

# Who is Jesus?

**Supplementary materials for Religious  
Education in the upper secondary school**

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ISBN 978-0-9933713-2-5

First published 2018

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**Dedicated to the memory of John Hull,  
Terence Copley and Jack Priestley.**

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# Introduction

## Introduction for teachers

Welcome to this resource for teaching about Jesus as part of upper secondary school Religious Education (RE). These lessons aim to **'do Jesus differently'**. They build upon, but also go beyond, approaches to teaching about Jesus that are commonly found in primary and lower secondary schools, such as looking at the life of Jesus, or exploring specific themes (e.g. miracles, healing or parables). Each lesson is designed to enable teachers to guide students in asking 'Who is Jesus?' for a different individual or group of people. The lessons also introduce students to various academic approaches that might be employed in attempting to provide answers to this question.

Present throughout the lessons are a team of fictional academics – scholars who model for students how to go about the task of asking 'Who is Jesus?', and whose approaches to answering this question students are encouraged both to adopt and critique. This is influenced by the **'RE-searchers' approach to RE** in primary schools (see [www.reonline.org.uk/re-searchers](http://www.reonline.org.uk/re-searchers)), also developed at the University of Exeter (Freathy, G. et al., 2015; Freathy, R. et al., 2017). The 'RE-searchers' approach employs cartoon character researchers to encourage students to engage with different interpretations, methodologies and methods in a critical, dialogic and inquiry-led approach to the study of religion(s) and worldview(s). Developed here for use in upper secondary school environments, each fictional academic featured in this textbook represents a branch of the academic disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies as they might be studied in a university setting – for example, Church History, Biblical Studies, or Contextual Theology. The academics introduce students to the different sources they use for their research, the methods or skills that they employ to examine these sources, and the particular perspectives or worldviews that provide the motivation for their work and which influence the directions their investigations take. Also included are paintings by Devon artist Brian J. Turner, which may be familiar to you from our earlier resource, *The Art of Bible Reading* (Freathy et al, 2014). Turner's artwork depicts biblical scenes in a quirky, contemporary style that is both engaging and thought-provoking, and further helps to open up notions of perspective and interpretation to students.

The approach of this textbook additionally touches upon four **Big Ideas** about the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) (Freathy and John, 2018). The first Big Idea emphasises that religion(s) and worldview(s) cannot be described in terms upon which everyone agrees. Rather, they are subject to contested definitions, and exist in diverse and ever-changing contexts. Through asking the question 'Who is Jesus?', this textbook encourages students to approach religion(s) and worldview(s) as inherently 'unstable', and as worth examining from a variety of perspectives.

The second Big Idea is that the 'we' in 'what we study' has a dramatic impact upon the outcome of our studies. Good researchers acknowledge that their own perspectives, motivations and research preferences influence

the outcomes of their studies, as it is not possible to engage in truly objective research. The textbook encourages students to reflect upon the perspective (positionality) of a variety of academics, and to consider what they can learn from that, including moving towards a better understanding of themselves and others (reflexivity).

The third Big Idea relates to the RE-searchers approach (above) – that numerous interpretations, methodologies and methods can be used to study religion(s) and worldview(s). Here the textbook invites students to encounter and recognise a diversity of approaches involved in the academic disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies.

Finally, the fourth Big Idea connects the study of religion(s) and worldview(s) with the real world. It is hoped that the textbook will help students to come to appreciate that the question ‘Who is Jesus?’ is one that is pertinent across perspectives and for many different people (not limited to those selected as examples here), and that to study it from a variety of perspectives involves the use of an impressive set of transferable skills. Students will be invited to engage in the interpretation of textual sources, artworks and faith-based or cultural settings and, in so doing, to encounter, and to attempt to empathise with, people from a variety of faith, gender, (dis-)ability and cross-cultural perspectives. The textbook therefore invites students to begin to grapple with the complexities of the apparently simple question ‘Who is Jesus?’, and to engage critically with these responses.

A chart showing how this works for each lesson is included below.

Key inquiry question	Who is Jesus...							
	...for historians?	...for the gospel writers?	...for Muslims?	...for feminists?	...for the visually impaired?	...for different cultures?	...for today's Church?	...for an artist?
Academics	• Church historian • Bible scholar	• Bible scholar • Church historian	• Scholar of Islam • Theologian	• Theologians • Church historian • Bible scholar	• Theologians	• Bible scholar • Anthropologist	• Theologians	• Theologians
Discipline	• Church History	• Biblical Studies	• Islamic Theology	• Contextual Theology	• Disability Theology	• Cross-Cultural Biblical Studies	• Theology	• Contextual Theology
Sources	• Bible • Historical writings	• Bible • 'Q' source	• Qur'an • Material culture	• Feminist theology • Bible • Material culture • Church documents	• Writings of John Hull, a visually-impaired theologian • Bible	• Bible • Ethnography • Grassroots communities	• Bible • Liturgy • Church artefacts	• Paintings by Brian J. Turner
Methods	• Historical analysis	• Scriptural interpretation	• Scriptural interpretation	• Theological analysis	• Theological analysis	• Cross-Cultural biblical interpretation	• Theological analysis	• Art criticism • Theological analysis
Perspectives	• Historical	• Biblical	• Inter-religious studies	• Socio-cultural	• Theological	• Biblical • Socio-cultural • Anthropological	• Theological	• Theological

These lessons therefore aim to provide students with the opportunity to learn the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to engage in, and to critique, the processes of inquiry involved in Theology and Religious Studies. The inclusion of specifically **theological** inquiry within RE has become a much-discussed topic among Religious Educators in recent years (see, for example, in the Church of England Archbishops' Council Education Division and National Society's 2014 report 'Making a Difference'). While many have agreed that theological inquiry should form an important element of RE in schools, the extent to which it might be considered an appropriate part of RE in schools *without* a religious affiliation, and the methods by which it might be successfully incorporated within such settings, remain unresolved. The approach to theology upon which the lessons in this textbook are based is designed to be acceptable in schools both with and without religious affiliations. Theology is applied in a critical, dialogic and inquiry-led context, and at no point assumes any particular faith, or non-faith, stance (Freathy and Davis, 2018).

Each lesson within the textbook consists of a variety of **activities** for completion within the lesson either by the class as a whole or in group work, and a larger activity intended to form a homework task. The materials are designed to be as **flexible** as possible so that teachers can decide how best to use them to meet the needs of their particular students. We would love to hear what you think of this resource, and how you implement its activities within your RE lessons. If you would like to offer any feedback, or to become involved in future RE curriculum development projects or trials, please **get in touch:** [R.J.K.Freathy@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:R.J.K.Freathy@exeter.ac.uk).

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## Aims and objectives

### These lessons aim to:

- ★ present the answers of different individuals and groups to the question 'Who is Jesus?';
- ★ enable students to develop and express their own answers to the question 'Who is Jesus?';
- ★ introduce students to various interpretations, methodologies and methods used in academic theology in connection with the question 'Who is Jesus?'

### In these lessons, students will:

- ★ investigate how religious beliefs and ideas are communicated by people, texts and traditions;
- ★ explore the impact of differing religious beliefs and teachings on individuals, communities and societies;
- ★ study a range of sources from different contexts, including texts, images and artefacts;
- ★ examine a variety of different theological approaches to engaging with these sources;
- ★ offer reflections on source materials as if viewing them from the perspectives of different theologians and scholars of religion;
- ★ develop and express personal responses to the source materials and perspectives under discussion.

## About the authors

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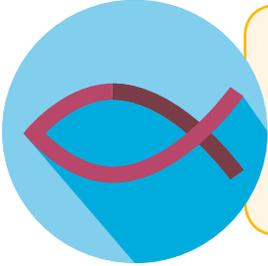
**Anneke Schmidt** is a doctoral researcher in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter, currently engaging in theoretical research on the place of theological understandings in multi-faith Religious Education in English schools. Her research interests are questions of universality and particularity in the (comparative) study of religions, inter-religious encounters and dialogue in plural societies, and the role of theology in non-confessional, multi-faith Religious Education. As an Associate Research Fellow at Exeter University, she has been involved in a Religious Education research project, and she also works as a freelance copy-editor, proof reader and (German–English) translator.

# Who is Jesus?

Part One

## **Who is Jesus?**

## Who is Jesus...

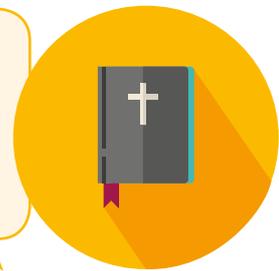


### ...for historians?

- ★ What historical sources can we use to find out about Jesus?
- ★ Are there facts about Jesus that we will never be able to know?
- ★ How have historical facts about Jesus shaped Christianity?

### ...for the gospel writers?

- ★ What do the gospel writers tell us about Jesus?
- ★ What sources of information did the gospel writers use?
- ★ Why do different gospels tell us different things?

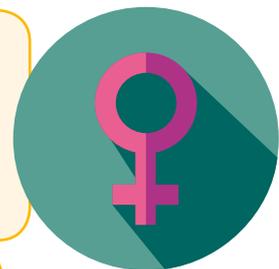


### ...for Muslims?

- ★ What sources do Muslims use to find out about Jesus?
- ★ What do Muslims mean when they describe Jesus as a 'prophet'?
- ★ How do Muslim and Christian views about Jesus compare?

### ...for feminists?

- ★ What can we know about Jesus' attitudes towards women?
- ★ What roles have women played in the Church across time?
- ★ How do women view the life and significance of Jesus?



### ...for the visually impaired?

- ★ How are visually impaired people represented in the Bible?
- ★ What was Jesus' response to visually impaired people?
- ★ What difficulties does this raise for visually impaired Christians today?

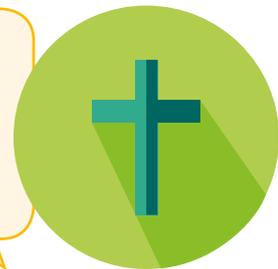


**...for different cultures?**

- ★ Is Jesus the same for people across different contexts and cultures?
- ★ How does our culture influence how we interpret the Bible?
- ★ What can we learn from cross-cultural interpretations of biblical texts?

**...for the Church today?**

- ★ How is the life of Jesus reflected in today's church buildings?
- ★ How has the life of Jesus influenced worship practices?
- ★ What is the significance of Jesus for the lives of Christians today?



**...for an artist?**

- ★ How do the paintings of Brian J. Turner represent Jesus?
- ★ Why does Brian paint Jesus in contemporary situations?
- ★ How does Brian use symbolism in his paintings?

**OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ Which topic or topics are you most interested in? Why?
- ★ What do you already know about this topic?
- ★ What would you like to find out about this topic?

Share your answers with the person next to you.

Are your answers the same or different? Why?

## Meet the academics

Helping you to explore the question 'Who is Jesus?' will be **five fictional academics**.

They are all experts in their areas and will be showing you how to go about the task of 'theological inquiry' from a number of different angles.

Here is a little background information about each academic and their particular interests.



**Dr Emily Stuart,  
Church Historian**

“ Hello! My name is Dr Emily Stuart and I am a **CHURCH HISTORIAN**. My job is to try and find out more about the history of Christianity.

When I was at school, my favourite subject was history. I enjoyed finding out about what people were like in the past, and thinking about what we could learn from that.

I liked history so much that I decided to study it at university. I chose to specialise in Church History because, as a child, my parents had made me go to church, and I wanted to find out how much of what we were told was historically true. ”



## Dr Ethan Jackson, Bible Scholar

“ Hello! My name is Dr Ethan Jackson and I am a **BIBLE SCHOLAR**.

When I was a kid, I thought the Bible was boring. I didn't go to church and saw the Bible as irrelevant to modern life.

When I went to university to study English Literature, I discovered that the Bible is read by lots of different people and can be understood in many different ways. Some Christians believe the Bible is literally true; others think its message has to be interpreted according to the context in which it is read. The Bible is even read by people who aren't Christians at all – for example, by Muslims who are interested in how it related to their own religion, and by non-religious people who see it as a very important work of literature.

In my research now, I am particularly interested in how reading the Bible in different ways shapes modern Christian beliefs. ”



## Dr Tom Abbott, Theologian

“ Hello! My name is Dr Tom Abbott and I am a **THEOLOGIAN** – someone who studies religious beliefs and, in particular, Christian beliefs.

I grew up on a council estate in Scotland. My mother was a single parent and I had five brothers, so we didn't have much money. At weekends, I used to go to a youth group that was run by the local church. I wasn't really interested in religion, but there was free food and a pool table. There were also lots of books, and I loved to read.

The vicar helped me choose books to borrow, and gradually I became more and more interested in Christianity. In particular, I was fascinated by the message of Christianity for disadvantaged and marginalised people.

I ended up getting a scholarship to study Theology at university, and now my job is to think about how Christianity interacts with, and responds to, contemporary social issues. ”



## Reverend Professor Lydia Green, Theologian

“ Hello! I’m the Reverend Professor Lydia Green and I’m a **THEOLOGIAN**, too.

Unlike Tom Abbott, I grew up going to church. In fact, both my parents were vicars, and my mother was one of the first women to be ordained.

I studied Music at Cambridge University, and after I graduated, I felt called to join the ministry, too. Now I work as a researcher at a university, and also as a part-time minister.

As an ordained woman in the church, I am particularly interested in the relationship between feminism and Christianity, and enjoy finding out about the role of women within contemporary Christianity. ”



**Dr Kamilah Malik,  
Scholar of Islam**

“ Hello! I’m Dr Kamilah Malik and I am a **SCHOLAR OF ISLAM**. I grew up in Manchester and I am a Muslim. My family is quite religious, and we go to worship in our local mosque.

