

Who Is This Guy? Exploring Jesus Together

Christian Assembly Foursquare Church — Wednesdays, 7 p.m., in the Bungalows
Class Schedule

- 1/21 Introduction
Jesus Is Jewish: The Setting of Our Salvation
Isaiah 2:1-4, Luke 1, Luke 2:21-52
- 1/28 The Meaning of Incarnation: Jesus' Divinity, Humanity, and Personhood
Luke 2:1-20, John 1:1-18, Romans 5:12-21
- 2/4 Loving Jesus the Wrong Way: Four Common Mistakes and How They Hurt Us
1 Corinthians 15, Hebrews 2:5-18, 4:14-16
- 2/11 God's Anointed: Jesus' Relationship with the Holy Spirit, and Ours
Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-22, John 1:19-51, Romans 6
- 2/18 Signs and Wonders: Jesus' Ministry and Its Message
I. Jesus' Prophethood, and Ours
Luke 4:14-22, Acts 2:14-21, Acts 3:17-4:4
- 2/25 II. Jesus' Priesthood, and Ours
Hebrews 4:14-5:10, 7:1-8:7 (compare Psalm 110 and Genesis 14 for background)
- 3/4 III. Jesus' Kingship, and Ours
John 12:12-16, 18:33-19:22, Revelation 22:1-5
- 3/11 Jesus Saves, But How? A Few Possibilities
Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, John 6:51-58
- 3/18 Can God Really Suffer? What the Cross Tells Us About God
Mark 14:32-36, 15:33-39 (compare Luke 22:39-46, 23:26-46)
- 3/25 Easter Changes Everything
1 Cor. 15 (again), Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-49, John 20:1-21:23
- 4/1 After the Ascension: Is Jesus Here, or Isn't He?
Acts 1:1-11, Acts 2
- 4/8 How Jesus Became an American
Acts 15:1-29, Ephesians 2:11-22
- 4/15 "I'll Be Back": Jesus' Return, and Judgment as a Kind of Salvation
Matthew 24:25-46, 1 Peter 3:8-5:11, Revelation 20:4-15

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Jesus Is Jewish: The Setting of Our Salvation January 21

Read Isaiah 2:1-4, concerning Isaiah's vision for Israel's significance in world history through its Messiah; and Luke 1:5-56 and 2:21-52, concerning the fulfillment of that vision in Jesus' coming.

Questions to ponder:

1. Why does it matter that Jesus Christ is a Jew?
2. What does God's decision to bring salvation to the world through Israel tell us about *God*?
3. God's attitudes in the Old Testament are often *contrasted* with God's attitudes in the New Testament. But in what ways are the two *alike*?
4. How does our Jewish inheritance enrich the Church? How does it enrich worship at C.A.? How does it enrich our personal lives as Christians?

And for extra fun:

Compare Mary's song (often called the Magnificat) in Luke 1:46-55 to Hannah's song, in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Why would Mary see Hannah as a precursor to herself? How does familiarity with the Old Testament help us understand the New Testament better? How does familiarity with the New Testament help us understand the *Old* Testament better?

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The Meaning of Incarnation: Jesus' Divinity, Humanity, and Personhood January 28

Read John 1:1-18, concerning the incarnation of the Word; and Romans 5:12-21, an argument using the humanity of Jesus to understand the salvation he accomplished.

1. Next, pick one or two stories about Jesus from anywhere in the Gospels, and meditate on how a knowledge of Jesus' "divine humanity" helps you understand the passage. The choice of stories is entirely yours. You may wish to pick one that has puzzled you up until now. If no particular story comes to mind, I suggest Luke 4:1-13, about Jesus' time of temptation in the wilderness; Matthew 14:22-33, about Jesus and Peter walking on water; John 11:17-44, about the resuscitation of Lazarus just before Jesus' own crucifixion; Matthew 27:45-50, on Jesus' death; or Luke 24:13-43 or John 21:4-14, recounting two of Jesus' appearances to his disciples after his resurrection.

