



## WHO IS JESUS? LIFE & MINISTRY.

### Who is Jesus?

Born in Bethlehem to Mary & Joseph, the birthday we celebrate at Christmas, Jesus is central to our understanding of the Christian faith. He shows us who God is. He shows us what God is like. If you want to get to know the Christian faith – get to know Jesus. Jesus is a historical figure. He really existed. In the New Testament section of the Bible, the four Gospels written down by authors named Matthew, Mark, Luke & John, tell the story of his life and teaching. The earliest Gospel (Mark) was written within 50 years of Jesus' death. Each one is slightly different, written from the sources they had available and eyewitness accounts. Together, they build a faithful portrait of who Jesus is.

### Jesus' birth (Luke 1.26-38)

Christians believe that Jesus' birth, life and death are foretold in the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfils the hope of the Jewish people for an anointed king or Messiah, bringing salvation to God's people. The message of Gabriel to Mary describes Jesus as the Son of God and a descendant of David, the great king of Israel who lived a thousand years before Jesus. The name Jesus means, in Hebrew, 'Saviour'. The word 'Christ' (the title given to Jesus) means, in Greek, 'anointed' and is the same word as the Hebrew 'Messiah'. At Christmas we hear another description for Jesus, 'Emmanuel' which simply means, God with us. Jesus is born to unite people and God:

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."* (John 1.1-3)

*"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."* (John 1.14)

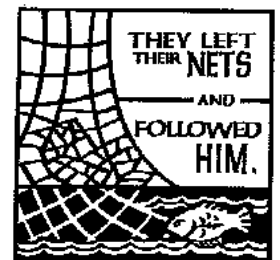
So, Jesus is a person who was born just like us. He then grew up, learned a trade (carpentry no doubt) and became an adult.

### Jesus' ministry (Luke 4.16-24 and 38-44)

Central to Jesus' ministry is his proclamation of the good news, that he comes as God's anointed king to proclaim God's kingdom for the whole world. Jesus proclaims the kingdom through his teaching in the synagogues and the temple and in the open air as crowds flock to him. As a sign that God's kingdom has come, Jesus heals the sick and performs miracles (in John's Gospel these are known as signs). From the beginning of Jesus' ministry there are those who reject his message and even want to kill him. They feel threatened by his radical new teaching, which is centred on love. Yet many believed he spoke with authority. *'They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority.'* (Luke 4. 32) From the beginning of Jesus' ministry there are those who reject his message and even want to kill him.

### Jesus call to 'follow him'

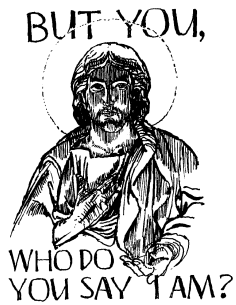
Jesus starts ministry with 'The Good News.' Faith is indeed that – it is good and hopeful, for Jesus calls all people to know God, love him and use their skills to share the Good News for every generation. The first to follow this call (as recorded in the Gospels) were fishermen. Because they left their nets and followed him, we have heard about Jesus today.



*Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus*



*passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.’ (Mark 1. 14-20)*



**Who do you say I am? (Luke 9.12-26)** One of the best ways to learn about God is to look at Jesus and what he believed and taught. Jesus used the Old Testament in his earthly life and ministry – it was the bedrock of his teaching. But he also applied to bible texts in the context of the time. For example, he healed the sick on the *sabbath* day of rest (John 5). In the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus again demonstrates his care and compassion for people and the abundance of what God provides through him. Christians see this and many more miracles as a foreshadowing of the Eucharist (Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper or Mass) as Jesus sustains his people in their journey of life and faith. The whole of the first part of the Gospel of Luke finds its focus in Jesus’ question to Peter: *‘Who do you say I am?’ (Matthew 16.15)* Jesus’ words and actions convinced them he is no ordinary person. Today we need to hear Jesus’ question and answer for ourselves. *‘Who do you say I am?’*

**Lord, teach us to pray**

*Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ (Luke 11.1)*

Jesus responds to the disciples’ question by giving them his own prayer which the foundation for every Christian’s life of prayer is:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**



Jesus encourages the disciples to develop good habits of personal prayer:

*Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6.6)*

And of prayer together:

*Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Matthew 18.20)*

**Jesus and the forgiveness of sins (Luke 7.36-50)**

Jesus proclaims a life-changing message for individuals who are far from God and rejected by society around them. This message is one of the forgiveness of sins (described here in the image of cancelling debts), a new beginning and acceptance by God and by the community of God’s people – the Church. Jesus proclaims this message not only by his words but also in his actions. The woman responds to the message of forgiveness by deep devotion to Jesus, but

his actions provoke a different response among the Pharisees and a question from the crowd: *'Who is this who even forgives sins?'* Jesus asks us to be his disciples and follow him in humility – forgiving others just as he forgives us. But do we find this easy?



### Do we recognise who Jesus is?

As soon as the disciples recognize who Jesus is, the focus of the Gospel turns to Jesus' suffering and death and the meaning of his death for the world. Jesus also begins to explore with his followers the cost of discipleship.

### Jesus is a window onto God

Jesus helps us to see the God we can't see. Jesus performs miracles beyond the wildest dreams of those he meets: healing, feeding, even raising people from the dead! He has the authority of God to bring about life in its fullest sense. He continues to do this today, to bring about life for us if we choose. Jesus makes God known to us in human form, revealing the love of the Father for every single person.

