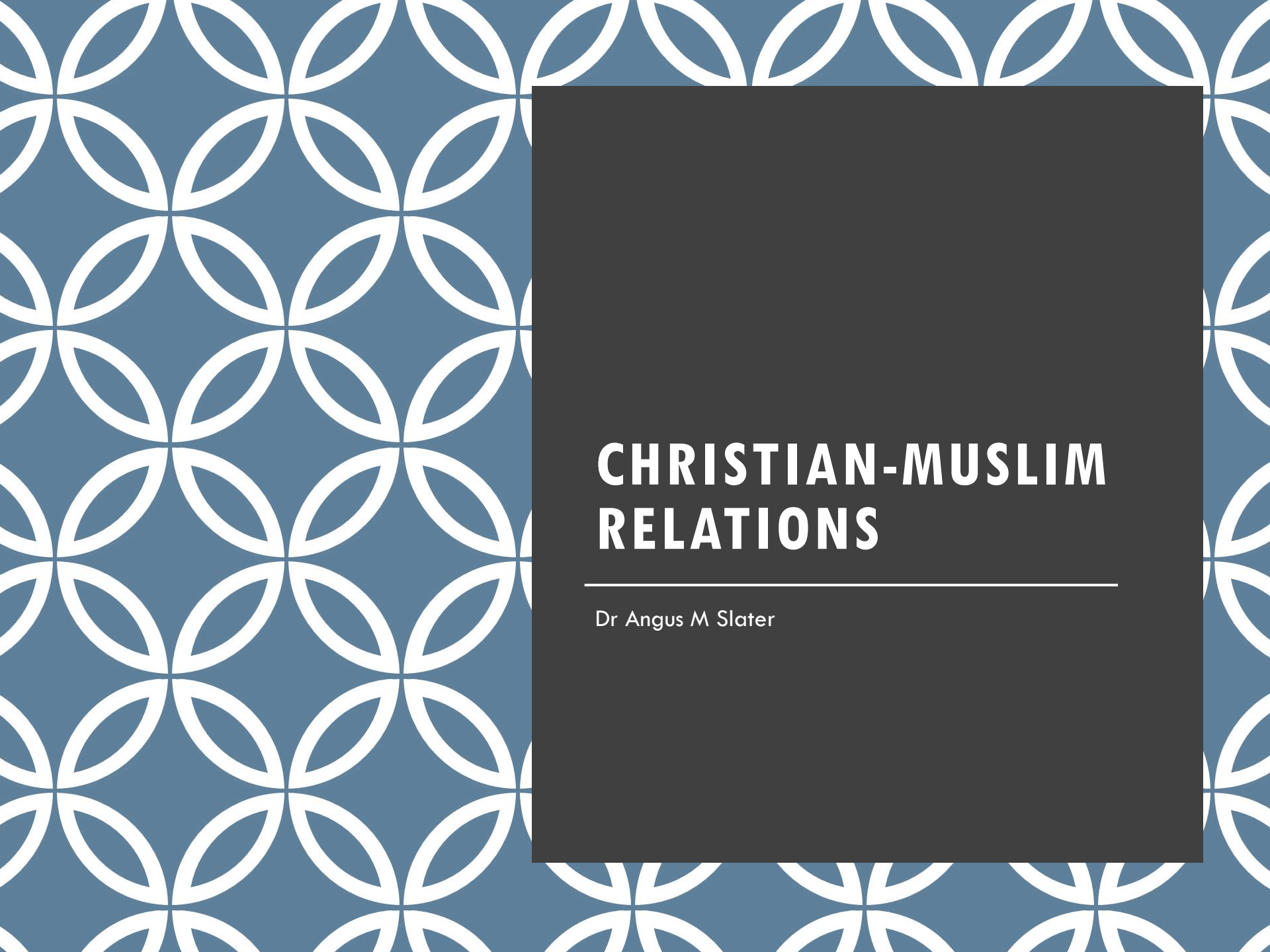




CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Dr Angus M Slater

REVISION

In the previous section, we examined not only the differing attitudes to scripture between the Christian and Islamic traditions, but also the concomitant attitudinal differences that this precipitates – differences in definition, in epistemology and the location and recognition of truth, differences in style and genre, and differences in ethical relevance.

We spent a significant amount of time looking at the way in which each tradition conceives of its own scripture, its sources and its reliability for theological reflection. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, we also explored the various ways in which the two traditions have developed interaction between them over scriptural matters and how each tradition has responded to claims of the other.

In doing so, we should now have a firmer grasp of the second of the three theological issues we are examining in this module – while we now turn in this section to the third, the sharing of characters between them.

REVISION

In the previous section, you had four readings to complete which offered further detail and exploration of this area of similarity and dissimilarity between the traditions.

The first two readings should serve as preparatory material for this section and revision for the previous section as they combine scriptural issues with shared narratives found in the Christian tradition.

The second two pieces were more focused on the use (and criticism) of the Biblical texts within the Islamic tradition. This is a historically controversial area of study that is receiving much more attention in recent years – the scriptural and theological implications are a fascinating study of the inter-connected nature of Christian-Muslim relations.



JESUS — CHRISTIAN NARRATIVES

JESUS — CHRISTIAN NARRATIVES

In this section, we move on from examining the nature of the scriptural texts in these two traditions, towards examining more of the content that is found within them.

We are going to examine this content, and its shared nature, through the prism of the most important shared figure, Jesus / Isa.

There are plenty of other instances of overlapping narratives between the Biblical text and the Qur'anic text, such as Mary or Abraham. However, the person of Jesus touches on the third of the key theological dividing lines between Islam and Christianity I wish to cover in this module — the nature, life, and death of Jesus.

We will examine the location of Jesus in the Christian tradition in this section, and then examine the place of Jesus in the Islamic tradition in the next section.



