

Sunday 20th July 2025; Benefice Holy Communion,
Ampleforth

A question sometimes asked of me is. “If Jesus came back today would anyone recognise him?” Indeed, it begs the question, ‘what do you think he will be like, when he returns? Will you have certain expectations, assumptions, preconceived ideas? Will he be just an extension of ourselves?

Will we try to make Jesus look just like us? Every successive period in Christian history people have promoted their own thoughts on Jesus, to make him live, but have continuously created him according to their own desires, hopes, and character. We don’t realize it, but most of the times when we think we find Jesus, it’s like we are looking into the bottom of a well – all we’re really seeing is a faint reflection of ourselves.

Just look around our church, you can find all sorts of images of Jesus. Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes, Jesus with slight stubble, and Jesus with a full-blown beard. Modern cultures have illustrated Jesus in jeans and a flannel shirt cutting down trees, or in a business suit speaking with clients, and all sorts of diverse ways to reflect the cultures where he is followed.

Undeniably, Jesus is global. He directed his disciples to speak of him in all the ends of the earth, the gospel is for all people and all minds who seek him. Throughout the book of Acts and the epistles Paul uses contexts of particular people to help illuminate the glory of Jesus Christ. For the Colossians, he borrows their philosophical speculations to demonstrate the importance of Christ for the world. He searches for a point of contact and then expresses it again and again until the fullness of God in Christ is established throughout their common

understanding. For the Colossians Paul relates Christ to their Natural Theology, presenting God's unique revelation of himself in Christ in the categories of thought with which they are familiar. He exalts Christ in terms that they would understand and the Good News spread throughout the Mediterranean.

All these portrayals are important. They get at the heart of Jesus being Emmanuel: "God with us." They help to adapt Jesus to a particular culture and set of people, making him and his message relevant and meaningful. However, when we use all these different images of "God with us," We cannot forget that Jesus' identity begins, not with our concepts, but with God, His Father, and we know Him not with our heads and concepts but with our hearts and souls.

St Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, fully God and fully human. The word for image in Greek means likeness or a representation; in other words, Jesus is not merely a picture of God but contains and expresses God's likeness and divinity.

We cannot create Jesus in our own image. Instead, we gather here to worship God who became flesh in the man Jesus, the man who walked and talked among us, revealing God's love and drawing us back to a loving relationship with Him. We don't need to adapt Jesus to concepts of our making, but instead we must adapt ourselves and the way we live to Him. We, like Paul, are apprentices of Jesus Christ whose calling is to make the Word of God known by the Holy Spirit working in and through us. The scripture today helps to remind us of who Jesus Christ is, and that we must not try to shape Him to us but be shaped by Him to be His body in the world. God has chosen to show us

the riches and glory of this mystery, we're not Jesus, but Jesus is in us and is leading us all toward the future glory.

Thanks be to God. Amen.