

Meanings on the way to and around the Cross: titles of Jesus



Reflections for Holy Week 2014

Easter, is almost without argument, the single most important festival in the Christian Calendar. It is the time when they great cry, 'Alleluia! Christ is Risen' and the triumphant reply, 'He is risen indeed! Alleluia!' reverberates around and shapes the world.

However, first we must journey with Jesus to the Cross and beyond. This year as we journey we will explore some of the titles of Jesus.

Each day a biblical text has been chosen and questions given to be explored either on your own or during our Common Worship together, whether at lunchtime or in the evening. Each daily section concludes with words of hope and challenge, from a hymn, poem or quotation. It is my prayer that this booklet will enrich our time together

Palm Sunday – The Son of David

God, our hope of victory,
whom we constantly betray
grant that us so to recognise your coming
that in our clamour
there may be commitment,
and in our silence
the very stones may cry out aloud in your name. Amen.

Son of David

David, the ancient king of Israel, had become for many Jews at the time of Jesus a prototype of what kingship should be like. Indeed, for those yearning for freedom, the reign, and the geographical extent of it, may have seen like halcyon days. The majority of Jews who were expecting a messiah would have thought in terms of a Davidic identikit image.

For those who lived by the Dead Sea at Qumran, the Davidic figure was also a healer and teacher. It is therefore not unusual for Jesus to have become associated with David, whether this be on the lips of Bartimaeus, the blind person, calling for help or the children singing hosannas to Jesus in the temple courts; and of during the triumphal entry itself.

Biblical Text – Mark 11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

Questions

1. There are many scholars, myself included, who think that the triumphal entry was a prophetic action, announcing the immediate coming of God's kingdom. How would those in authority, whether pagan (Roman) or religious (Jewish) have interpreted such a sign?

Reflection for Palm Sunday

Hail to the Lord's anointed, great David's greater Son!
Hail in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,
To take away transgression and rule in equity

(c) James Montgomery, 1771-1854
Based on Psalm 72

Holy Monday

The Messiah

It will strike some of us as surprising that the Messiah was not really a full-blown concept at the time of Jesus. In fact the term 'messiah', which in Greek is 'Christ' and in English 'Anointed one' is used as a title only 38 times in the Old Testament.

For those Jews were expecting a messiah figure, he would usually be a king or warrior-general who would rout the Roman oppressors and restore liberty to the land of Israel. This is why successive roman procurators were only too willing to dispense easily and quickly with would-be messiah figures. It might be for this reason that Jesus seems to have shunned the title 'messiah' preferring other titles like 'teacher' and 'one like a son of man'.

The mighty warrior was not the only description for the Messiah, for some Jews, the anointed one would be a priest who would reform and purify the Temple, for others a teacher, and still others, a prophet.

Biblical Text – Mark 8:27-30

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

Questions

1. What does the term 'Messiah' or 'Christ' mean to you?
2. What do you think the term 'Messiah' means for Jews today?
3. What do you think that God had anointed Jesus to do – and how was that expressed?
4. What are people – what are you – anointed by God to do today?

Reflection for Holy Monday

Jesus in some way acted like the Messiah, yet a Messiah very different from contemporary Jewish hopes. It is difficult to believe that Jesus filled a role of which he was unconscious. He must have known himself to be the Messiah

(c) G E Ladd

The Theology of the New Testament

I am anointed, but it is a secret,
Anointed openly by water and fire
visible to those who were able to see
I am anointed, but no
not a political animal or zealous priest
nor a soothsaying prophet nor a dreamer of dreams
I am anointed, free to be.
I am anointed to hang on that tree

Holy Tuesday

Son of God

It is interesting that the ancient kings of Israel were declared to be the son of God at their coronations. We have a brief snippet of that liturgy in Psalm 2: 7 *The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.* The angels sometimes were also called sons of God, and the nation of Israel was referred to as the 'son' of God by the Prophet Hosea (11:1).

