



**Easter 3**

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**In believers the world experiences Christ**

**Being disciples of Christ does not happen by chance**

## ***Jesus is God's Son - Is our Messiah and Saviour***

***Here is the key message*** from today's readings: Jesus is God's Son. His teaching and his ministry all originate in God. Because of his heavenly origins, he is to be believed – even if in believing Christians are marginalized from the wider world and from other religious communities.

Now all of that sounds reasonable and few Sunday worshipers would question it in any way. After all, we pray the creed together when we gather in the name of God. For John, however, there is an ocean of difference between professing faith and living out the faith we profess.

## ***Just where does Jesus stand in the events of our daily living?***

It is this spiritual challenge that makes today's Gospel of such great importance for Christians. It challenges us to clarify for ourselves whether Jesus is just "another good man" or whether we can respond to his calling in faith, accepting him as God's Divine Son, our Messiah, the Son of God.

***Thus these questions:*** If we profess Jesus as Lord, in what ways does this change us? What are the manifestations in our lives of the Lordship of Christ? In what ways does our faith community manifest/give a living and unambiguous witness to the Lordship of Jesus to those around us?

## ***Jesus is our Messiah?***

The concept of *messiah* is one proclaimed in the Bible. According to Isaiah He is a *chosen arrow*, His mouth like a sharp sword. The *Spirit of the Lord is poured out* upon Him, and God's word is put into His mouth (42:1; 49:1). The fundamental ministry of the Messiah is the revelation of Yahweh and although this Servant of God will emerge within Israel, the reality is that all nations wait on His teaching. He is the light of the Gentiles (42:6) and it is only in the Messiah is it possible to understand what it means to live as God created us to be living, to reap the blessings of creation and enjoy the fellowship of those also created in the image and likeness of God.

Counter intuitively, this Messiah establishes His Kingdom not by displays of material power, but by meekness and suffering, by obedience to the command of God in laying down His life for the salvation of many (53:10)... *And so, I will give him a place of honour, a place among the great and powerful. He willingly gave his life and shared the fate of evil men. He took the place of many sinners and prayed that they might be forgiven* (53:12). His Kingdom shall be composed of the great multitude redeemed through his dying for all, his death on the cross. This is a gift for all peoples.

***How do we translate this message into practice?*** All we do as faith communities must be oriented to this overarching goal or we will wither and die, and the mission given to others.

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## *Jesus – a name, a mission and a ministry*

Jesus means in Hebrew: *God saves* and so it was no accident that at the annunciation, the angel Gabriel gave him the name *Jesus* as his proper name. His name proclaims both his identity and his mission. The Father sent the Son to be the divine gift of *salvation* to those who dare to believe. In Jesus alone is *salvation*. What Jesus did and continues to do; in the shared ministry he passed onto his disciples and through them this divine mission is given to all who take on the responsibilities of baptism, is making this *salvation* a reality for all peoples.

- **Salvation from:** “being saved” means being *saved from* something but unless we are able to articulate what those things are and how they are destructive for all men and women we will not be able to proclaim a message for which the world is yearning (as per Isaiah). Paul gives us a bit of an idea of some of these... *When self-indulgence is at work, its effects are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.* That all sounds a bit like a normal night of television! This is what a world without Jesus the Saviour looks like.
- **Salvation for:** The Father sent the Son in order to restore the world to the Divine vision, to the way we were created to be living. This new order can be seen in Jesus, experienced in his words and his deeds and it is surely something for which the world yearns. The world we are called in baptism to be building in Christ is shaped by, not self-indulgence but by self-sacrifice... *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*

### *But we are a broken Church in need of the world's forgiveness*

Sadly, the history of our Church (and local churches) are not illustrations of this vision of Paul. We are broken by sin, by arrogance, exclusiveness, ambition, the quest of power and the abuse of our privileged position in society. This is why we have been rejected by so many. It is a rejection of our own making, one for which we need to take a full and public responsibility. We must acknowledge our brokenness. Our need of forgiveness. We also believe God does forgive sins. It is God who, in Jesus his eternal Son made man, will save his people from our sins. Surely that is why we are now an Easter people rejoicing in our newfound freedom and the restoration of life.

But there is more demanded of us and that something more is all about how we take up the responsibility of being *saved for* something. The list found above from Paul's letter to the Galatians should be an outline of our pastoral priorities. How can we be *seen to be living* these gifts of the Spirit and then *building them up* in others? This is what Paul and Barnabas meant when they *urged the people to be faithful to the grace God had given them. How then, might these spiritual gifts* shape and energize our pastoral activities? What do they mean in action? Equally, how might we address the destructive sins causing so much harm to all around us? This is not meant to be a list of ministries for the “few”, our pastoral team, but a characteristic of the entire community. But is it?