2. Popular advice for teenagers is to have them ask, "What would Jesus do?" when they face a difficult moral decision. I've heard arguments both for and against this kind of approach; so let's test it using the concept of incarnation. Pick a moral question your family, friends or church has faced. How does asking "What would Jesus do?" help clarify your thinking? How does this question depend on the unity of full humanity and full divinity in Jesus for it to help you?

We're likely to discuss these questions briefly next week, so feel free to speak up!

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Loving Jesus the Wrong Way: Common Mistakes and How They Hurt Us February 4

Read 1 John 4:1-6, a warning to John's congregations to beware of error, yet without being intimidated by it. Notice the reference to confession that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." It's possible that this text refers to some early group of disciples who denied Jesus' full humanity.

1. Scrutinize your personal faith (and faith you've inherited from others — parents, churches, and wider culture) in the light of the Scriptures and the Church's traditional confession of Jesus as God with us. In other words, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God." How has your belief in Jesus compromised his full divinity, full humanity, and/or their unity in him? How does a deeper appreciation of incarnation change the way you:

... worship?

... work?

... pray?

... reach out to others?

... treat those with different beliefs?

... treat God's creation?

... regard suffering and death?

This obviously isn't a quick assignment. In fact, it's one that lasts at least a lifetime.

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God's Anointed: Jesus' Relationship with the Holy Spirit, and Ours February 11

Read the texts we concentrated on this week, especially Luke 3:1-4:30. But you might also like to compare it to Matthew 3:1-4:17, Mark 1:1-15, and John 1:24-34.

How does seeing Jesus as God's *anointed* change your perception of him?

How does seeing the connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit clarify the Holy Spirit's role in your own life as a Christian?

What does it say about the incarnate Son of God, that his ministry would *need* empowering by the Holy Spirit and affirmation by the Father?

What does it say about the work *you* do for God?

Read Romans 6, where Paul makes a very close connection between the baptism of Christians and the lives they are to lead afterward. What do the meaning of Jesus' baptism, and the connection between Jesus' baptism and ours, tell us about the meaning of baptism for us, Jesus' disciples? In other words, connect baptism, the Holy Spirit's role in your life, and your behavior as a Christian.

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Signs and Wonders: Jesus' Ministry and Its Message

I. Jesus' Prophethood, and Ours

February 18

Read one of the Old Testament prophets — Joel is a good example (and in only four chapters!), but of course you can pick any one you like.

Notice the themes:

1:1-2:17: Reading the “signs of the times” (a locust plague in Judah) as God’s judgment

2:18-32: Assurance of Judah’s salvation in the *coming* day of judgment

3:1-21: Warning about Judgment Day’s damnation and deliverance

How does this book improve your understanding of what a prophet is?

How does it change your understanding of the kind of prophet Jesus is?

(Hint: Compare Joel to Mark 13.)

How does it help you understand the “Kingdom of God” whose arrival Jesus is announcing?

Now turn it around: How does Jesus’ prophethood change your understanding of Old Testament prophethood?

How does it change your understanding of your own prophethood?

(Hint: Compare Joel and Mark 13 to Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-41, or to Stephen’s ministry and its result, in Acts 6:8-8:2 (especially 7:51-8:2))

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2/25 Signs and Wonders: Jesus' Ministry and Its Message

II. Jesus' Priesthood, and Ours

Read:

Old Testament background: *Genesis 14. Num. 8:5-22. Psalm 110. Isa. 61 [6].*

New Testament: *Hebrews 4:14-5:10, 7:1-8:7. Matt. 16:19. 1 Pet. 2:4-10.*

How does the office of the priesthood in ancient Israel prefigure, or foreshadow, Jesus' ministry?

How does Jesus' ministry as priest help make the Old Testament priesthood more understandable?

How does Jesus' priesthood help you understand your own priesthood?

How have other believers done God's work in your life by forgiving you, or by not forgiving you?

How should you use your "power of the keys?" When and how should you forgive, and when and how should you *not* forgive?

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3/4 Signs and Wonders: Jesus' Ministry and Its Message

III. Jesus' Kingship, and Ours

Read:

Old Testament background: *Psalm 146, 2, and 110.*

And for extra jewels in your crown, Daniel 2.

New Testament: *Luke 11:2-4, John 12:12-16, 18:33-19:22, Revelation 22:1-5.*

What do Israel's ancient kings (especially David) tell us about what kind of king Jesus is?