The early Church, almost immediately, after the resurrection of Jesus declared that he was the Son of God. Jesus himself was comfortable with the idea that he was the Son of God in a unique sense. This is seen in two principle ways. First, in the way that he called God 'Abba', which was both personal and revolutionary within 1st century Judaism; and second, his statements which indicated that the Father and the Son (Jesus) acted in unity. This is seen across all four gospels (Matthew 11:27, Luke 10:22, Mark 13:32, John 10:30)

Biblical Text – Mark 12:1-12

And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the wine press and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. ² When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. ⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;^[b]
¹¹ this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”

¹² And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

Questions

1. This parable, in a nutshell, contains a broad sweep of ‘salvation history’. How important is an understanding and appreciation of the Old Testament for the Christian faith?
2. What do you think the term ‘Son of God’ means?
3. When you look at a child, you can often see the parent; what does that fact that Jesus is the unique Son tell us about his ‘father’ God?
4. Would you address God ‘as daddy’?

Reflection for Holy Tuesday

The immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's co-eternal Son bore all my sins upon the tree;
The immortal God for me hath died
My Lord, my love is crucified

(c) Charles Wesley

Divine and mortal
Fragile and Immortal
Constrained and Expansive
The God in the human
showing us what it means to be human;
so that we might understand the divine

Holy Wednesday

Son of Man

Of all the phrases used by Jesus to describe himself; the term 'one like a son of man' is used most often. There has been some suggestion that perhaps it was not a title after all, but means something like 'a human being' or is the equivalent of using the word 'I'. However, this seems unlikely given the evidence of both Old Testament texts like Daniel and Ezekiel and Jewish texts that were contemporaneous to the life of Jesus, like 1 (Ethiopic) Enoch.

In such texts, the Son of Man is a divine figure, who exercises judgement on the nations, acts on behalf of God and is offered worship (Daniel 7, Ezekiel 1 and 1 Enoch 46)

Biblical Text – Mark 8: 31-38

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a human being to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a human being give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Questions

1. What would you not want to lose in order to follow Jesus?
2. How important do you think the title 'Son of Man' is?
3. Who do you think the Son of Man will be ashamed of?
4. What do think of the fact that it was necessary (part of the divine plan) for Jesus to suffer on our behalf?

Reflection for Holy Wednesday

Within the first decade of the life of the early Church, that is to say within a decade after the resurrection, Jews who followed Jesus as Messiah were worshipping him alongside God. We cannot overestimate the importance of the language and symbolism surrounding the figure of the 'Son of Man', in helping them to do this.

Word incarnate, truth revealing
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By your humble birth

(c) Michael Saward

Maundy Thursday

The Servant

Mark 10:45 with the following words placed on the lips of Jesus For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give

his life as a ransom for many” sets the scene for us as begin thinking about Maundy Thursday. In context, Jesus is talking about how to exercise power, after James and John had come to him asking to have thrones next to him.

Instead of claiming the right to rule, Jesus claimed the right to serve. One of the earliest Christian poems preserved by Saint Paul picks up on this.

Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of human beings.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2: 6-8).

Biblical Text – John 13: 1-5

¹It was before Passover, and Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and to return to the Father. He had always loved his followers in this world, and he loved them to the very end. ²Even before the evening meal started, the devil had made Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, decide to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that he had come from God and would go back to God. He also knew that the Father had given him complete power. ⁴So during the meal Jesus got up, removed his outer garment, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵He put some water into a large bowl. Then he began washing his disciples' feet and drying them with the towel he was wearing.

Questions

1. This passage is unique to John. How different would our faith be if the major symbol was not a Cross but a bowl and a towel?
2. What would it feel like if Jesus came to you and offered to wash your feet? Why would you think he was washing your feet?

3. John writes that Jesus knew had 'complete power'. Is washing feet an example of how power should be exercised in the Church and world?

