



The Fifth Face of Jesus

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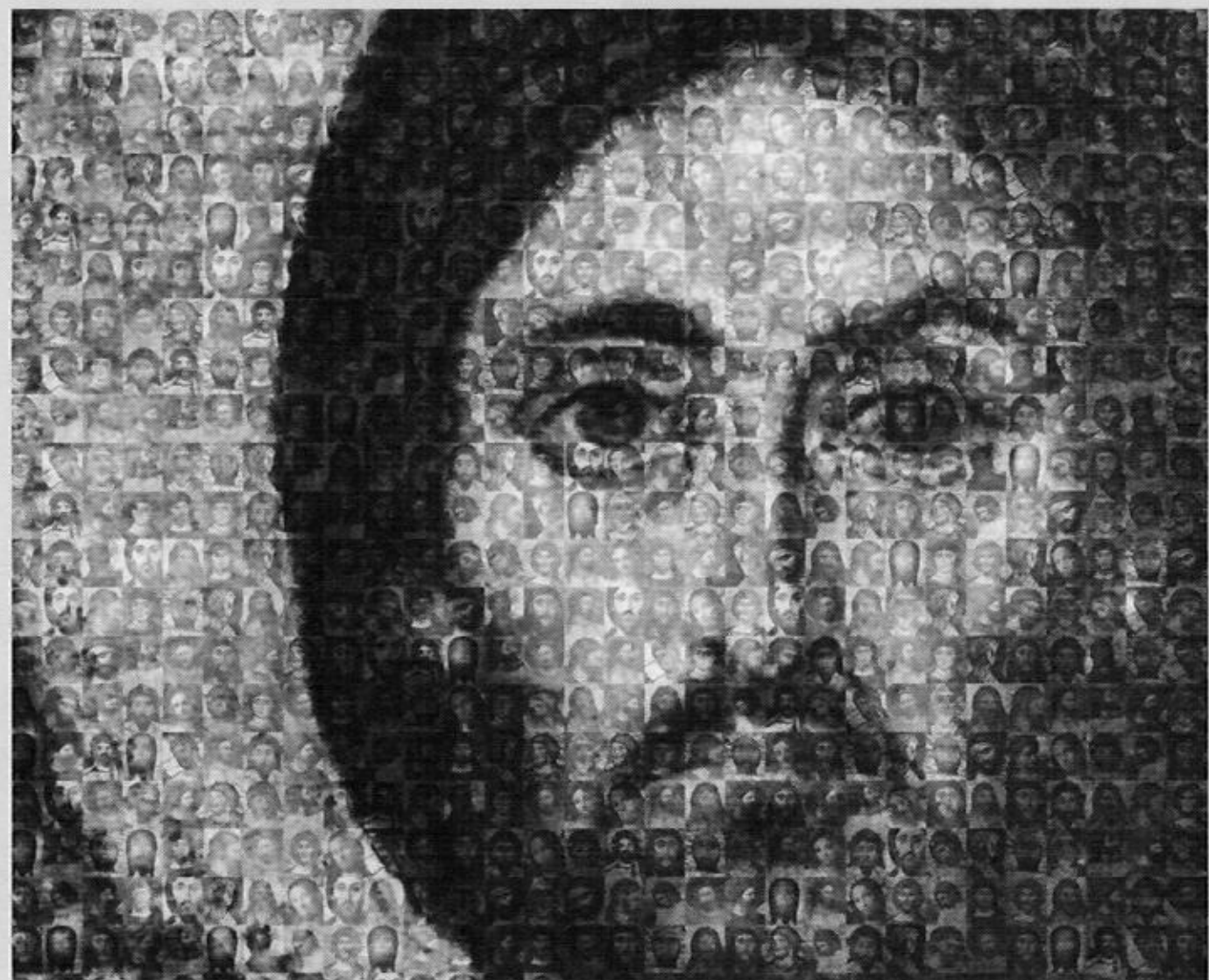
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FOUR FACES OF JESUS

Like a prism, the four Gospel portraits of Jesus refract the light of Christ in a manner that gives each a distinct coloration. The Jesus who emerges is a more complete image than any single narrative could provide. *by Virginia Smith*



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The writers of the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John offer four different—sometimes intriguing, sometimes perplexing—portraits of Jesus. Their unique challenge? Portray someone both human and divine. But how can four diverse descriptions characterize the same person? Each Evangelist chose words and deeds from Jesus' life that related to his particular audience. These audiences differed dramatically in religious background, culture, and ethnic origin.

Which Gospel is most authentic? Which best reflects the historical Jesus? They all do. Jesus emerges possessing greater depth, breadth, and height than any single narrative could provide.

MARK'S HARRIED, HURRIED, HUMAN JESUS

Mark is the earliest Evangelist, writing between AD 65 and 70, shortly after the persecution of Christians by Nero. Possibly because of the loss of so many leaders, such as Peter and Paul, Mark deemed it necessary to produce a written record of Jesus. Christianity's rapid spread also suggests the need for an organized account of Jesus' life.

