

Call to Worship

There is no other name in heaven or on earth above the name of Jesus Christ. **There is no other who more fully reveals God's love, declares God's forgiveness, or advocates for God's justice.**

Jesus is Lord! **Let us worship God in Christ's name.**

Prayer of Invocation

God of Wonders, we celebrate Christ's presence among us, even though, we often forget that he is always with us. Awaken us to recognize the One in our midst, the One who gathers us together from our various ways, who communes with us in loving fellowship, and who reveals spiritual truth. Amen.

*The Word

Colossians 1:11-20

Being strengthened through his glorious might so that you endure everything and have patience; and by giving thanks with joy to the Father, he made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy people.

He rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation, **Because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.**

He existed before all things, and all things are held together in him. He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the one who is firstborn from among the dead so that he might occupy the first place in everything.

Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

Living the Word

What did Jesus look like? We are going to look at some images of Jesus that I have put together for you. Some may look familiar, others maybe-not-so-much. We all have in our minds what we think that Jesus must look like. Most of us hold to pictures that we were brought up with, in the church or in our home.

Let's look at a few of them more closely: From the 16th Century, a Renaissance painting by Titian, an Italian painter. The most important painter of the Venetian school, he experimented with vivid colors and often broke conventions of composition.

The *Head of Christ*, painted by Warner Sallman, has been reproduced more than 500 million times according to its publishers, who arranged to market the image late in 1940. During the years of the Second World War, one press at Chicago Offset continuously printed the *Head of Christ* under the operation of two shifts of laborers.

The image was marketed in an inexpensively framed format; and as cards bearing devotional texts; and on greeting cards, church bulletins, clocks, lamps, buttons, and funeral announcements to name only a few examples. One admirer of the *Head of Christ* wrote the following about its meaning to her:

There is something about Warner Sallman's pictures that makes me feel ... that this artist had felt Christ's presence when he made the images ... and you can feel Christ's presence ... conveyed ... to you through his images.

She goes on to say: *From the image of the head of Christ I see righteousness, strength, power, reverence, respect, fairness, faithfulness, love, compassion. From the way the hair in the image is highlighted in the back and highlights around the front of the head and face there seems to be a holy radiance emitted from the image...*

This one is an image of Jeffrey Hunter from the 20th Century MGM film *King of Kings*. Not a painting, but someone portraying the image of Christ.

Also from the 20th Century, this painting, is entitled "Black Jesus Blesses the Children" by Joe Cauchi. Is this your Jesus? As different as it may seem to you, I am sure there are many in our world who would relate better to this Jesus than the one you grew up with.

From the first time Christian children settle into Sunday school classrooms, an image of Jesus Christ is etched into their minds. In North America he is most often depicted as being taller than his disciples, lean, with long, flowing, light brown hair, fair skin and light-colored eyes. Familiar though this image may be, it is inherently flawed.

A person with these features and physical bearing would have looked very different from everyone else in the region where Jesus lived and ministered. Surely the authors of the Bible would have mentioned so stark a contrast.

On the contrary, according to the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane before the Crucifixion, Judas Iscariot had to indicate to the soldiers whom Jesus was because they could not tell him apart from his disciples.

Further clouding the question of what Jesus looked like is the simple fact that nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus described, nor have any drawings of him ever been uncovered.

There is the additional problem of having neither a skeleton nor other bodily remains to probe for DNA. In the absence of evidence, our images of Jesus have been left to the imagination of artists.

The influences of the artists' cultures and traditions can be profound, observes Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, associate professor of world Christianity at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta.

"While Western imagery is dominant [here], in other parts of the world he is often shown as black, Arab or Hispanic."

And so the fundamental question remains: What did Jesus look like?

An answer has emerged from an exciting new field of science: forensic anthropology. Using methods similar to those police have developed to solve crimes, British scientists, assisted by Israeli archeologists, have re-created what they believe is the most accurate image of the most famous face in human history.

