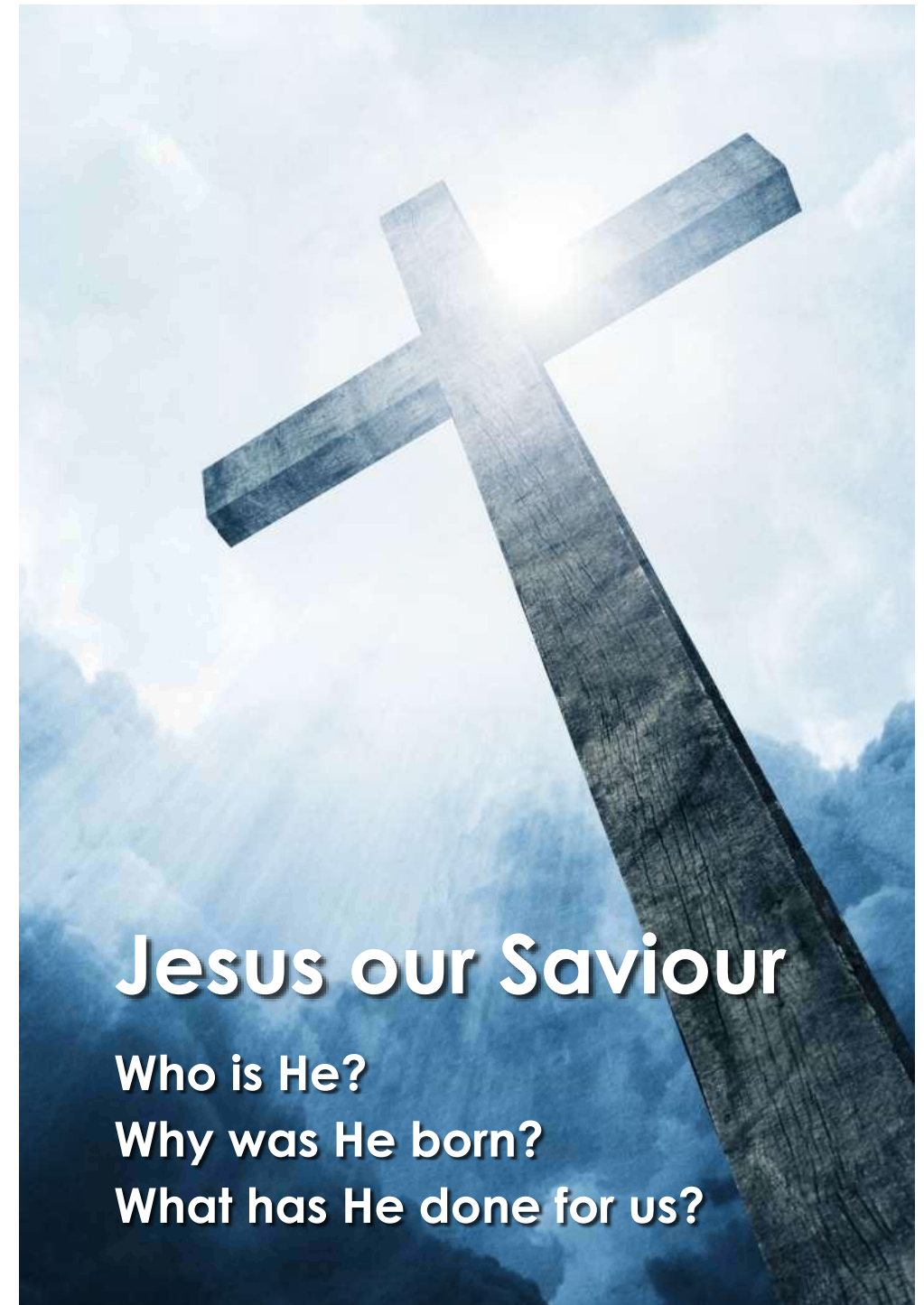


An invitation

One day, you and I and everyone else will stand before God's judgment seat. Each one of us will give an account of our life to God. God will assess my life and your life and everyone's life—even our most secret thoughts. Each of us must live and make our choices in the light of this reality. Jesus said: **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6). We can only come to God through Jesus Christ. There is no other way. There can be no other way.

If you have not already done so, will you accept Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, and be **"born of God"** (1 John 5:1)? Will you begin a new life as a child of God, someone who can call God their **"Father"** (Romans 8:15)? That's the new life that God offers all of us. No offer can ever be made to you that is more important or more wonderful than this.



Jesus our Saviour

Who is He?

Why was He born?

What has He done for us?

by Robert Gordon Betts
June 2021

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Pronouns for God, for God the Father, for Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in Bible quotations have been capitalised by the author.

John was seeing the final, perfect and eternal stage of the Kingdom of God. As we said before, Jesus often taught about the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is God's perfect world—where *God's people live in God's presence in God's paradise*. These verses in Revelation describe God's perfect world. God's plan to establish His Kingdom on Earth will then be complete.

We believers have already experienced a *spiritual* resurrection. We "**were . . . raised with**" Christ (Colossians 2:12). We're now spiritually alive—in other words, we now enjoy fellowship with God. But if we die before Jesus returns to Earth, we'll experience a *physical* resurrection. When Jesus returns, we'll be raised from death and receive new resurrection bodies, bodies that can never die. Believers who are still alive when He returns will receive their resurrection bodies without experiencing death.

Jesus already has His resurrection body. As Paul puts it, Jesus is "**the firstborn from among the dead**" (Colossians 1:18 NIV). He was the first to rise from death. But when Jesus returns to Earth, we believers will receive a new resurrection body like His. *We will live in God's presence in God's paradise for all eternity*. God's perfect world—and life in that world—will be more wonderful than anything we can even begin to imagine now.