Reflection for Maundy Thursday

This is our God, the Servant King
he calls us now to follow him
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King

(c) Graham Kendrick

Washing feet

Washing feet, touching the divine
Touching the divine, healing wounds
Healing wounds, with self-emptying love
Self-emptying love, a pattern both human and divine
Human and divine patterns offering a shape
A shape for us to love and grow
To love and grow as we wash feet
To see in each the presence of the divine

Good Friday

It is difficult, I think, to imagine ourselves at the foot of the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not that I do not want to be with Jesus, supporting our crucified and dying God, as he begins his final battle. No, it is for me that fact that, sometimes, I cannot look at the consequences of our sin, my sin, squarely in the face. This year, hesitantly, I am going to try.

Biblical Texts

³⁴Then about that time Jesus shouted, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" ³⁵Some of the people standing there heard Jesus and said, "He is calling for Elijah." ³⁶One of them ran and grabbed a sponge. After he had soaked it in wine, he put it on a stick and held it

up to Jesus. He said, "Let's wait and see if Elijah will come and take him down!" ³⁷ Jesus shouted and then died (Mark 15: 34-37)

³³ When the soldiers came to the place called "The Skull," they nailed Jesus to a cross. They also nailed the two criminals to crosses, one on each side of Jesus. ³⁴⁻³⁵ Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people! They don't know what they're doing." While the crowd stood there watching Jesus, the soldiers gambled for his clothes. The leaders insulted him by saying, "He saved others. Now he should save himself, if he really is God's chosen Messiah!" (Luke 23: 33-34)

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (John 19: 25-27)

Questions

1. 'Father, forgive them...' Take a moment to think about the hardest thing you have had to forgive. The current Chief Rabbi calls forgiveness 'life's greatest adventure'. Do you think he is right?
2. Think of a time when you have felt alone. When was that? How did you deal with it at the time? How do you deal with it now?
3. Which of the sayings of Jesus from the Cross means the most to you and why?

Reflection for Good Friday

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied

For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

(c) Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

Holy Saturday

The Holy One of Israel

Holy Saturday should not become Easter Sunday. The first Holy Saturday would have been an entirely numbingly bleak affair. The one on whom Jesus' followers had begun tentatively to pin their hopes had gone. He was not in the next room; he had been humiliated and executed. Strands of scripture that may have pointed to Jesus being the holy one of Israel would have sounded like a clanging gong. Silence for this painful Saturday is an appropriate and utterly human response.

Biblical Text – Luke 24: 13-27

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and

found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Questions

1. What do you think the words ‘we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel’ meant?
2. The words ‘we had hoped’ are sometimes very sad; how do we move beyond hopelessness?
3. The early Church set great store by the fact that the pattern of Jesus’ life followed some of the contours found in the Old Testament. Is this important you? How important is the Old Testament for our faith?

Reflection for Holy Saturday

Bitter pain, searing loss
divine abandonment, mother’s tears
mocking soldiers, cruel crown
battered body, beyond the lament
gathered together; in one place
together in silent defiant space
silence demands its sacred pause
the stillness does not wait
we need not pretend does
lest all is forgotten as the breath comes again

Easter Day

God of terror and joy, you arise to shake the earth
Open our graves and give us back the past:
so that all that been buried may be freed and forgiven
and our lives may return to you through the risen Christ. Amen.

Lord and God

The resurrected Jesus is none of other than our Lord and God demanding loyalty, offering freedom, allowing obedience and giving grace.

Biblical Text – Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid

Questions

1. He has risen, he is not here. How do you respond to such a statement?
2. What is the most exciting thing about the story of Easter for you?
3. What have you learnt this week during our journey to Easter Day? Give thanks to God for it and all that others have learnt too.

Reflection for Easter Day

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!



Yr Eglwys Yng Nghymru ar Ynys Cybi
The Church in Wales on Holy Island