An outgrowth of physical anthropology, forensic anthropology uses cultural and archeological data as well as the physical and biological sciences to study different groups of people.

Experts in this highly specialized field require a working knowledge of genetics, and human growth and development. Even seemingly distant fields like nutrition, dentistry and climate adaptation play a role in this type of investigation.

While forensic anthropology is usually used to solve crimes, Richard Neave, a medical artist retired from The University of Manchester in England, realized it also could shed light on the appearance of Jesus. This image of Jesus was presented on the front of Popular Mechanics in 2002.

Is this your Jesus? How does it make you feel? Does it make you wonder? The science world has long worked to find the proof to this mystery of the face of Jesus.

There is a famous story of the shroud of Turin, a length of linen cloth bearing the image of a man who appears to have suffered physical trauma in a manner consistent with crucifixion. It is believed by some to be the burial shroud of Jesus of Nazareth.

According to one authority, today's technology has now shown that radiocarbon dating places its origins in the Medieval period (800-1500), well after the death of Jesus. Others don't agree and still believe that it is authentic. According to a report dated 2 weeks ago, new research indicates that the Shroud of Turin shows signs of blood from a torture victim, and undermines arguments that the reputed burial shroud of Jesus Christ was painted.

It is not simply a matter of fitting Jesus into our present way of thinking. We need to be transferred, moved, deported, from one kingdom to another, from one way of living into another. Nothing is as we have known it.

Paul says to the Colossians in verse 15: "The Son is the image of the invisible God." We are not to know what Jesus actually looked like or God would have made that clear for us. There were no cameras in Jesus' day, but there were artists and we have drawings, but not of Jesus. Instead it has become one of the great mysteries of God.

Instead through the Gospel writers and the Apostle Paul's letters we do have an image of Christ. Paul gives us three parts to the image of Jesus.

1. He participates in Creation – Coming from God's side to live as human while at the same time still divine and part of God.
2. He holds things together – Jesus came and still comes to bring order and peace out of chaos. Through trust and surrender, we humans can know a peace that goes beyond understanding.
3. He died by crucifixion, so we could be saved from our humanness. We are forgiven because of his life given for us.

He even wore Crown of Thorns, a sign for us of the kind of King he came to be.

There are multiple meaning of Christ's Identity to and for us:

-The Cross and his sacrifice for all people through time. During the Last Supper with his disciples he emphasized that his life was being poured out as a new covenant between our Creator, God and all of humanity; for you and for me, as a sign of the loving forgiveness we can receive through knowing and accepting the God that Christ presented to us.

-Another meaning is Jesus as the ruler throughout the Kingdom of God, over the church and all of creation; our teacher and example. In fact, one of my favorite pictures of Jesus looks like the traditional ones we are most used to, but when you look closely, you see it is made up of multiple and varied human faces.

Jesus teachings remind us that we wear the face of Christ for the world. Instead of looking at renderings of what others have imagined as the image of Jesus, we should be able to look in the mirror and see by looking within ourselves, the true image of who Christ calls us to be.

-Another meaning of Christ's Identity to and for us: His birth as a human so we would know he understands what life is like for us. The same Christ who is hailed as king also suffers a cruel death at the hands of the government of his day, and the same Christ who rules over all creation, also entered the world as a vulnerable baby.

Paul wrote to the Colossians *Verse 16: *"Because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him."*

Verse 19,20: *"Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in Jesus, and God reconciled all things to himself through Christ—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross."*

The Wisemen, from another country, could see at the beginning that the baby would be a king. Toward the end of Christ's human time on earth, Pilate had to ask him if he was the 'King of the Jews.' Throughout time those who have searched for the image of who Christ is, have been able to see the real image of God by knowing Christ as King.

Process all of this as you come through this season of Thanksgiving, Black Friday and Cyber Monday. This is the source of our power over a commercial Christmas. Keep focusing in on one of these images in your mind's eye: the Image of Jesus...