

Chapter 2. I believe in Jesus Christ n. 422-682

- born just prior to the death of Herod the Great (c. 4BC).
- died by crucifixion when Pontius Pilate was the military prefect in Judea (30 or 33AD)
- Main source of information is the Christian New Testament (48-100AD)
- Josephus Antiquities xx.9.1 (93AD) 'James, the brother of Jesus who was called Christ'.

- Pliny, governor of Bithynia (c.110), Letter to Trajan x.95
 - ‘I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or had ever been Christians when they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue ... and furthermore had reviled the name of Christ ... They meet regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god.’

- ‘To suppress this rumour [that Nero had set fire to Rome], Nero fabricated scapegoats – and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius’s reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judaea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome ... Dressed in wild animal’s skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark ... Despite their guilt as Christians, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.

Jesus of Nazareth: a man

Obviously, the disciples recognised something special in Jesus, but this did not distract them from knowing that he shared the human condition with them.

‘Jesus became like his brothers and sisters in every respect’ (Hebrews 2:17).

Jesus of Nazareth, a **man** attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – you crucified this man, but God raised him up’ (Acts 2:22-24).

‘The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second **man** is from heaven’ (1 Corinthians 15:47).

Jesus of Nazareth: a man

‘The grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one **man**, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many’ (Romans 5:15).

Catechism n. 470

‘The Son of God ... worked with human hands.

He thought with a human mind.

He acted with a human will.

He loved with a human heart.

Born of the Virgin Mary,

he has truly been made one of us,

like to us in all things except sin’ (Vatican II, GS 22§2)

A miracle in the terminology of the NT is something that arouses wonder, and is a sign of God's presence and action. Accounts such as the miracle at Cana, Jesus' walking on the lake, the multiplication of the loaves and the resuscitation of Lazarus are not describing events. Rather, in the long tradition of story-telling that we find in the Hebrew Scriptures, they illustrate aspects of Jesus' ministry as the longed for Messiah, who perfected the ministry of Moses and the prophets. As to the accounts of Jesus' healing and liberating, we would do well to reflect on the 'miracles' that love brings about in our own lives.

Jesus' special relationship with God

At the heart of their attraction to Jesus was their experience of his special relationship to God. Again and again the Gospels speak of Jesus' prayer. Having described a busy day in Jesus' ministry, Mark writes that Jesus left the house to find a secluded place where he could be alone in prayer (see Mark 1:35). Luke tells us that 'many crowds would gather to hear Jesus and to be cured of their diseases. but he would withdraw to deserted places and pray'(Luke 5:16). Before selecting his twelve disciples, 'Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and spent the whole night in prayer to God'(Luke

It was after he had been praying alone that he asked his disciples who they thought he was (see Luke 9:18). Matthew, Mark and Luke all describe the scene where 'Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray'(Luke 9:28). They go on to describe the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36).

Luke records a prayer that burst from the heart of Jesus: 'At that time Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him".'¹(Luke 10:21-22; see Matthew 11:25-27).

This prayer reveals the special intimacy Jesus experienced with God, whom he addresses as 'Father'.

It was this special relationship that fascinated Jesus' disciples, and, more than anything else attracted them to him. It was this, too, that scandalised the religious leaders (John 5:18). Jesus knew that his being and his mission were from the Father (John 5:26; 5:30).

Luke records that on one occasion the disciples, seeing Jesus at prayer asked him: 'Lord, teach us to pray'(Luke 11:1). Jesus spoke of God as their Father, too (see Matthew 6:14-15; 6:26; 6:32; 7:11; Luke 11:13; 12:30), and they wanted to share the kind of intimacy with God that was so apparent in Jesus. This intimate communion with God is what John calls 'eternal life'(see John 3:16; 4:14).

Matthew, Mark and Luke describe Jesus' anguished prayer in Gethsemani (see Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; compare John 12:27). Jesus' humanity, but also his faith in God are, perhaps, nowhere shown more poignantly than in his cry from the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). It is his faith in God that Luke highlights when he records Jesus' prayer from the cross: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (23:46).

No one brings out the intimacy of Jesus with God better than the Beloved Disciple, who leaned against Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, and stood with Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross. This is especially clear in his account of the Last Supper.

