

## THINKING ABOUT JESUS' LIFE AND 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 Gospels (Written down by authors named Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) tell the story of his life and teaching. The earliest Gospel of Mark was written within 50 years of Jesus' death. Each one is slightly different, written from the sources they had available and eye witness accounts. Together, they build a faithful portrait of who Jesus is.



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

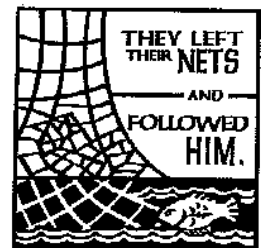
Christians believe that Jesus' birth and life and death are foretold in the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfils the hope of the Jewish people for an anointed king or Messiah who will bring salvation to God's people. The message of Gabriel to Mary describes Jesus as the Son of God and a descendant 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'.

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

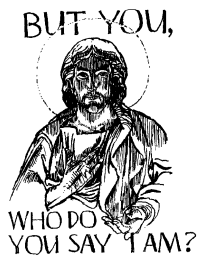
At the centre of Jesus' ministry is announcing the good news that he comes as God's anointed king to proclaim God's kingdom for the whole world. Jesus proclaims the kingdom through his teaching in the synagogues and the temple and in the open air as crowds flock to him. As a sign that God's kingdom has 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. Indeed, it is because those fishermen left their nets and followed him, that 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 service of Holy Communion 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?*'

### 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. Again, 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.



### 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)*