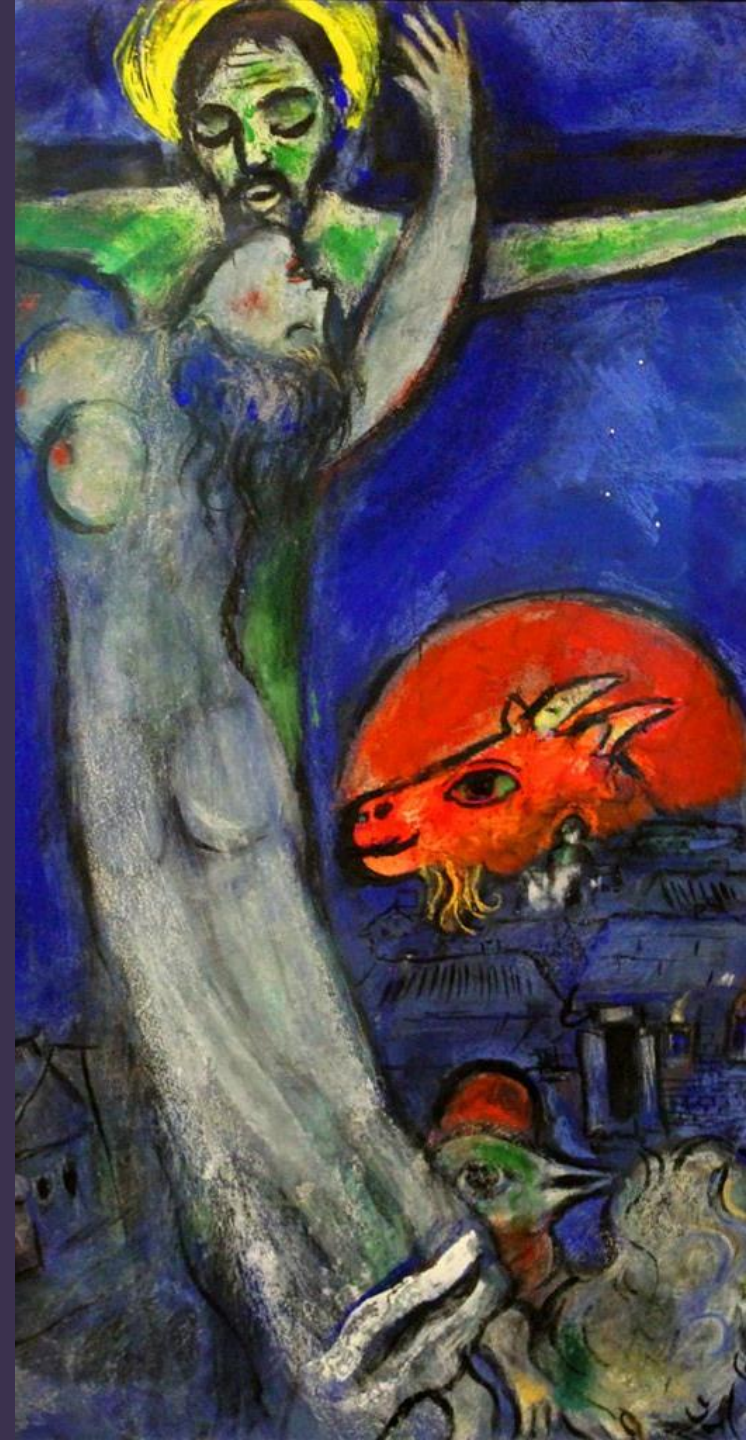
JESUS IN CHRISTIANITY

JESUS IN CHRISTIANITY

I want to begin this section with a short introduction to the centrality and theological importance of the figure of Jesus for the Christian tradition.

I am sure this will be familiar to many of you, but many students may be much more familiar with the Islamic tradition or may not have much knowledge of either tradition before taking this module.

In this section, we will just have a quick (and somewhat general) overview of the centrality of Christ for the Christian tradition, focusing on identifying those characteristics that are either shared with the Islamic tradition or are central points of difference.



WHO IS JESUS?

For the Christian tradition, the question of the nature of Jesus is one of the most important.

This is well illustrated by the famous passage in Matthew 16:13-16:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”

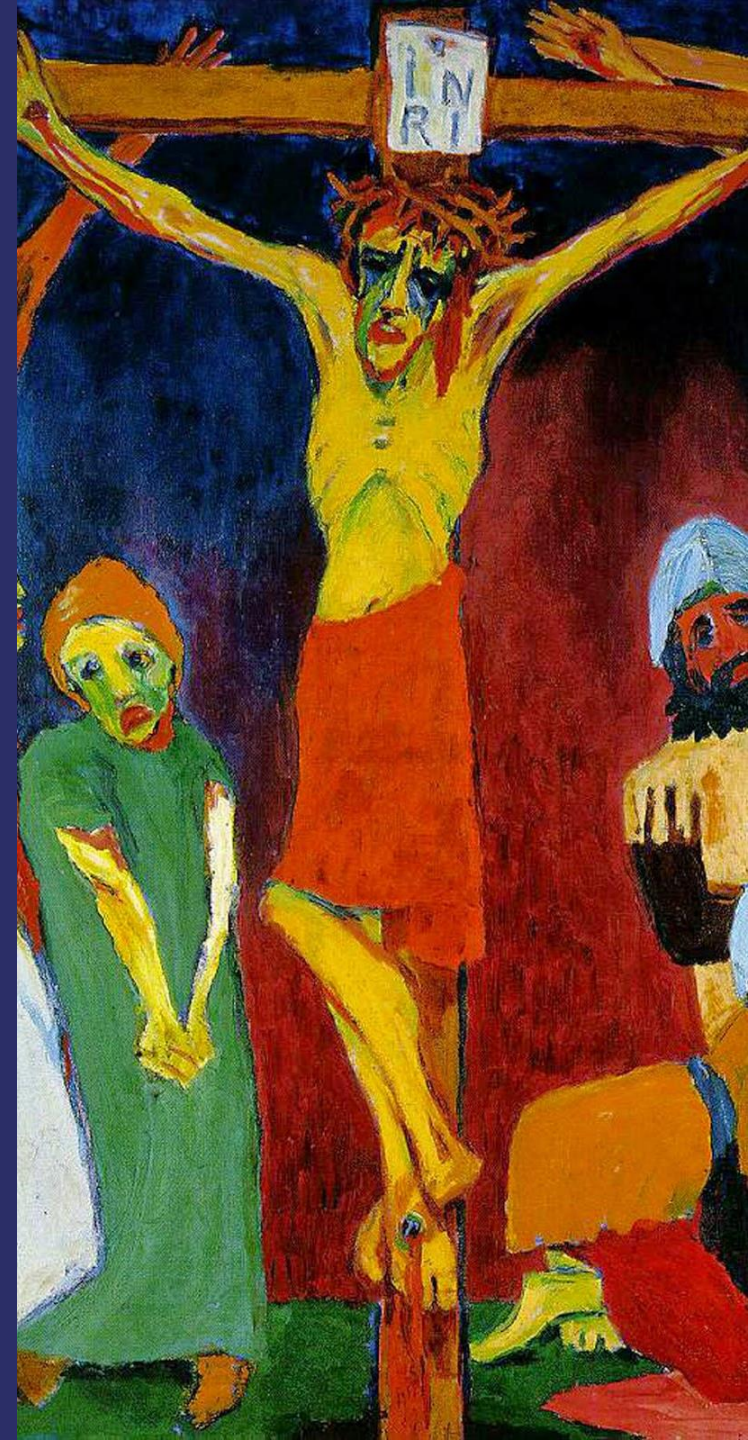


WHO IS JESUS?

Answering this question correctly and theologically accurately is at the very core of the Christian tradition – but what do these words like Messiah or Son of the living God mean?

We are going to attempt to quickly answer this question by highlighting some of the important features of Christ for Christianity, such as the pre-existence and eternality of Christ, Christ as prophesied in the Old Testament, the incarnation of Christ, the Passion and Crucifixion, the Resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the awaited future return of Christ.

Each of these characteristics is important internally to the Christian tradition, but also important for understanding the relationship between Islam and Christianity

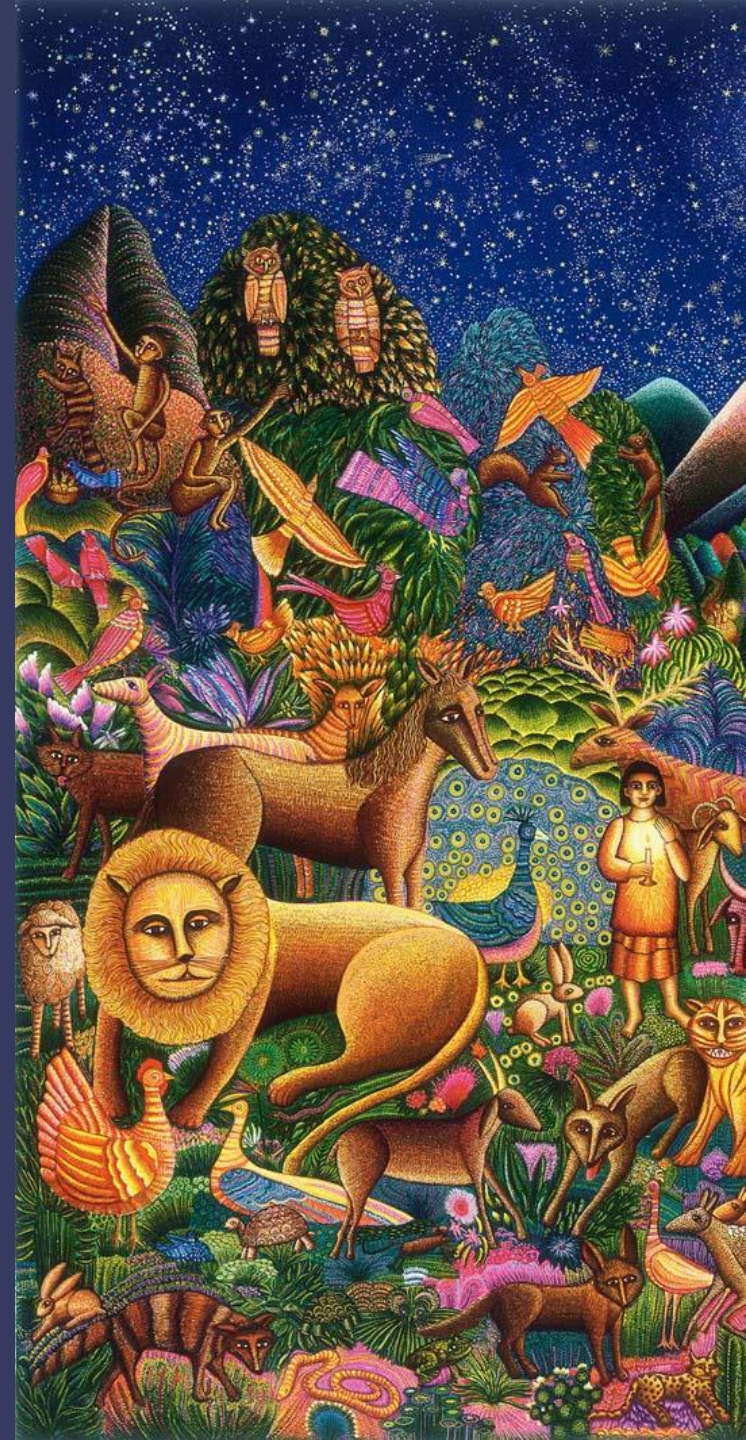


ETERNALITY AND PRE-EXISTENCE

As we saw in the section dealing with the Trinity, the person of Christ is an integral aspect of God. This means that the pre-existence and eternal character of Christ is an important part of the overall story of Christ. We see this scattered across the Christian scripture, such as:

John 1:1-3 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John 8:57-58 - "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"



JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus, as Christ, is seen in the Christian tradition as being both eternal and pre-existing his life and ministry.

This pre-existence, as part of the divine, should then be represented in the Old Testament. Christ should be prophesied of in these scriptures – and his coming should be apparent to those able to read them.

This can be seen both through references from Jesus himself, like:

Luke 24:44 - He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."



JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

And through the identification of direct prophetic references in the Old Testament, such as:

Isaiah 7:14 - Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Which is then referred back to in the New Testament, during the birth narrative of Jesus:

Matthew 1:23 - "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"

This process of prophecy is particularly important in both Christian and Islamic narratives – it establishes the legitimacy and pre-existence of Christ within the Jewish tradition.



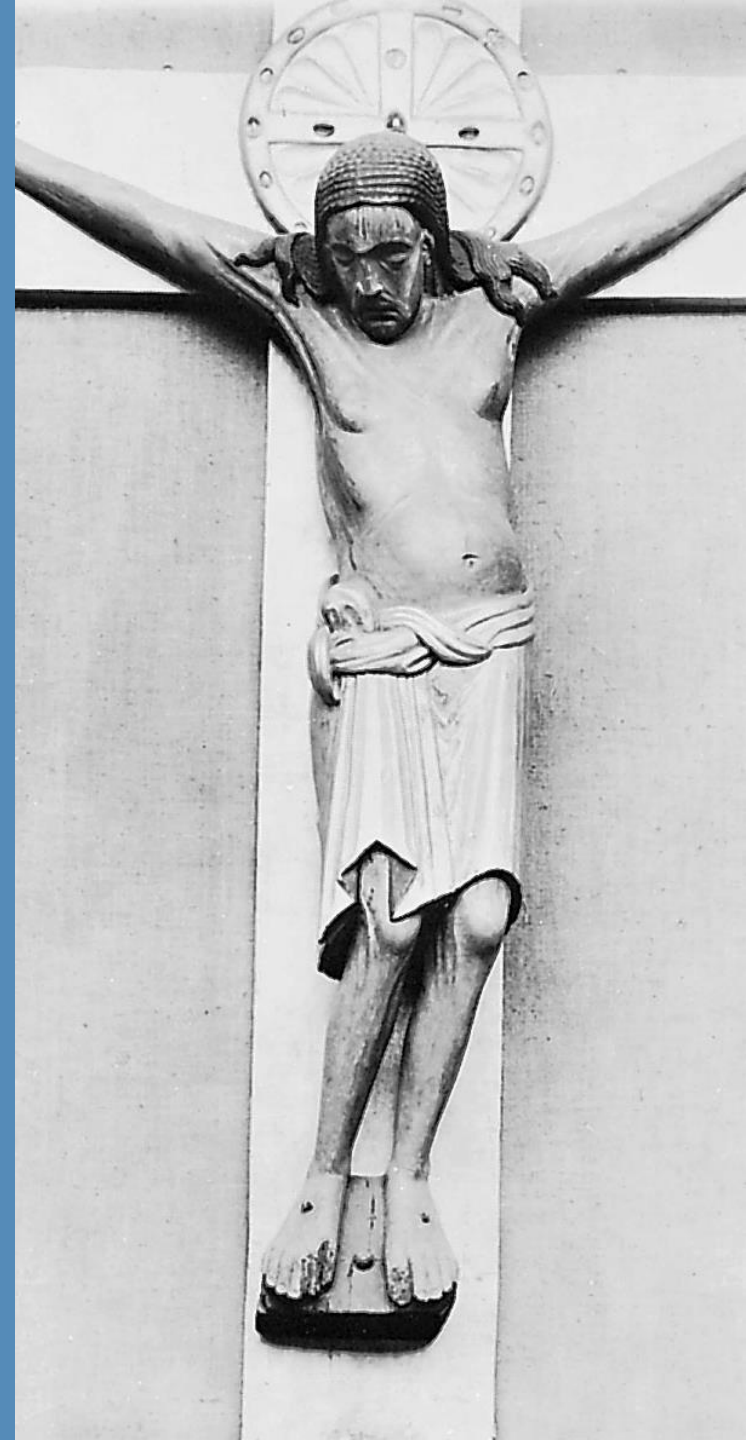
THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

Of course, this pre-existence and eternality, this prophecy only really matters in the Christian tradition when viewed through the life and ministry of Jesus.

This begins with the Incarnation – perhaps the central moment of the Christian narrative. This is the point where the eternal God takes flesh, adopting an additional human nature through the birth of the Son to the Virgin Mary:

John 1:14 - Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us

Phil 2:6-7- Christ Jesus . . who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature



THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

This is central to the Christian story – God takes on human form in order to redeem us from sin. It is through this process that our sinfulness no longer stands between us and the divine. As CS Lewis puts it –

‘The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God’.

An important aspect of this, and a significant point of tension with the Islamic perspective, is that the figure of Christ in Christianity is seen to bring into union the divine and the human – Christ, in a later formulation, is both fully human and fully divine.

This union of the divine and the human in the person of Christ is perhaps the critical characteristic of Jesus’ role in the Christian tradition.



THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

This can be seen in the lengths that scripture goes to establish the human nature of Christ, such as his biological lineage:

Matthew 1:1-17 - This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham...

And his experience of human traits such as hunger or death:

Matthew 4:1-3 - Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Luke 23:46 - Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.



THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

Similarly, the fully divine nature of Christ in the Christian tradition is also prominently placed a central aspect of the story of Jesus, and has come to a central theological claim of the Christian tradition.

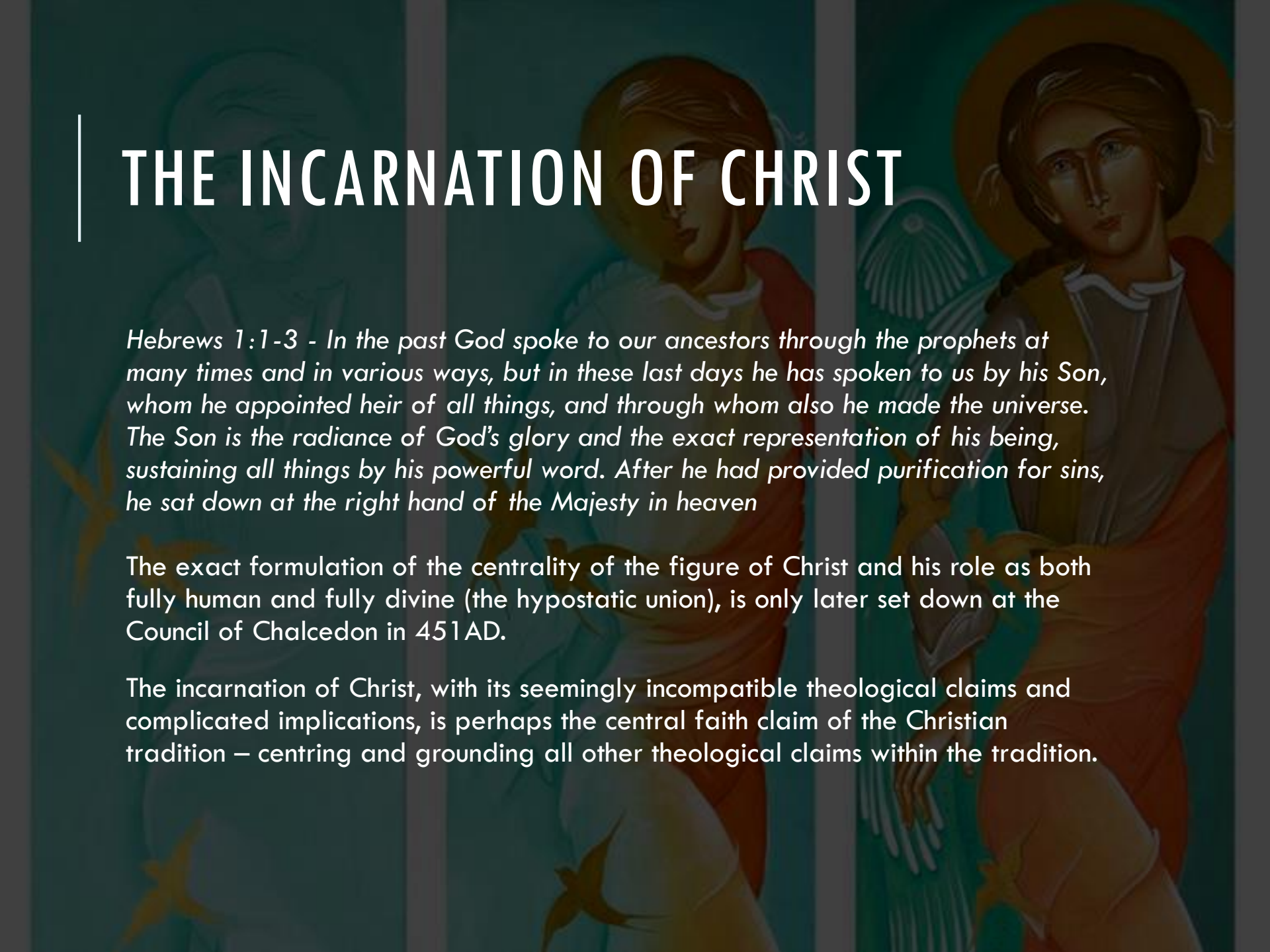
This includes the use of titles for Christ which emphasise his divine nature:

John 10:29-30 - My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

And his performance of key divine acts, like creation or the purification of sin:

Colossians 1:16 - For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.



The background of the slide features a classical religious painting of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. Mary is depicted on the right, wearing a red mantle over a blue gown, with a halo around her head. The Christ Child is on the left, wearing a red garment, and is shown in a gesture of blessing. The overall image is dimmed and serves as a backdrop for the text.

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

Hebrews 1:1-3 - In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven

The exact formulation of the centrality of the figure of Christ and his role as both fully human and fully divine (the hypostatic union), is only later set down at the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD.

The incarnation of Christ, with its seemingly incompatible theological claims and complicated implications, is perhaps the central faith claim of the Christian tradition – centring and grounding all other theological claims within the tradition.

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

It is difficult to imagine Christianity without this figure of Christ.

Martin Luther put it well:

Argument: Moses says, "The Lord your God is one God." Therefore Christ cannot be true God.

Response: What Moses says, that God is one, in no way contradicts us. For we too say that there is one God, and not many, but that unity of substance and essence has three distinct persons, as the nature[s] of Christ are united in one person... Here we preach, insofar as it is possible, that these three persons are one God and one essence. But we believe that these things are incomprehensible; if they could be comprehended, there would be no need to believe them



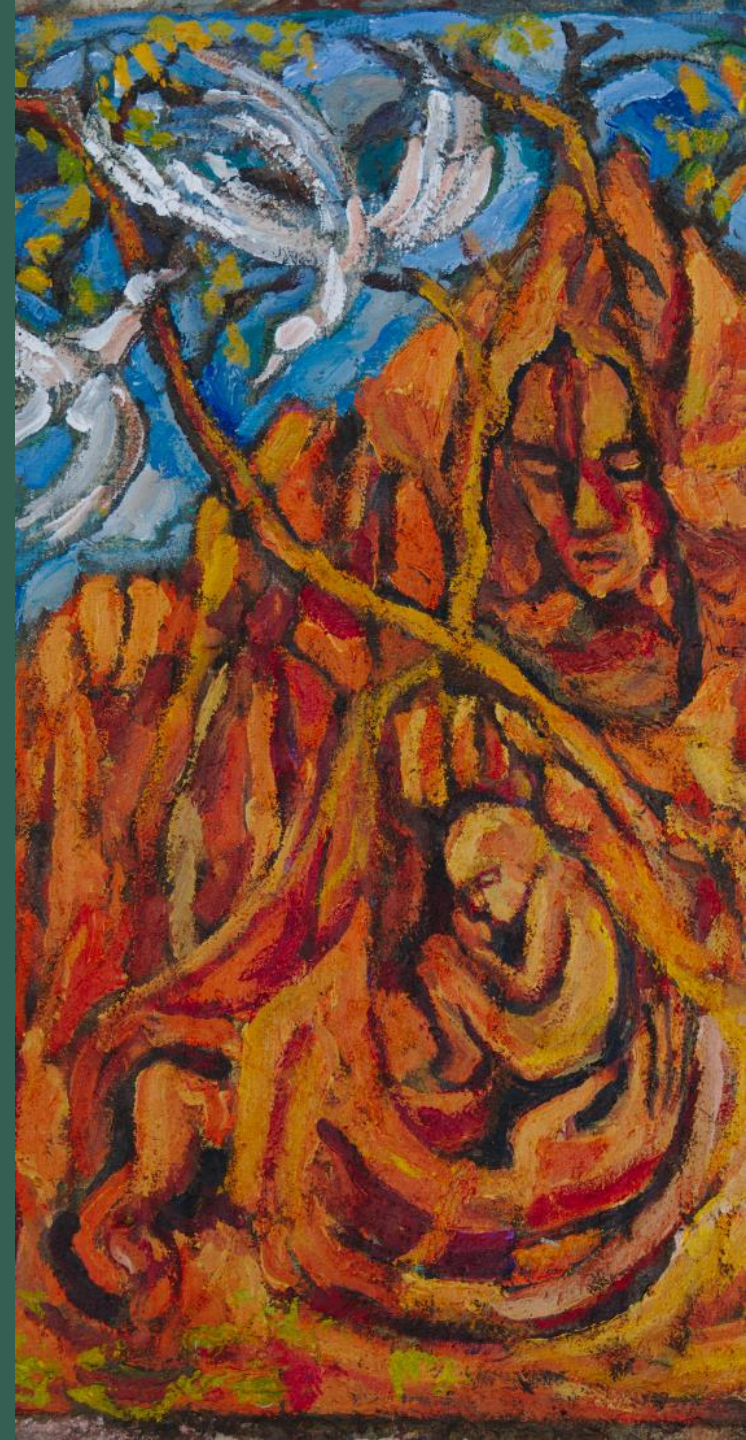
THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Similarly, the events of the last three or four weeks of Jesus' life are of central importance to making sense of the Christian story – as can be seen in the prominent place that narratives about these final days take up in the gospel accounts.

Indeed, it is a common Christian reading to see the events leading up to this period as prophetic of it, as can be seen in Mark 10:45:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many

with a great deal of focus being placed on the events leading up to the Crucifixion – a critical event in the Christian tradition, and one of the key points of divergence between Christian and Islamic narratives of Jesus' life.



Passion Week

Jesus triumphant entrance to Jerusalem
Multitude spreads garments and palm leaves on the ground as he rides an ass into the city.

Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday

Jesus comes across the cursed fig tree - it has withered, Prophecies destruction for his enemies, Olivet discourse, Judas makes a deal with Jewish leaders to betray Jesus.

Mark 11:20
Matthew 21:28-46
Mark 13
Mark 14:10-11

Tuesday

Peter and John find the room for the Passover and make other preparations. Jesus washes disciple's feet, 'The Last Supper', Jesus is betrayed by Judas, Peter denies Jesus 3 times.

Mark 14:13-16
Matthew 26:26
Matthew 26:47-48
Matthew 26:69-75

Thursday

Pilate puts guards on the tomb.

Matthew 27:62-66

Saturday

Monday

Jesus curses the fig tree that had no fruit, Weeps over Jerusalem, Cleanses the temple the second time.

Mark 11:13-14
Luke 19:41
Matthew 21:12

Wednesday

The gospels do not provide events for Wednesday.

Good Friday

Jewish leaders condemn Jesus, Jesus before Pilate, Jesus is beaten, scourged, mocked. Judas hangs himself. Jesus crucified & dies, buried before sunset.

Mark 14:64
Mark 15:1,15,25
Mark 15:37,46

Resurrection Sunday

Jesus rises from the dead, empty tomb, angels appear at tomb, Jesus appears five times to disciples.

Mark 16:6,9,12,14

Isaiah 53:3-5 "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

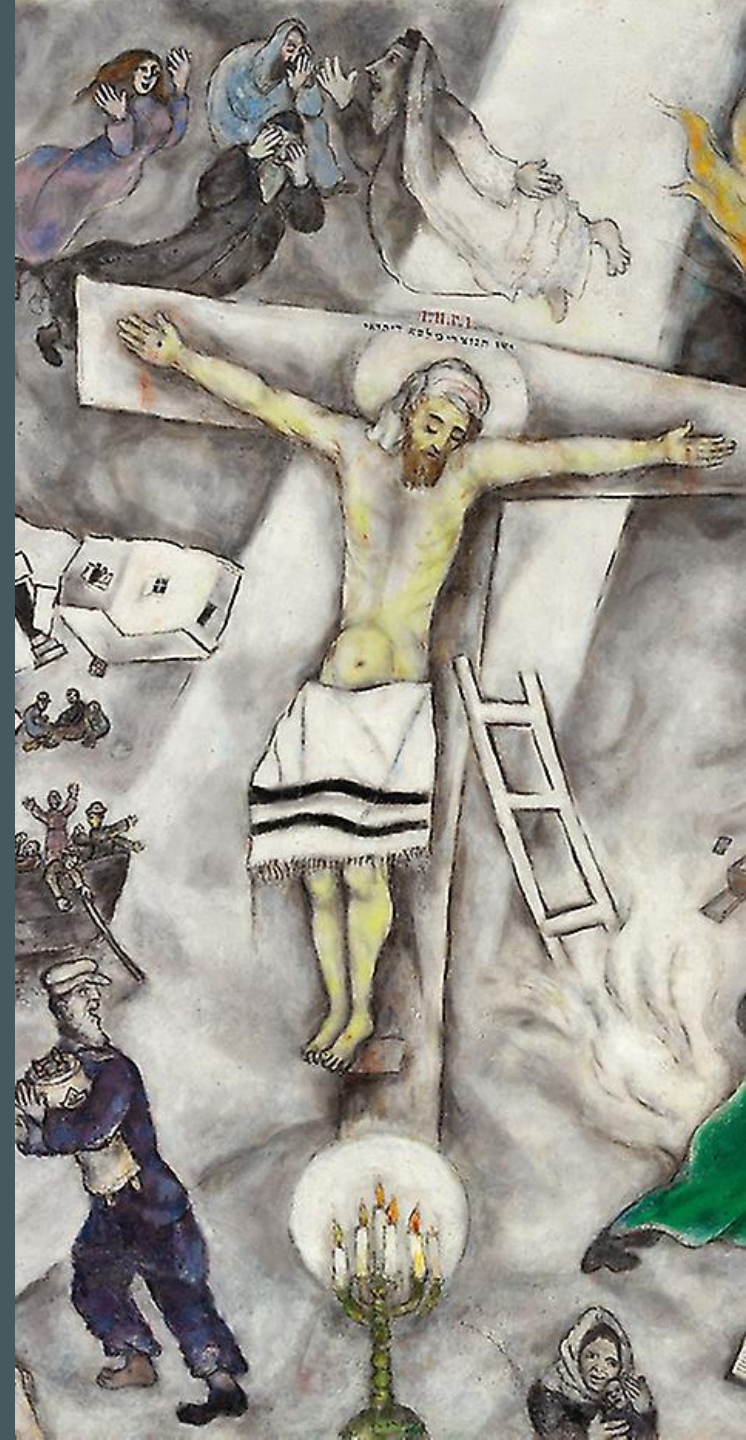
THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Sunday: On the Sunday of the Passion Week, we have the scriptural descriptions of Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem:

John 12:12 - The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!", "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!", "Blessed is the king of Israel!"

Monday: We then have the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus:

Matthew 21:12 - Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers'



THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Tuesday: Jesus debates with the leading religious groups of the time, debating and establishing his authority, for example:

Matthew 11:27-33 - They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin' ..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."





THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Thursday: Thursday is a significant (and busy!) day in the Passion narrative – the betrayal of Christ, the Last Supper, Gethsemane, and the arrest of Jesus all occurring.

Matthew 26:26-28 - While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Matthew 26:49-52 - Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend."

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword".

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Friday: Friday is the culmination of the trial of Jesus, by the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod, leading to his sentencing to crucifixion.

Mark 14:61-64 - Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death.

John 19:15-16 - But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.



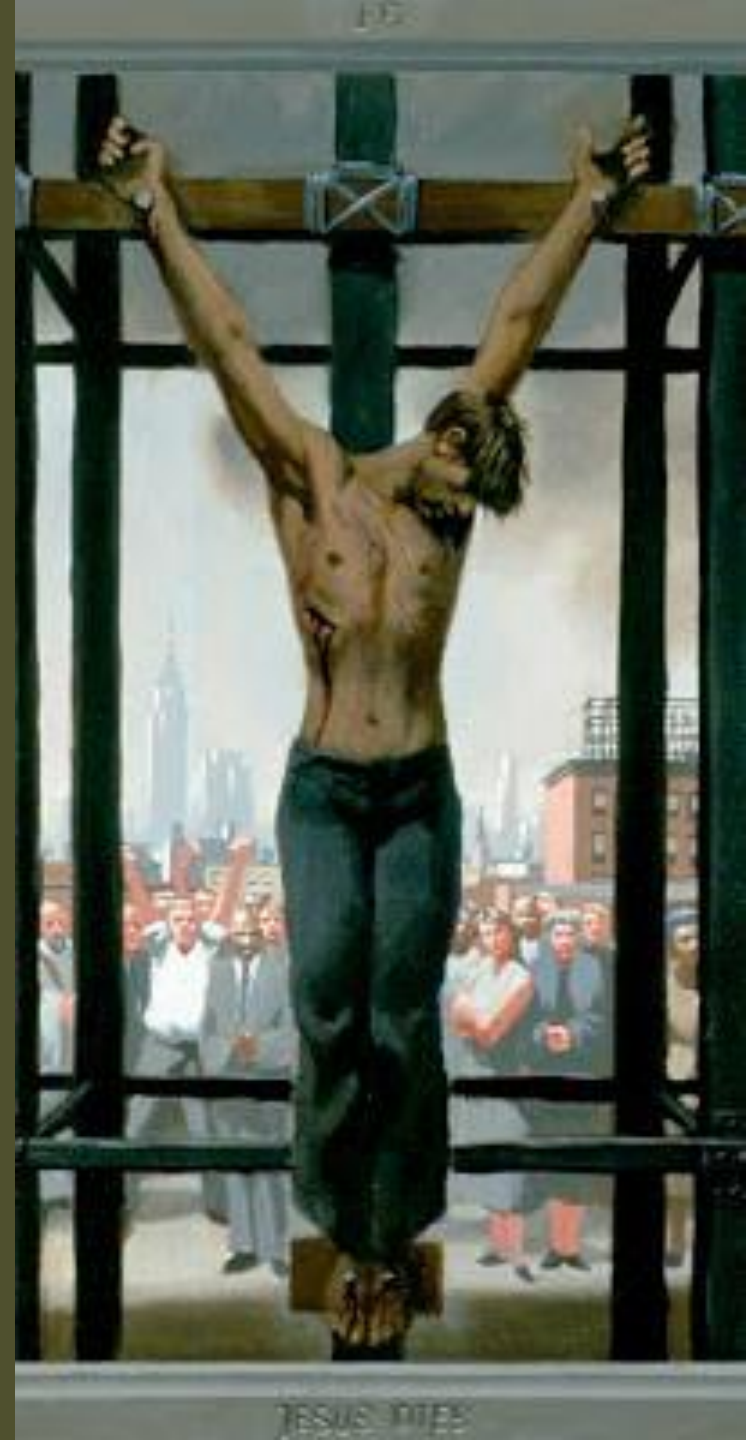
THE PASSION OF CHRIST

The culmination of all this is, of course, the death of Christ on the Cross – that, theologically, seals the salvation of fallen humanity and restores a breach between ourselves and the divine. In the Christian scriptures, it is Christ's last words which bind these themes together, such as:

Luke 23:34 - Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"

Matthew 27:46 - About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")

Luke 23:46 - Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.



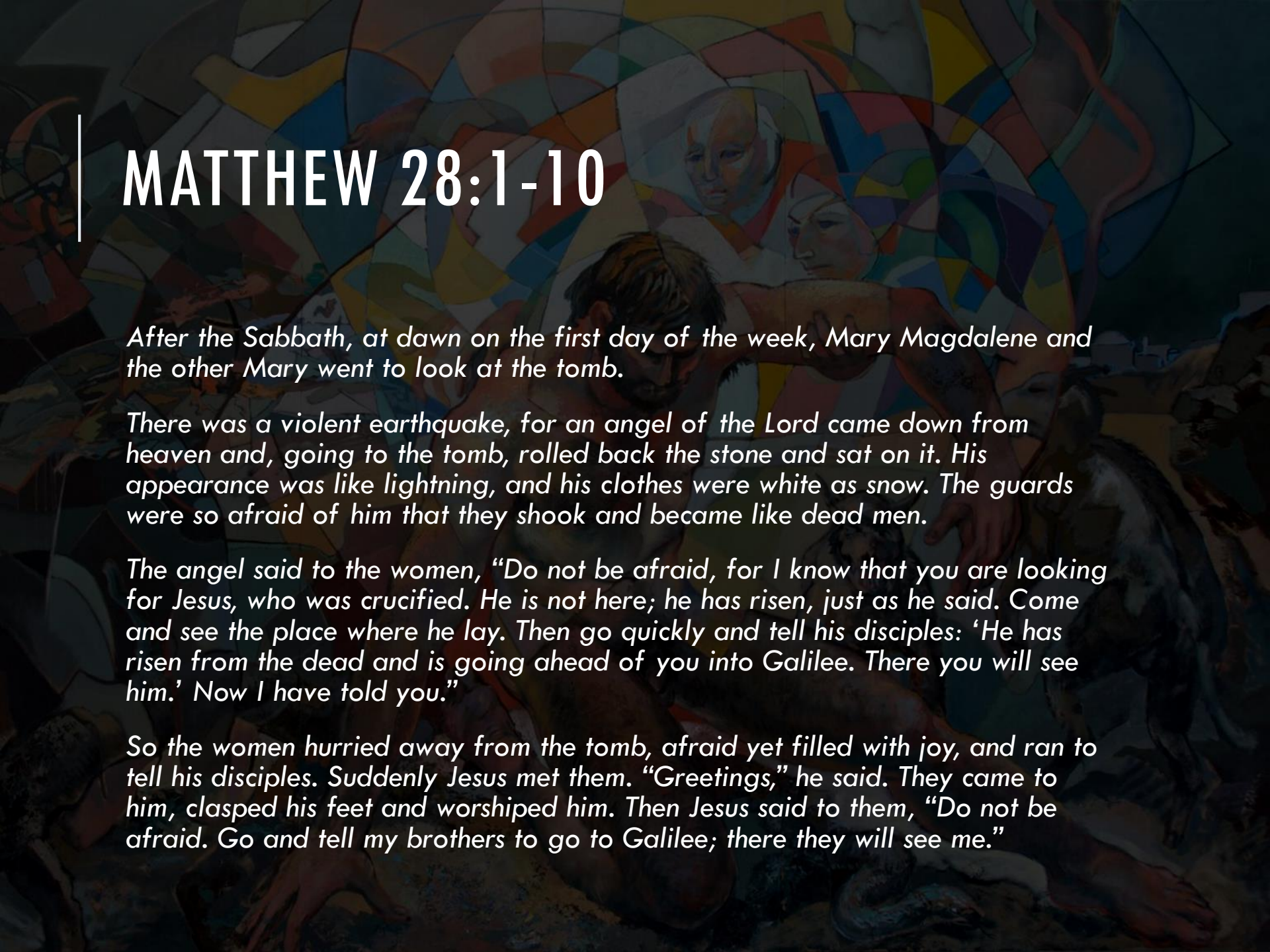
THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The Death of Christ on the Cross is another of the critical moments in the Christian narrative of Jesus, one that precipitates another critical moment, that of the Resurrection – the raising from the dead of Jesus.

This resurrection is seen to predicted in Jesus' own words and actions:

Matthew 16:21 - From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.





MATTHEW 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

ASCENSION OF CHRIST

I wish to leave the Jesus narrative there, and turn quickly to another area of interesting overlap between the place of Jesus in Christianity and in the Islamic tradition – the ascension and future role of Jesus / Isa in the Judgement of Creation.

In the Christian narrative, Jesus ascends to heaven forty days after his resurrection and after conversing and instructing the disciples.

Acts 1:7-9 - He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.



SECOND COMING

Christ is also expected to play a significant role in the judgement of the created order, the apocalypse, the end times. This part of the Christian narrative about Jesus is commonly referred to as the 'second coming' of Christ and is characterised by role as a judge of creation, but also as a blessing to those who have kept faith.

This twin future role can be seen in the following passages relating to the actions ascribed to Jesus in the second coming:



SECOND COMING

Revelation 19:11-16

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.

JESUS IN THE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE

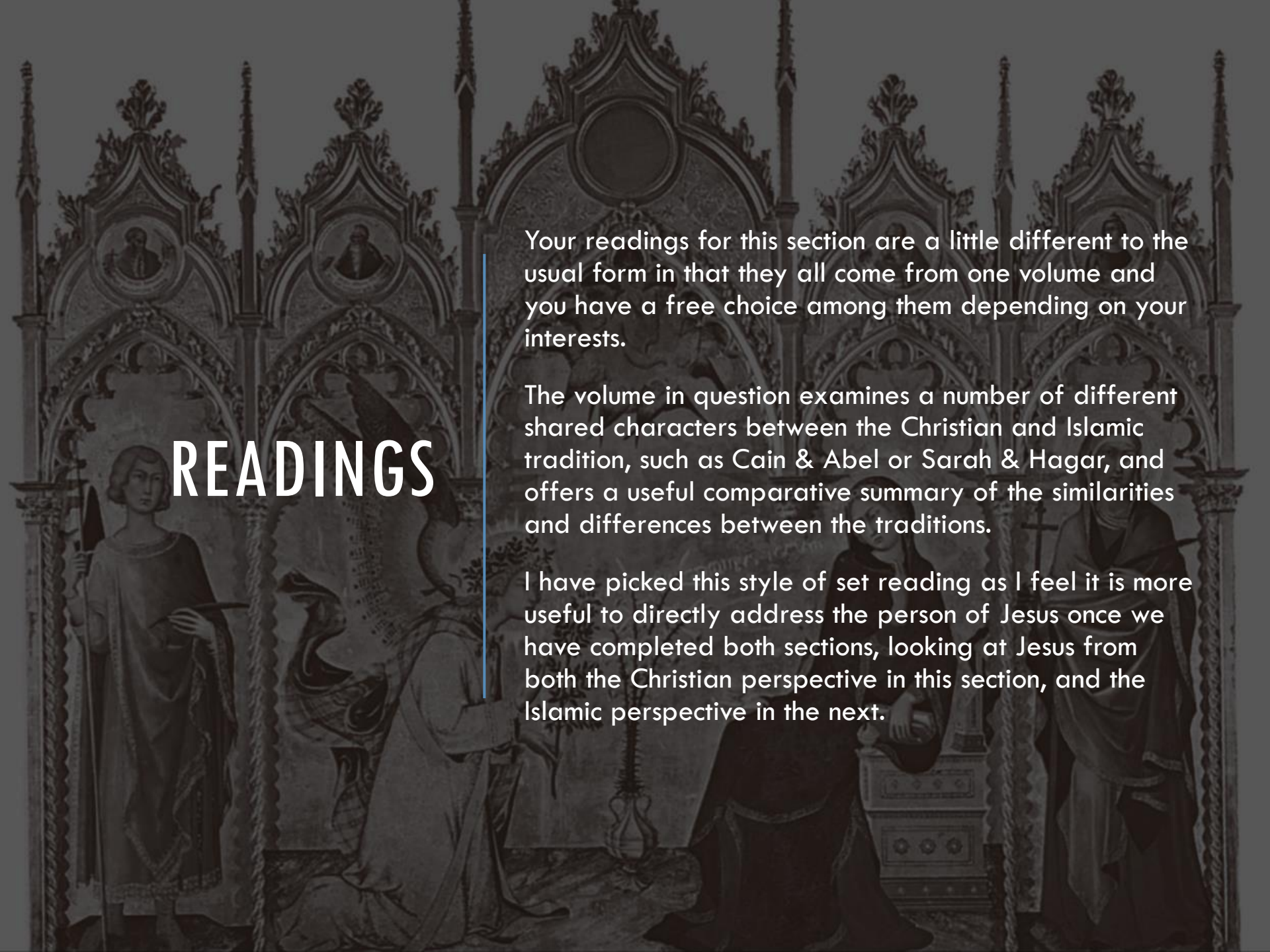
I hope that this section has fruitfully explored some of the key scriptural narratives featuring Jesus in the Christian tradition and developed some of the theological importance that these narratives hold.

In the next section, we will examine the place and role that the figure of Jesus plays in the Islamic tradition, looking at some of the ways in which his role is similar to the Christian narrative, and some of the ways in which his role fundamentally differs.

Along with the nature of God and the nature of scripture itself, these distinctions in belief about Jesus remain one of the key concerns in theological discussion between Christian and Islamic traditions.



READINGS



READINGS

Your readings for this section are a little different to the usual form in that they all come from one volume and you have a free choice among them depending on your interests.

The volume in question examines a number of different shared characters between the Christian and Islamic tradition, such as Cain & Abel or Sarah & Hagar, and offers a useful comparative summary of the similarities and differences between the traditions.

I have picked this style of set reading as I feel it is more useful to directly address the person of Jesus once we have completed both sections, looking at Jesus from both the Christian perspective in this section, and the Islamic perspective in the next.

READINGS

Gregg, R. (2015-10-01). *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.* : Oxford University Press

Pick one part of this volume and read through the four chapters associated with it:

Cain & Abel

Sarah & Hagar

Joseph & Potiphar

Jonah

Mary