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Christianity isn't first and foremost a set of beliefs; nor is it a list of moral instructions. Christianity is a living encounter with Jesus.

What we know about Jesus comes mainly from the gospels and letters in the New Testament. They were written to answer the question: Why is Jesus important? They show why people were attracted to Jesus, why he faced opposition, how he died, and what happened afterwards. And they show what these things mean.

Jesus of Nazareth lived about two thousand years ago in Palestine, an area then occupied by the Romans. He was steeped in the faith, scriptures and culture of his people, the Jews.

Jesus' ministry included teaching, preaching and healing. In God's name Jesus invited people to acknowledge how seriously they had become separated from God. He stressed God's love for all who repented. He showed respect to the despised and the marginalized. He spoke about living in



God's rule of justice, truth and hope, the 'Kingdom of God'.

The gospels show Jesus being gentle, but they also show him being forceful, critical and angry. He spoke against those who failed to see God's good news for what it was. Inevitably there was bitter conflict. His enemies had him executed on a cross – the usual and shameful method for a common criminal.

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new way. When he had shown himself to his disciples a number of times, he parted from them.

From soon after Jesus' resurrection, his followers realized that it wasn't enough simply to describe Jesus as a good and holy man. They believed that while Jesus was really human, God was completely present in him. Christians say that Jesus is divine, truly 'God the Son'. The title 'Messiah' or 'the Christ', meaning the anointed one, was the title that people had expected to give to a great political leader, in Jesus they took on a new dimension because he was understood as more than a historical figure – he was the world's

But Jesus' tomb was discovered empty on the first Easter Day. He appeared – not resuscitated, not a ghost, but resurrected – to Mary Magdalene and to his disciples. He was alive in his body, but alive in a



Saviour who made it possible for anyone to be saved from guilt and sin, and who had rescued creation from its destructive separation from God.

The classic Christian belief is that, at the end of time, Jesus will appear again. Meanwhile, Christians don't think of him as being absent from us. We believe that he is present, through the Holy Spirit, through the life of his Church, and as we pray and meet him in Scripture.

And we believe he is present in the Eucharist (Holy Communion, the Mass) as we recall the events of the night before he died. That evening, Jesus shared a meal with his friends. He spoke of bread as his broken body, and wine as his blood, because having given these, that is, himself, on the cross (as he was soon to do), he would ever after give himself to his followers in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, so that joined to him they might be joined to God.

## FURTHER READING

Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust* (2007)

Tom Wright, *Simply Christian* (2006)

**Christ emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human  
form, he humbled himself and  
became obedient to the point of  
death - even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly  
exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name, so  
that at the name of Jesus every  
knee should bend, in heaven  
and on earth and under the  
earth, and every tongue should  
confess that Jesus Christ  
is Lord, to the glory  
of God the Father.**

Philippians 2: 7-11, NRSV

**Nothing** will be able to  
separate  
us from the **love** of **God**  
in **Christ Jesus**  
our Lord.

cf. Romans 8: 39, NRSV

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## Who Is Jesus?

### Christian Faith