Everything Jesus said or did came from this special communion. John writes: 'The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands'(John 3:35). His special communion did not protect him from the suffering that is part of the human experience, but it sustained him, and the fruit of this communion was a loving that his disciples had never previously

Jesus' love

Those of his contemporaries who followed Jesus did so because he impressed them by his love, a love that welled up from his loving communion with God. The Catechism (n. 470) quotes from the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (GS n.22):

‘The Son of God ... worked with human hands. He thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will. He loved with a human heart – He was like us in all things except sin.’

Jesus' love

Those of his contemporaries who followed Jesus did so because he impressed them by his love, a love that welled up from his loving communion with God.

If the essence of sin is a saying No to love, what impressed people most about Jesus was that he never failed to respond with love (he never sinned). Those who chose to follow him came to see him not simply as a very loving man, but as one who opened them to God and revealed God to them as a God of Love. This is how his loving is portrayed in the Gospels. Something about their experience of Jesus brought them in touch with their own religious experience

In loving people, Jesus was inviting them to share in his own religious love. Speaking of the nourishment provided by Jesus' word and revelation, John has Jesus say:

‘As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me’(John 6:57).

‘Father, I have revealed you to them and will continue to do so, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them’(John 17:26).

- When Jesus loved people, his one desire was that they would come to know God as their Father too:
- ‘that the world will realise that it was you, Father, who sent me, and that you have loved them even as you have loved me’(John 17:23).’
- Catholic Catechism n.478 quoting Pius XII ‘Haurietis Aquas’, 1956.
‘The Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation “is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that ... love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings” without exception’.

Jesus the wise teacher

- ‘Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour’(Luke 2:52).
- ‘His teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught with authority’(Mark 1:22).
- ‘It was said to you of old, but I say to you’(Matthew 5:21ff).
- ‘The people were astounded: Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him?’(Mark 6:2).

Jesus the wise teacher

‘The queen of the south came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here’(Matthew 12:42).

- ‘Christ the power of God and the **wisdom** of God’
(1Corinthians 2:24).
- ‘Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of **wisdom** and knowledge’(Colossians 2:3).

The whole of the Gospel story bears witness to Jesus' teaching about God, and about how we are to respond to God. It could appear that Jesus failed in this mission. He himself was killed and only a generation after his crucifixion his land was ravaged by war. His worst fears were realised. Towards the end of his short ministry his apparent failure bore in upon him and we find him weeping over the city (Luke 19:41), and undergoing his own personal agony (Luke 22:41-44).

But the story of Christianity is the story of Jesus' success. Some listened to his teaching and believed him. He had said once: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already'(Luke 12:49). He started a fire in people's hearts, and in spite of his own short-term 'failure' to avert the 'hell' that was threatening, he left his contemporaries with what John calls 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life'(John 14:6): the truth that God is our Father; the life of intimacy with God that enables us, as it enabled Jesus, to live life to the full even amid failure; and the way of communion with God that bears fruit in love.

Jesus the 'poor' man

Jesus welcomed his total dependence on God and cried out to God in his distress knowing-in-faith that God would hear his cry.

This is the defining quality of those the biblical literature calls the 'poor'. Nowhere is this more clearly portrayed than in Jesus' final suffering, agony and death:

Jesus the 'poor' man

'Abba (Father) for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, may your will be done, not mine'(Mark 14:36).

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'(Mark 15:34).

These are the opening words of Psalm 22, which, after a prolonged cry, issue in a cry: 'praise the Lord who did not despise the poor man when he cried out to him. He did not hide his face from me but heard me when I cried'(Psalm 22:24).

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus is portrayed by Luke as choosing a passage from Isaiah that summed up for him the essence of the mission given him by God:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor’ (Luke 4:18).

It is not that Jesus addressed himself only to certain group. Rather, it is the ‘poor’ – those who recognised their total dependence on God – who welcomed his message.

Jesus the just (righteous / 'right-wise') man

Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14

Jesus is obedient to God's will and reveals God's justice as God's fidelity to who God is – a God who is love.

'I can do nothing by myself. I can judge only as I am told to judge, and my judgment is just, because my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me'(John 5:30).

