blue Like Jazz” and discussion with its filmmaker, musician Steve Taylor.

The festival also will include films such as “Luminaris,” a fantasy film that Wandtke said has “a sort of joy to it and a beauty in looking at it.”

Then there’s a “challenging” film called “The Discarded,” which takes place in a setting where people have been put out of work, he said.

Thought-provoking

And there’s “Father of Lights,” the last in a trilogy of films by Wilson that attempt to film and understand God, whether that’s through miracles or evangelism. Cinematographer and “creative musician” Matt Bilen answered more than a half-hour of questions about the film after it screened Tuesday night.

And that was an answer itself to Wandtke’s encouragement to moviegoers: “We hope these are films that call you to continue to think.”