And with this glorious future in view, let's join in the cry "**Come, Lord Jesus!**" (Revelation 22:20).

A new and perfect world

One day, when God's people have completed their great mission, Jesus will return to Earth, bodily and visibly. Everyone will see Him. Everything will then be put right. And God will complete everything He planned to do when He created this world. This Earth will be transformed. It will become God's perfect paradise. God will cast Satan and every evil being into Hell; God's people and God's paradise will never be troubled by sin and evil. And God will lavish on His people all the wonderful blessings of life in His presence for all eternity.

We read about this at the very end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation. God showed a vision of it to a man called John, almost certainly the man who wrote the Gospel of John. John wrote, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4 NIV).

Introduction

At the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we read how Almighty God created the heavens and the Earth. He filled Earth with all kinds of living things. And He created the first humans, Adam and Eve, in His image. God blessed Adam and Eve, and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28 NIV).

God created humans to make this planet a paradise. And He created them to be His friends, to live in fellowship with Him. God wanted Earth to be the place where He lived among us—*God's people living in God's presence in God's paradise.*

After God had created this world, it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Earth is still a wonderful place, full of beauty. But it's also spoiled. It's spoiled by natural disasters, by famine and disease and death, by pollution, pain and suffering. It's spoiled by crime and violence and war.

What went wrong? The Bible tells us in Genesis chapter 3. There we learn how a snake tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God. This snake was no ordinary snake. It may have been the messenger of the evil angel Satan, God's chief enemy. Or it may have been Satan himself in disguise.

Adam and Eve fell to the snake's temptation. They rebelled against God—in other words, they sinned. They chose to decide for *themselves* how to live. But, by falling to snake's temptation, Satan gained power over them. And so Satan began to have power over human society as a whole.

However, it's important to realise that Satan has power *only* by God's permission and within God's limits.

That first sin had devastating consequences. From that moment, things went wrong with this world.

But that's not the end of the story. God began to put everything right. He was going to forgive people, release them from bondage to sin, and give them a new and wonderful kind of life, a life in fellowship with Himself. And He was going to complete everything He had planned to do when He created this world. He was going to transform this Earth and make it a paradise, and lavish on His people all the blessings of life in His presence for all eternity. And God would cast Satan and every evil being into Hell; God's people and God's paradise would never be troubled by evil and sin.

And God was going to do all this through a man—*a man who would also be God Himself*. That man was Jesus Christ. He was a true member of our human race. But He was also the Son of God.

And so Jesus was born and lived among us. He never ever sinned. Yet He was executed like a criminal. He was crucified—one of the most brutal and shameful ways to die. But God raised Him from death. He is alive, and He lives in heaven with God the Father. *And through the death and*

witnesses to Him. Jesus had promised this before His ascension. He had said, "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8).

We're to reach out to unbelievers with the good news about Jesus Christ and His salvation—so that they, too, become disciples of Jesus. And we're to teach, guide and help believers towards maturity in their Christian faith and lives.

commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31).

We're to love God. And we're to love others; we're to show kindness to our family, our colleagues at work, our neighbours, our friends, and everyone we meet. And we're also to show kindness to people we've never met, but whom we have opportunity to support.

And we're to love other believers—they're our spiritual brothers and sisters in God's family. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35).

The great mission

Jesus has given us believers a mission. Before His ascension, Jesus said this to His disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20). And by His Holy Spirit, God gives us power—power to be

resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is putting everything right and completing all His wonderful plans for mankind and for this world.

But how could the death and resurrection of Jesus *possibly* do all this? How could the death and resurrection of Jesus have such astonishing power? It seems unbelievable. But it's true. The Bible tells us the whole amazing story. This little book explores that story.

Jesus – God with us

“The virgin . . . shall bear a son”

Two thousand years ago, in a Middle Eastern town called Bethlehem, a Jewish virgin girl called Mary gave birth to a boy. That baby was Jesus. God had promised that He would be born. And God had been preparing the world for His coming.

About 15 months before the birth of Jesus, a Jewish priest was serving God in the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, a city near Bethlehem. This priest’s name was Zacharias. There, in the Temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel told him that his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son. They were to name him John. John would prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus, and for the salvation He would provide.

Zacharias was an old man. Elizabeth was also old. And she hadn’t been able to bear children. But now she conceived and gave birth to this son. As a young man, John lived in the desert until he began his public ministry.

John—called John the Baptist or John the Baptiser—warned people about God’s judgment. He told them to turn away from their sins—in other words, *to repent* of their sins. In the river Jordan, John baptised those who repented. This baptism was symbolic. First and foremost, it pictured cleansing from sin.

sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:17-18). As we said earlier, our “old self”—the old self-willed, self-reliant, self-centred person that we once were—“was crucified with” Christ (Romans 6:6). And so we were set free from slavery to sin. We no longer have to live under the power of sin.

However, we have a vital part to play, too. We’re to turn away from sin. We have to put off our old way of life—our wrong attitudes, wrong ways of thinking and speaking, and sinful habits. New attitudes, right ways of thinking and speaking, and godly habits, have to be formed. Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV).

The Holy Spirit guides us and gives us the power to do all this. Our part is to co-operate with Him and obey Him. As Paul wrote: “Let all you do be guided by the Holy Spirit, and you will not gratify sinful desires” (Galatians 5:16, author’s paraphrase). And as we, day by day, follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our character—all that we think and say and do—becomes increasingly holy. In this way we reflect, more and more, God’s own holy character.