What does Jesus' kingship tell us about the ancient kings of Israel? In other words, now that Jesus has come, what can we say was their role in God's plan?

How does your life reflect (or not reflect) the fact that you are a subject of the Kingdom of God?

What relationship does the Kingdom of God have with, say, the "kingdom" of the United States? In other words, what does being Jesus' subjects have to say about our own civil and public lives? (Examples: Whether and how we vote; obey particular laws; pledge allegiance; use the legal system; serve in the armed forces; pay taxes; treat non-citizens and even "enemies of the state"; work to change public policy; and so on. This is another one of those questions you can and should spend your life answering.)

How does your life in the Church and in the wider world reflect (or not reflect) the fact that you reign *with* Christ the King?

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3/11 Jesus Saves, But How? A Few Possibilities

Read: *John 1:11-13, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27, Hebrews 9:11-13, Colossians 2:9-15, Romans 5:1-8.*

1. God offers salvation for everyone, but different people need it and receive it in different ways. Describe your own needs for salvation (past and future) in terms of any or all of these saving acts on God's part:
 1. God taking on humanity in the incarnate Jesus and making you a member of his body, the Church;
 2. His "repayment" for your sins;
 3. Jesus' victory over the powers of evil and death;
 4. The change in your outlook brought by your awareness of who God is and what he has done for us.
2. As a Christian, you are (or would be) not only a *recipient* of God's salvation, but a *channel* of it for others. So consider a person in your life who especially needs God's salvation. Describe that need, again in terms of a,b,c, and d above. How might God have put you in that person's life as a means of his or her salvation?
3. Do a,b,c, and d give you an adequate description of the salvation you and the other person have, or need? What more about salvation needs to be said that these different "theories" of salvation still aren't helping you say?

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3/18 Can God Really Suffer? What the Cross Tells Us About God

Read: *Mark 14:32-36, 15:1-47. Compare Luke 22:39-46, 23:26-46.*

Compare the anguished Jesus of Mark to the more serene, “in-control” Jesus of Luke. Don’t try to blend the two into one; just appreciate each Gospel on its own terms.

I think the Eastern (Greek) Church relates more to Luke, while the later Western (and especially Protestant) Church relates more to Mark’s version of Jesus’ death.

1. How does each account give you a slightly different picture of how Jesus experienced his own death, especially as far as his divine humanity/human divinity is concerned?
2. Do you find *yourself* relating more to one Gospel account than to the other? How do the two accounts feed and challenge your faith?
3. In what ways do (or don’t) you have to choose between the two pictures?

Read one (or two or three, if you like) of the texts we covered in class:

1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 5:1-10.

4. How would you explain to someone else what it teaches about God?

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3/25 Easter Changes Everything

Read: *1 Corinthians 15 (again), Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-49, John 20:1-21:23*

1. Jesus Christ is risen! What does the Resurrection tell you about:
 1. Life after death?
 2. Life *before* death?
 3. The significance *of* death?
 4. The proper Christian attitude towards the material world?
2. Easter is coming soon. How does a more thorough “resurrection perspective” lead you to look differently on your own life, on the lives of others, and on the world around you?

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4/1 After the Ascension: Is Jesus Here, or Isn't He?

Reminder: *From Jesus to Christ* will be airing on PBS *Frontline* April 6-7.

Read Acts 1:1-11; Matthew 28:16-20; John 14.

1. Pick a “spiritual gift” being practiced in the modern-day Church. (For examples, see 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 or Romans 12:4-8. By the way, Paul isn’t offering a comprehensive list; he’s just rattling off examples. That’s why the lists don’t match.) How does it symbolize and accomplish Christ’s salvation in the power of the Spirit? Or does it?
2. How do you, as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of his body, make him present to others?
3. How is Jesus made present to you in your daily life (for example, through worship together, the service of others, corporate and personal prayer, and “sacramental” means like Communion or the hearing or reading Scripture)?
4. “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink....” (Matt. 25:35; compare 25:42 and Hebrews 13:3) Where has Jesus been present (either through you or through others) in ways you hadn’t realized?