Jesus the just (righteous / 'right-wise') man

Jesus' mission was to make us just – to share with us his communion with God so as to make it possible for us to act justly = to do God's will.

Paul writes: 'Put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of the truth'(Ephesians 4:24).

Jesus the prophet

‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old’(Mark 6:15).

- ‘Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’(Luke 24:19).
- ‘He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure’(John 3:34).
- ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world’(John 6:14).
- ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’(Mark 9:7).

Jesus the prophet

- ‘It is the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made God known’(John 1:18).

Jesus in his person, in his actions and in his words is God’s focal word, bringing the prophetic words of the Old Testament to their full flowering (see Matthew 5:17).

Jesus – the Servant of the Lord

The Hebrew scriptures like to speak of the great characters of their history as ‘servants’ of YHWH, thereby underlining the fact that they were committed to doing God’s will and carrying out God’s mission. When the temple singers from exile in Babylon are describing the kind of leader that the exiles need to take them back to the Promised Land, they speak of him as ‘the Servant of the Lord’. Throughout the New Testament there are many quotes from and allusions to the four Servant Songs of Isaiah:

Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-6, 50:4-11 and 52:13 – 53:12.

Jesus – the Servant of the Lord

We find the opening words of the first song quoted by Matthew who sees Jesus bringing these promises to their perfect fulfillment:

- ‘Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim God’s verdict to the Gentiles’(Matthew 12:18, quoting Isaiah 42:1).

‘God has glorified his servant Jesus’(Acts 3:13).

‘Your holy servant, Jesus’(Acts 4:27, 30).

Jesus, the 'Son of Man'

'As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool ... The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened'(Daniel 7:9-10).

'As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a **Son of Man** coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. **To him** was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed'(Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus, the ‘Son of Man’

The kingship and dominion ... shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them’(Daniel 7:27).

Jesus, the 'Son of Man'

In the Synoptics

1. Judgment
2. Identification with the oppressed
3. Reveals God through obedience

In John the same themes are central. plus:

4. Ascension into glory = return
5. Judgment is now in Jesus' ministry
6. Focus is on the cross as Jesus' hour of glory, judgment, vindication

Jesus, the ‘Son of Man’

Corrective of other titles

‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’(John 1:51).

‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’(John 9:35)

‘The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost’(Luke 19:10).

‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for the many’(Mark 10:45).

Jesus : judge from God to vindicate the oppressed

- ‘The Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels’(Mark 8:38).
- ‘You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’(Mark 14:62).
- ‘The Father has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man’(John 5:27).
- ‘Work for the food that endures for eternal life,
- which the Son of Man will give you’(John 6:27).

The Son of Man and Suffering

- ‘The Son of Man must undergo great suffering’(Mark 8:31).
- ‘The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’(Matthew 8:20).
- ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am’(John 8:28).

Jesus, the 'Son of Man'

'In speaking of himself as the Son of Man, Jesus is highlighting his prophetic mission, stressing the fact that what he reveals is what he himself has experienced in the special intimacy which he has with the Father.

The title underlines the finality of God's saving revelation as well as the ultimate judgment that is based on people's acceptance or rejection of this revelation. Above all it stresses the spirituality of the Servant of the Lord, for the title Son of Man identifies Jesus with the poor and the outcast.

Jesus, the ‘Son of Man’

The title ‘Son of Man’ focuses our attention on the cross, where we see God’s love finally revealed, as well as the ultimate revelation of what it is to be a human being, a ‘son of man’, who is faithful to love-giving, even unto death.’

nn.459, 577-
582

Jesus the Way to the Father

The tension in the New Testament between Jesus who saw the Torah as the Way of journeying in obedience to the mysterious God and those who saw it as a Law, investing the written word with the immutability of God with the danger of following the Law independently of faith or conversion of heart.

‘The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath’(Mark 2:27).

‘How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God to preserve your own traditions’(Mark 7:9).

Jesus the Way to the Father

‘Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is love not sacrifice’(Matthew 9:13 & 12:7 – quoting Isaiah 6:6).