Vital to our Christian lives is *love—love that is selfless and sacrificial*. During His ministry on Earth, a Jewish scribe (a scholar of Jewish theology) asked Jesus this question: “Which

the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel calls “a new heart”. Through Ezekiel, God had said to His people: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. . . . And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). And through the prophet Jeremiah, God had promised His people: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” (Jeremiah 31:33).

The word “heart” here means the innermost control centre of our personality. When we believers were born again, God transformed that innermost control centre. In other words, God gave us a new heart—in other words, a new character that hates sin and that loves God and wants to obey Him. Our new heart has God’s Law written on it, just as Jeremiah prophesied. This doesn’t mean that we’ve memorised all God’s commandments in the Bible. It means that God’s Spirit, who lives within us, is teaching us what God’s will is, and we have a heartfelt desire and willingness to obey God.

God releases us from slavery to sin

Our new character also means that we’re no longer slaves to sin—to sinful thoughts, actions and habits. Jesus said, “everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34 NIV). We were all born slaves to sin. We may have had an occasional victory over sin. But, in the end, the power of sin was too strong for us.

But we believers are no longer slaves to sin. Paul writes, “you who were once slaves of sin . . . having been set free from

And John spoke to the people about Jesus. John said that Jesus would baptise people, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit.

A few months before John was born, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary. Mary lived in Nazareth, a little town in the province of Galilee, in what is now northern Israel. She was engaged to marry a man called Joseph.

Gabriel told Mary that she would bear a son. She was to call His name Jesus. Jesus is a Hebrew name meaning ‘Yahweh saves’; Yahweh is the personal name of Almighty God. Her son would not be conceived by marital union. Instead, He would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. He would be the Son of God Himself. He would be a King, and would reign over God’s people for ever.

Centuries before, God’s prophet Isaiah had foretold the birth of Jesus. He wrote: “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Immanuel is a Hebrew word. It means ‘God with us’ (Matthew 1:23).

So Mary became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Son of God became a human being, conceived in a virgin’s body.

An angel also appeared in a dream to Joseph. He assured Joseph that Mary’s pregnancy was from God. The angel told Joseph, “. . . you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

"A Saviour has been born to you"

At that time, Galilee was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor had ordered a census to be carried out. So Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem to be registered for this census. They went there because Bethlehem was the home town of Joseph's ancestor, the great Israelite king called David.

In Bethlehem, Mary gave birth. Jesus was probably born in a simple home that, at night, people shared with their animals. His first bed was an animal's feeding trough.

Mary was His mother. But Mary was a virgin; Jesus had no human father. Instead, the Holy Spirit of God caused Him to be conceived. God was His Father. And Jesus wasn't half God and half human. He was both fully God and fully human.

So the Son of God became a human being, born as a helpless baby. This is so amazing, it's hard for our minds to comprehend it.

After Jesus was born, angels announced His birth to shepherds in fields nearby. It was night, and the shepherds were watching over their sheep. An angel appeared to them and announced: "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:11 NIV). The Messiah would save God's people, bring an end to evil, and rule the world. Another word for Messiah is 'Christ'.

Suddenly, a whole army of angels appeared, praising God. So the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found the baby Jesus.

of Jesus. In other words, God has *justified* us. This new legal status is God's free gift to us. We can't do anything to earn it. We have been "**justified by faith in Christ**" (Galatians 2:16).

And our justification is far more than simply a legal transaction. Because we are justified, we're no longer under God's wrath because of our sin. And so the barrier between us and God—the barrier that was placed between us and God because of our sin—is removed. We're *reconciled* to God. The apostle Paul writes, ". . . **while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son . . .**" (Romans 5:10 NIV). We believers are reconciled to God. We enjoy a personal relationship with Him. We are His friends.

And there's another wonderful truth. Remember what we learned right at the beginning of this booklet. When Adam and Eve fell to Satan's temptation, Satan gained power over them. And so Satan gained power over human society as a whole. But now God has forgiven our sins, credited us with the perfect righteousness of Jesus, and made us His friends. *And therefore God's enemy Satan no longer has power over us.*

God gives us a new character

As we explained above, we believers share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our "**old self**" was "**crucified with Him**" (Romans 6:6). And we "**were . . . raised with Him**" (Colossians 2:12) and we now have the power to "**walk in newness of life**" (Romans 6:4). God has given us a new character that hates sin and loves God, and wants to obey Him. We have what

There is another aspect to being holy, too. We are also to *become holy*. We're to be holy in what we think and say and do. And as we, empowered by the Holy Spirit, obey God day by day, our character—all that we think and say and do—becomes holy. In this way, our lives increasingly reflect God's holy character. We'll explore this in more detail shortly.

God justifies us

There's another wonderful aspect of our salvation: God has *justified* us. What does this mean?

As we've said earlier, Jesus endured the penalty for our sins on the Cross. He suffered God's righteous wrath. And He experienced death—both spiritual death, and then physical death.

Jesus has borne the penalty for our sin. So God has declared us believers 'not guilty'! Paul writes: **"There is . . . now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** (Romans 8:1).

But there's more. God also credits us with the perfect righteousness of Jesus. We receive **"the free gift of righteousness"** (Romans 5:17). God considers us to be as righteous as Jesus Himself is—perfectly, faultlessly righteous!

Of course, we still sin. Nonetheless, we enjoy a new legal status of being perfectly righteous. God has declared us 'not guilty', and He has credited us with the perfect righteousness

Wise men—called magi—journeyed from an eastern land to worship Jesus. They had seen a star that showed that the King of the Jews had been born. They were guided on their journey by the star's movement in the sky. These wise men gave precious gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh—to Jesus.

But the local king, Herod, heard about the birth of King Jesus. He didn't want a rival for his throne. So Herod tried to kill Jesus. But an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him about Herod's plot. So Joseph took Jesus and Mary and they escaped to safety in Egypt.