I have always been interested in the history of Islam, as well as how that history relates to life today. I decided to go to university in London to study Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. Being a British Muslim, I am also really interested in inter-faith relations – how Islam and Muslim communities relate to and interact with other religions and communities in the UK.

The relationship between Islam, the Qur’an (our sacred text) and the Bible is a key part of this. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ What questions might each academic want to ask about Jesus?
- ★ What questions might you like to ask the academics?
- ★ What do you already know about Jesus? Try to think of at least five things.
- ★ Where and how have you learned about these things?
- ★ What would you like to find out about Jesus?
- ★ Which of the above academics would you approach for each question and why?

Share your ideas with the person next to you or with your class.

# Who is Jesus?

Part Two

## **Who is Jesus for historians?**

“ Although not all academics believe that Jesus is the Son of God, there is little doubt that he did actually exist, and that he is an important historical figure. ”

“ Jesus was a member of the Jewish faith. Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions (religions that have only one God.) The Jewish people believe they are chosen by God (Yahweh) to set an example of how to live. ”



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Bible Scholar**

“ In the New Testament part of the Bible, we can find many narratives that tell us about Jesus’ Jewish identity. It’s important to know about Jesus the Jew if we are to properly understand the early development of the Christian religion. ”

### **OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ Look at one of the sources on page 17.
- ★ Why might this source help Dr Ethan Jackson to understand Jesus’ Jewish identity?

**SOURCE A**

The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: "Every first-born male is to be dedicated to the Lord." They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the law of the Lord.

**Luke 2: 22-24**

**SOURCE C**

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

**Mark 15: 25, 34**

**SOURCE D**

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day the lambs for the Passover meal were killed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and get the Passover meal ready for you?"

Then Jesus sent two of them with these instructions: "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: 'The Teacher says, Where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?' Then he will show you a large upstairs room, fixed up and furnished, where you will get everything ready for us."

The disciples left, went to the city, and found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

**Mark 14: 12-16**

**SOURCE B**

One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman there had an evil spirit that had made her ill for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, "Woman, you are free from your illness!" He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God.

The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, "There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!"

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept bound up for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?" His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.

**Luke 13: 10-17**

**SOURCE E**

Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual. When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. His parents did not know this; they thought that he was with the group, so they travelled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends. They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him.

On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers. His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you." He answered them, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand his answer.

**Luke 2: 41-50**

### What?

“ We often read about Jesus in the Bible, but there are other historical sources we can turn to as well.

Tacitus was a member of the Roman nobility. He hated both Jews and Christians. Tacitus refers to Jesus as ‘Christus’ and sees the development of Christianity as the beginning of a dangerous cult.

Josephus was a Jewish historian. The main purpose of his writings was probably to make Judaism seem more appealing to the Romans.”



**Dr Emily Stuart,  
Church Historian**

### How?

“ When I examine historical sources about Jesus, I want to ask:

Who wrote the source?

Why was the source written?

What does the source tell us?

Was the writer biased? If so, how and why?

Do the different sources agree with one another?”

### Why?

“ I am interested in reading historical sources about Jesus because I want to find out what we can actually know about Jesus for sure.

I also enjoy seeing how different sources record the same event in different ways, and thinking about reasons why this might be the case.”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ What information is common to all three of the sources on page 19?
- ★ Why do you think each source was written?
- ★ Which source might Dr Emily Stuart think is the most helping for finding out who Jesus was? Why?
- ★ Which source might Dr Emily Stuart think is the least useful? Why?

**SOURCE F**

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, and the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

**Tacitus (55-115 CE),  
The Annals, XV: 44**

**SOURCE H**

About the same time there lived Jesus, a wise man for he was a performer of marvellous feats and a teacher of such men who received the truth with pleasure. He attracted many Jews and many Greeks. He was the Christ. When Pilate sentenced him to die on the cross, having been urged to do so by the noblest of our citizens; but those who loved him at the first did not give up their affection for him. And the tribe of the Christians, who are named after him, have not disappeared to this day.

**Flavius Josephus (born 37 CE), Antiquities 17.3.3**

**SOURCE G**

The soldiers took Jesus inside to the courtyard of the governor's palace and called together the rest of the company. They put a purple robe on Jesus, made a crown out of thorny branches, and put it on his head. Then they began to salute him: "Long live the King of the Jews!" They beat him over the head with a stick, spat on him, fell on their knees, and bowed down to him. When they had finished mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

On the way they met a man named Simon, who was coming into the city from the country, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was from Cyrene and was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) They took Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which means "The Place of the Skull". There they tried to give him wine mixed with a drug called myrrh, but Jesus would not drink it. Then they crucified him and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing dice to see who would get which piece of clothing. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The notice of the accusation against him said: "The King of the Jews". They also crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left.

People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the Temple and build it up again in three days! Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law jeered at Jesus, saying to each other, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

And the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also. At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

Some of the people there heard him and said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah!" One of them ran up with a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and put it on the end of a stick. Then he held it up to Jesus' lips and said, "Wait! Let us see if Elijah is coming to bring him down from the cross!"

With a loud cry Jesus died.

The curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The army officer who was standing there in front of the cross saw how Jesus had died. "This man was really the Son of God!" he said.

**Mark 15: 16-39**



**Dr Emily Stuart,  
Church Historian**

“ Early Christianity developed out of Judaism. As we have already discovered, Jesus was a Jew, and his followers were Jews, too. ”



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Bible Scholar**

“ During his life, Jesus began doing things that were not approved of by many Jews. He was interpreting his Jewish roots differently to most, and gradually moving away from normal Jewish customs and traditions. ”

“ The Jewish people had long been waiting for a Messiah, or saviour, who had been promised in the Hebrew Bible. But Jesus was not the sort of person they had been expecting. He was not a political leader, and didn't try to free them from Roman military rule. ”

“ After Jesus' death, his followers initially formed a new sect within Judaism. The new religion of Christianity, which saw Jesus as the promised Messiah and rather than just an important prophet, began later. St Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, was very influential in its development. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

The Bible gives us several clues about how Jesus reinterpreted traditional Jewish teachings and laws.

★ Look at one or more of the sources on the next couple of pages.

- ★ How is Jesus acting, or how is he being described?
- ★ Why might our academics think that these things would have been surprising or controversial to Jewish people and leaders at the time?

**SOURCE A**

One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman there had an evil spirit that had made her ill for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, "Woman, you are free from your illness!" He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God.

The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, "There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!"

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept bound up for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?" His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.

**Luke 13: 10-17**

**SOURCE B**

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The notice of the accusation against him said: "The King of the Jews". They also crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left.

People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the Temple and build it back up in three days! Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law made fun of Jesus, saying to one another, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

And the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also.

**Mark 15: 25-32**

**SOURCE C**

Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today."

Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. All the people who saw it started grumbling, "This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much."

Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

**Luke 19: 1-10**

#### **SOURCE D**

While Jesus was having a meal in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and other outcasts came and joined Jesus and his disciples at the table. Some Pharisees saw this and asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such people?"

Jesus heard them and answered, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. Go and find out what is meant by the scripture that says: 'It is kindness that I want, not animal sacrifices.' I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts."

**Matthew 9: 10-13**

#### **SOURCE E**

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

**1 Corinthians 12: 12-13**

#### **OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ Choose an event from the life of Jesus. It might be one you have learned about in this lesson, or one you knew about from before.
- ★ Choose a person who either witnessed this event or heard about it afterwards. They can be a real or imaginary person.
- ★ Write an account of the event from the perspective of this person. Include the sources they used to find out about the event, what they think about Jesus and this particular event, and why they think the things they do.

# Who is Jesus?

Part Three

## **Who is Jesus for the gospel writers?**



### Gospel of Matthew

- ★ Matthew was a tax-collector, and later one of Jesus' disciples.
- ★ Matthew's Gospel was written for a Jewish audience, and it emphasises how Jesus' actions fulfilled Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, prophecies.

### Gospel of Mark

- ★ Mark was a follower of Peter (one of Jesus' disciples).
- ★ Mark's Gospel was the first gospel to be written and it is also the shortest.
- ★ It is mostly concerned with recording factual information and the acts of Jesus.



### Gospel of Luke

- ★ Luke was a medical doctor who had a particular concern for Jesus' interactions with poor and outcast in society.
- ★ Luke's Gospel was written for a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience.
- ★ It is thought that Luke knew Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the **synoptic gospels**. Historians believe they were written at a similar time and shared some source material. This means that these three gospels have a common 'synopsis' or order.

There is also a fourth gospel, the **Gospel of John**, which uses different source material and so does not follow the same order.

The precise **authorship** of the gospels is not known; it may be that one (or more) of them was not written by the person to whom it is attributed.

**OVER TO YOU...**

★ From which gospel do you think each of the following sources about Jesus is taken?

★ On what evidence are you basing your decision?

**SOURCE A**

Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority. Just then a man with an evil spirit came into the synagogue and screamed, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are – you are God's holy messenger!"

Jesus ordered the spirit, "Be quiet, and come out of the man!"

The evil spirit shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him. The people were all so amazed that they started saying to one another, "What is this? Is it some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!"

And so the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the province of Galilee.

**SOURCE B**

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born – Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

### SOURCE C

Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs and sent by the chief priests and the elders. The traitor had given the crowd a signal: "The man I kiss is the one you want. Arrest him!"

Judas went straight to Jesus and said, "Peace be with you, Teacher," and kissed him.

Jesus answered, "Be quick about it, friend!"

Then they came up, arrested Jesus, and held him tight. One of those who were with Jesus drew his sword and struck at the High Priest's slave, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him. "All who take the sword

will die by the sword. Don't you know that I could call on my Father for help, and at once he would send me more than twelve armies of angels? But in that case, how could the Scriptures come true which say that this is what must happen?"

Then Jesus spoke to the crowd, "Did you have to come with swords and clubs to capture me, as though I were an outlaw? Every day I sat down and taught in the Temple, and you did not arrest me. But all this has happened in order to make come true what the prophets wrote in the Scriptures".

Then all the disciples left him and ran away.

### Answers on page 29.

#### What?

“ Many of the key events in the life of Jesus are told in all three of the synoptic gospels. In some places, the details included and the language used is very similar, or even identical. In other places, the accounts are more varied. ”

#### How?

“ When I read the different accounts of Jesus' life given by the synoptic gospels, I ask:  
What is the same in each account?  
What is different between the accounts?  
Why is some of the material the same and some different?  
Where did each gospel writer get his material from? ”



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Bible Scholar**

#### Why?

“ I enjoy being a Bible detective. I want to uncover the story of how the Bible came to be: What inspired its writers? Why do they tell the narratives in the ways that they do? And how can we, the readers of today, go about uncovering this information? ”

**OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ Underline the phrases shared between Matthew and Mark in **RED**.
- ★ Underline the phrases shared between Matthew and Luke in **GREEN**.
- ★ Underline the phrases shared between Mark and Luke in **BLUE**.
- ★ What explanation might Dr Ethan Jackson give for these similarities?

The Sending Out of the Twelve Disciples		
Matthew 10: 7-16	Mark 6: 6-13	Luke 9: 1-6; 10: 12,3
	Then Jesus went to the villages around there, teaching the people.	
"Go and preach, 'The Kingdom of heaven is near!' Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons.	He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. He gave them authority over the evil spirits and ordered them,	Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. Then he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick, after saying to them,
You have received without paying, so give without being paid.		
Do not carry any gold, silver, or copper money in your pockets; do not carry a beggar's bag for the trip or an extra shirt or shoes or a walking stick.	"Don't take anything with you on the trip except a walking stick – no bread, no beggar's bag, no money in your pockets. Wear sandals, but don't carry an extra shirt."	"Take nothing with you for the trip: no walking stick, no beggar's bag, no food, no money, not even an extra shirt.
Workers should be given what they need.		
When you come to a town or village, go in and look for someone who is willing to welcome you, and stay with him until you leave that place.	He also told them, "Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that place.	Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that town;
When you go into a house, say, 'Peace be with you.' If the people in that house welcome you, let your greeting of peace remain;		
but if they do not welcome you, then take back your greeting.		
And if some home or town will not welcome you or listen to you, then leave that place and shake the dust off your feet.	If you come to a town where people do not welcome you or will not listen to you, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a warning to them!"	wherever people don't welcome you, leave that town and shake the dust off your feet as a warning to them."

Matthew 10: 7-16	Mark 6: 6-13	Luke 9: 1-6; 10: 12,3
	So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins. They drove out many demons, and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them.	The disciples left and travelled through all the villages, preaching the Good News and healing people everywhere.
I assure you that on the Judgment Day God will show more mercy to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah than to the people of that town! Listen! I am sending you out just like sheep to a pack of wolves.		"I assure you that on the Judgment Day God will show more mercy to Sodom than to that town! Go! I am sending you like lambs among wolves."
You must be as cautious as snakes and as gentle as doves."		

“ There are many sources that we can use to find out about Jesus. The Bible is one of them. The Gospel of Mark is the earliest of the gospels. It was written in approximately 70 CE, about 40 years after the death of Jesus. However, there are other sources, too, such as gospels that were not selected for the official New Testament: the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter, for example. Many academics agree that there was also an early collection of the sayings of Jesus, which Matthew and Luke used when writing their gospels.

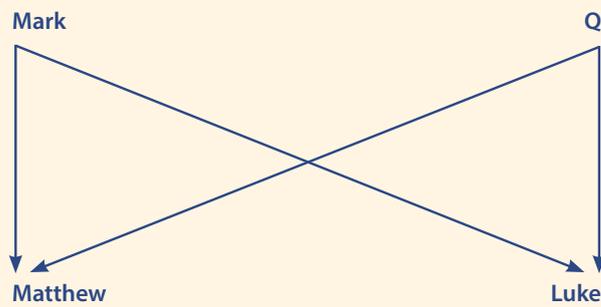
This collection of sayings is referred to as ‘Q’ (from the German word for source, ‘Quelle’). You can see some sayings that are believed to have been in Q below. ”



**Dr Emily Stuart,  
Church Historian**



The 'two-source hypothesis', which many (but not all) biblical academics agree with, suggests that Matthew and Luke used two sources when writing their gospels: Mark and Q. In other words, they share material from Mark (Source 1), and they share material from Q (Source 2).



