

The life and ministry of Jesus **Handout 3**

Jesus is central to our understanding of the Christian faith. He shows us who God is. He shows us what God is like. If you want to get to know the Christian faith – get to know Jesus.

Jesus is a historical figure. He really existed. The Gospels tell the story of his life and teaching. They were written within 50 years of his death. Each one is slightly different. Together they build a faithful portrait of who Jesus is.

Share together in small groups what you know already:

- *What attracts you about Jesus of Nazareth?*
- *What questions do you have about Him*
- *How much (if any) of the Gospels have you read?*
- *Has your impression of Jesus changed as you have grown older?*

Jesus' birth (Luke 1.26-38)

Christians believe that Jesus' birth and life and death are foretold in the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfils the hope of the Jewish people for an anointed king or Messiah who will bring salvation to God's people.

The message of Gabriel to Mary describes Jesus as the Son of God and a descendant of David, the great king of Israel who lived a thousand years before Jesus. The name Jesus means, in Hebrew, 'Saviour'. The word 'Christ' (the title given to Jesus) means, in Greek, 'anointed' and is the same word as the Hebrew 'Messiah'.

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

At the centre of Jesus' ministry is announcing the good news that He comes as God's anointed king to proclaim God's kingdom for the whole world.

Jesus proclaims the kingdom through his teaching in the synagogues and the temple and in the open air as crowds flock to him. As a sign that God's kingdom has come, Jesus heals the sick and drives out demons.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry there are those who reject his message and even want to kill him.

Reflect on what has been said in small groups. Reflect, for instance, on:

- *Why do you think some people were so attracted to Jesus yet others so hostile to Him?*
- *How would you have responded?*

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

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

The woman responds to the message of forgiveness by deep devotion to Jesus but his actions provoke a different response among the Pharisees and a question from the crowd: 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'

Who do you say I am? (Luke 9.12-26)

In the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus again demonstrates his care and compassion for people and the abundance of what God provides through him. Christians see in these miracles a foreshadowing of the service of Holy Communion as Jesus sustains his people in their journey.

The whole of the first part of the Gospel finds its focus in Jesus' question to Peter: 'Who do you say I am?' Jesus' words and actions have convinced us that this is no ordinary person. The people of Jesus' day and down the ages have their own theories. In the end, each disciple needs to hear Jesus' question and answer for ourselves.

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

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

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

Discuss in small groups:

- *What do you think is the cost of following Jesus today?*

For reflection

Spend time this week thanking God for the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Continue your reading of the Gospel of Luke, looking back again at this week's passages.