



None Shines More Brightly

John Fuja

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This novelization of the life of Jesus emphasizes the idea that good always triumphs over evil.

John Fuja's *None Shines More Brightly* is a historically conscious retelling of Jesus's early life, spanning from the arrival of the Magi through the murder of John the Baptist, that forwards the idea that God can use even evil acts for good purposes.

The novel trades between the virtuous life of Jesus's family and the wickedness of Herod's family. Young Jesus grows in divine nature before even realizing his divinity. His cousin John hears God calling him to his own purpose before he's old enough to fully comprehend it. Meanwhile, demon-possessed Herodias enters Herod's palace and uses her "womanly charms" to influence the already corrupt family in an attempt to end Jesus's mission before it starts. Both families clash at various points of the narrative, representing battles between good and evil.

Switches in perspective illustrate how evil forces plot against good ones. In the narrative, Satan—acting through Herodias—arranges everything from the Massacre of the Innocents to the beheading of John. But the text also emphasizes the idea that good always triumphs: in spite of all negative attempts, Jesus's mission moves forward. Moreover, the details of Jesus's life sprinkled throughout the tale ground the story in relatable contexts. For example, Mary and Joseph are as enamored of their infant's giggles as any other parents. Succinct explanations of potentially unfamiliar cultural factors, like ancient Jewish burial rites, also eliminate the chance for confusion and make it easy to comprehend the progression of events.

Characterization is strong for some players, but less so for others. Joseph steadily protects his family against Herod's threats each time they occur, and his kindness toward everyone he meets even earns the friendship of a Roman centurion. While Jesus is not exceptionally attentive to what he sees as the man-made aspects of Jewish law, he never strays from his understanding of the ways of God and gradually draws closer to the divine before fully realizing the truth of his identity. On the other hand, John progresses through his childhood years in a robotic fashion, and his early obsession with water seems trance-like since it isn't backed by narrated introspection. As he grows into an adult, the story reveals more of his thought processes, but not enough to shed light on his earlier days.

While the book remains true to its overarching goal of showing the power of good over evil, some aspects of its tone seem uneven. Early chapters mask seedy practices with euphemisms—for instance, trysts between Herodias and Herod are termed "stargazing." As the story progresses, however, the text becomes more direct on even viler acts, including depictions of child sacrifice and violent portrayals of possession. While these later descriptions underscore the reality of evil, the early modesty does not adequately prepare the reader for the harshness lying ahead.

None Shines More Brightly offers an insightful depiction of the events that preceded Jesus's ministry. Christians interested in reflecting on the life of Jesus from a fresh yet theologically sound perspective stand to appreciate this novel.

CAITLYNN LOWE (March 22, 2016)

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