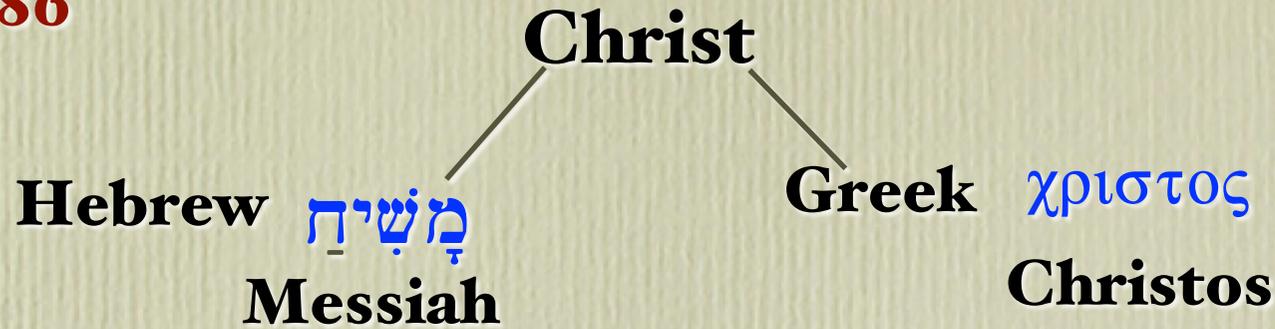
‘Though the Torah was given through Moses, the gift of truth has come through Jesus the Christ’(John 1:17).

‘You teach the way of the Lord in accordance with truth’(Matthew 22:16).

‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’(John 14:6).

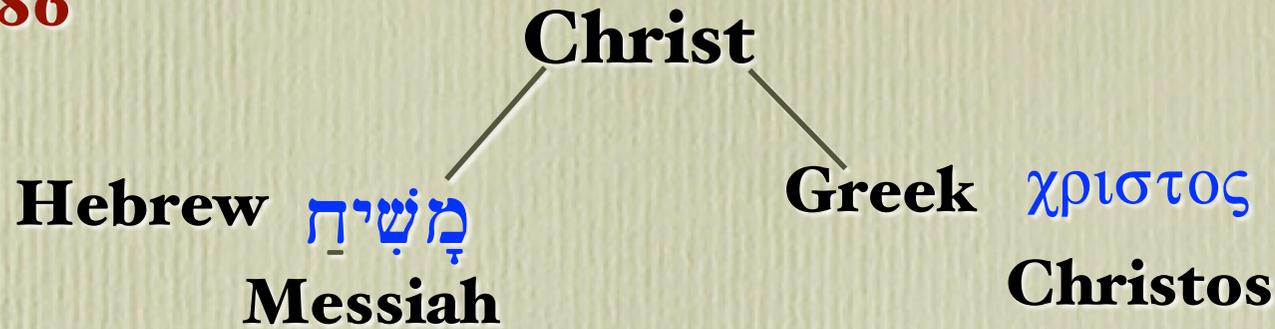
Christianity is called ‘the Way’(Acts 9:2 et passim)

n. 436-440, **Jesus the Christ** ['Messiah', 'Anointed One']
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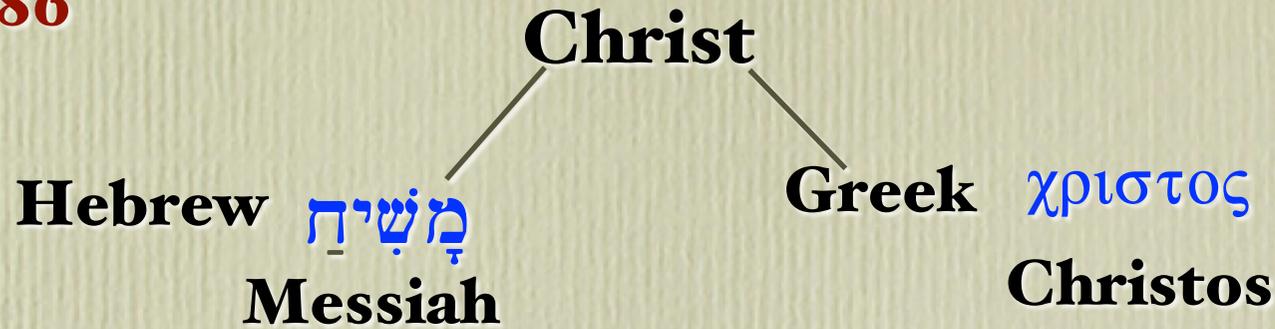
- 1. Consecrate with oil the **place** where God has revealed his presence:
- 'Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it'(Genesis 28:18).

