

Son of God and Son of Man

Jesus is an historical figure. He was born a Jew and lived in Palestine at the time of the Roman occupation. The (estimated) date of his birth has been used for centuries as the pivotal point of the Christian calendar, with dates being designated either B.C. (before Christ) or A.D. (anno domini – in the year of our Lord). After a three year ministry he was arrested, condemned to death and crucified. Despite what people sometimes allege, there is actually more evidence for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth than there is for other important figures of this era, such as Julius Caesar! Look at <http://www.request.org.uk/main/history/jesus/Jesus00.htm> for an outline of the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus.

Jesus the man. At the heart of the Christian faith is the Incarnation; the belief that, in Jesus, God became man. It is also central to the Christian understanding of Jesus that he should be seen as someone who shared our humanity. If this were not so, the significance of the Incarnation, of God becoming man, would be diminished

Jesus was a teacher and healer The teaching of Jesus was simple yet profound. He taught that men and women must love God and their neighbour. Many people found this teaching attractive and he inspired great loyalty in his followers who came from all walks of life (e.g. James and John the fishermen, Matthew the tax-collector, Joanna the wife of a court official, Nicodemus the member of the Jewish hierarchy, Simon the freedom fighter.) He aroused great hostility because he attacked the abuse of power, greed, hypocrisy and false religiosity. Christians believe that Jesus was someone more than simply a man of his time. Although his teaching uses images and styles that were current in the first century A.D., Christians believe that he both taught and exemplified eternal, universal truths about man and God, as well as values such as forgiveness, love and justice that Christians try to practise in their lives. His miracles are accepted by most Christians as manifestations of God's power.

The Christ of Faith Christian beliefs about the eternal significance of Jesus are rooted in the faith of his first followers, who were convinced that, after his death on the cross, he rose to new life in fulfilment of the promises about the Messiah in the Jewish scriptures. Their beliefs are reinforced by the belief that they have their own personal relationship with him. Christians use many titles for Jesus, all of which say something of his significance for them:

- i. *Son of God.* Jesus is like God, at all times close to God and doing his will.
- ii. *Christ/Messiah.* Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God, who will return in glory to judge the world.
- iii. *Son of Man* This doesn't mean what you expect! It is another title of the Messiah taken from Daniel chapter 7 verses 13f.
- iv. *Saviour.* Jesus died to restore a relationship with God that has been destroyed by human sin. Christians believe that they share in the new life of Christ with God.

- v. *The Word*. Jesus is the translation of God into human language. In Jesus God is revealed.
- vi. *"I am..." sayings*. In John's Gospel (John chapter 6 verse 35, chapter 8 verse 12, chapter 10 verses 7, 11,14, chapter 11 verse 25, chapter 14 verse 6, chapter 15 verse 1) these use metaphors and images to explain Jesus' significance for Christians e.g:
- vii. *The Good Shepherd*. Jesus looks after the sheep (people) and is prepared to die to save them from danger.
- viii. *The Light of the World*. Jesus shows up what is wrong, dispels fear and ignorance and shows the way to go in life.
- ix. *The Life*. Jesus came to help people start a new life with God that even death cannot destroy

When teaching about Jesus, even at the primary level, it is not appropriate to concentrate entirely on his earthly life and ministry as for Christians he is both present and eternally relevant. As is often said, he is both the Jesus of history AND the Christ of faith. The schemes that follow try to pick up on that important point.