



Jesus

Scott Petty

• Little Black Books •
books that get to the point

Jesus

It is no exaggeration to say that no army that ever marched, no navy that ever sailed, no government that ever sat, and no king that ever reigned has left as much of a lasting impression on the course of history as this one solitary life.

That life was the life of Jesus. But it's easy to get caught up in misinformation about who Jesus is, his history, and what he really came to do.

In this latest Little Black Book, Scott Petty clears away the confusion and takes us to the centre of the Bible's teaching on who Jesus is, what he came to do, and what he wants for us. Sprinkled with humour, this book will help you understand the difference Jesus makes to life, history and eternity.



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Little Black Books: Jesus

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CHAPTER I

A short but extraordinary life

I'm not sure whether you've realized but Jesus is one of the biggest things on our planet. He really is. People have estimated there are about two billion Christians on the planet today. They probably aren't all devoted Bible-believing legit followers of Christ—lots probably tick the 'Christian' box on a government form just because it's the closest thing they identify with, religiously speaking. If there were an option to tick 'Jedi knight', we might find the number of 'Christians' dropped markedly. But still, this Christianity thing has grown crazy big.

When you consider that Christianity is such an important feature of the world today, you might be surprised at the humble beginnings of its founder, Jesus Christ. According to the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which are like

biographies of the life of Jesus—about 2,000 years ago angelic messengers visited a young, engaged woman called Mary. After she recovered from the initial shock, they told her that she would give birth to a baby boy who would be none other than the Son of God, the one for whom God's people had been waiting for centuries. This child was not conceived in the usual human manner, but was conceived inside Mary's womb in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the child did arrive in the usual human manner; nine months passed and the time came for the baby to be born, just as Mary and her fiancé Joseph went to register at a government census.

If you've ever celebrated Christmas, you probably know the story: all the hotels had *No Vacancy* signs out, and so this young unmarried woman gave birth to Jesus in a stable. Although the Christmas carols paint a pretty rosy picture of this birthing environment, I could not imagine a less inviting place to squeeze new human life out into the world. I'm guessing the cattle weren't lowing or singing a cow lullaby, because I've never seen a cow do that. They were more likely chewing, mooing and pooing, which after all is what cows do. And the other animals were probably not much better behaved. But in those crude and primitive

surroundings, Jesus Christ the Son of God was born.

As was the custom for Jewish baby boys, Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem before the Lord God, and then his parents went back to their hometown—a backwater place called Nazareth in Galilee. (If you're in America or Europe, think of Australia. If you're in Australia, think of Tasmania. If you're in Tasmania, think of New Zealand. If you're in New Zealand, I'm praying for you. No, really I am.) When he was twelve, at the end of a visit to Jerusalem, his parents accidentally left him behind. It took them three days to find him. That sounds a little like they were having a bender in Las Vegas, but it's more likely that they thought he was with relatives or friends also in their travelling group, because just about everyone had gone to Jerusalem that week for a national holiday. Jesus certainly wasn't running amok either; he was having deep and meaningful conversations with the religious leaders right there in the Jerusalem temple.

Other than that, we know very few other details about his early life.

In the gospels, we learn that “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2:52). But we hear very little about the next part of his life until he bursts forth into

the wilderness of the Jordan Valley, where John the Baptist was baptizing people (that is, dunking them into the river to symbolize that they had turned away from their sins and back to God). In order to identify with us and show us that he was truly human even though he had never sinned, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist along with the crowds. And then to show us that though he was truly human, he was the most remarkable human, he entered the wilderness for testing for a period of 40 days, during which time he was repeatedly tempted by Satan but never buckled under the pressure.

He was about 30 years old by this stage. Having commenced his public ministry, he devoted himself to a semi-nomadic life, travelling around preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God and his own central place within it. He gathered a core group of 12 fairly ordinary fellows around him, who became known as the disciples or sometimes just “the Twelve”. And as he performed miracles, healings and exorcisms along the way, large crowds also began to follow him. He was known for his authoritative teaching, his empathy and friendship with outsiders, his love of children, and a certain laxity with some of the more rigid Jewish traditions that had developed by that time.

He increasingly became at odds with the Jewish religious leaders, such as the teachers of the Old Testament law and the scribes and many Pharisees. Not only was he relaxed about the Jewish traditions to which they were so attached, but as Jesus continued to garner a following, the Jewish religious figures felt he was a growing threat to their control over the Jewish people and religion. Though this tension was apparent at many times within the last three years of Jesus' life, it boiled over when he was in Jerusalem once again. The Jewish religious leaders and the Roman political leaders conspired to arrest Jesus on fabricated charges; they tried him before an unjust and unlawful court; and they sentenced him to death by crucifixion, the most horrible and humiliating of deaths then known to man.

Jesus lived a short but extraordinary life.

However, many people live short and extraordinary lives. The question is, why has this one life changed history more than any other? How can Jesus' 33 years on earth, over 20 centuries ago, result in a movement like Christianity that remains one of the biggest influences on our world to this day?

Jesus never went to high school or university. He never wrote a book or went into politics. He didn't marry, he didn't have children

and he didn't own a home. He did not backpack around Europe or venture more than 200 km from his hometown.

He did few of the things that other 'great' people have done. When crowds wanted more from him, he withdrew from them. He had no credentials but himself. When he was given over to his enemies and sentenced to death on a cross, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth—the simple woven shirt he had worn. After he died, his body was laid in a borrowed grave provided by a sympathetic friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today the Lord Jesus Christ remains a central figure of the human race. His birth divides our history into two eras—BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, the Year of our Lord). The first day of every week is set aside in remembrance of him. And our two most important holidays—Christmas and Easter—celebrate his birth and death. The symbol of his death, the cross, can be seen on church towers all around the world. His life has been the subject of more songs, books and paintings than any other person or event in history. Thousands of colleges, hospitals, orphanages and other institutions have been founded in honour of him. It is no exaggeration to say that no army that ever marched, no navy that ever sailed, no

government that ever sat, and no king that ever reigned has left as much of a lasting impression on the course of history as this one solitary life.

To understand why this is the case, we need to look more closely at the life and work of Jesus Christ. So we are going to think about three basic questions concerning Jesus: who he was (and is), what he came to do, and what he wants for us and from us.

Let's get rolling.