n. 436-440, **Jesus the Christ** [‘Messiah’, ‘Anointed One’]
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- 2. Consecrate with oil the **priests** who minister in the sanctuary: ‘Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them ... He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him’(Leviticus 8:10,12).

n. 436-440, **Jesus the Christ** [‘Messiah’, ‘Anointed One’]
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- 3. Consecrate with oil the **prophets** who speak God’s word: ‘The spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me’(Isaiah 61:1).
- ‘Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm’(Psalm 105:15).
- Elijah is told to ‘anoint Elisha as prophet’ to succeed him (1Kings 19:16), and Elisha is called ‘a holy man of God’(2Kings 4:9).

- 4. Consecrate with oil the **king** who is to bring about the reign of the Holy One in Israel:
 - ‘I have found my servant David;
 - with my holy oil I have anointed him’(Psalm 89:20).
 - ‘Your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions’(Psalm 45:7).
 -
 - ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’(Psalm 110:4)

- The end of the Davidic line in 598BC, gave rise to the hope that one day God would restore the fortunes of Judah and place, once again, on the throne a Messiah. This Messiah was imagined
- in various ways (priest, prophet, king).
- Jesus is called ‘the Christ’ (‘the Messiah’) - over 200 times in the New Testament – because his followers saw him as the fulfilment of God’s promises and of the Messianic hopes of Israel.
- Jesus’ preaching God’s kingdom n. 541-570

- Peter at Caesarea Philippi ‘You are the Christ’(Mark 8:29).

Jesus accepts in terms of the ‘Son of Man’(Mark 8:31).

- Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:7-10)

The anti-climax of Jesus’ emptying the temple

- “The high priest put this question to Jesus: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One”. Jesus replied: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power (Daniel 7:13) and coming with the clouds of heaven”(Psalm 110:1)’(Mark 14:61).

- ‘They began to accuse Jesus before Pilate: “We found this man saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king”’(Luke 23:2)
- ‘They crucified Jesus. The inscription of the charge against him read: The King of the Jews’(Mark 15:26).

Whatever the extent to which his followers thought of Jesus as the Messiah during his public ministry, they certainly saw him this way after his death.

‘Since David was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying: “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.” This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’”. Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified’(Acts 2:30-36).

Luke also gives us a typical statement of Paul from his preaching about the exalted Jesus in the synagogues:

‘We bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm: You are my Son; today I have begotten you’ (Acts 13:32-33).

Jesus’ disciples experienced the power of the Spirit of the living Jesus in their lives. They understood this as an expression and proof of the power of the exalted Jesus to bring about the reign of God in the world. Jesus was now definitively King (‘Christ’), in a position (‘at the Father’s right hand’) to fulfill the most ambitious hopes associated with the promised Messiah.

Jesus' followers were attracted to Jesus because they sensed in him a quite extraordinary kind of communion with God. Furthermore he awakened in them a longing to share this communion, a longing which they recognised was at the heart of who they were and who they aspired to be. This was no less real because it was so mysterious. The second is that Jesus himself was very conscious of this communion. He identified with it. It was not a communion that lifted him above the human. On the contrary it led him to experience the heights and depths of the human condition, brought him intense love, and sustained him through a dreadful rejection that climaxed in his being crucified.

Each of the Gospel narratives bear this out. It is the Beloved Disciple who best captures the essence of Jesus' communion with God, sense of mission, and fidelity to sharing with others what he had come to experience:

‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work’(John 4:34).

“I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me’(John 5:30).

