

Yeshu: A Novel for the Open-Hearted

Charles David Kleymeyer

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The life of Jesus takes on new meaning through the eyes of a contemporary child.

In *Yeshu: A Novel for the Open-Hearted*, Charles David Kleymeyer draws on his experience as a culture and development sociologist and performing storyteller to reimagine many well-known biblical tales in an entirely unique and engaging way.

From the birth of Yeshu (Jesus) in a manger in Bethlehem to his crucifixion, the novel fills in details about Jesus's life, but from the perspective of seven-year-old Daavi, a neighbor of Yeshu's who lives in Nazareth with his parents. The narrative begins when Yeshu is twenty-three and working as a carpenter, but he soon becomes the village storyteller and healer.

Daavi looks up to Yeshu and begins to model Yeshu's approach to life. While on long journeys, the two explore what it means to pray, how God speaks to people, and how people can speak to God. The one-on-one interactions between Yeshu and Daavi are compelling, and the most interesting and unusual aspect of the novel is the fact that it is told from the perspective of this "ordinary" boy living beside Yeshu and his parents, Maria and Yosef.

In addition to events described in the New Testament, Kleymeyer relies on other sources of inspiration. He masterfully weaves in cultural and historical references to craft the novel, including Quaker teachings, children's fables, Chinese and Japanese folktales, musical compositions, art and literature, '60s folk singers, and his own personal experiences. Kleymeyer takes this cultural material and seamlessly applies it to the spiritual principles, getting to the heart of how people influence each other in a society—and specifically how even one person can have a profound impact.

The chapters are well written and quickly paced, and they contain active dialogue. But the novel is very lengthy, and because it retells recognizable tales, it doesn't hold much suspense. Kleymeyer overcomes this to a degree, however, by introducing a particularly intriguing aspect: Daavi's sister, Shoshana, has been missing, and throughout the novel, Daavi is on a quest to find her. This element is well integrated into the overall narrative and serves to reinforce many of the themes presented because, while on his journey, Daavi is striving to follow Yeshu's teachings.

Each chapter of *Yeshu* provides an opportunity for reflection on the specific biblical messages that are highlighted. As a result, the novel will appeal to fans of Christian fiction as well as to those interested in exploring spiritual themes. Through comforting and reassuring messages of love and forgiveness, Kleymeyer presents a new context for familiar biblical passages and parables.

MARIA SIANO (October 14, 2013)

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