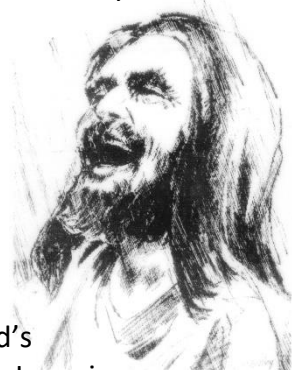
I see no escape from the dilemma: either Jesus is fraudulent, or his claim is true; either we judge him for being terribly amiss, or we let him judge us.

*Arthur Michael Ramsey,  
Introducing the Christian Faith, p. 41*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1: 14-18)*

### Christians believe:

- ❖ Jesus tells his disciples that his death and resurrection are at the heart of his ministry. This is exactly what he has come to do – save us!
- ❖ Jesus taught his followers that he *must* suffer and die.
- ❖ Dying upon the cross of Calvary was something he had to do.
- ❖ Jesus explained that he was taking our place upon the cross – he is the *'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'*.
- ❖ The cross for Christians is a metaphor for life, not death!



### Jesus teaches the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes sum up Jesus' teaching about what it means to live as a child of God's kingdom. They can be found right at the beginning of a long passage of teaching by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Just as Moses taught the people of Israel from the mountain after he had received the Commandments, so Jesus begins his ministry by going up a mountain and teaching his disciples.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

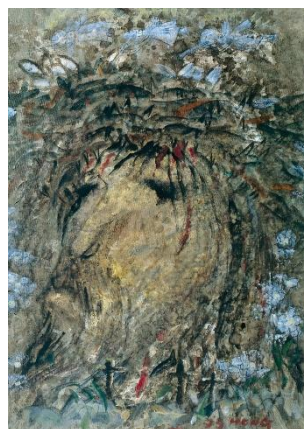
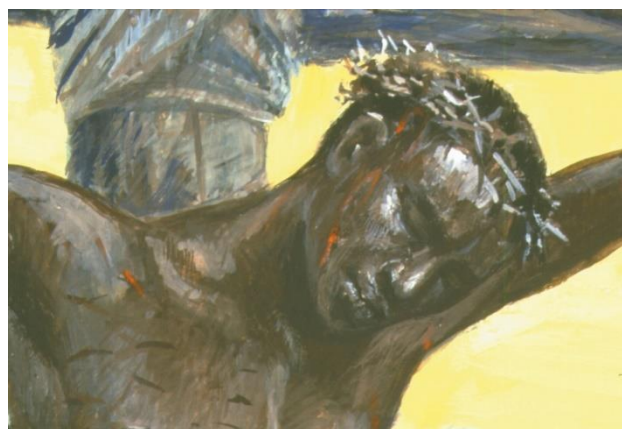
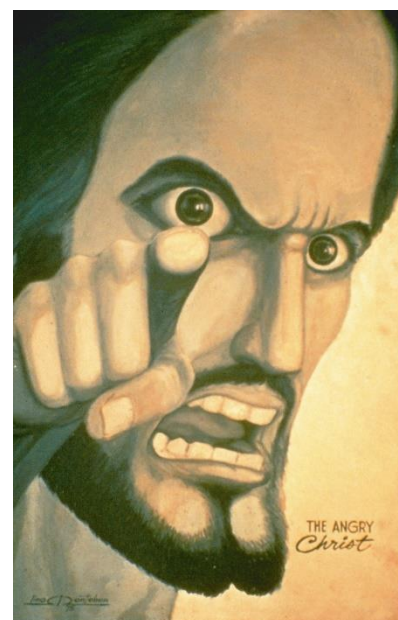
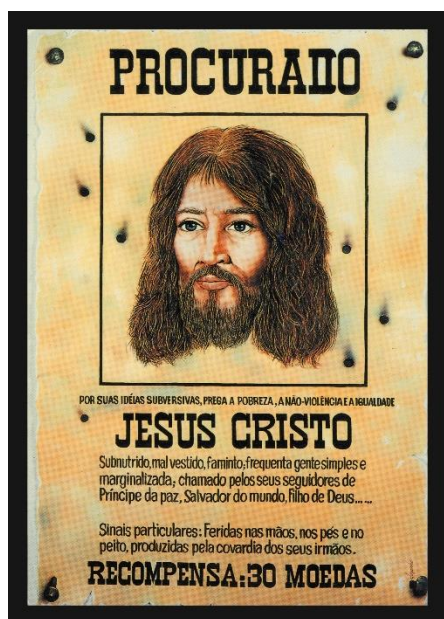
*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5: 1-12)*



Some of these sayings may be difficult to understand, and some are uncomfortable for us today, just as they would have been to Jesus' first hearers. We can start to understand their meaning, and who Jesus is by looking at how he lives them out himself. For instance, if you are not sure what Jesus means by 'blessed are those who mourn', look at the examples in Jesus' own life and ministry where he cries out with sadness and anguish to God. This will help us see that mourning is not just about bereavement, but a whole attitude of lamentation and crying out to God when we see and experience the injustices and sorrows of the world. Because that is exactly who Jesus is, the person who unites us with God the Father, creator of all things. Some of us may find that we are naturally people who thirst for justice, or who are merciful to others. But likewise, we may also conclude that being pure in heart or meek do not come naturally to us. Whatever our natural tendencies, though, all of the beatitudes are for all of us, and they need to be understood as a whole.

The Beatitudes are complex. They are hard to live out. But they are also very beautiful. They describe what it means to live by a set of standards, callings and attitudes that go way beyond the observation of rules or the keeping of the law. This is what life looks like when you are truly Christ-like. To follow Jesus, to truly know Him and live the Christian life, we need to enter into the challenging world of the Beatitudes. At St James' Church Weybridge, knowing Jesus is bound together with our desire to work for the building-up of his kingdom, on earth, as it is in heaven.



So, who is Jesus to you?

What are your thoughts on his life and ministry?