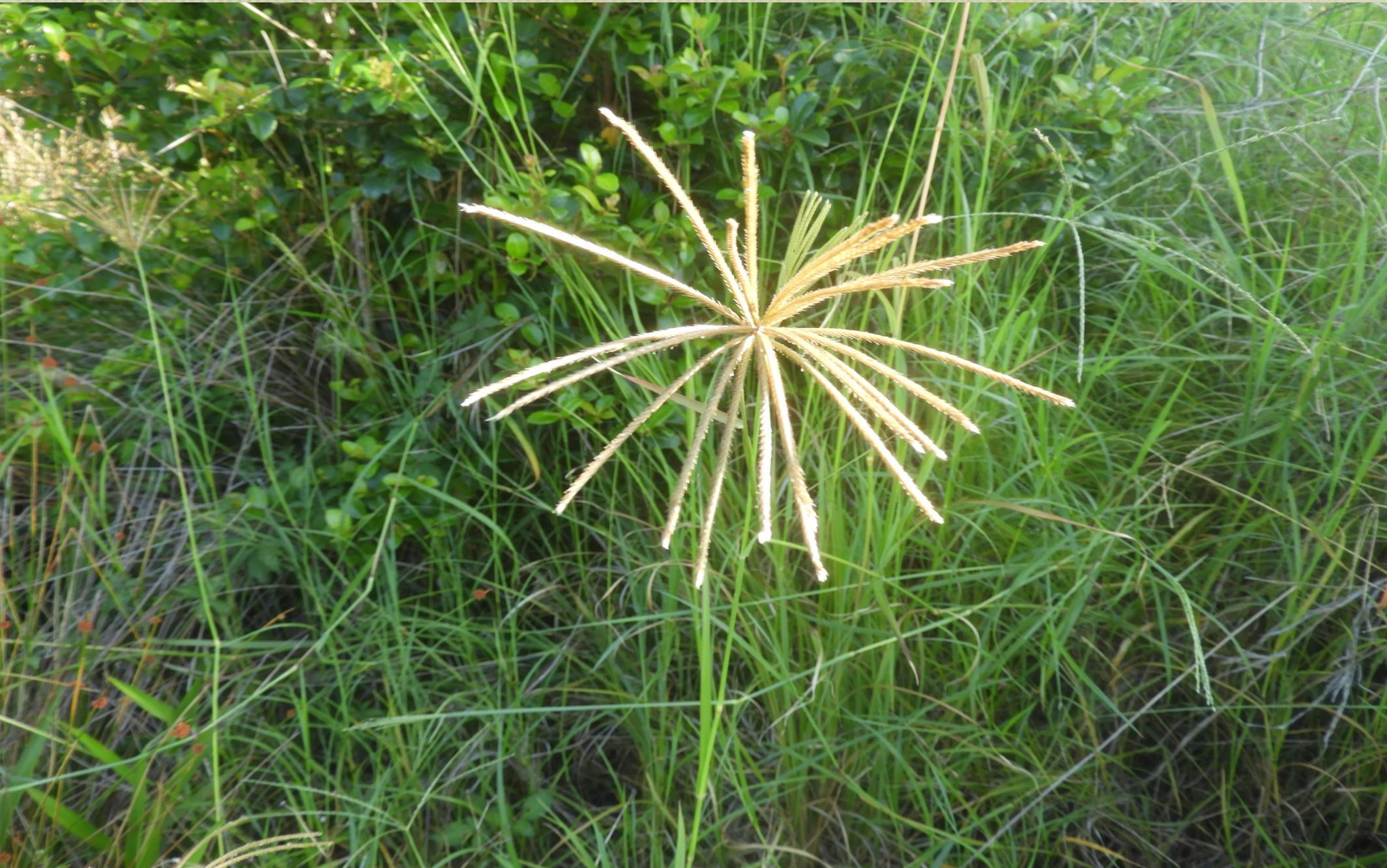
‘The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him’(John 8:28-29).

