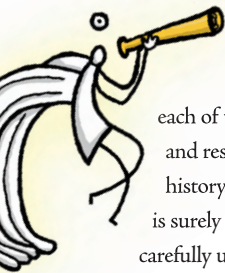


Jesus will divide people for eternity

And if he is who he claims to be, there is another important reason to take him seriously. Jesus said that one day he would be the judge of the world. He is coming back to put things right for all time. He will divide mankind into those who have accepted the forgiveness he offers and those who have ignored him. The most famous verse in the Bible sums up the meaning of Jesus' life this way:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16



If this is true, then it is good news. The coming of Jesus into the world is proof that there is a God, and that this God has a deep and yearning love for each of us. If this is true, then it means that Jesus' life, death and resurrection are the most important events in all of history. If this is true, then God's gift of his Son to the world is surely the greatest Christmas gift ever, and needs to be carefully unwrapped.

But if this is true, then it is also a warning. This verse reminds us that there remains an alternative to eternal life. What drew people to

Christ in his own day was his compassion for the lost and needy. But Jesus taught just as clearly that everyone must face a judgment. So to ignore Jesus would be foolish, and put our souls in terrible danger.

So why not take the opportunity this Christmas to think more seriously about this divisive figure? You could read one of the Gospels, or visit a church where they take the teaching of Jesus seriously. Ask the friend who gave you this leaflet for some advice on where to start.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER FOR THE UNSURE

Dear God, I don't even know if you're there.

But I want to know the truth about you, about life and about eternity.

So please help me to discover the truth as I look into the life of Jesus Christ, whose birth we remember at Christmas.

Help me to be honest about what I find in him, and what his teachings say about me.

And help me to have the courage to respond to what I discover with honesty. Amen



The baby whose birth we remember at Christmas – Jesus Christ – is also perhaps the most divisive person who ever walked this earth...



He divided the people of his time

You may know the story. How the baby born in humble circumstances grew to be a wandering teacher. How he fearlessly attacked the corrupt leaders of his time, and showed up the sham of false religion. How his teaching and miracles drew thousands to him.

But many also hated him. He made shocking claims: that he spoke the truth about God; that he would rise from the dead; that he would be the judge of all mankind. Eventually, the powerful people he challenged got their way. The man who preached love and truth and compassion for the weak was nailed to a cross and left to die.

Some thought he was the 'Chosen One' who God had sent into the world. They wept as his body was laid in a borrowed grave. Others thought he was a dangerous liar or out of his mind. They laughed at

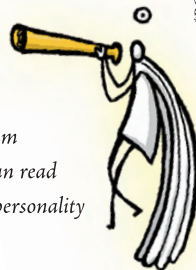
him as he died, and thought they had dealt with their "problem" as his cold and lifeless body was sealed in a rock tomb.

He divides history

But three days later, his little group of scared disciples began to tell people that Jesus had risen to life again, just as he had predicted. They went everywhere boldly telling others that Jesus was alive, that he was God's Son, and that anyone could receive forgiveness and eternal life through him. This tiny band grew, so that the faith that bears his name – Christianity – is now followed by billions of people from all sorts of backgrounds, languages and ethnic groups.

Many people have argued that the stories about Jesus are just made up – mere myths. Others have tried to rewrite history to make him fit their own ideas. But those who come with an open mind to examine this remarkable life come away with a different conclusion.

Atomic scientist Albert Einstein said: *"I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."*



*BC = Before Christ; AD = Anno Domini (Latin for 'the year of our Lord')

And, like it or not, Jesus has touched and shaped each one of us since. Our history, architecture, language and culture are woven through with references to the life and teaching of this man. Even our calendar is split in two: BC and AD*. Before and after Jesus.

People have been divided about him ever since

So what do you make of the baby of Bethlehem who grew to be the preacher from Palestine and the man who died and rose again? If he is a liar and a fraud, or if he was simply self-deluded along with the rest of his followers, then you can safely ignore him.

But the tragedy is that many people choose to dismiss Jesus without really investigating the facts. Because the other possibility is that he is not a liar, or a fake, but the real deal. Is it possible that he could be who he claimed to be?

Is it possible that the disciples were transformed from cringing cowards into fearless followers – and died for their beliefs – because he really did rise from the dead? If Jesus did rise from the dead, then all his claims to be God and the one who can give forgiveness and eternal life are shown to be true.