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Bible Scholar**

Answers from page 26

Source A: Mark 1: 21-28

Source B: Luke 2: 8-20

Source C: Matthew 26: 47-56

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Why do you think academics argue that the Gospel of Mark was the earliest gospel?
- ★ Can you find evidence of Matthew and Luke using Mark in the texts on the previous page?
- ★ Can you find evidence of Matthew and Luke using the Q Source in the texts on the previous page? (Hint: Find parts of the text that Matthew and Luke share, but which are not included in Mark.)



'Resurrection' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

The angel spoke to the women. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him. Remember what I have told you.'" **Matthew 28: 1-7**

'Good representation of the two women coming to visit Jesus' tomb, finding the body gone and seeing an angel dressed in white.' **TomAbbott #He'sNotHere**

'Lovely how Brian shows the bright blue sky and sun coming up in the right hand panel. After the resurrection, things are looking up for the world.' **LydiaGreen #NewBeginnings**



Instagram

'Interesting painting showing events over several days – Jesus' body is laid in the tomb and then three days later he is shown raised from the dead.' **EthanJackson #ThreeDaysDead**

### OVER TO YOU...

Our academics are looking at Brian J. Turner's painting 'Resurrection' on Instagram. Above are their comments about the painting.

★ Which academic's interpretation do you like best? Why?

★ Choose one of the sources presented in this chapter. Draw a picture showing how you think Jesus is portrayed in it.

★ Imagine you are one of the academics. Write a comment from them about the representation of Jesus in your picture.

# Who is Jesus?

Part Four

## **Who is Jesus for Muslims?**

## Who are Muslims?

“ Islam is a religion that began in Arabia in the seventh century CE. The word ‘Islam’ means submission to the will of **Allah**, which is the Arabic term for ‘God’. Those who follow this religion – in other words, those who submit to God’s will – are called ‘Muslims’ ”

PBUH stands for ‘Peace Be Upon Him’ and is used by devout Muslims when they mention the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

“ In addition, Muslims believe that the **Sunnah**, the verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), provides a practical example, by which all believers must live. In particular, there are five religious acts, collectively known as the **Five Pillars of Islam**, which are considered obligatory for all Muslims:

- ★ The declaration of faith that there is only one God and that Muhammad (PBUH) is his messenger.
- ★ Praying five times a day.
- ★ Giving money to charity.
- ★ Fasting during the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar).
- ★ A pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. (Muslims aspire to go on this journey at least once in their lifetime.) ”



**Dr Kamilah Malik,  
Scholar of Islam**

“ They believe that the teachings of Islam were given, verbally, to the **Prophet Muhammad** (c. 570-632 CE) (PBUH) by Allah in a series of divine revelations mediated through the archangel Jibril (Gabriel). The first and most central of those revelations was that there is only one God. Muhammad (PBUH) was Allah’s messenger whose sacred task it was to report everything Allah had revealed to him to the world. First, the divine laws and teachings were transmitted only orally; later they were also collected in the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, which Muslims believe contains the original speech of Allah, dictated without human editing, and is therefore considered by Muslims to be the most sacred text that exists. ”

“ After Muhammad’s (PBUH) death in 632 CE, the Islamic empire continued to expand from Arabia in different directions, which started the spread of Islam. By 666 CE, the empire extended from North Africa in the west (present-

day Tunisia) to central Asia (Afghanistan) in the east. By 750 CE, the Islamic empire had spread further west, across North Africa, to what are Spain and Portugal today, as well as east to the northern parts of India. ”

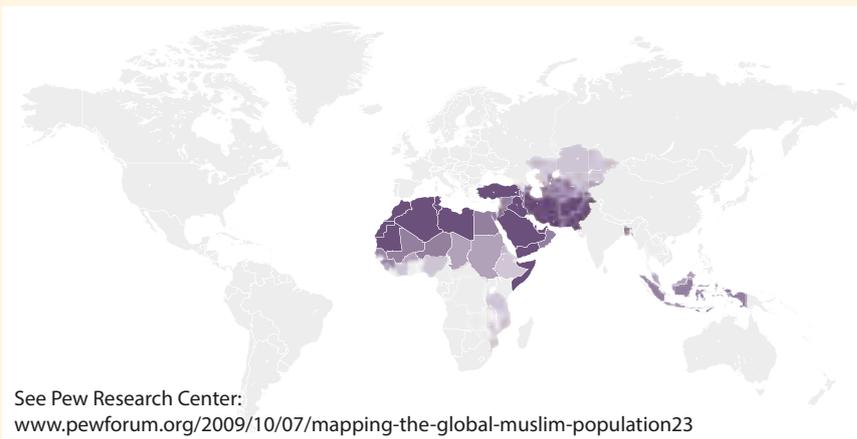
### Sunni and Shi’a Islam

Soon after Muhammad’s death, there was a dispute in the community of Muslims in what is today Saudi Arabia about who should be the next religious and political leader (*caliph*). Some of Muhammad’s followers wanted the elders of the community to choose a successor. Another group was convinced it should be someone from Muhammad’s family, so they favoured his cousin, son-in-law and closest blood relative, Ali.

Muslims who saw themselves as followers of Ali were called *Shi’a*, which means ‘party’ of Ali. Those who believed that questions of leadership should be determined by the elite of the community are known as **Sunni** Muslims.

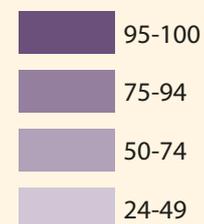
The Sunnis prevailed and chose Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad’s favourite wife, Aisha, as the first *caliph*. Ali did not become a successor until the fourth *caliph* was elected and by that time, violent conflicts had already broken out between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims.

The dispute about spiritual and political leadership was never resolved and to this day, Shi’a Muslims do not accept the first three *caliphs* as rightful successors of Muhammad. Today, Shi’a Muslims are concentrated in Iran as well as in the south of Lebanon and Iraq. In Iraq especially, one can see that the Sunni/Shi’a relationship is a difficult one.



See Pew Research Center: [www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population23](http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population23)

Estimated percentage of the population practicing Islam



Today, Muslims live all over the world. Nearly two-thirds live in the Asia-Pacific region. More Muslims live in India and Pakistan, for example, than in the entire Middle East-North Africa region. Muslims make up a majority in 49 countries. The highest concentration of Muslims (i.e. as a proportion of each country’s population) is found in the Middle East-

North Africa region, but Muslims also live as minority groups in other parts of the world including Europe and North America. Islam is the world’s second largest religious tradition, with 1.8 billion people following it all over the world. In the UK, between four and five per cent of the population are Muslims.



**Dr Kamilah Malik,  
Scholar of Islam**

### **Prophethood in Islam**

“ According to Islamic belief, Allah sent many different prophets to humankind over the course of hundreds of years to teach people how to live according to his law. A number of prophets had come before Muhammad (PBUH), including those whose prophecies are recorded in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. These prophets were, amongst others, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Muslims believe that Muhammad (PBUH) was the final prophet to be sent by Allah to guide humanity; for this reason, he is sometimes referred to as ‘the **seal** of prophets’.

Some Muslims would therefore argue that Islam was not founded in the seventh century, but has always existed and that Muhammad (PBUH), rather than being the founder of an entirely new religion, has perfected the prophecies that went before him. This is why the messages of prophets who had lived earlier than Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), such as Jesus’ teachings, are not necessarily viewed as wrong by Muslims, but rather as the specific messages that were right for the people at the given time (e.g. 30 CE in the case of Jesus’ prophethood), but needed perfection through Muhammad (PBUH) in the seventh century. ”

### **Jesus as prophet**

Christians believe that Jesus was the **Son of God**, which makes him both human and divine (God) at the same time. They also believe he was the long awaited **Messiah** or Anointed One who was sent by God from heaven to earth to save all humans from their sins. When Jesus was alive, the Jewish people around him were eagerly awaiting a specific prophesied figure referred to in the Hebrew Bible as a great king of the lineage of David, chosen by God to restore Israel and rule the world. Those who followed Jesus were convinced that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy – that he was this unique Messiah. In Islam, by contrast, Jesus (called Isa Ibn Maryam – Jesus, son of Mary) has a different status. Although seeing him as a very important and highly respected prophet, Muslims do not believe that

Jesus is the Son of God. To say that Jesus is both human and God would contradict the central Muslim belief in the absolute oneness of God (**tawhid**) – the first revelation that Muhammad reported to his followers. How can there be both God and a Son of God at the same time if there is only one God altogether? Since Christians agree with Muslims that there is only one God, they justify their belief in Jesus as the Son of God by arguing that the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are all united in one Godhead – just as the individual ingredients in a dough make up one cake, for example. This is called the concept of the **Trinity**. Most Muslims, however, do not accept this argument as they still think it contradicts their belief in the absolute oneness of God.

### ‘Messiah’ in Islam

“ The term ‘messiah’ also has a different meaning in Islam. Muslims acknowledge that scriptures earlier than the Qur’an, such as the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, frequently refer to messiah figures. They agree that Jesus was such a messiah but they tend to interpret this term as applying to all divinely-guided prophets alike. Even though the Qur’an uses the title ‘messiah’ only for Prophet Jesus, most Muslims would argue that this simply reflects a historical development. For them, it does not imply that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, understood in the Christian sense as the Son of God and saviour of the world.

Some Muslims also believe in the coming of a **Mahdi**, which is Arabic for ‘messiah’. For Sunni Muslims, this is the prophesied redeemer of Islam who will rule the world for a few years before the Day of Judgement. It is expected that this event will take place at the same time as the predicted return of Jesus at

the end of time. In particular, Jesus will help the *Mahdi* in his battle against the Antichrist, the false messiah of which also the New Testament warns (e.g. 1 John 2: 18).

For Shi’a Muslims – specifically the largest branch called Twelver Shi’a Muslims – the *Mahdi* has already been born in the person of Muhammad al-Mahdi, the twelfth Shi’a **imam** (spiritual and political leader), who went into hiding after most former *imams* had been murdered. He is known as the Hidden Imam who, one day, will return to become the rightful leader of the whole Muslim community. These two messiah concepts also differ in respect to the nature and importance they ascribe to the *Mahdi*. Sunnis have a more human view of the *Mahdi* and do not expect him to be much more than a rightly guided Muslim of his time. Shi’a Muslims *believe in the spiritual powers of the Mahdi* and see this as one of the foundations of their beliefs.”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ What are the similarities and differences in Muslim and Christian views about Jesus’ nature?
- ★ Why might Christians not be satisfied with the Muslim view of Jesus as prophet?
- ★ Why might Muslims argue against the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God and why do they tend to reject the concept of the Trinity.



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**

“ Christians believe that there is one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is called the doctrine of the **Trinity**. Jesus is the Son of God but his person is not separate from that of God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit together form a perfect union. ”

“ Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross but rose from the dead after three days and is now seated to the right hand of the Father in heaven. This is called the ‘resurrection’. They believe that Jesus sacrificed his life so that all who believe in him can be saved from their sins and have eternal life. At the end of time, Jesus will return to the earth to judge the living and the dead. ”

“ Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God and long awaited Messiah sent to the earth by God to save humanity. They believe that he takes away the sins of those who believe in him so that they may have eternal life. He came to the world in human form but he is also God (divine). ”

“ For Muslims, Jesus was Allah’s beloved messenger and one of the best prophets. According to the Qur’an, he never called himself ‘Son of God’. Jesus performed miracles but these were given to him by Allah and are not a sign of his divine status. ”



**Dr Kamilah Malik,  
Scholar of Islam**

“ Belief in the absolute oneness of God is central to Islam. **Tawhid** means ‘making one’ and is a very important theological concept. The word itself is not mentioned in the Qur’an but is implicit in the fundamental statement of faith (the first pillar of Islam): ‘there is no God but God’. ”

“ Most Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus but they agree with Christians that Jesus will return to the earth at the end of time. According to the Qur’an, Jesus did not die but was raised bodily to heaven by Allah. It only looked as if Jesus had died. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Read the views of Dr Tom Abbot and Dr Kamilah Malik (on pages 36-37) and compare them with the Qur’anic sources on the next two pages (38-39).
- ★ Which Qur’anic source reflects which Muslim belief about Jesus?
- ★ Do any of the sources contradict one or more Christian beliefs about Jesus? If so, explain how.

## Scriptural Reasoning

Religious believers who are interested in inter-faith dialogue (engaging in constructive, fruitful discussion about faith matters with people from other religious traditions) sometimes participate in so called **Scriptural Reasoning** practices. This means that people from different faiths (here: mainly Jews, Christians and Muslims) come together to read and discuss passages from their sacred

texts. Thus, they explore the ways in which textual study can help them understand their own faith tradition, learn from other religions, and respond to pressing political, social, economic and environmental issues to do with modern life. The aim is to share and discuss spiritual insights in an atmosphere of hospitality, mutual trust, respect and potential friendship.

### SOURCE A

O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter anything concerning Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and his word which He conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So – believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not “Three” – Cease! (It is better for you! Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that he should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender.

**Qur’an, Surah 4: 171 (Pickthall Translation)**

### SOURCE B

And because of their saying: We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, Allah’s messenger – they killed him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them; and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt of it; they have no knowledge of it except pursuit of a conjecture, they killed him not for certain.

But Allah took him up to Himself. Allah was ever Mighty. Wise.

**Qur’an, Surah 4: 157-158 (Pickthall Translation)**

**SOURCE C**

And we caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which was (revealed) before him in the Torah [Hebrew Bible], and We bestowed on him the Gospel in which is guidance and a light, confirming that which was (revealed) before it in the Torah – a guidance and an admonition to those who ward off evil.

**Qur'an, Surah 5: 46 (Pickthall Translation)**

**SOURCE D**

And when Allah says: O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? he says: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then You knew it. You know what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Your Mind. You, only You, are the Knower of Things Hidden.

I spoke to them only that which You commanded me (saying:) Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when You took me, You were the Watcher over them. You are witness over all things.

**Qur'an, Surah 5: 116-117 (Pickthall Translation)**

**OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ Write a dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian who engage in Scriptural Reasoning about the question: Who is Jesus? Use one of the Qur'anic sources from pages 38-39 as a basis for the discussion.

*(Remember that the aim of Scriptural Reasoning is not to convince others of your opinion but to offer room for the exchange of insights shared in an atmosphere of mutual respect.)*



**Dr Kamilah Malik,  
Scholar of Islam**

#### **The doctrine of *shirk***

“ In some parts of the Islamic world, it is forbidden to depict (e.g. draw or paint) people and animals in art. The reason for this can be found in the doctrine of *shirk*. *Shirk*, which literally means ‘placing partners beside God’, is the sin to worship anything or anyone other than Allah – the only God who exists. This would be a crime called ‘idolatry’ (worshipping false idols in place of God), which is regarded as particularly serious in Islam as it contradicts the central Muslim belief in the absolute oneness of God (*tawhid*).

For this reason, there is a rule never to associate anything with God, who is far above all creation, whether through the spoken or written word or in representational art. Especially, drawings or paintings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are viewed as highly offensive by some Muslims but the doctrine of *shirk* also applies to all other prophets including Jesus. For example, you would never find a sculpture or picture of Jesus, let alone Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in a mosque. ”

### Differences in Islamic and Christian visual art: Comparing mosque and church designs

Mosques tend to look very different from many Christian church buildings. This is both with regard to their external decoration and their interior design. Many of the things Christian churches traditionally include would be unthinkable in Islamic places of worship. In buildings of the Church of England or Catholic Church, for instance, we usually find paintings or sculptures of Jesus, his mother Mary and many other human figures depicted in the Bible. Churches also often include representations of complete biblical stories over the course of a series of individual pictures (e.g. in large wall paintings or on stained glass windows).

All this is rarely found in mosques as it could be interpreted as an expression of the worship of false idols in place of Allah. Islamic art in mosques often uses different forms of artistic

expression to depict religious knowledge and beliefs. The main two forms of expression found in mosques are **symbolism** and **abstraction**, both of which involve the creation of a new visual language of shape and form that tends to be independent from visual references to things that exist in the world. Another important way of decorating mosques, both externally and internally, is calligraphy. This is the art of copying passages of the Qur'an in a beautifully ornamented style of handwriting, usually based on the Arabic alphabet. Such **calligraphy** is highly venerated not just for its aesthetic beauty, but also because the Qur'an is believed to be the literal word of Allah, which also makes Arabic – the original language of the Qur'an – a holy language sometimes referred to as 'the language of God'.



Muqarnas detailing, Alhambra, Granada, Spain



'13 Letters' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Look at Brian J. Turner's painting '13 Letters'. The letters in the painting spell out five words that make up a question. The letters of each individual word are painted in the same colour. Can you find out what the question is?
  - \* Who do you think could be asking this question? To whom are they asking it, and why?
- ★ Read the texts on the previous pages about the doctrine of *shirk* and the differences between Islamic and Christian visual art. In what ways could this painting be seen as a successful attempt to represent Jesus from
  - an Islamic perspective? Why is it so important for some Muslims not to paint Jesus in a figurative way – as a real human being?
- ★ Create your own painting or drawing of Jesus that does not show Jesus as a real human being, but in some abstract form. You may use symbols or letters, shapes, forms, objects and colours in whichever way you like.
 

*(But remember: abstract art is not nonsensical! Make sure that you are able to explain the meaning of the individual parts of your painting and how they relate to Jesus in Islam.)*

\*The answer is: How do you see me?

# Who is Jesus?

Part Five

## **Who is Jesus for feminists?**

#### **SOURCE A: JESUS AND THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY**

Early the next morning [Jesus] went back to the Temple. All the people gathered around him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and they made her stand before them all. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?" They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him. But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger. As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her". Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. He straightened up and said to her, "Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?"

"No one, sir," she answered.

"Well, then," Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again."

**John 8: 2-11**

#### **SOURCE B: SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN AT THE TIME OF JESUS**

At the time of Jesus, society's attitudes towards women were very different from how they are today. Women had a far lower social status than men: they had to obey their fathers or husbands, and were considered to be their property. Men of good social standing did not talk to women who were not their family members. In the Temple, men and women were kept separate. Women were not permitted to teach and were often illiterate.

#### **SOURCE C: 'CHRISTA' BY EDWINA SANDYS, 1975**



© Edwina Sandys | ARSNY

#### **SOURCE D: MOTHER JULIAN OF NORWICH (1342-c.1416)**

So Jesus Christ who sets good against evil is our real Mother. We owe our being to him – this is the essence of motherhood! – and all the delightful, loving protection which ever follows. God is as really our Mother as he is our Father.

**Revelations of Divine Love, Chapter 59**

#### **SOURCE E: ABOUT FEMINIST THEOLOGY**

Feminist theologians believe that it matters who is doing theology. There's no such thing as thinking about God in a vacuum; in other words male theologians bring their experience of gender when they talk about God, and so do female theologians. When engaging with religion it matters what someone's body is like, what their experience is like and how they've been included in or excluded from the church. Christian feminists' emphasis on experience and context leads them to look at biblical texts, worship services and even personal devotion from the perspective of who is included and who is excluded. The goal is to shape the Christian tradition in ways that value both genders.

[www.queergrace.com/feminist-theology](http://www.queergrace.com/feminist-theology)

**SOURCE F: JESUS AND THE WOMAN AT THE WELL**

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was winning and baptizing more disciples than John. (Actually, Jesus himself did not baptize anyone; only his disciples did.) So when Jesus heard what was being said, he left Judea and went back to Galilee; on his way there he had to go through Samaria.

In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the trip, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.) The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan – so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)

Jesus answered, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his children and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?"

Jesus answered, "Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life."

"Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

"Go and call your husband," Jesus told her, "and come back."

"I don't have a husband," she answered.

Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you don't have a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth."

"I see you are a prophet, sir," the woman said.

"My Samaritan ancestors worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God."

Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is."

The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything."

Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you."

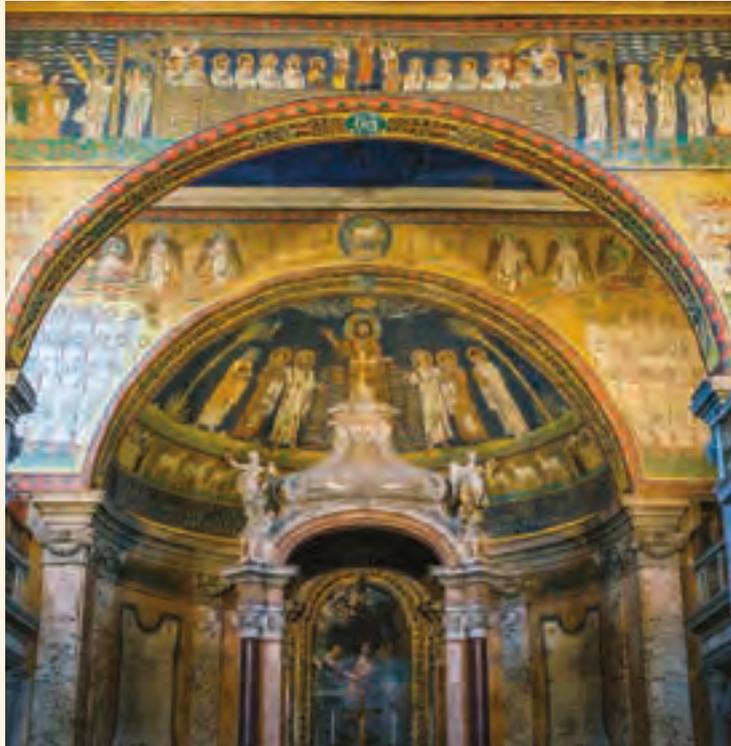
At that moment Jesus' disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, "What do you want?" or asked him, "Why are you talking with her?"

Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, "Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?" So they left the town and went to Jesus.

**John 4: 1-30**

**SOURCE G: MOSAIC SHOWING WOMEN WITH POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

This mosaic from the Chapel of Zeno, Church of Saint Praxedes, Rome, includes images of Episcopa Theodora, Saint Praxedes, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Saint Prudentia.



Chapel of Zeno, Church of Saint Praxedes, Rome

**SOURCE H: ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN**

The Vatican declared today that any women who attempt "ordination" or any bishops who attempt to "ordain" women are automatically excommunicated from the Church by their actions. The decree from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is said to be absolute, universal and immediately effective.

[www.catholicnewsagency.com](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com)

29th May 2008

**SOURCE I: ORDINATION OF WOMEN**

Women have been ordained as priests in the Church of England since 1994.





**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Biblical Scholar**

#### What?

“As biblical studies scholar, I am mostly interested in **Source A** and **Source F** which come from the New Testament part of the Bible.

However, to understand these sources properly, I might need to refer to other sources, too.

For example, **Source B** tells me about what life was like at the time when the biblical text was written.”

#### How?

“When I read **Sources A** and **F**, I look for clues about **Jesus’ attitudes towards women**. These might be deliberately spelt out or implied more subtly. Sometimes they are revealed by the words and actions of other characters. When I read **Source B**, I try to place the ideas from the biblical texts into **context** – to think about whether or not they are surprising given commonly-held views of the times.”

#### Why?

“I want to study **Sources A** and **F** so that I can better understand what the Bible can tell us about Jesus’ attitudes towards women. These sources can help me to find out how Jesus interacted with women, and how these interactions would have been viewed by others at the time.”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ What is happening in the biblical narratives in Sources A and F? How is Jesus acting in relation to the women involved?
- ★ Looking at Source B, what does this tell us about attitudes towards women at the time of Jesus?
- ★ In what ways does Source B change how you understand Jesus’ actions and attitudes in the biblical narratives found in Sources A and F?
- ★ Having examined Sources A, B and F, what might Dr Ethan Jackson conclude about Jesus’ attitudes towards women?
- ★ Do you agree with these conclusions? Why or why not? What are your own ideas?

### What?

“ As a church historian, I am interested in **Source D** and **Source G**, as they can help me to learn how women in the Church have viewed Jesus. They can also tell me about the role women have played in the Church in the past.

I am also interested in **Source H** and **Source I** as they show how these ideas have changed or stayed the same over time.”



**Dr Emily Stuart,  
Church Historian**

### How?

“ When I read **Source D**, what intrigues me most is that **women had a voice** at all at the time. So much of history has been written by men that I want to be able to hear what a woman has to say.”

### Why?

“ I want to study **Sources D, G, H** and **I** to discover what women in the Early Church – the first women in Christianity – **thought** about Jesus, and what their roles were within the worshipping community.

I also want to be able to think about how my findings support or challenge modern day stereotypes about the role of women within Christianity.”

### OVER TO YOU...

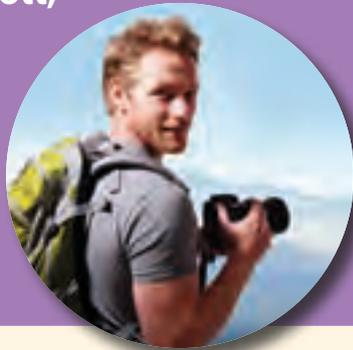
- ★ How does the woman in Source D view Jesus? Why does she see Jesus in this way?
- ★ What does Source G suggest about the authority of women in the Early Church?
- ★ What event does Source I record?
- ★ Having examined Sources D, G, H and I, what might Dr Stuart conclude about the development of the role of women in Christian worship over history?
- ★ Do you agree with these conclusions? Why or why not? What are your own ideas?

### OVER TO YOU...

Dr Abbot and Reverend Professor Green have been examining Source C and Source E.

- ★ Look at these sources, then read their conversation below.
- ★ Can you answer any of their questions? Do you agree with their ideas? Why or why not?

**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**



“ So, **Source C** shows a modern sculpture of the Crucifixion – of Jesus on the cross. But this is a Crucifixion with a difference, because the figure is a woman...”

**Reverend James Parks Morton from  
New York says:**

“ Christa simply reminded viewers that women as well as men are called upon to share the suffering of Christ.”  
[www.edwinasandys.com/Christa](http://www.edwinasandys.com/Christa)

“ Maybe the artist is trying to say that Jesus, as God incarnate – the ‘Word made Flesh’ – is one with all humanity, not just men?”



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**

“ But why has the artist, Edwina Sandys, chosen to show Jesus as a woman? What might she be trying to say?”

“ Look at **Source E**. I think Edwina Sandys must be a feminist theologian. Perhaps she is using art to try to change how we view women in Christianity?”

“ Yes. We all participate in Jesus’ death and resurrection through the sacrament of Holy Communion. Maybe she’s trying to remind us that Jesus’ salvation is for all people, regardless of gender?”



### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Re-read Sources A and F on pages 44 and 45.
- ★ Choose one of these two sources, and re-write it from the perspective of the woman involved. Think about how she feels about the events that happen, what Jesus does, and how the other characters react.
- ★ In what ways is the account you have written the same as the Source? In what ways is it different? Why?

# Who is Jesus?

Part Six

## **Who is Jesus for the visually impaired?**



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**

“ The Bible makes many references to people who are unable to see, become blind, or are healed from blindness by God. In the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ miracles, for example, we find a number of stories in which Jesus restores the vision of blind people, e.g. Matthew 9: 27-31 (Jesus heals two blind men) or Mark 10: 46-47 (Jesus heals a blind beggar named Bartimaeus). ”

“ To be visually impaired means that a person’s ability to see is limited to such an extent that it causes him or her serious problems in everyday life that cannot be fixed by usual means such as glasses or contact lenses. Visual impairment may include a wide range of different phenomena including loss of visual acuity (the inability of a person to see objects as clearly as others can), distortion of images, a limited field of vision and/or double vision as well as blindness. The term ‘blindness’ is commonly used to describe a complete or almost complete loss of sight.

A person can be born blind or lose the ability to see, either instantly or gradually, at a later stage in life, for example due to an accident or eye disease. ”

### **Jesus Heals Two Blind Men**

Jesus left that place, and as he walked along, two blind men started following him. “Take pity on us, Son of David!” they shouted.

When Jesus had gone indoors, the two blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I can heal you?”

“Yes, sir!” they answered.

Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “Let it happen, then, just as you believe!” – and their sight was restored. Jesus spoke sternly to them, “Don’t tell this to anyone!”

But they left and spread the news about Jesus all over that part of the country.

Matthew 9: 27-31



'Jesus Heals the Two Blind Men' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)



**Brian J. Turner,  
Artist**

“ My painting ‘Jesus Heals Two Blind Men’ depicts Jesus walking through a crowd of people. Many of these people appear to be unable to see. This is symbolised by the blindfolds they wear. Jesus heals two of them – the two white figures in the background – leaving many others unhealed. This is shown by the signs the figures have raised: the exclamation of one of them, “I can see!” is countered by other people’s replies of “I can’t!” and “Nor can I!” ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Read the Bible story ‘Jesus Heals Two Blind Men’ and look at Brian J. Turner’s painting of the same title above.
- ★ What do you think is the painter’s message? Why does he turn our attention to the fact that a lot of people remain blind in this scene? Does this change your view on the Bible story?

## A difficult Jesus?



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**

“ This connection between faith and healing could be seen as a problematic aspect of Jesus’ life and spiritual practice. What does this imply for those ill or disabled people who also believe in Jesus as the Son of God but are not healed through their faith? Does this mean that their faith is not strong enough? Have they done something wrong to deserve this fate? Could their illness or disability be God’s punishment for a sin they committed? Or is healing maybe a sign of God’s grace, given only to some for reasons beyond human understanding? ”

“ This Bible story about one of Jesus’ healing miracles seems to make a link between the blind men’s faith and the restoring of their sight. Before healing the two men, Jesus asks them: “Do you believe that **I am able** to do this?” and when they say “yes”, he proclaims that it is **due to their faith** that they will be healed by God through him. So, it is their belief in God (and his all-powerful nature present in Jesus) that is key to their healing. ”

“ Some of these questions are controversial. For example, most Christians would definitely reject the idea that there is a link between a person’s disability and sin. This is because the idea of a punishing God contradicts what most Christians believe about the nature of God – that he is not just all-powerful, but also wholly good and loving, and so would never actively make people suffer. The question of why Jesus would heal only a few despite all the suffering that continues to go on around him is therefore not an easy one to answer. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

★ Read what Dr Tom Abbott says about ‘A difficult Jesus?’. Some people claim that it was not fair that Jesus healed only a few even though others were asking for healing, too. Why do you think Jesus did this? What was he trying to say through his miracles?

★ How would you feel if you were one of those people who remained blind despite asking for help? How might this influence your feelings and opinion about Jesus?

This is the theologian **John Hull** (1935-2015). He was Professor of Religious Education at the University of Birmingham and wrote, amongst other things, books and articles on the topic of disability in the context of Christian belief. In particular, he wrote about biblical perspectives on the meaning of blindness. John himself suffered from severe visual impairment, due to an eye disease early on in his life, and he became completely blind in the early 1980s when he was in his mid-forties.

Over many years, he recorded a diary on tape about his experience as a blind person and academic in the field of theology, which was

published under the title *Touching the Rock* in 1990. In 2001, he also wrote a book called *In the Beginning There Was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversation with the Bible*. In this work, he concludes that the Bible was written by and for sighted people, with an attitude that is clearly hostile to blind persons and disability in general. For him, it is evident in the gospels that blindness is a symbol of the unbeliever and represents sin, whereas sight stands for faith and discipleship. One example is that people who do not believe in Jesus are frequently described as blind or having 'closed eyes' in the New Testament. Only those whose eyes have been opened through faith are capable of following Jesus.



**John Hull, Theologian**

“ Hello! I'm John. A central question I wanted to ask about the relationship between disability and Christian faith was: **Could a blind person living at the time of Jesus' life have been one of his disciples, or was the ability to see a necessary condition for early Christian discipleship?** I concluded that it was practically impossible for blind people to become disciples for a simple reason: Jesus would have instantly restored the sight of the new follower so that this disciple would no longer have been blind when starting

his work as Jesus' messenger. Besides, most people (both followers of Jesus and his enemies) would have certainly expected Jesus to heal his closest friends as he was already famous for healing complete strangers like the two blind men or Bartimaeus. Failure to restore the sight of his own disciple would therefore have raised doubts about Jesus' authority as the Son of God. As a result, Jesus' other twelve disciples would have felt too embarrassed to accept a blind person in their group because this could have been interpreted by their opponents as an obvious sign of the false prophethood of Jesus. ”

In 2016, the audio diary John Hull had recorded when he became blind was made into a documentary called *Notes On Blindness*. Explaining his motivation to record his thoughts on the meaning of going blind, John says: 'I had to understand blindness so as not to be destroyed by it.' In the film, John speaks about his deep sense of loss, sometimes accompanied by feelings of absolute despair, his altered perception of time and space, practical adaptations he had to make to

handle everyday life (such as walking with a white cane), and the joy of finding new ways of experiencing the world. He also talks about his spiritual development as a Christian, the questions of faith he struggled with, and the moments in his life in which he was able to see the light despite the darkness. At the end of the film, he says he has come to realise that his sight loss is a gift from God – not a gift he wanted to have, nor one he would want his children to have, but still a gift.



Notes on Blindness. An Archer's Mark production, [www.notesonblindness.co.uk](http://www.notesonblindness.co.uk)

“ In the first years of my blindness, I felt the need to rebel against my disability. Accepting it would have been like giving in to death, so I could not help but resist being drawn in by the darkness. There were also times when I felt very angry at God for allowing this to happen to me. At one point, I thought: **‘How could anyone think they have the right to deprive me of my sight?’** At that time, I experienced a growing feeling of doubt in my life. It seemed as if I were being drawn into an abyss – like coal miners that are transported deeper and deeper into the mountain where there is no natural light. I felt isolated from the rest of the world and entirely alone. ”

“ However, my negative perspective slowly changed over time. I realised that it was possible for me to return to the world of light even if my eyes cannot see. There is a difference between sight and **insight**. Even though I had lost the physical ability to see the beauty of the world, I was still capable of finding beauty in the insights I gained when perceiving things and people in new ways – by truly listening to them, smelling and touching them, reflecting deeply about their nature and meaning. My anger with God disappeared. In the end, I realised it made no sense to blame God for my illness. Faith is not a shield against the ordinary ups and downs of human life, and this may include disabilities and illnesses. The important question is not: “Why has this happened to me?”, but “What do I do with it now that I have it?”. ”

## OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Read the texts on pages 56-57 about John Hull and the question of whether a blind person could have been a disciple of Jesus. Some passages in the Bible seem to associate blindness with sin and disbelief. What might this mean for Christians who happen to be blind today? How do you think they feel when they read such biblical references to blindness and its alleged source and meaning?
- ★ Some Christian churches offer healing ceremonies for people who are disabled or ill. These are events in which a preacher or evangelist spontaneously tries to heal people by praying for them, through the power of Jesus. Imagine someone invited John Hull to such an event. How do you think he would have reacted at the beginning, compared with the end of his spiritual development as described in the film?



Thomas reaches for eyes © Archer's Mark

Extract from the documentary *Notes on Blindness*. Dialogue between John Hull and his four-year old son, Thomas.

- T:** [When you became blind], could the doctors not help you?
- J:** No, they couldn't.
- T:** Why doesn't God help you?
- J:** God does help me, in lots of ways.
- T:** How?
- J:** He makes me strong and gives me courage.
- T:** But he doesn't help you to get your eyes back.

They do not believe, because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

**2 Corinthians 4: 4**

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. "I am the light of the world," he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."

**John 8: 12**

"Don't worry about them! They are blind leaders of the blind; and when one blind man leads another, both fall into a ditch."

**Matthew 15: 14**

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?" Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him. As long as it is day, we must keep on doing the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work."

**John 9: 1-4**

"You yourselves used to be in the darkness, but since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light. So you must live like people who belong to the light, for it is the light that brings a rich harvest of every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Try to learn what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the worthless things that people do, things that belong to the darkness. Instead, bring them out to the light."

**Ephesians 5: 8-11**

"Blind fools! Which is more important, the gold or the Temple which makes the gold holy?"

**Matthew 23: 17**

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Read the Bible verses on pages 58-59. These are all quotations from Jesus or one of his early followers. What do they tell us about these people's views about blindness? Do you think blind people should feel offended by these verses?
- ★ In the Gospel of John (8: 12), Jesus is described as the 'Light of the World'. It could be argued that this expression lacks inclusiveness of blind people as it does not give them a chance to perceive Jesus' nature in the same way as sighted people would. On the other hand, the term 'light' could be used as a metaphor here, to describe a quality of Jesus that is not the same as actual light. How might a blind Christian explain the significance of Jesus without using sighted metaphor? Can you think of an alternative metaphor that a blind person might use instead?
- ★ Have a closer look at John 9: 1-4. Does Jesus confirm the traditional link between sin and blindness here? What is his explanation for why this person was born blind?

## What does it mean to 'see'?



**John Hull,  
Theologian**

“ Even though biblical perspectives on blindness seem to be more negative than positive, I don't think the Bible, and Jesus' message in particular, deliberately discriminates against visually impaired people. As I wrote in my book, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness*:

'When it is recognized that the Bible was written by and for sighted people (and after all, they are the vast majority of people in any society), it can be understood that this is not a permanent or particularly significant aspect of the Bible. It is just the way it was unconsciously adapted by the sighted people who wrote it.' ”

“ All the comparisons of blindness and sight or darkness and light found in the Bible are probably just a reflection of the limitations of human thought and imagination. This is most evident when people try to define the nature of God himself as being either sighted or blind. Although some passages in the Bible seem to describe God as necessarily able to see ('He who formed the eye, does he not see?', Psalm 94: 9), and others seem to compare God to a blind person ('The Lord has said that he would reside in thick darkness', 2 Chronicles: 6: 1), I think it makes little sense to use these human categories in the context of God. Rather, **God is beyond light and darkness**. This idea is revealed in Psalm 139: 12, where David addresses God in the following way: 'Even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.' ”

If God is beyond darkness and light (as well as blindness and sight), we might ask ourselves what it actually means 'to see' from a faith perspective. Perhaps, it is not always beneficial in the context of religious belief to be able to see everything with our eyes because faith always involves *not* seeing and *not* knowing something, but believing it anyway. This view is confirmed at several points in the New Testament. For example, Jesus himself seems to give extra credit to those people who did not see or meet him personally while he was alive, but came to believe in him nonetheless. In John 20: 29 he says to his followers: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**'

For this reason, John Hull argues that blindness could even be regarded as a *model for faith*. In Hebrews 11: 1 it is written: '**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**' Given that, in the context of faith, unseen things are obviously more important than that which is visible, it is the blind person rather than the sighted one who is well prepared to navigate through the world of belief. This is particularly relevant for Christians today who live at a time when Jesus is no longer physically available to them. Like blind people who need to have confidence in the physical surrounding they are unable to see, Christians, too, need to trust in things they cannot see. An example that is central to Christian belief is Jesus' promise of an eternal life in heaven for those who believe in him as the Son of God and saviour of the world.



John Hull with his wife, Marilyn, in 2006

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Why does John Hull think that blindness could also be regarded as a good model for faith? Do you agree with him?
- ★ Read the text above, then look again at Brian J. Turner's painting 'Jesus Heals the Two Blind Men'. Another interpretation of the painting could be that only the two white men in the background are truly blind. The other people's eyes are healthy. Why would the painter then put blindfolds on sighted people's eyes and give them signs saying that they can't see?
- ★ Read the quote below. What do you think John Hull means by this? In what ways is this similar to, or different from Jesus' teaching: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12: 31)?

“To gain our full humanity, blind people and sighted people need each other.”



'Jesus Heals the Two Blind Men' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

# Who is Jesus?

Part Seven

## **Who is Jesus for different cultures?**



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Biblical Scholar**

“ Wherever it has been adopted – whether that context is in Europe or Africa, Asia or the Americas – Christianity takes on the ‘flavour’ of the culture it finds itself in.

Because of this, there is no such thing as ‘pure’ Christianity. Christianity is always found in a **context**. How people interpret biblical texts in these varied contexts can prove very interesting because each culture produces different perspectives. ”

“ Christianity spread to the UK with the Romans from around the first century CE, becoming fairly well-established after the Roman emperor Constantine adopted it in 312 CE. Over the course of its history, Christianity has spread across the globe. In some places, this is the result of Christian missionaries from Europe going to live in communities abroad and encourage the people to adopt Christianity as their faith. This was the case in many countries in Southern Africa. Spreading Christianity was also a part of colonialism, which is when European powers went to countries in Africa (and beyond), claimed the land for themselves and imposed European rule. ”



**Helen John,  
New Testament Scholar**

“ In this chapter, we will explore Christianity and biblical interpretation in Namibia, a country in Southern Africa. Namibia has been independent since 1990, after various colonial powers (Germany, Britain, South Africa) ruled it in part or as a whole. Working with community groups in the north of the country, Dr Helen John aims to interpret New Testament texts alongside the local culture. She is interested in how local culture and African Traditional Religion has an influence on Christianity and biblical interpretation in the Namibian context. Helen uses these cultural resources and the ideas arising from her discussion groups to help her to understand New Testament texts better. She hopes that the people participating in her studies will find similarities with their context and culture, and thus be able to understand certain texts that she herself finds puzzling. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Has Christianity taken on the flavour of your context? How?
- ★ Do you agree with Helen John's suggestion that it might be helpful to try to understand the Bible by discussing it with people from lots of different cultures and contexts? Why or why not?
- ★ Read the interview with Helen John on the next page and share with the class any extra questions that you would have for her.

## Dr Ethan Jackson interviews Helen John



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Biblical Scholar**



**Helen John,  
New Testament Scholar**

**EJ: What is your background and connection to studying the Bible?**

**HJ:** I have always been interested in the Bible, even though I am not religious. I went to a Christian school, but I found that faith was not for me. I am an atheist and a Humanist, but I remain fascinated by religion and by religious texts. I suppose I am most interested in the worlds behind the Bible – the ways in which the authors and audiences experienced the world and how their societies functioned. Reading the texts, this world (or worlds) seems so different from my own, and frankly a bit puzzling to me! I want to understand better what the writers were talking about. That is why I went to university to study Theology, specialising in Biblical Studies.

**EJ: What is your area of specialism?**

**HJ:** I focus on the New Testament and on the gospels, in particular. I want to know how the writers and audiences of these texts viewed the world around them. Did they really believe in miracle healings? What do they mean when they talk about people being ‘possessed’? What was their context, culture, and society like? What were their views about the natural world, about gender, about spirits, and illness, for example? I want to know what life was like for them.

**EJ: Where do you work?**

**HJ:** I am an independent scholar, but I am connected to the University of Exeter. I am an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religion there. My fieldwork takes place in Southern Africa, in rural communities in Namibia, Zambia and Malawi.

**EJ: What does your research involve?**

**HJ:** In many ways, I am just as interested in different cultures (anthropology) as I am in the Bible. I have also been lucky enough to work and travel in Southern Africa. This is why my research involves interpreting biblical texts with community groups in African contexts. I bring groups of volunteers together to discuss their culture and to talk about a biblical text. I ask participants to try to find similarities and differences between the biblical texts and their own cultural contexts. Interpreting in different contexts helps me to understand bits of the texts that I find difficult to understand, as well as to see how my own context affects how I interpret texts. It is important for me to use lots of different resources and methods to examine the issues: I work with people in interpreting biblical texts, I read up on different cultures using research in anthropology, and I go and live in different cultural settings myself, and that’s before I even begin to look into the work that has been done on these texts within biblical studies!

**EJ: What would happen at one of your group meetings?**

**HJ:** I would ask the group to tell me about their culture, focusing on a particular theme. We might talk about spirits, for example. I would ask them questions about spirits in their context. Do they have spirits in their culture? What types? What do spirits do? Have any of them experienced spirits or heard from other people who have? What happens to someone when they are affected by spirits? Then we would read a biblical text – a biblical narrative (story) which has something to do with spirits. I ask the volunteers to tell me about parts of the narrative that are similar to their context, and aspects of the text that are different. I examine how the volunteers interpret the text and whether their own culture helps them to 'decode' what is going

on in the story. I do not come from a context in which people experience spirits. Although some people in the UK do believe in spirits, our society is very influenced by science, and a science-based perspective would usually deny the existence of spirits, and I know that I view the world through a scientific 'lens', if you like. It is therefore really helpful for me to look at the texts with people from another worldview – one which does involve spirits. They can help me to understand what the biblical writers might have meant, and what people in the New Testament context might have believed and been influenced by. Have a look at the example I have given you on the next page: I wonder if you will find that the interpretations from Namibia differ from how you might interpret the Stilling of the Storm narrative?



## Jesus Calms a Storm

On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them. Other boats were there too. Suddenly a strong wind blew up, and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?"

Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, "Be quiet!" and he said to the waves, "Be still!" The wind died down, and there was a great calm. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?" But they were terribly afraid and began to say to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Mark 4: 35-41





### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Discuss with a partner what is happening in the text and point out any aspects that you find unusual or surprising. Share your ideas with the class.
  - ★ Helen John is particularly interested in the way Jesus speaks to the wind and the waves. What do you make of that part of the text?
  - ★ How do you think we should interpret this text? Do you think the author (and the people who would hear the story) share your way of looking at the world (worldview)?
  - ★ Your teacher will now split the class into groups (A, B, C, D, or AB and CD) to focus on how the story has been interpreted by various interpreters in Helen's research.
- Each group will explain its findings to the class.
- ★ Feel free to look at the activity pages of other groups as well as your own.

## GROUP A: Interpretations from Owamboland, Namibia

**Memekulu Julia liyambo:** According to my experience, while I was young, I was told by my parents, if you see a whirlwind near the house you run out and clap your hands and call out 'we have **omwaali** here in the **egumbo**'. And that whirlwind will make a turn and go away. [**omwaali** is a woman who has very recently given birth]

**Helen John:** What is the connection between the whirlwind and the **omwaali**?

**Memekulu Julia liyambo:** The whirlwind is **ombepo ya nyata** [an unclean spirit]. The connection is that if that spirit destroyed that house, the **omwaali** is not able to run away with that infant. Therefore, you say you have a special person in that house so the unclean spirit must not put harm on that house.

**Women's Group**

**Loide Petrus:** One day we were at home. Suddenly we saw a whirlwind coming straight to our house. One of my parents said, 'please, we have **omwaali** here!' Suddenly the whirlwind turned away.

**Ananias Imbondi:** One day we were in our house and the whirlwind came. One of our parents said, '**oshiluli** [restless spirit] pita po!' [**Oshiluli**, go away!]. Then the whirlwind went away.

**Helen John:** So, is a whirlwind an **oshiluli**?

**Ananias Imbondi:** Yes, maybe. I just heard what my parents said to the whirlwind.

**Children's Group**

**Memekulu is a respectful title for an older woman. Tatekulu is a respectful title for an older man. The words mean 'Grandmother' and 'Grandfather'.**

**Translator:** Have you heard about people commanding aspects of nature through shouts?

**Tatekulu Herman liyambo:** In our culture or in Christianity?

**Helen John:** Either.

**Tatekulu Herman liyambo:** In our culture I recall the field where I am staying now [where his homestead is located]. There was an evil spirit. And there is a person

known as Kambonde Kalugodhi who stopped it. He was a headman [village chief] and he was the previous owner of the field.

**Helen John:** How did he stop the evil spirit?

**Tatekulu Herman liyambo:** He stopped it by calling the name of **Kalunga kaNangombe** [the Owambo Supreme Being]. He said please give me the power to stop this evil spirit and then the evil spirit stopped.

**Men's Group**

**Frieda Shilemba:** Jesus calms the strong wind.

**Helen John:** How do you think he does that, Frieda?

**Frieda Shilemba:** Jesus commands the wind to stop.

**Helen John:** Like people might command a whirlwind to go away?

**Frieda Shilemba:** No.

**Eliaser Uushona:** He commands this wind by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Helen John:** And in your context, what power are you using to order the whirlwind away?

**Eliaser Uushona:** They command the whirlwind through the power of the traditional culture.

**Loide Elago:** They command it through their own power.

**Frieda Shilemba:** I agree with Eliaser [that the power of traditional culture is used to alter the course of a whirlwind].

**Erastus Kuutondokwa:** I agree with Eliaser.

**Helen John:** Please would you put your hand up if you think that traditional culture is still powerful (18/25 do so.)

**Children's Group**

**Loide Petrus:** There is another, for example thunderstorms. When there is lightning and thunder you have to use the words '**Nayi kwate, ihe inayi lya!**' [Let it rain with thunder and lightning, but without killing or destroying!]

**Martha Nangolo:** When there is rain, our parents used to say '**vula loka**' [please rain/give us water] so that we do not go and steal.

**Children's Group**

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Why do you think the participants talked about whirlwinds? How did their understanding of whirlwinds help them to interpret the story about Jesus calming the storm?
- ★ What does the extract from the men's discussion tell you about Owambo ways of looking at the world?
- ★ What is the key point that the children were making about Jesus?
- ★ Do you think that the groups thought Jesus was performing an exorcism on the wind and the waves? (An exorcism is the expulsion of an evil spirit from a person or place.)

## GROUP B: Information about African cultures and Owambo culture

The following sources give information about Owambo culture in relation to storms, spirits, landscapes, and rain. These may help to give background to the interpretations that Group A are investigating.

### Referring to African cultures in general terms

The earth, the sky, and the waters are believed to contain spiritual or life forces similar to that of humankind. These forces can be beneficial or harmful. In either case, they are subject to prayer, flattery, and sacrifice. . . . Spirits or life forces are present in the mountains, pools, streams, and many plants and animals. They are also found in storms, thunder, lightning, tides, and other forces of nature.

**Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward,**  
*Religions of the World*, p. 55

During the time I spent researching and living in an Owambo community, I became very aware of just how central beliefs in spirits were to people. There was the sense that spirits of the dead could come back to disturb the living, and that parts of the landscape housed spirit forces. These included graveyards, fields where ancestors were buried, and specific groups of trees. Weather systems like storms and thunder were also seen to be spirits in action. There were certain words or actions that could be used to encourage spirits to leave, perhaps because a dead person's spirit was visiting the homestead, or perhaps because a storm or whirlwind was heading for the homestead. The homestead itself always has the entranceway at the east, for this is the direction in which the good spirits live.

**Helen John**

### Describing 19th century Owambo procedures

If the drought continues for two or more years, the king sends the rainmaker to Evale or Ombwenge with cattle and slaves, since there lies the source of rain and the home of those who have rain in their possession. There is the origin of clouds. Rain resides there in a doorless and roofed hut about 8 English feet by diameter. . . . Gradually it starts thundering and clouds fill the rain hut. Now it is the right moment to take the rain spirit captive in a basket made of palm leaves and to cover the basket with a hide, because no living person must see it before arriving at home.

**Maija Hiltunen,** *Good Magic in Ovambo*, p. 79

Referring to African spirituality in general terms, Klaus Nürnberger notes that 'words . . . carry dynamistic power'. This means that words can actually make things happen. He also says that some African communities may understand whirlwinds to be one of the ways that ancestors communicate with the living.

**Klaus Nürnberger,** *The Living Dead and the Living God: Christ and the Ancestors in a Changing Africa*, p. 31 and 38

It was really important for me to live in the community and not just read books about it. I wanted to hear real people's opinions on their culture, beliefs, and the biblical texts. After all, views vary within a community and cultures change over time.

**Helen John**

A homestead's labyrinthine passages may weave in and out to confuse a stranger or an evil spirit.

**J.S. Malan, *Peoples of Namibia*, p. 22**

Some aspects of life in an Owambo village gave an insight into how people experience the world in that culture. Here are some examples:

Most girls and women wore strings of beads around their waists. Although not everyone gave me the same answer when I asked why, many girls told me that the beads protected them against witchcraft. People felt that bad situations could land at your door because of ill-feeling from other people in the community, particularly where envy was concerned.

Indeed, water rituals were used centuries ago to defeat or destroy one's enemy. The enemy's image would be conjured up on the surface of the water and 'stabbed' to stop the negative influence. Even today, ritual specialists offer the chance to see enemies in a mirror or a TV set (I would see the adverts in the newspapers) – perhaps a development of the water ceremony!

Water seems connected to spirits and power sources, somehow. Local people told me that spirits are afraid of water, perhaps because they do not like to see their own reflection. It is possibly because a reflection makes someone vulnerable to an 'attack' through a water ceremony.

**Helen John**

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Prepare to explain to the class the most important features of Owambo culture as you see it.
- ★ How does this cultural setting differ from or share similarities with your own?
- ★ Which aspects of the local culture do you think might influence the participants when they come up with interpretations of Jesus calming the storm?
- ★ How do you think they would interpret the story?

## GROUP C: Interpretations from biblical scholars in Europe/USA

Here are some comments from Western academics on the Stilling of the Storm narrative. Can you identify any trends in their interpretations?  
(Clue: look carefully at the bold words and phrases)

“ By having Jesus address **the elements as though they were demonic** ... the story underscores the nature of the struggle ... ”  
Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8: 26*, p. 267

“ ... the feeding and water miracles are **highly problematic** from the viewpoint of modern science (and, no doubt, from that of ancient common sense), ... ”  
Eric Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles*, p. 383

“ Thus, if the waves beating on the little boat are **symbolic** of the persecution being experienced by the Markan community, that persecution is shown ... to have its source in Satan's implacable hostility to Jesus' mission. ”  
Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 339

“ Modern readers find even the most starting accounts of the cure of disease less hard to believe than this **control over the elements. ... who can believe that the weather will obey personal commands?** ”  
C. F. D. Moule, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 41

“ ... now obedience is rendered to the Messiah not only by human beings but also by **inanimate powers.** ”  
Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 340

“ ... Mark is probably saying that in the stilling of the storm, **Jesus is dealing with and overcoming the demonic.** ”  
Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism Among Early Christians*, p. 41

“ Jesus demonstrates his sovereign power over **the elements.** ”  
Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 338

“ In the context of Mark as a whole, it is clear that the disciples are not ready to think of themselves as individuals able to control **the natural elements** through trust or faith in God. ”

**Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, p. 262**

“ The reason why the wind and sea are **treated like demons** is that demons or evil spirits were thought to be responsible for inclement weather. ”

**Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, p. 261**

“ Jesus addresses the wind and the sea as if they were living beings. He rebuked the wind and commanded it “Be still!” (literally, “be muzzled”) – the same words that Mark used when he described Jesus rebuking the evil spirit in the synagogue (1.25). When the wind dropped and there was a dead calm the disciples were awestruck and said to one another, who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him”, showing that **they also regard the wind and the sea as animate, if not actually demonic. The distance from our attitude toward the natural world is obvious.** ”

**C.S. Rodd, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 53**

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Which views on the story do you agree with? Which do you disagree with? Why?
- ★ What seems to be the major point of disagreement between the biblical scholars here?
- ★ How much does modern science affect how you view the world and judge a story like the Stilling of the Storm?
- ★ Which of the interpretations do you think are influenced by modern science and Western culture?

## GROUP D: Information about the Enlightenment and its influence on Western culture

The following sources give information about the impact of the Enlightenment on Western worldviews and Christianity. These may help to give background to the interpretations that Group C are investigating.

### The Enlightenment

#### What?

A period of intellectual and scientific progress. 'The Age of Reason' – a focus on rationalism (gaining knowledge through intellectual investigation) and empiricism (gaining knowledge through senses and scientific testing).

#### When?

Early 17th century to late 18th century (1600s and 1700s)

#### Where?

Western Europe (starting in France, Germany and Great Britain)

#### So what?

There was a turn away from supernatural thinking and towards critical, 'scientific' thinking. This was apparent in attitudes to Christianity and to the Bible.

### Enlightenment: Rationalism

Many thinkers during the Enlightenment focused on **reason**. Reason is the power of the mind to work things out. In other words, you can think your way to understanding something and to true knowledge. You know that  $2 + 2 = 4$ . You know this by using your mind in the process of logical thought. You do not need to put two pairs of objects on the table in front of you to show this to be true. This also applied to ideas of **how to live** – moral behaviour could be worked out using intellectual power (and therefore did not rely on church authority).

### Background: The Reformation

In the 16th century (before the Enlightenment), the Protestant Reformation had taken place across Europe. The Catholic Church claimed its authority based on the line of popes extending all the way back to the apostle Peter. The Pope's words were just as authoritative as biblical scripture, to this way of thinking. The religious reformers (Protestants), on the other hand, argued that Christian practice and the interpretation of the Bible should not be dictated solely by the Catholic Church in Rome. They challenged abuses by the Church, such as the sale of 'indulgences' – payments for forgiveness of sins, or 'spiritual privileges'. They wanted to refocus on the Bible and move away from authority based in the Catholic Church. This was the period in which Henry VIII challenged the authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church – the Church of England was established as a result. Protestant challenges to the authority of the Catholic Church in Rome meant that the Bible became more accessible to ordinary people. It was translated into their local languages and interpreted by them, or by local pastors and princes. The study of the Bible as a historical/natural (rather than supernatural) document began in Protestant circles and, in the period that followed as well as today, has been greatly influenced by Enlightenment thinking.

### Enlightenment: Empiricism

The Enlightenment also brought with it a focus on **empirical testing**. This is the process by which you use your physical senses to test your way to knowledge and understanding. For example, you could boil pure water in the science laboratory and demonstrate (by observation) that it boils at 100 degrees. Empiricism demands that physical evidence is offered as proof of fact.

**Enlightenment: Science**

Important scientists like Isaac Newton (1643-1727) – the father of modern science – were making ground-breaking discoveries about the world. Newton showed that the world operated according to a set of laws (mathematical formulae). How the world worked had previously been the realm of the Church alone. Now there was another authority on the scene: scientific thought, which emphasised critical thinking, open-mindedness, and a willingness to challenge one's own beliefs.

**Enlightenment: Nature**

In this period, science had revealed that the natural world and universe obeyed a set of laws – it was like a machine that operated in a fixed way. This cast doubt on the idea of miracles. Not only did this mean that the natural world was viewed as less of a mystery, but it could also be mastered by human beings once they understood it. It was no longer the unpredictable, threatening place it once was.

**Enlightenment: The Supernatural**

The new, scientific way of looking at the world meant that the Enlightenment also brought a sense of suspicion of things 'supernatural', or things connected to 'superstition'. This meant that biblical miracles came into question, because they could not be explained by intellectual investigation. The Enlightenment called people to 'dare to think for themselves' in working out what to believe and how to act. This provided a direct challenge to church and tradition.

In modern Biblical Studies, you can trace the influence of this way of thinking. One academic in particular – Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) – suggested that we should separate the 'mythical' parts of the gospels from the Christian message. He felt that, as we no longer share the 'supernatural' worldview of the gospel writers, we should not

believe the alleged supernatural events in the texts (such as the virgin birth, the miracles, or the resurrection). Instead, these events could be understood symbolically. He called his approach to interpreting the gospels 'demythologization'; in other words, rejecting the 'supernatural' or 'mythical' elements of the texts because they do not fit with our (scientific) way of looking at the world.

Bultmann called the world of the New Testament: 'a time now past which was not yet formed by scientific thinking,' and argued that 'we cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament' **Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, pp. 3 and 4.**

**OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ What is the Enlightenment?
- ★ How did the Enlightenment change the way people thought about and viewed the world?
- ★ What effect did this have on Christianity and the way people interpreted the Bible?
- ★ Which of the interpretations that Group C looked at do you think are influenced by the Western, 'Enlightenment-based' culture we live in?
- ★ How is your thinking influenced by the Enlightenment?

## OVER TO YOU...

Bring your ideas together as a class, by having each group explain their findings in discussion:

- ★ Group A: What did the Owambo interpreters make of the Stilling of the Storm? Did they think Jesus was just like figures in their culture, or were there differences?
- ★ Group B: Give the class a flavour of the local culture to give context to the interpretations. Which aspects of the culture came to the forefront when they were considering the Stilling of the Storm?
- ★ Group C: How do the interpretations from Europe and the USA compare? Did they all agree with each other?
- ★ Group D: What are the major influences on Western culture that you have found out about? How are those influences visible in the interpretations from Europe and the USA?



**Dr Ethan Jackson,  
Biblical Scholar**

“ You have had a chance to see how a biblical text might be interpreted in another cultural setting, and to see how a cross-cultural researcher (Dr Helen John) goes about her work. Now have a look at the questions on page 79 and discuss them as a class. ”



### **OVER TO YOU...**

- ★ How has taking a cross-cultural approach helped the investigation of this biblical text (The Calming of the Storm)?
- ★ What do you think we can learn from encounters with other cultures? Have you got cross-cultural experiences that increase your appreciation of the world – perhaps through friends, family, holidays, books, foods or music?
- ★ How much of an influence are your context and your culture on the way that you experience and view the world? Can you give an example of how your experience and worldview is influenced by your culture?



'Jesus Driving Out an Evil Spirit' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Have a look at Brian Turner's depiction of Jesus driving out an evil spirit (above). What is going on in the painting?
- ★ Having learned about cross-cultural interpretations of spirit texts, how might people from different parts of the world interpret this story and Brian's depiction of it?

# Who is Jesus?

Part Eight

## **Who is Jesus for Christians today?**



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**

“ For many Christians, church communities are seen as the Body of Christ. This means that the groups of people who come together to worship God are seen as continuing the work of Jesus in the world today. ”

“ Church buildings, too, can give us lots of clues as to the importance of Jesus’ life and example to contemporary Christians. ”

“ And worship practices – how Christians praise God and celebrate God’s saving of humankind – tell us about the important place of Jesus in the Church today. ”

“ We are going to examine some church artefacts and worship practices to help us think about the question ‘Who is Jesus for today’s Church?’ ”

## The Bible

“Copies of the Bible are found in nearly every church. For Christians, the Bible is the inspired word of God. It tells them, amongst other things, about the life and example of Jesus, as you learned about in Parts 2 and 3. Many Christians believe the Bible can also help them to understand how God wants them to live their lives today, inspired by the actions of Jesus.”



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**

### Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, 'Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today.' Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. All the people who saw it started

grumbling, 'This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!'

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much.'

Jesus said to him, 'Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

**Luke 19: 1-10**

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ For many Christians, the story of Zacchaeus reminds them of how sin leads to broken relationships, but also of how Jesus brings salvation, which is the mending of their relationship with God. How does the Bible text use the story of Zacchaeus to show these ideas?

## The cross



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**



“ Empty crosses and also crucifixes (crosses with the figure of Jesus on) are found in most churches.

For Christians, Jesus is God's Son – he is God **incarnate** ('carne' is Latin for 'flesh'). This means that, unlike any other person, Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He experienced all the things that we experience – hunger, fear, happiness, pain and joy – but he did not sin.

Jesus did not have to die, but he voluntarily accepted death, and was killed by crucifixion (being hung on a cross). Sin causes damage of many kinds, destruction and death, so Jesus was sharing in the effects of our sin. As Jesus was not guilty of sin himself, Christians believe that he died for the sins of everybody else in the whole world instead. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Why do you think some crosses show Jesus being crucified and others are empty?

## Hymn books

“ Church services and worship often feature congregational singing. Hymns and songs are another source we can use to find out about how Christians view Jesus. ”



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**

In the tomb so cold they laid him,  
Death its victim claimed  
Powers of hell, they could not hold Him  
Back to life He came

**Christ is risen!**  
**Death has been conquered**  
**Christ is risen!**  
**He shall reign for ever**

Hell had spent its fury on Him  
Left Him crucified  
Yet, by blood, He boldly conquered  
Sin and death defied

**Christ is risen...**

Now the fear of death is broken  
Love has won the crown  
Prisoners of the darkness listen  
Walls are tumbling down

**Christ is risen...**

Raised from death to heaven ascending  
Love's exalted King  
Let His song of joy, unending  
Through the nations ring

**Graham Kendrick**  
Copyright © 1986 Thankyou Music

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ What do you think 'By blood, He boldly conquered Sin and death defied' means?
- ★ What do you think 'Love has won the crown' means?
- ★ What events in Jesus' life do you think this hymn is about?
- ★ Why might Christians sing this song during worship?

## Prayer books



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**

“ During worship, Christians use special prayers to praise God, or say thank you to God for sending Jesus to save people from their sins, or to ask God for forgiveness. Above is a prayer taken from the Order of Service for worship in the Church of England. ”

Almighty God,  
long-suffering and of great goodness:  
I confess to you,  
I confess with my whole heart  
my neglect and forgetfulness of your  
commandments,  
my wrong doing, thinking, and speaking;  
the hurts I have done to others,  
and the good I have left undone.  
O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you;  
and raise me to newness of life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*Common Worship: Services and Prayers for  
the Church of England.*

© The Archbishops' Council 2000 and published by  
Church House Publishing.



### OVER TO YOU...

★ What are the people who say  
this prayer confessing they have  
done wrong?

★ What do they want God to do  
for them?

★ What role does Jesus play in this?

## The font



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**

“ Many Christians will be **baptised** at some point during their lives, either as babies or as adults. Baptism symbolises Christians taking part in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Sometimes at baptism, just a small amount of water from a font is poured over the person’s head. At other times, the person being baptised is completely ducked under water. ”



### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ What do you think the person having water poured over them, or being ducked under the water, represents?
- ★ What do you think the person coming out of the water afterwards represents?
- ★ When you are dirty, you wash to get rid of the dirt and make yourself clean. What do you think Christians believe is being ‘washed away’ when they are baptised?

## The altar

“ Salvation is a reason to celebrate, and what better way to celebrate than with a party! Christians celebrate salvation by sharing a meal where they remember Jesus’ death and resurrection. This meal is called **Holy Communion** or the **Eucharist**. Everyone gathers around a table called the **altar**, the vicar blesses bread and wine, and everyone eats and drinks together. Christians believe that God and Jesus are present at this party, too. ”



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**



### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ The bread and wine that are eaten and drunk at the meal are symbolic. What do you think they represent? Why?
- ★ Why is it important for Christians that God and Jesus are present at the meal? Look back at the Zacchaeus story activity to help you answer this.

# Who is Jesus?

Part Nine

## **Who is Jesus for an artist?**



**Brian J. Turner,  
Artist**

“ Hello! My name is Brian J. Turner. I’m an **artist** from Exeter, Devon, in south-west England. For the past ten years, I have worked on an epic 30-year project to paint my way through all the stories in the Bible. This is an enormous task that will involve producing more than 3,000 paintings!

The story of this project began in 2004, when 33 biblical paintings were exhibited in different cathedrals across England. Through these paintings, viewers were taken from the Genesis account of creation (in the Old Testament) to images found in Revelation (in the New Testament), but also out of the biblical context and into contemporary settings. After the exhibition,

in a conversation with my wife, Melanie, I thought about ways to proceed. When Melanie said: “Well, you could always paint the entire Bible”, I liked the idea, despite the challenge it would mean, and the Bible Project was born.

I am motivated by my Christian belief in God. I feel a calling to explore the Bible through art. Painting the Bible is also a way of deepening my faith and seeking spiritual understanding. The project has invigorated my faith and enlivened my belief. It has also raised a lot of questions. I hope it will open the Bible to those who do not normally bother with it, and offer new insights to those who know it well. ”



'Jesus and the Cross Dressers' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)



**Brian J. Turner,  
Artist**

“ One way of interpreting this painting is to look at what is happening in the picture and compare it with similar situations in which Jesus is reported to have been. The cross dressers could, perhaps, be a modern interpretation of Jesus’ positive interaction with people who felt like outcasts of society because their lifestyle was not accepted or was considered morally wrong at that time. ”

“ The painting ‘Jesus and the Cross Dressers’ takes Jesus out of the New Testament context into a fictitious modern setting. Here, a road construction site shows four men dressed in women’s clothes working on a closed road in front of what might be part of a church building. Jesus is the white figure to the right-hand side of the scene and he seems to be about to remove one of the street barriers. ”

“ Viewed from this perspective, the painting might suggest that some people, such as the cross dressers, could feel excluded from the Christian community today because not all Christian churches accept their lifestyle. Jesus, however, does not reject them, but seeks their company and opens up the road to the church that is closed to them. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Look at the above interpretation of Brian’s painting. This is one possible way of looking at its meaning. What do you think is the message of the painting and why?



'Jesus Catches Up' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Look at the painting 'Jesus Catches Up'. What might Jesus think about life on earth today? How has it changed compared with the year 30 CE?
- ★ Write down two local and two global headlines you would typically find in the papers today. Try to think of a positive and a negative one for each. What do you think Jesus would say, feel or do about such developments?
- ★ On the next page are Reverend Professor Lydia Green's ideas about the painting. She believes Brian uses symbolism in his paintings to help him convey his ideas. Can you find examples of each of the symbols she talks about in the painting?



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**

“ Brian tries to represent God’s presence in the world in metaphorical ways. Sometimes he uses depictions of a breeze to show the work of the **Holy Spirit** in the world. ”

“ A central theological concept to which Brian often refers in his paintings is that of the **Trinity** – the idea that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all united in one Godhead. Brian often uses the number three to represent this Christian belief. For example, he deliberately chooses to position certain objects in his pictures in groups of three. ”

“ In Brian’s paintings, we sometimes find different dimensions. For example, there might be a scene in the foreground and then an outlook into a different, often greater, place. This could hint at the Christian belief in the **Kingdom of God**. Also, these dimensions are usually connected in some way, often through a person reaching out from one space to another. ”

“ Brian always includes pictures of a plant called ‘mother-in law’s tongue’ in his paintings.

He often uses it to refer to the doctrine of the **Trinity**. In some cultures, the plant is believed to possess healing powers. Perhaps, this is a reference to Jesus’ miracles as a healer. ”

“ In many of Brian’s works, there is only one heavenly body, such as a star or small sun, to be found in the sky. The idea of the ‘heavenly body’ could have different layers of meaning here. It could point to God and, in particular, to his manifestation in Jesus as the **Light of the World**. ”

What do you think? Can you find other symbols in the painting? Why, for example, is Jesus holding the newspaper up in the air? Or why is there a picture (perhaps of himself) on the wall?



'Jesus and the Dragons' Den' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

### **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

Jesus went into the Temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the stools of those who sold pigeons, and said to them, "It is written in the Scriptures that God said, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer.' But you are making it a hideout for thieves!"

**Matthew 21: 12-13**

The painting on the previous page makes reference to the TV show *Dragons' Den*, broadcast by the BBC since 2005. The show offers several entrepreneurs the opportunity to present their business ideas to five multi-millionaires (who may then, if they like an

idea, invest in that project). Only those business ideas that the investors believe will be financially successful are supported. Successful candidates can receive many tens of thousands of pounds to help develop their businesses.

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Look at the painting 'Jesus and the Dragons' Den'. What is your first impression of it? What message do you think the artist, Brian, wants to get across with it?
- ★ Imagine Jesus were to be a guest on the Dragons' Den show today. How might he react to the show? Might he have any problems with it? If so, why?



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green,  
Theologian**

“Dragons are giant, powerful and sometimes dangerous mythological creatures. Despite their bodies’ weight, they are able to fly, which makes them superior to many other animals. They also have a reputation for being greedy and hoarding treasure.”

“The investors in this painting seem to be appalled by the fact that the treasure chest is empty. Their mouths are open and their hands grasp at nothing. Maybe they focus so much on the loss of their wealth that they don’t really notice Jesus above them and the cross he offers to them. This preoccupation with worldly goods, such as money, is called “materialism”. In this context, this means that you ascribe too much significance to material possessions and neglect the pursuit of spiritual or intellectual growth. Perhaps Jesus is saying that the cross – a symbol for faith in God – transcends the materialism of the modern world.”



**Dr Tom Abbott,  
Theologian**

“There aren’t any real dragons in the painting, though. The term ‘dragon’ must be being used metaphorically. Maybe the painting wants to express that the central figures in this scene – the wealthy investors – are like dragons, or behave in similar ways to dragons. Just as dragons are stronger and more powerful than other animals, so, too, these successful business men and women have much more power than other people. As millionaires, they can easily buy whatever they want or make people do what they want them to do, simply by paying for it.”

## OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Read the Bible passage under the 'Jesus and the Dragons' Den' painting on page 95, and the conversation between Dr Tom Abbott and Reverend Professor Lydia Green about the painting on page 97. Why does Jesus describe the temple as a den of robbers? In what way is this story similar to the message of the painting?
- ★ Read the three questions below. Can you answer them, using your own ideas and what you have learned about Brian's paintings in this chapter?
- ★ Re-read Reverend Professor Lydia Green's ideas about the use of symbolism in the painting 'Jesus Catches Up' on page 94. Can you find any of the symbols she discusses in the 'Jesus Draws a Crowd' painting on the next page? What could they mean in this context?

“ Why does Jesus hold up a cross above the heads of the business men? ”

“ What signs of the presence and promise of the Kingdom of God can you find in this painting? ”

“ Why is the treasure chest empty? Does this symbolise anything? ”

In the next painting, 'Jesus Draws a Crowd', Brian J. Turner paints Jesus in another modern day setting. By doing so, he could be asking: 'What would Jesus do in this situation?' or 'Who would Jesus be if he were alive today and happened to live where I live?' Another possibility is that he could be saying: 'Look, Jesus is still relevant today! If he were to walk the streets of my hometown today, he would still attract a lot of attention and people would follow him to be in contact with him.'

'Jesus Draws a Crowd' is inspired by the Bible story called 'The Sermon on the Mount'. In the story, a group of people gather around Jesus and he talks to them about blessings.

The first part of this sermon is known as the 'Beatitudes'. According to Matthew 5: 3-12, these include eight points, all starting with the word 'blessed' for example, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled', and 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God'. It is believed that the purpose of the Beatitudes is to declare the blessings given by God's Kingdom, as well as the character of that Kingdom. As they step into the Kingdom of God, people should therefore strive to become more like those named as blessed: more hungry for peace and justice.



'Jesus Draws a Crowd' © Brian J. Turner, [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk)

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Look at the painting 'Jesus Draws a Crowd' on the previous page. Why do you think Jesus has gathered this crowd together? What might he be trying to tell them? What might they be saying in reply?
- ★ What might the building next to the figure in the sky be? Why do you think it has three parts?
- ★ Amongst the crowd of people, there is one figure that looks different from the others. They are wearing a white robe, like Jesus and the God figure in the sky. Who could this be and what might they be doing in the crowd? Why do you think they are pointing towards the sky?

“ The painting on the previous page is called 'Jesus Draws a Crowd'. It is another painting in which I take Jesus out of the biblical context and into a modern one. In this case, the painting shows Jesus drawing a crowd of people in front of the cathedral in Exeter, Devon – my home city. ”

**Brian J. Turner, Artist**



“ The people on the right seem to be drawn towards Jesus (the big white figure in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture). This could be because they perceive Jesus as inspirational or special and want to be close to him. Perhaps, Jesus is preaching to them, as he did at the Sermon on the Mount. ”

“ In the upper left-hand corner, the painting offers insights into another dimension of existence, maybe the Kingdom of God. The figure in the sky represents God watching over the earth. ”

### OVER TO YOU...

- ★ Create your own painting or drawing of Jesus at a place that is important to you. Like Brian J. Turner, try to use symbolism to put hidden messages into your work to help you express your ideas.
- ★ Write a paragraph explaining your painting. Try to include answers to the following questions: In what situation have you shown Jesus? Why? What symbolism have you used? What are you trying to tell people about Jesus?

# Who is Jesus?

Part Ten

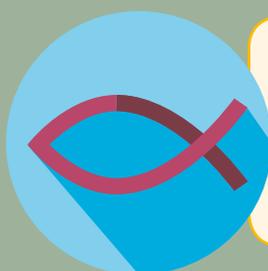
## **Who is Jesus?**

### OVER TO YOU...

Look back at the questions you wrote for the first activity in Part One on pages 8-9.

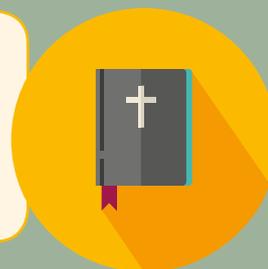
★ Try to answer these questions using the material you have learned during this unit of work. Share your questions and answers with the person sitting next to you.

★ For each topic listed below, think of at least one fact you have learned during this unit of work. Share your ideas with the person next to you.



...for historians?

...for the gospel writers?



...for Muslims?

...for feminists?



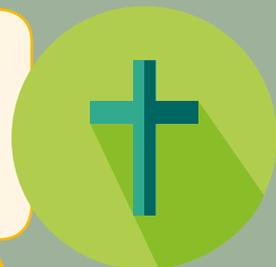
...for the visually impaired?



...for different cultures?



...for the Church today?



...for an artist?



## OVER TO YOU...

Look back at the questions you wanted to ask the academics in Part One (pages 10-14).

- ★ Can you now answer any of these questions?
- ★ In the final activity of Part One, what did you want to find out about Jesus?

- ★ Can you now answer your questions?
- ★ Which academic or academics have helped you find these answers?

Share your ideas with the person next to you or with your class.



**Reverend Professor Lydia Green, Theologian**



**Dr Tom Abbott, Theologian**



**Dr Ethan Jackson, Biblical Scholar**



**Dr Emily Stuart, Church Historian**



**Dr Kamilah Malik, Scholar of Islam**

Who is Jesus?

## **Assessment activity**

★ Choose one of the Bible passages on pages 107-108.

★ Choose one of the academics who have been guiding you through these curriculum materials.

1. Explain how the scholar you have chosen might interpret the event you have selected, and why you think they might choose to interpret it in that way. Think about:

- ★ What background are they coming from?
- ★ How might they approach the source in question?
- ★ What will they find particularly interesting about the source?
- ★ Does their interpretation have a particular purpose?

2. In what ways do you agree with their interpretation? Why?

3. In what ways do you disagree with their interpretation? Why?

4. Is their interpretation helpful to you in forming your own understanding of the text? Why or why not?

5. What other perspective or perspectives might be helpful to you in coming to understand the event better? Why?

Remember that you will be assessed on the following:

- ★ Your knowledge and understanding of the worldviews of others
- ★ Your ability to critique and evaluate these positions
- ★ The clarity and coherence of your responses



**TEXT 1: Visitors from the East (Matthew 2: 1-12)**

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

"In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote:

'Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah; for from you will come a leader who will guide my people Israel!'"

So Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: "Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him."

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

**TEXT 2: The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14: 13-21)**

When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. The people heard about it, and so they left their towns and followed him by land. Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed their sick.

That evening his disciples came to him and said, "It is already very late, and this is a lonely place. Send the people away and let them go to the villages to buy food for themselves."

"They don't have to leave," answered Jesus. "You yourselves give them something to eat!"

"All we have here are five loaves and two fish," they replied.

"Then bring them here to me," Jesus said. He ordered the people to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left over. The number of men who ate was about five thousand, not counting the women and children.

### TEXT 3: Jesus Heals a Woman of Faith (Luke 8: 43-48)

Among them was a woman who had suffered from severe bleeding for twelve years; she had spent all she had on doctors, but no one had been able to cure her. She came up in the crowd behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once. Jesus asked, "Who touched me?"

Everyone denied it, and Peter said, "Master, the people are all around you and crowding in on you."

But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I knew it when power went out of me." The woman saw that she had been found out, so she came trembling and threw herself at Jesus' feet. There in front of everybody, she told him why she had touched him and how she had been healed at once. Jesus said to her, "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

### TEXT 4: The Last Supper (Mark 14: 12-26)

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day the lambs for the Passover meal were killed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and get the Passover meal ready for you?"

Then Jesus sent two of them with these instructions: "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: 'The Teacher says, Where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?' Then he will show you a large upstairs room, fixed up and furnished, where you will get everything ready for us."

The disciples left, went to the city, and found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, Jesus came with the twelve disciples. While they were at the table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you that one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me."

The disciples were upset and began to ask him, one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, do you?"

Jesus answered, "It will be one of you twelve, one who dips his bread in the dish with me. The Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say he will; but how terrible for that man who will betray the Son of Man! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born!"

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. "Take it," he said, "this is my body."

Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. Jesus said, "This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's covenant. I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God." Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are extremely grateful to the following for their help and support with this project:

Bible Society (England and Wales)

The Westhill Endowment Trust

Brian J. Turner and the bibleproject  
(see [www.bibleproject.co.uk](http://www.bibleproject.co.uk))

Marilyn Hull

Professor Julian Stern (York St John University)

Professor William Gallois, Professor Rob Gleave and Dr John Cooper  
(University of Exeter's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies)

What historical sources can we use to find out about Jesus? What do the gospel writers tell us? How do Muslim and Christian views about Jesus compare? What can we know about Jesus' attitudes towards women? How might a visually impaired Christian respond to biblical stories in which Jesus heals the blind? Is Jesus the same for people across different contexts and cultures? What is the significance of Jesus for the lives of Christians today? How and why do artists represent Jesus in different situations using a variety of signs and symbols? All of these questions and more are addressed in this textbook for upper secondary school Religious Education.

*Who is Jesus?* provides an innovative examination of the figure of Jesus through a variety of different cultural, religious and disciplinary lenses. A team of fictional scholars, each with a different set of interpretations, methodologies and methods, guide students in their encounters with artistic, visually-impaired, Muslim, feminist and cross-cultural perspectives of Jesus. The aim is not to inculcate any particular view of Jesus or to promote a particular approach to studying him, but to introduce students to some of the diverse ways in which the title question – *Who is Jesus?* – can be answered.