You are the centre

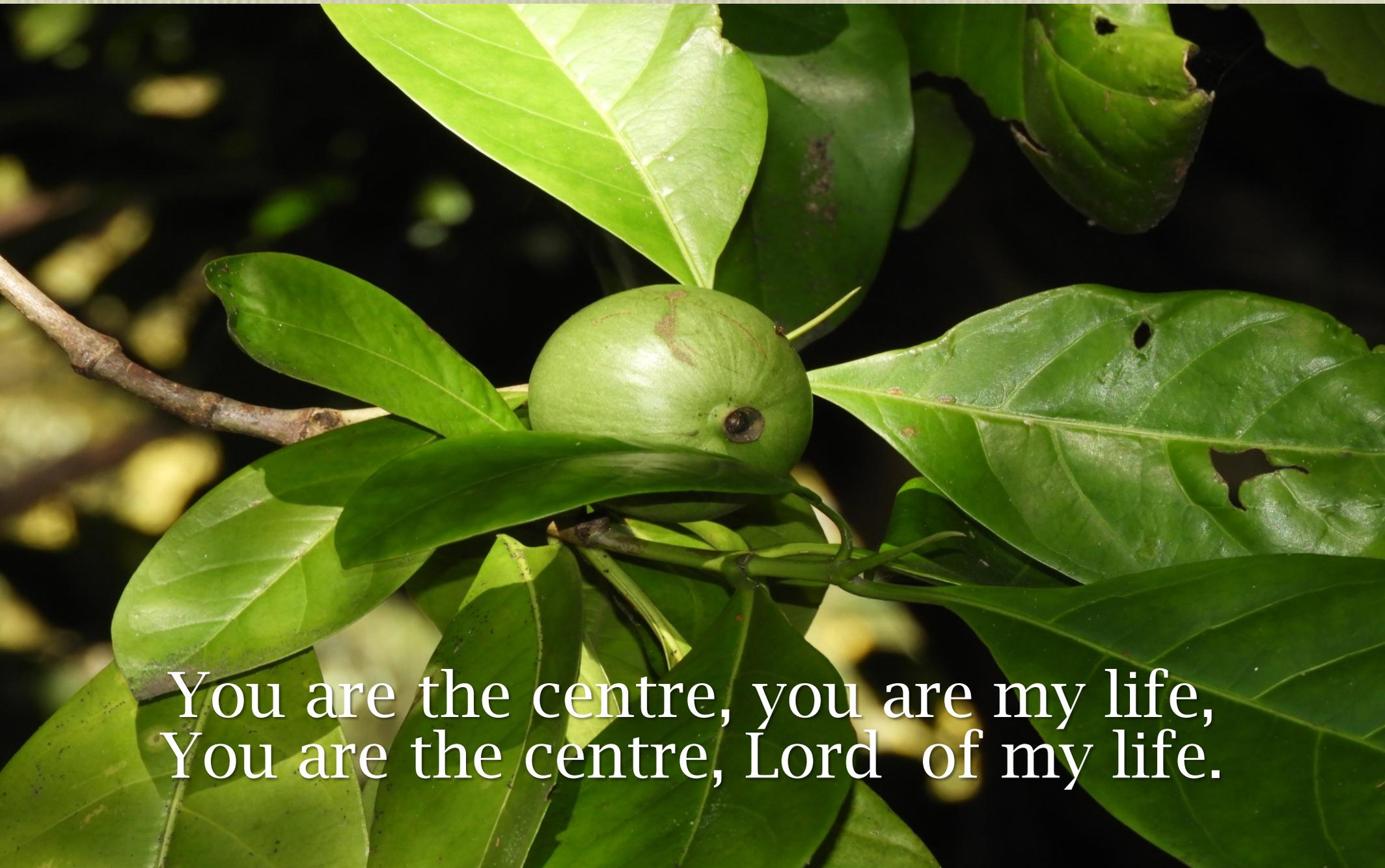
Margaret Rizza *Fountain of Life*

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You are the centre, you are my life,
You are the centre, Lord of my life.

A photograph of a waterfall cascading down a rocky cliff in a lush green forest. The water is white and frothy as it falls, surrounded by dense green foliage and trees. The scene is captured from a slightly elevated angle, looking down at the waterfall.

Come, Lord, and guide me, Lord of my life.
Send me your Spirit, Lord of my life.



You are the centre, Lord of my life.











You are the centre, you are my life



You are the centre, Lord of my life.



Come, Lord, and heal me, Lord of my life.



Come, Lord and teach me, Lord of my life.



You are the centre, Lord of my life



Give me your spirit and teach me your ways



Give me your peace, Lord, and set me free.



You are the centre, Lord of my life











Give me your spirit and teach me your ways



Give me your peace Lord, and set me free



You are the centre, Lord of my life



You are the centre, Lord of my life