

CPYU 3-D Review

Movie/DVD: *Juno*



Background/summary: Nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture, this modest budget film stars Ellen Page, Michael Cera, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman, Allison Janney, J.K. Simmons and Olivia Thirlby. The movie is directed by Jason Reitman (*Thank You for Not Smoking*) and the screenplay is by stripper turned blogger turned movie writer, Diablo Cody. *Juno's* plot is simple: A 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant and finds a family to adopt her child. But the film's ability to portray the complexity and depth of teen pregnancy and adoption has earned it overwhelmingly positive reviews. Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* concludes, "It is very smart, very funny and very touching; it begins with the pacing of a screwball comedy and ends as a portrait of characters we have come to love. Strange, how during Juno's hip dialogue and cocky bravado, we begin to understand the young woman inside, and we want to hug her." *Juno* is rated PG-13 for mature thematic material, sexual content and language.

Discover: What is the message/worldview?

- The movie opens with 16-year-old Juno (Ellen Page) drinking a gallon of Sunny-D and staring at a recliner in her backyard. A brief flashback with a somewhat explicit scene reveals a sexual encounter on that recliner where Paulie Bleeker (Michael Cera) loses his virginity and Juno becomes pregnant. The next scene is in a local convenient store. Juno purchases and shows positive on her third pregnancy test.
- Juno's initial response is to call her best friend for advice, reminding viewers that today's teens first go to peers for processing difficult situations. Juno decides to have an abortion, tells Bleeker of her plan and he accepts it with little hesitation.
- Juno chooses the abortion clinic that does not require parental consent for minors, but can't go through with it. She decides that she would rather give up the baby for adoption, and searches a newspaper seeking suitable parents.
- When Juno explains all of this to her parents (dad and step-mom), they are relieved she is not into hard drugs or had been arrested, calmly accept her decision and help her with her plans.
- The adoptive parents-to-be Vanessa and Mark Loring (Garner and Bateman) seem like your typical yuppie couple desperately wanting a child, but as the story unfolds more is revealed. The marriage is breaking apart because of Mark's immaturity. He still has dreams of being a rock star and is not ready to settle down into parenthood.
- It is not easy to be a pregnant high school student. Juno is viewed as an outcast by her peers, she's emotionally confused about her relationship with Bleeker and she begins to have an inappropriate relationship with Mark. At one point Juno's dad asks her, "Where've you been?" She responds, "Just out dealing with things way beyond my maturity level."
- The movie takes a surprising turn at the end. Mark leaves Vanessa and seeks a divorce, but Juno still wants Vanessa to be the mother of her child. The baby is born and given to Vanessa, and Bleeker and Juno repair their relationship.

Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- This movie affirms life. At first, abortion is seen as a solution to the “problem” of this pregnancy, but Juno wrestles deeply with the ramifications of such a decision. Children are a gift from God, and Juno’s decision to give up the baby for adoption is a biblical one.
- Divorce is not the way it is supposed to be. Juno’s parents are divorced and the adoptive parents eventually divorce, but it is not sugar-coated or seen as an easy way out of a difficult relationship. This movie presents an honest portrayal of the problems with divorce.
- The biblical story is full of examples of the power of adoption (Ruth, Moses). Adoption is a central metaphor used by Paul to explain how gentiles become part of God’s family. This film illustrates the depth and importance of adoption in a way that makes abortion seem cruel and absurd.

Decide: What do I do with it?

- While *Juno* could be a good movie to discuss with mature teenagers, its main audience should be adults. It has been marketed as a comedy, but is much richer and deeper than most movies in that genre.
- *Juno* helps viewers wrestle with the complexity of the issues surrounding teen pregnancy, seeing it from a variety of angles: peers, parents and teachers. There are powerful scenes where Juno is viewed as an outcast at school. It serves as a great discussion starter for how we should respond to teen pregnancy.
- The parents’ reaction to Juno’s pregnancy is interesting. Some reviewers have commented that they under-reacted. Others suggest that their parenting style was a “breath of fresh air” because the parents were not judgmental but supportive. This is an important discussion to have: How would you respond if your daughter was pregnant? What is a biblical response? How do we communicate that something is wrong, without failing to love the pregnant teenager and child on the way?
- When Juno arrives at the abortion clinic, a friend from school is protesting the killing of unborn babies. Juno engages her in a conversation before entering the clinic. The movie indicates a direct link between the protester’s words and Juno’s eventual decision against the abortion. This provides a great context for discussing abortion. Is protesting and picketing abortion clinics an effective response? Why or why not? What should we do, or stop doing, in our response to abortion in our culture?
- Mark Loring’s (Bateman) inability to grow up provides a great opportunity to discuss the extended adolescence that is pervasive in our culture. Why is it that so many young people do not think they are ready or able to be parents? Has having children become viewed as a hindrance to individual fulfillment?
- At one point Juno says, “Normalcy isn’t our style.” This movie can spark an interesting conversation about “normalcy” in our culture. What is normal? How would you describe a “normal” family in our culture?

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