After Herod's death, Joseph and his family returned and settled back in Nazareth. In this ordinary little town, Jesus spent the greater part of his life on Earth.

Jesus passed through infancy and childhood and grew to be an adult just as we do. As a young man, he worked as a carpenter and builder.

As we have seen, Jesus was fully human as well as fully God. Like ourselves, He was subject to hunger and thirst, tiredness and pain. He was tempted in every way that we are. But He never once sinned.

Four biographies of Jesus

The Bible includes four different biographies of Jesus, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These biographies are called Gospels. They're at the beginning of the New Testament. (The Bible consists of two halves – the

longer first half is the Old Testament; the shorter second half is the New Testament.)

Each Gospel gives us a unique view of the life and character of Jesus.

- Matthew was one of the twelve disciples whom Jesus chose near the beginning of His public ministry. In his Gospel, Matthew especially presents Jesus as the King of the Jews, descended from the great Israelite King called David, and who would establish the kingdom of God.
- Mark knew the apostle Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus. Mark may well have got much of his information from Peter. Mark's Gospel presents Jesus as the powerful Son of God who lays down His life to save people.
- Luke may have been a Gentile, in other words, a non-Jew. Luke especially presents Jesus as the Saviour for everyone, both Jews and Gentiles.
- John, like Matthew, was a disciple of Jesus. One purpose of John's Gospel is to reveal Jesus as the Son of God. In his opening chapter, John refers to Jesus as "**the Word**"—that is, the Word of God. John writes: "**The Word became a human being. He made His home with us. We have seen His glory. It is the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father. And the Word was full of grace and truth.**" (John 1:14 NIV). John explains that he wrote his Gospel: "**so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name**" (John 20:31).

God lives in us

So we believers are born again and adopted as God's sons. And, by His Holy Spirit, God lives *within* us. Jesus told His disciples about this new relationship. On the night before His crucifixion, He said to them "**I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever—the Spirit of truth. . . . He lives with you and will be in you.**" (John 14:16–17 NIV). And He told them: "**If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.**" (John 14:23).

In Old Testament times, God had lived *among* His people in a special tent called the Tabernacle. Later, He lived among them in a magnificent Temple. But now, from the Day of Pentecost onwards, God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—*made His home in believers*. The apostle Paul wrote, "**we are the temple of the living God**" (2 Corinthians 6:16). We believers, collectively, are the temple of God. Each of us believers, too, is a temple: Paul writes, "**. . . your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you**" (1 Corinthians 6:19). And the Holy Spirit guides and teaches and gives us power to obey and serve God.

And because God lives in us, we believers are *holy*. We're holy in the sense that *we now belong to God*. The apostle Paul wrote, "**God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.**" (1 Corinthians 3:17). Each of us believers became holy at the moment of new birth. We're "**sanctified in Christ Jesus**" (1 Corinthians 1:2)—"**sanctified**" here can be translated "**made holy**".

But what does it really mean to be born again? As we have just said, we believers were 'connected' to Jesus Christ. We were *united* with Him. And so *we were united with His death and resurrection*. Our "**old self**"—the old self-willed, self-reliant, self-centred person that we once were—"**was crucified with**" Christ (Romans 6:6). And we "**were . . . raised with**" Christ (Colossians 2:12). We're now spiritually alive—in other words, we have *eternal life*. This life isn't only unending life. It's a whole new amazing quality of life. *It's life in fellowship with God*.

And we believers have the power to "**walk in newness of life**" (Romans 6:4). Our old sinful character—the character we were born with because of our connection to Adam—died. And we were reborn with a new character, a character that naturally hates sin and loves God, and wants to obey Him.

So, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "**if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

God adopts us as His sons

There's another wonderful aspect of the believer's relationship with God. God has *adopted* us. We're adopted sons of God. Paul writes, "**. . . the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.**" (Romans 8:15-16 NIV). Now we can call God 'Father'!

Why Jesus came

So why *did* God become a member of our human race?

Firstly, Jesus came to show us what God is like. Before Jesus was born, God revealed His nature and His character especially through the Old Testament. But, finally, He revealed Himself on Earth in the man Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said, "**Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**" (John 14:9).

Secondly, Jesus came to show us what *we* should be like. He is our example. Through His selfless love, His humility, His reaction to insults, His patience and kindness, His fearless courage and righteous anger, His dependence on God and obedience to Him, Jesus shows us how *we* should live.

Thirdly, the Gospels also show us how sinful we can be. If we want to know what wickedness we are capable of, then the Gospels show us that, too. There we read that the teaching and miracles of Jesus provoked people's hatred. In the end, the Jewish leaders had Jesus executed. God came and lived among people, and people killed Him.

But, finally, Jesus came to be our Saviour. As the angel said to Joseph, Jesus would save God's people from their sins. And He would do this by His death—His execution on the Cross. This was the worst crime ever committed. Yet, amazingly, God used this crime to put everything right and complete all His wonderful plans for mankind and for this world.

“This is my beloved Son”

When Jesus was around 30 years old, He was baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. As Jesus came up from the water, the Holy Spirit—visible as a dove—descended and rested on Him. The Holy Spirit was anointing Jesus as God’s Messiah—the man who would save God’s people, bring an end to evil, and rule the world. Then the Father commended Jesus, saying: *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:17). We see all Three Persons of the Trinity here—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son was sent by the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit for the work He would do.

The Holy Spirit then led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by His enemy Satan. Three times, Satan tried to persuade Jesus to disobey God. But Jesus refused to give in to Satan’s temptations. Jesus remained loyal to God. In fact, Jesus *always* obeyed God. He only ever did what pleased His Father.