Mark was not one of the Twelve. He was likely not an eyewitness either. This Mark is traditionally associated with "John Mark," mentioned three times in the Acts of the Apostles (12:12; 12:25; 15:37). This makes him Barnabas' cousin (Col 4:10) and a companion of Paul (Acts 12:25). Tradition has Mark accompanying Peter to Rome. The Big Fisherman (Peter) was an excellent eyewitness source of information about Jesus.

Mark's Jesus is in a hurry. If Jesus ever sat down, Mark failed to record it. Mark's drama opens to introduce a no-holds-barred John the Baptist baptizing Jesus before his 40-day desert experience—all in the first 13 verses of chapter 1. By chapter's end, Jesus has called his first disciples, performed his first cure (plus two more), and left for Capernaum.

We must take in Mark in a single gulp. Read this Gospel

in one sitting, and you'll be introduced to a Jesus you may not have met before—earthy, relatable, approachable, and with whom most of us would be comfortable. Mark's Jesus is hemmed in by crowds: "They brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door" (Mk 1:32-33); "He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him" (Mk 3:9); "[The] crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat" (Mk 3:20). "Crowd" or "crowds" is used 38 times in Mark's Gospel.

In Mark, we meet the most human Jesus. We readily identify with him because his feelings are obvious. When a leper, ostracized from society, came to Jesus, he boldly reminded Jesus that he could make him clean. "Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I do will it. Be made clean'" (Mk 1:41). But if he softened at the sight of suffering, Jesus turned a flinty eye toward those lacking compassion, such as the Pharisees who questioned him about healing on the Sabbath: "Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was restored" (Mk 3:5).

As his earthly life drew near its close, he and his closest friends went to Gethsemane. "He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful even to death'" (Mk 14:33-34). Jesus' range of emotions endears him to us who experience the same.

MATTHEW'S NEW MOSES: JESUS, THE TEACHER

A likely locale for Matthew's Gospel is Antioch, Syria, around AD 80. Syria was north of Palestine and had a sizable Jewish population. Using his audience's Hebrew background, Matthew explains Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Matthew begins with a rundown of Jesus' family tree; the more illustrious branches include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Ruth, David, Solomon, and Joseph. Properly speaking, this



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is Jesus' foster father's lineage. Matthew makes Joseph the central figure of his infancy narrative.

Jesus emerges as the new Moses. With Jesus' birth, Matthew draws parallels between the Messiah and Moses. Only Matthew tells how Herod's jealousy forced Joseph and his family into Egyptian exile. Just as Pharaoh feared the Hebrews in Moses' time, so Herod feared Jesus and his family. Herod's phobia led to the slaughter of innocent young boys (Mt 2:16-18), just as male Hebrew infants were doomed under Pharaoh (Ex 1:15-22). Jesus, like Moses, is saved and, in due time, comes forth, like Moses, from Egypt.

Gentiles were joining Matthew's Church. This accounts for inclusion of the Magi, who were certainly gentile (Mt 2:1-12), and Jesus' comment, "Many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 8:11).

Matthew's comparisons to Moses continue in Jesus' most famous discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. Placing the stamp of divinity on Jesus, Matthew situates him above Moses by having Jesus quote from the Law Moses brought down from Mount Sinai and expand its meaning by his own authority from a mountain site of his own: "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors. . . . But I say to you . . ." (Mt 5:21-22).

Matthew's is a thoughtful Gospel, spotlighting a reflective Jesus. Organized into components, Matthew's Gospel is referred to as a *catechism*. The Church has frequently used it in its teaching ministry. Here we meet Jesus the teacher, the rabbi.

In five principal areas, Matthew assembles much of what Jesus said on given topics and makes a single discourse of it. Each is preceded by a narrative section that focuses on the same theme and is concluded by some variation on the phrase "When Jesus finished these words" (Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1). The fifth and final discourse ends slightly differently: "When Jesus finished *all* these words" (Mt 26:1, emphasis added). The discourses are

- Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-7:29);
- Missionary Discourse (Mt 10:1-11:1);
- Parable Discourse (Mt 13:1-53);
- Church Community Discourse (Mt 18:1-35); and
- Eschatological (Last Things) Discourse (Mt 24:1-25:46).

In this Gospel, Jesus is frequently addressed as "Teacher," even by his opponents. Jesus instructs the entire community as Moses did before him, but he doesn't go to the mountain to receive authority; he preaches *from* the mountain by his *own* authority. Where Mark's Jesus has much to *show* us, Matthew's Jesus has much to *tell* us.



LUKE'S COMPASSIONATE, FORGIVING JESUS

Luke, like Mark, sought out others in compiling his portrait, for he was not one of the Twelve nor was he an eyewitness (Lk 1:1-3). Luke was a Greek who wrote for gentiles. He may have written in a province of modern Greece at about the same time as Matthew. Luke was a master writer. His skill helped him balance a diversity of themes:

1. Women. Women have a prominent role, on a par with men. Luke often parallels two individuals, male and female: Mary and Zechariah (Lk 1:5-38); Anna and Simeon (Lk 2:22-38); the man with the lost sheep and the woman with the lost coin (Lk 15:1-10).

