



[The Gospel according to Jesus, Queen of Heaven](#)

Written and performed by Jo Clifford

Reviewed by [Stephen Bowler](#) February 2016

The Gospel according to Jesus, Queen of Heaven is a one hour 'sermon' written and performed by Jo Clifford, who invites us to embrace a 'queer Jesus'. More agitprop performance art than theatrical event.

The audience is addressed and directly challenged by Clifford who is constantly on the move, sometimes in-amongst those who have responded to the offer to sit closer, in a more intimate setting, but more often round the back of us, disallowing any comfortable sense of distance between audience and performer.

Gospels are plundered and parables recast in a style that is first pitched as 'story-telling' but then drifts toward the didactic as the queer/transgressive theme becomes the yardstick by which Christian compassion is measured.

It isn't enough that a Bishop and a Policeman fail where a 'queen' succeeds in the role of good Samaritan; the tranny's status as transgressive outsider is underscored by reference to the 'cum on her lips.' You get the picture.

The performance took place in the knave of a working church at the more permissive end of the Anglican spectrum - St Chrysostoms in Rusholme. Whilst a Curate refused to answer my enquiry about the suitability of the show for a sacred space such as this, the Nun beside me was nonplussed. Which isn't surprising really, as Clifford is pushing at an open door; the fluidity of identity is now a conventional trope and such hetero-normative baggage as remains within the Church of England is only there because it is yet to be thrown overboard. It comes as no surprise to find a show about a queer saviour enacted in my local church. In the Mosque, yes. But that's another show.

Clifford has an agenda and it is forcefully put. I'm partial to radicalism in art. Indeed, this is the privileged ground on which art sits, separate from the day-to-day trawl of utilitarian philistinism. At which level, it is dispiriting to witness such a conventional message masquerading as radical spiritual chic. Poly-amorous perversity and gender bending was vaguely outré in 1920s Berlin but is now just another claim for recognition.

The value of something sacred, like a church - 'a serious house on serious earth' as Larkin put it – is that our lives are judged in its presence. Many flee from that judgement or seek to destroy it, or, as is the case of *The Gospel according to Jesus, Queen of Heaven*, attempt to re-arrange the symbolic furniture to fit their own – entirely personal – taste. The result is profane.