We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God  
The Nicene Creed

If the Anglican Church has a distinctive teaching or emphasis, it is an insistence on the fundamental importance of the person and work of Jesus. Our faith and our unity are built upon Jesus the Christ. He is the means of our salvation, our only way to God. He is the Head of the Church and the subject of our Gospel of hope.

What do we know about Jesus?

Belief in the person and work of Jesus is central to our Christian belief but what do we really know about Jesus?

We have the Revelation of Scripture but, outside the New Testament, there is very little contemporary mention made of Jesus or his Church.

In January of the year 112 CE, Plinius Secundus, a Roman official, wrote to the Emperor Trajan complaining about the slump in the agricultural markets because people were no longer buying animals for sacrifice. This, he said, was the fault of people called 'Christians' who had formed a secret society and who were refusing to offer sacrifice to the god-emperor.

About the same time, the historian Cornelius Tacitus recorded that Christians had been blamed for the great fire of Rome in the summer of 64 CE. He wrote a brief passage to explain who the Christians were: ‘The founder of this sect, Christus, was given the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate; suppressed for the moment, the detestable superstition broke out again, not only in Judaea where the evil originated, but also in the city (of Rome) to which everything horrible and shameful flows and where it grows’.

These, and one or two other such passages, are the only early non-Christian references we have to Jesus or his disciples.

Inevitably, most of what we know about Jesus is contained in the New Testament. The books and letters of the New Testament - plus a little historical research - tell us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem about the year 7 BC.

He was a carpenter or builder by trade and he lived in Palestine. He was executed during the time that Pontius Pilate was pro-consul of Palestine, from 26 CE to 36 CE.

Those few details, however, tell us next to nothing about the God-Man who changed the course of history; who, nearly 2000 years after his death, still changes the lives of millions of men and women.

So what do we really know about Jesus? The titles given him in the Apostles’ Creed give us some clues:

Jesus the Christ

You will recall that by the end of the Old Testament era a small and faithful minority of God’s chosen people were expecting the imminent arrival of a Deliverer, a Messiah. Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning ‘the Anointed One’. In the Greek language it is translated as Christos: Christ.

The Hebrew belief in the coming of the Christ had evolved over many centuries.

The Hebrews remembered Moses, their national hero who had led them out of slavery in Egypt. And they came to believe that a new Moses would rise up and renew the covenant between God and his people.
They remembered David, the King who had led them to victory, but whose real claim to fame was that he would be the forefather of an even greater King; a King who would deliver them from their enemies and reign over them in faithfulness and righteousness.

And they remembered the words of the Prophets concerning this King, this Christ; that he would be no ordinary mortal but one who would come from God to judge the world.

Jesus himself never openly claimed to be the Christ but when he asked his disciples, ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God’. Jesus responded by calling Peter ‘blessed’ because this knowledge could only have come from God. And he charged his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)

Jesus the Son of God

The Apostles’ Creed tells us that Jesus is the Christ, then goes on to call him the Only Son of God.

The Nicene Creed goes further. It calls Jesus: ‘God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father’. All these words are calculated to emphasize just one thing: that in Jesus, it is the God of Creation who meets us. In Jesus, we see and experience the action of God.

When Peter said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God’, he was not merely saying that Jesus was a child of God. He was saying that Jesus is God from God and one in Being with the Father.

To call Jesus the Son of God is to acknowledge that, in Jesus, we see and experience God himself.

Jesus the Lord

The Latin word for Lord, Dominus, means ‘one who owns slaves’. But the word has another meaning.

The Hebrews had a name for God but that name was so holy it was not allowed to be written or spoken. So, instead of writing the name, they wrote only the consonants; . And instead of saying the name out loud, they used the word Lord.

When we call Jesus ‘Lord’, we use the word in both these senses. We acknowledge him as our Master and our God.

Nowadays this may seem of small consequence. But in New Testament times many Christians died rather than deny Jesus as Lord.

Caesar worship was the official religion of the Roman Empire. Once every year, all citizens of the Empire had to appear before the magistrates in order to burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar while saying, ‘Caesar is Lord’.

For Christians, this was anathema. The centre and essence of their creed was that Jesus alone is Lord and rather than deny that fact they submitted to persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom.

Most of what else the Church teaches about the person and work of Jesus is expressed in three fundamental doctrines or teachings: Incarnation, Atonement and Resurrection.

Think about it

I believe that he (Jesus) belongs not only to Christianity but to the entire world, to all races and all people.
- Mahatma Gandhi

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.
- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity