**St. Margaret’s English Community – RCIA**

**“Who do people say that I am?”** [Matt. 16:13-16]

***References***

Michael Pennock, “*This is Our Faith,*”pp. 45-48

Michael Pennock, “*Encountering Jesus in the New Testament*,” pp.2-21

In our recent study of the prophets and especially the prophet Isaiah, we have been introduced to the theme of the *Messiah*.

The belief in a *messiah*, a person who will redeem the people of Israel and usher in a more perfect era, is often considered one of the fundamental tenets of Judaism. Interestingly, however, the [**Bible**](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible.shtml) does not use the word Messiah to refer to an eschatological redeemer. The word Messiah is derived from the Hebrew *mashah*, “to anoint,” and in the Bible, refers to a king or priest with a special divine purpose. In our reading on the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (yesterday 18 Oct. 2020) we read in Isaiah 45:1 that the term refers to the Persian King Cyrus as God’s anointed, because God caused him to allow the Israelites to return from their [exile in Babylonia](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Ancient_and_Medieval_History/2500_BCE-539_BCE/Jerusalem_Destruction_and_Restoration.shtml).

According to Jewish tradition, the Messianic Era will be one of global peace and harmony, an era free of strife and hardship, and one conducive to the furtherment of the knowledge of the Creator. The theme of the [Messiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_in_Judaism) ushering in an era of global peace is encapsulated in two of the most famous scriptural passages from the [*Book of Isaiah*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Isaiah):

*They shall beat their*[*swords into plowshares*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swords_to_plowshares)*and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again*. [ *Isaiah 2:4*]

And…

*Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and the young lion show browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall graze, together their young shall lie down; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the viper’s den, and the child shall lay his hand on the adder’s lair. They shall not harm or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea* [*Isaiah 11:6-9*].

[*See painting of Edward Hicks “The Peaceable Kingdom”*

[*https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/62/Edward\_Hicks\_-\_Peaceable\_Kingdom.jpg*](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/62/Edward_Hicks_-_Peaceable_Kingdom.jpg) ]

In his [*Mishneh Torah*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishneh_Torah), the ancient Jewish scholar [Maimonides](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maimonides) describes the Messianic Era:

"And at that time there will be no hunger or war, no jealousy or rivalry. For the good will be plentiful, and all delicacies available as dust.

The entire occupation of the world will be only to know God... the people Israel will be of great wisdom; they will perceive the esoteric truths and comprehend their Creator's wisdom as is the capacity of man. As it is written (*Isaiah 11:9*): "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea."

In our readings last class of *Second Isaiah* we were introduced briefly to the theme of the “suffering servant of God.” (read again *Isaiah* 42:1-4). The theme adds something new in *Isaiah* 49:14 with this phrase, “*But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me*!” And then Isaiah gives us a lesson about God’s divine love in delivering a message to the people in exile calling them into a new era, a liberation and restoration: “*Can a mother forget her infant, or be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will not forget you*,” (49:15).

I have often spoken of the sight of abandoned street children in the cold, grey winter mists where you would see these children emerging from underground passageways, foraging for scraps of frozen wasted foods near cafes and restaurants. The sight of such young children who were unable to be protected and cared for by their parents is troubling. For us – and for such children, and for the exiles of Israel - the message of this passage is an encouragement of divine love that is so beyond human love. This love is so great that it constitutes one of the greatest mysteries of faith. The love we experience from parents can give us only a hint at the depth and breadth of the love for all creation – all humans – of God the Father.

For those of us who are Christians, stemming from the prophecies and oracles of the Old Testament, we affirm that the Father sent to us his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and death. This shows how precious we are – God’s own creation – created in “*his image and likeness*” [*Gen*. 1:27]. For us, Jesus the Christ (the “anointed one”) is truly GOOD NEWS. Jesus is our salvation. One of the most repeated versus from the Gospel of St. John describes this well:

“*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.*” [*John* 3:16]

Saint John’s Gospel – the fourth of our Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and then John, **connects belief in Jesus as God’s Son** to **our achieving eternal life**. And so, for us **the identity of Jesus** is an important question we must face. And it appears Jesus himself thought this was an important question when in the Gospel of Matthew he asks his Apostles about this:

“*When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘****But who do you say I am?***’ *Simon Peter said in reply, ‘****You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God***’” [Matt. 16:13-16]. Given what you have now been taught about the Old Testament, you can see the importance of the title “Son of man” especially going back to my lecture on *Ezekiel*.

***Excursus on SON OF MAN***

The Hebrew expression "son of man" (בן–אדם, *ben-'adam*) appears 107 times in the [Hebrew Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible), the majority (93 times) in the [Book of Ezekiel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Ezekiel). It is used in three main ways: as a form of address (Ezekiel); to contrast the lowly status of humanity against the permanence and exalted dignity of God and the angels ([Numbers 23:19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers+23%3A19&version=NRSV), [Psalm 8:4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8%3A4&version=NRSV)); and as a future [eschatological figure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eschatology) whose coming will signal the end of history and the time of God's judgement ([Daniel 7:13-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+7%3A13-14&version=NRSV)).

[Daniel 7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_7) tells of a vision given to [Daniel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_(biblical_figure)) in which four "beasts," representing pagan nations, oppress the people of Israel until judged by God. [Daniel 7:13–14](https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt3407.htm#13) describes how the "Ancient of Days" (God) gives dominion over the earth to "one *like a man (כבר אנש [kibar 'anash])*. The passage in Daniel 7:13 occurs in [Biblical Aramaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Aramaic).

Later in Daniel 7 it is explained that "one like a man" certainly implicates a "human being" and also stands for "the saints of the Most High" (7:18, 21-22) and "the people of the saints of the Most High" (7:27).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_man#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurkett200264-3) The "saints" and "people of the saints" in turn probably stand for the people of Israel – the author is expressing the hope that God will take dominion over the world away from the beast-like pagan "nations" and give it to human-like Israel.

In the [Koine Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek) of the [New Testament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament), "the son of man" is "ὁ υἱὸς τοὺ ἀνθρώπου" (*ho huios tou anthropou*). The Hebrew expression "son of man" (בן–אדם i.e. ben-'adam) also appears over a hundred times in the [Hebrew Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible). In thirty-two cases, the phrase appears in intermediate plural form "sons of men", i.e. human beings.

The expression "**the Son of man**" appears 81 times in the [Koine Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek) of the four Gospels: 30 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 25 times in Luke and 12 times in John. However, the use of the [definite article](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definite_article) in "the Son of man" is novel, and before its use in the [Canonical gospels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canonical_gospel), there are no records of its use in any of the surviving Greek documents of antiquity.

In the Christian scriptures, Jesus uses the reference for himself more than Son of God. The attributes given to "the Son of man" in the Christian scriptures seem to correspond with those found in the Book of Daniel of the Hebrew scriptures - Daniel 7:13-14 "*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*." In the *Book of Revelation* in the New Testament we read that Jesus will come to earth on the "clouds of heaven," and that he will be given unending dominion and authority. It describes him as the "ruler of the kings of the earth," to be served and worshiped by all nations, people, and language groups. Another possible connection is found in repeated usage of a similar phrase in the Book of Ezekiel.

***Who is Jesus of Nazareth?***

Take a moment and think, “*Who do I think Jesus of Nazareth is*?” I am going to read descriptions of different people on how they answer that question.. [*Encountering Jesus in NT* p. 4]

In the notes for the rest of this chapter today you will see that I speak first about the dynamic of “how” we come to know someone else. We ask them questions about their background, their family, where they were born etc… I also spoke of the art of writing a letter – a lost art in this age of digital communications where we can write e-mails, or texts, or Instagram or Twitter… By using these forms of writing, we can often be careless about what we write or ask, and so people do not get a full idea of who we are. In the art of writing a letter by hand, you have to think before you write, speak out (or at least mull over in your mind) the phrases you wish to say and check (look up) the spelling of certain words because you cannot keep erasing words and mistakes in a letter (the way we can on a computer). And yet, hand-written notes are more expressive of “who” we are – they come from the heart.

So too, in the dynamic of coming to know Jesus we have to begin with an important question. “Who is JESUS for you now? What do you already know about him? How can you get to know more about him?”

An important aspect of the “Suffering Servant” in Isaiah and in Jesus the Christ, is that they sacrificed for others. Jesus gave up his life for others. Have you ever met or heard of someone else who sacrificed his or her life for others?

***COMING TO KNOW GOD AND JESUS***

In Psalm 42:2-3 we read, “*As the deer years for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My being thirsts for God, the living God*.” The great early Christian theologian and Saint, Augustine, wrote, “*You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised… You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”* Both of these quotes reveal something important: God – who created us out of love to share his life with him in eternity, made us in his own image and likeness, and implanted in us a great desire to see him and to be united with him. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [*CCC*] states, “*The desire for God is written in the human heart because man is created by God and for God*”*.* (*CCC* 27).

For the rest of the class, please refer to chapter 3 of “This Is Our Faith”.