2. Holy Spirit. The Spirit receives more recognition from Luke than from any other Evangelist. The Holy Spirit plays an even larger role in Luke's Acts of the Apostles.

3. Universal Salvation. Writing for gentiles, Luke notes that Jesus' salvation is available to everyone, not just Jews: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Lk 3:6).

4. Mercy and Forgiveness. Luke's Jesus is a compassionate friend and advocate for the poor, disabled, public sinners, and other outcasts. None were ostracized more than Samaritans. For nearly a millennium, they'd been viewed as heretics. Yet Samaritans are heroes in two of Jesus' parables. Only Luke writes of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the cured Samaritan leper who expresses gratitude (Lk 17:11-19).

The parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) might more aptly be titled the parable of the Forgiving Father, for it graphically portrays God's mercy. The father not only hopes and prays for his son's repentance and return but stands peering down the road. When he finally catches sight of him, he runs to meet him, brushes aside the young

DIG DEEPER

Which portrait of Jesus best fits your image of him? Why?

Which portrait of Jesus challenges you? How? Why?

How do you portray the face of Jesus in your own life?

man's penitent speech, and calls for a welcome-home party.

As Luke's Gospel nears its climax, Jesus hangs in agony from the cross and prays, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). When the man next to him pleads, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom," Jesus replies, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:42-43). These incidents are recorded only in Luke.

JOHN'S NOBLE, MAJESTIC, DIVINE JESUS

John's Gospel is like entering a new world. John presents a Jesus of great nobility, who deals with individuals: Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21), the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:4-42), the man born blind (Jn 9:1-41), Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44).

John's Jesus inspires awe from his opening, wanting his audience to see Jesus as divine—coexistent with the Father: "In the beginning [reminiscent of the opening of Genesis] was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). John clearly speaks of one whose humanity is undeniable but who possesses another greater nature: divinity. The oneness of Jesus and his Father is a constant. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (Jn 8:19). And, to Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

In John, Jesus is totally in control, even of his death: "I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again" (Jn 10:17-18). Aware of others'

thoughts and plans, Jesus sidesteps or challenges them: "Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone" (Jn 6:15); "Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, 'Whom are you looking for?' They answered him, 'Jesus the Nazorean.' He said to them, 'I AM'" (18:4-5). Here, Jesus proclaims his divinity. The "I AM" passages remind us of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush. When Moses asked who God was, the answer came,

"I am who I am" (Ex 3:14).

At his trial, Jesus' dignity surfaces again. Pilate says, "Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?" Jesus answers, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above" (Jn 19:10-11). Sublime to the end, Jesus' final words from the cross are simply, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

WHICH PORTRAIT DO WE CHOOSE?

All these aspects represent the same individual. Jesus is more than any one person can describe. Each writer was aware of those facets of Jesus' personality, teachings, and deeds that would draw his community into deeper faith.

Are these the only portraits that might be drawn? By no means. All Christians are called to portray the face of Jesus in our own lives.

Virginia Smith is cofounder of Scripture From Scratch, a Bible study program for adult Catholics (Franciscan Media), and a freelance writer.

**NEXT
ISSUE**
Scripture and
Tradition
(by Margaret
Nutting Ralph)

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Tues. 06/25	<u>A Day of Prayer for Victims of Heart Diseases</u>
<i>Feast</i>	Weekday
8:00 AM Mass	David Conrad, <i>Mom</i>
Wed. 06/26	<u>A Day of Prayer for Victims of Arthritis</u>
<i>Feast</i>	Weekday
8:00 AM Mass	Janet Pufka, 2nd Ann, <i>Shirley Siedlarczyk</i>
Thur. 06/27	<u>A Day of Prayer for Victims of Nervous Disorders</u>
<i>Feast</i>	Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Bishop and Doctor of the Church
8:00 AM Mass	Denise Keagy, <i>Mark and Diane Moschella</i>
Fri. 06/28	<u>A Day of Prayer for Victims of Emotional Disorders</u>
<i>Feast</i>	Saint Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr
8:00 AM Mass	Thomas Gibbons, <i>Alan R. Campbell</i>
Sat. 06/29	<u>A Day of Prayer for Victims of Diabetes</u>
<i>Feast</i>	Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
4:30 PM Mass	Our Lady of Fatima Parish Family
Sun. 06/30	<u>A Day of Prayer for Victims of Addictions</u>
<i>Feast</i>	Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
9:00 AM Mass	Brothers Paul & Neil Cassarly on entering U.S. Marine Corps, <i>R. Kuiawa</i>
11:00 AM Mass	Tom Byrne, <i>Jean Hagan</i>

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A
Sinner*

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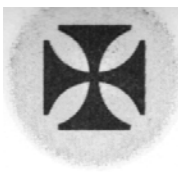
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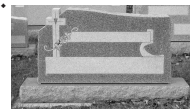
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