Jesus began His public ministry when He was about 30 years old. His ministry probably lasted for around 3½ years. He was a rabbi—in other words, a Jewish teacher. A lot of His ministry was in Galilee, the province where Nazareth was. But He travelled to other regions, too. He visited Jerusalem a number of times.

From among His many followers, Jesus chose 12 men to be His special disciples. Jesus chose them to be with Him and to learn from Him. He taught them, and He sent them out to preach, and to heal and to drive demons out of people.

And that’s *exactly* what has happened! God has provided a new Adam for us. That new Adam is Jesus. Jesus had no human father; He was conceived *“from the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 1:20). He is the Son of God; God is His Father. So He wasn’t connected to Adam in the way we are. He wasn’t affected by Adam’s sin. He never sinned.

The first Adam was the first member of the human race. Jesus Christ is a new Adam; He is the first member of a *new* human race, God’s *new* humanity.

Everyone who repents of their sin and trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation is ‘disconnected’ from the first Adam and ‘connected’ to the new Adam, Jesus Christ. They’re *united* with Him. In other words, they are (as the apostle Paul, one of the writers of the New Testament, often puts it) *“in Christ”*. *They’re now members of God’s new humanity.*

We were all born as members of the first Adam’s humanity. To become a member of the new Adam’s humanity, we need to be reborn. And so the Christian life begins with new birth. That’s the aspect of salvation we’ll look at now.

God gives us a new birth

We believers began our Christian lives by being *“born again”* (John 3:3,7)—or, as it can be translated, *“reborn from above”*. We’re now members of God’s new humanity. We’re now children of God.

But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can be forgiven and escape sin's penalty, and be released from bondage to sin. And we can be made new people and enjoy a completely new and wonderful kind of life, a life in fellowship with God. In other words, we can be *saved*. This salvation is a free gift to everyone who genuinely repents of their sins, places their trust in Jesus Christ and receives Him as their Lord and Saviour.

What does that salvation consist of?

- *God unites us with Jesus Christ.*
- *God gives us new life—we're born again.*
- *God adopts us as His children.*
- *By His Holy Spirit, God now lives in us.*
- *God justifies us*—in other words, He declares us “not guilty” and credits us with the righteousness of Jesus.
- *God gives us a new heart*—a new character that hates sin and that loves God and wants to obey Him.
- *God releases us from slavery to sin.*

We'll now briefly explore these wonderful aspects of salvation.

God has united us to Jesus Christ

As we said earlier, we're all connected to the very first human Adam. So Adam's sin has affected all of us. And so *another* Adam had to be born—an Adam who would *not* sin.

Jesus, our Teacher

Jesus taught people the good news about the Kingdom of God—how to enter it, and what life was like in it. He announced: “*The time has come,*” . . . “*The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*” (Mark 1:15 NIV). Jesus often taught about the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom was God's perfect world – where *God's people lived in God's presence in God's paradise*. That was the Kingdom that Jesus was going to establish.

The teaching of Jesus is radical. It's radical in the original sense of that word—it goes to the root of things. Jesus reveals what's really true, and what's really important.

Jesus reveals what God the Father is like—the Father who loves His children, the Father who provides everything for them, the Father who can be trusted.

Jesus teaches us how to live. He teaches us how to love God, and how to love others. He teaches us that we must forgive others. He teaches us how to pray.

In His teaching, Jesus told lots of stories, called parables. And He used lots of examples from ordinary life—a grain of wheat dying and springing into life, the carefree beauty of the flowers, a father's astonishing love to a delinquent son, a shepherd's care for his flock, a vine and its branches. He told parables to teach us spiritual truth in such a way that we understand it and don't forget it.

Jesus often talked about a great division. There's a broad way that leads to spiritual death, and a narrow way that leads to spiritual life. There are wise and foolish builders;

trees with good fruit and those with bad; wheat and weeds. That great division is a division among people—among us. Some people receive Jesus as their Saviour. Others reject Him.

The ordinary people flocked to Jesus. And He befriended people who were social outcasts, and He shared meals with them. He declared “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:32). But most of the Jewish leaders rejected Him.

Defeating disease, death and demons

During His ministry, Jesus set countless people free from illness, disability, and demonic possession. He raised people from the dead. And He set people free from guilt by forgiving their sins.

Jesus showed His authority over the natural world, too. For example, He calmed a storm that was threatening to sink the boat that He and his disciples were in.

Jesus did these miracles, of course, because He cared for people. But these miracles also showed that Jesus was the Son of God. And they showed that He was God’s promised Messiah who would save God’s people, bring an end to evil, and rule the world.

And these miracles also show us truths about the salvation that Jesus would provide through His death and resurrection. For example, in John chapter 9, we read that Jesus restored the sight of a man who had been blind from

Salvation, free and full

At the beginning of this little book, we saw that the very first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned. That first sin had catastrophic consequences. One of those consequences was this: their *character* changed. From now on, it was natural for them to disobey God, to do what *they* wanted, and not what God wanted. They had become rebels against God—in other words, they had become sinners.

And all their descendants would have that same rebellious character, too. It was inevitable. This was because we’re all members of the human race. We’re all connected to our forefather Adam.

So Adam’s sin has affected all of us. Every human who has ever been born—except Jesus Christ—has been born a sinner. All of us have not only committed sins, but we were born with a sinful character—a self-centred, self-willed, and self-reliant character, rebellious against God. In the Bible, we read that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). None of us is perfect; none of us is the kind of person that God created humans to be.

And, as we have seen earlier, sin has disastrous consequences. Sinners are under God’s wrath—His righteous reaction to sinners because of their sin. And “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). That death is not just physical death. It’s also spiritual death—in other words, being cut off from fellowship with God.

The gift of the Holy Spirit

Before He ascended to Heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, . . . in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:4-5 NIV).

Ten days after His ascension, the eleven disciples and many other believers were gathered in a room in Jerusalem. It was the Jewish festival of Pentecost, which was 50 days after the Feast of Passover.

Suddenly a sound like a strong wind came from heaven. It filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they “saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3 NIV). They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke about God’s powerful works, speaking in languages they didn’t know before.

On that day, God poured out His Holy Spirit on those believers. God had promised He would do this. Centuries before, God had said through His prophet Joel: “. . . I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, . . .” (Joel 2:28). Now God had fulfilled that promise. We call it ‘the day of Pentecost’.

From the day of Pentecost onwards, people could experience God’s full salvation.

But what do we mean by ‘full salvation’? Let’s now explore what this salvation means, and how we can obtain it.

birth. This pictures healing from *spiritual* blindness. Jesus gives people spiritual sight, so they understand spiritual truth, believe in Him and receive His salvation.

And by forgiving, healing and delivering people, Jesus was beginning to put right all the harm that Satan and sin had done to mankind. He was giving people a foretaste of what God had intended life to be like—a life free from guilt and shame, a life free from illness and demonic oppression. He was giving people a foretaste of what life would be like when God puts everything right.

Transfiguration

Towards the end of His ministry, Jesus took three of His disciples—Peter, James and John—up a mountain. Jesus was transfigured there; “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light” (Matthew 17:2). Two men appeared—Moses and Elijah. These men lived on Earth centuries before Jesus was born. Moses was a great leader of God’s people, the man who had led them out of slavery in Egypt. Elijah was a great prophet. Now they talked with Jesus about “His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). That departure was His death and resurrection and ascension.

The Cross in view

Around this time, Jesus began to tell His disciples about His coming death and resurrection.

And He taught them about what it really means to follow Him. He said: “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24). What He meant was this: if I really want to follow Jesus, I must stop putting myself at the centre of my life. I must die to myself, yield myself to Jesus Christ as my Lord, and devote myself to Him.

Around 9 months after His transfiguration, Jesus approached Jerusalem. It was springtime, shortly before Passover, one of the Jewish festivals.

Borrowing a donkey, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. On the way, joyful crowds waved palm branches and welcomed Him as the King of Israel and the Messiah. There in Jerusalem, Jesus concluded His public teaching, climaxing in His scorching criticism of the Jewish leaders.

Finally, near the city, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus taught His disciples. He explained what would happen in the years after His death and resurrection, and through the centuries until His glorious return to Earth in the future.

And Jesus taught them about how to live while awaiting His return. We don't know when He will return. But while we wait, we're to live obedient, faithful lives. And we're to be alert and watchful for His coming.

The plot to kill Jesus

The opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus had now come to a climax. Jesus was popular among the ordinary people.

Ascended into Heaven

Finally, Jesus very probably appeared to His disciples again in Jerusalem. Then He led them out to the Mount of Olives, blessed them and ascended to His Father in Heaven. As they watched, He was lifted up and a cloud hid Him from their sight. Where is Jesus now? The Bible tells us that He's with His Father in Heaven.

In His earthly life, Jesus was fully human as well as being fully Divine. He was a human being, and He was also the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. And Jesus didn't stop being a human when He ascended into heaven. He is *still* a human being as well as being the Son of God. And one day, Jesus Christ will return to Earth in His human body. He and His Father will reign here on Earth.

Jesus Christ is now enthroned in Heaven with His Father. Jesus Christ has absolute authority over all creation—including over Satan and every evil being. Of course, the Son of God has always ruled creation and sustained it. He created it. But now He rules creation as a human being, too. *A member of our own human race* rules the Earth. And He rules every other planet and every star and the invisible heavenly realms, as well!

And Jesus is helping God's people who live here on Earth. Through Him, we believers have constant access to God's presence. He prays for us all the time. He aids us when we suffer trials and temptations. He is our Advocate who assures us of forgiveness on the basis of His sacrificial death on the Cross. And through Him, all God's resources and blessings are available to us.

Mary Magdalene had already told the others about the empty tomb. But she didn't yet know that Jesus had risen. Peter and John ran to investigate. They entered the tomb. But they found only the graveclothes, neatly arranged.

Then Mary went back to the tomb alone. She *still* didn't know that Jesus had risen. She thought His body had been stolen. Weeping, she peered into the tomb. She saw the angels and they spoke with her.

Then she turned and saw Jesus. At first, she thought He was the gardener. Jesus said, "*Mary*" (John 20:16). Astonished and full of joy, Mary recognised Him. Jesus told her: "*Do not cling to me, . . . but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*" (John 20:17).

What was the resurrection body of Jesus like? It was the same body He had before His death. It still bore the marks of His crucifixion. But it had new powers. Jesus could, for example, appear and disappear. But His body was quite solid. He was able to eat and drink.

The risen Jesus appeared to people a number of times during the next six weeks. As we've seen, He met with Mary Magdalene. Then He met with other women, and with Peter, and with two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. He met twice with His disciples in Jerusalem. He also met with seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee, and with James, His half-brother. Jesus also met with over 500 of His followers on a hill somewhere in Galilee.

The Jewish leaders said that, if they let Jesus continue His ministry, "*everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.*" (John 11:48). The word "*place*" probably means the Temple. The leaders feared that Jesus's popularity might set off a rebellion by the people—a rebellion that would be crushed by the Roman authorities. For the Romans to "*take away . . . our nation*" meant that the Romans would rule the nation directly, not through the Jewish leaders—and so these leaders would lose their power and prestige.

So the Jewish leaders plotted to arrest Jesus and kill Him. But how could they arrest Him without angering the ordinary people?

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, did a deal with them. He agreed to betray Jesus to them in return for money.

The Gospels tell about the last days of Jesus, and about His death and resurrection, in great detail. They are the climactic events of His life on Earth. They are, in fact, the great climactic events of history.

The Last Supper

The night before the Passover festival, Jesus and His disciples shared their final meal together. It's called the Last Supper. During this meal, Judas Iscariot left and went to make arrangements with the Jewish leaders to have Jesus arrested.

At this meal, Jesus “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”” (Luke 22:19-20 NIV). Notice the words “given for you” and “poured out for you”. The bread symbolised the body of Jesus; the wine symbolised His blood. Together, the bread and wine represented Jesus; the bread and wine *given to the disciples* represented Jesus being *given for them*. He was going to die for them—and for us.

But what would His death achieve for them, and for us? When Jesus took the cup, He spoke of “the new covenant”. His death *would inaugurate this new covenant*.

What is a covenant? A covenant is a binding agreement. It brings two parties into a binding relationship with each other. A modern-day example of a covenant is marriage. A man and a woman make binding commitments to each other and enter into a new kind of relationship together.

God made several covenants with people during Old Testament times. Now, through Jesus Christ, *God was going to make a new covenant with people*. He was going to bring them into a new kind of relationship with Himself. That’s why Jesus spoke of “the new covenant”.

Centuries before Jesus was born, God had promised to make this covenant. Through His prophet Jeremiah, God had said: “. . . I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and

“He is not here, he has risen!”

The body of Jesus lay in the tomb. But death’s decay couldn’t touch Him. In the darkness before dawn on the Sunday morning, Jesus was raised from death. And He was no longer in the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, and an angel rolled back the huge stone to open the tomb. This wasn’t to let Jesus out. He was no longer there. The angel opened the tomb to show people that He had risen!

The guards reported to the Jewish leaders what had happened. In desperation, the leaders invented a story. They claimed that the disciples of Jesus had stolen His body while the guards were asleep! That was impossible, of course.

All four Gospels tell us what happened next. When we combine these four accounts, what took place may have been as follows.

Very early on that Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and other women went back to the tomb to finish embalming the body of Jesus. They found the stone rolled back.

Mary dashed off to tell the others in the city. Meanwhile, the other women entered the tomb. It was empty! Two angels appeared. One of them announced “He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. . . . go quickly and tell His disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.’ . . .” (Matthew 28:6-7 NIV). Dazed and trembling, but full of joy, the women rushed back through the narrow streets of Jerusalem to tell the others.

Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3.16).

Then, suddenly, Jesus cried “It is finished” (John 19:30)—in other words, “It is accomplished!” His work was complete. Jesus released His spirit and died.

At that moment, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). This curtain was most probably the curtain that blocked the way into the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place was the room in the Temple that was reserved for God’s presence on Earth. No-one could enter that holy room except the High Priest just once a year. That curtain was a symbol. It showed that people were barred from God’s presence. They were barred because of their sin. But Jesus had now borne the penalty for our sin. So the barrier between God and mankind, placed there because of sin, was now removed. To show this, God tore the curtain from top to bottom.

A Jewish leader called Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus, arranged for Jesus to be buried. It was now late on Friday afternoon. The Jewish Sabbath would soon begin, when no work was to be done. The body of Jesus was embalmed with spices, and laid in Joseph’s own new, empty, tomb. The tomb was a cave. A massive round stone was placed at the entrance.

The Jewish leaders feared that the disciples of Jesus might try to steal His body and pretend He had risen again. So the tomb was sealed and soldiers were sent to guard it.

with the people of Judah. . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31,33–34 NIV). That new covenant would be inaugurated *through the death of Jesus*.

Through this new covenant:

- God would forgive His people’s sin—as Jesus said at the Last Supper, His blood would be “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26.28).
- God would give His people a new character that hates sin and that loves Him and wants to obey Him.
- God would bring His people into a personal and intimate relationship with Himself. He would be their God, and they would be His people.

All these blessings can be summed up in the word *salvation*.

This is what the death of Jesus would achieve for His disciples, and for us. His death would inaugurate “the new covenant”. Through this covenant God would enable people to be *saved*. He would forgive them, give them a new character, and bring them into a personal and intimate relationship with Himself.

In the Garden of Gethsemane

Very late that evening, around midnight, Jesus and His remaining eleven disciples left the city. They went to the Garden of Gethsemane, an olive orchard close to the city.

There, in that garden, Jesus prayed. He began to be “**greatly distressed and troubled**” (Mark 14:33). What He was very soon going to endure on the Cross now filled Him with horror. He would suffer terrible humiliation and torture during His execution. But that wasn’t the thing that so horrified Him. Jesus would endure something far, far worse. Jesus was perfectly sinless. Yet on the Cross all mankind’s guilt would be transferred to Him. He would be reckoned to be guilty of *all the sins of mankind ever committed*. And He would suffer the *penalty* for those sins. That penalty was to endure God’s righteous anger against sinners and their sins, and to suffer spiritual death—in other words, being cut off from fellowship with God—and physical death.

Jesus was spotlessly pure. He had never once sinned. To be reckoned as guilty of the sins of all mankind, and to endure the penalty of that sin, horrified and appalled Him. But, in His agony, he said ‘Yes’ to God. He would obey His Father, and suffer for our sins—for my sins and for your sins and the sins of all mankind.

The trials of Jesus

Suddenly, “**Judas came, . . . and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of**

we want, not what you want”. Sin is not a trivial thing—a minor problem that can easily be put right. Sin has disastrous consequences. The Bible tells us that “**for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger**” (Romans 2:8 NIV). That wrath and anger is God’s righteous reaction to sinners because of their sin. And we read that “**the wages of sin is death**” (Romans 6:23). That death is not just physical death. It’s also spiritual death—in other words, being cut off from fellowship with God.

Jesus was now suffering this penalty for sin instead of us. He experienced God’s wrath. And He experienced death—first spiritual death, and then physical death. Isaiah prophesied: “**But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.**” (Isaiah 53:5-6 NIV). Isaiah was prophesying about Jesus. Jesus suffered all this, so we didn’t have to. His death was a *sacrificial* death—in other words, it was done for the sake of others—for you and for me, and for all mankind.

Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and escape sin’s penalty, and so we could be released from bondage to sin. And He died that we might be made new people and have what the Bible calls “**eternal life**”. This life isn’t only an unending life. It’s a whole new amazing quality of life. *It’s life in fellowship with God*. In John’s Gospel we read, “**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only**

Cross, sinless Jesus was “made sin”. On the Cross, my guilt, and your guilt, and the guilt of all mankind, was *transferred to Jesus*. God the Father reckoned Jesus, who never sinned, to be guilty of all mankind’s sins—*my sins and your sins*, and the sins of every person who has ever lived. God reckoned Him to be guilty of all mankind’s proud defiance of God, the mass murders, the tortures and abuses and immorality, right through to the unforgiveness and acts of unkindness that daily spoil our lives.

To the spotless, pure Son of God, this was an ordeal so terrible that we cannot possibly imagine it. Jesus would have felt enveloped by sin’s sickening, filthy pollution. A sense of shame, rejection, intense loneliness, and emptiness would have overwhelmed Him.

On the Cross, the guilt of all mankind was transferred to Jesus. And so Jesus suffered the penalty of all mankind’s sin. He experienced God’s righteous anger to the full. And His relationship with His Father was broken. In the darkness, Jesus cried; “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus had always enjoyed perfect, unclouded fellowship with His Father. That fellowship, so deeply intimate and precious to Him, was now broken. We all know the pain of broken relationships. But we cannot imagine the anguish Jesus endured while His relationship with His Father was broken.

Jesus suffered all this for our sake; He suffered this so we didn’t have to. All of us have sinned. We have all rebelled against God. We have, in effect, said to God: “We’ll do what

the people.” (Matthew 26:47). They arrested Jesus and took Him into the city. They brought Him first to a man called Annas. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Annas questioned Jesus. He wanted evidence that would enable the Jewish leaders to condemn Jesus.

Then Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas. The Jewish leaders had gathered with Caiaphas. Witnesses were called. But their testimony was false. And their statements didn’t agree.

Caiaphas persisted. He questioned Jesus. Jesus said nothing. Then Caiaphas put Jesus under oath and demanded: “. . . Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” (Matthew 26:63 NIV). Jesus answered, “You have said so,” “But I say to all of you: from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:64 NIV). To His accusers, this was blasphemy.

Mark tells us “they all condemned Him as deserving death” (Mark 14:64). Jesus was mocked and beaten—a foretaste of the brutality to come.

Early in the morning, the Jewish leaders reached their decision. They wanted Jesus to be executed. So, they submitted the case to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Pilate questioned Jesus. But it’s clear that Pilate became aware that there was something different about Jesus. Finally, he announced that he found no grounds for charging Jesus with any crime.

Pilate sent Jesus to the Jewish king Herod Agrippa. Herod questioned Him for a considerable time, but Jesus did not answer. The Jewish leaders were standing there and they vehemently accused Jesus. Then Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked Him.

Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. Pilate called together the Jewish leaders and the people, and announced that neither he nor Herod had found any grounds for charging Jesus. He declared that Jesus had done nothing to deserve death and said, **"I will therefore punish and release Him"** (Luke 23:16).

There was a custom that the people could ask for one prisoner to be released at the Passover festival. But the Jewish leaders persuaded the people to ask for a rebel and murderer called Barabbas to be released, rather than Jesus. Pilate appealed to the people, wanting to release Jesus. But they kept shouting, **"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"** (Luke 23:21 NIV). Pilate responded, **"Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have Him punished and then release Him."** (Luke 23:22 NIV). Pilate had Jesus flogged. Soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and clothed Him in a mock kingly robe. They then mocked and kept slapping Him in the face.

Pilate went outside again and told the people that he found no grounds for charging Jesus. He then presented Jesus to the crowd. Jesus was wearing the robe and crown of thorns. The chief priests and the officers cried out, **"Crucify Him, crucify Him!"** (John 19:6).

Pilate again declared that he found no grounds for charging Jesus. He desperately tried to release Jesus. The crowd cried out again, **"Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!"** (John 19:15).

In the end, Pilate gave in to the crowd. It seems likely that Jesus was flogged again, more brutally than the previous time. It's also possible that Jesus was once more dressed in the robe and crown of thorns, and mocked and maltreated by the soldiers.

Then Jesus was taken to the place of execution outside the city walls. His hands and feet were nailed to a rough wooden cross. Two criminals were crucified with Him, one on either side.

Crucified, dead and buried

Crucifixion was a horrific, brutal, and agonisingly slow form of execution. The victim—disfigured, almost certainly completely naked, and suffering unspeakable agony—was exposed to public ridicule and shame.

At noon, darkness fell. It lasted for three hours. This was no eclipse—it was a supernatural darkness.

The apostle Peter tells us that Jesus **". . . Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross"** (1 Peter 2:24 NIV). The prophet Isaiah wrote that God **"laid on"** His Servant **"the iniquity of us all"** (Isaiah 53:6). The Servant was Jesus. Jesus never once sinned. But, as we read in the Bible, **"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). On the