

There is a television programme, in fact I think the BBC have made something like 20 series of this programme, which I have always had a mild interest in, but have only watched one or two episodes, until I started thinking about our gospel reading for today. That programme is called, "Who do you think you are?". I'm sure some of you will have seen at least some of them, but for those who haven't what happens is that with the help of various historians and newly discovered family members, a celebrity is able to trace some of their family history. I picked a programme to watch the other day to get an idea of how it worked, and it was about the actress Olivia Coleman. Olivia knew that her father's family were very much Norfolk based – in fact she had always considered that being from Norfolk was the most interesting aspect of her family – but she knew very little about her mother's side, although there was some talk of a lady in the family at one point having come from France.

Well to cut a long story short, it turned out that something like her great great great great great grandmother was in fact Indian – her, the same number of greats, grandfather being a British army officer based in India, and in those times no respectable English lady would go and live in India and so it was quite often the case that an English Officer and an Indian lady would marry and have children together.

And much of the programme was about building up a picture of this couple's daughter's life, and through this they indeed discover that someone, I can't quite remember who, did in fact marry a French lady. All in all, it made a very interesting story.

For some time now on Sunday mornings we have been following Jesus' life – particularly the three years that we consider to be his ministry, through the writings of Matthew in his gospel. Almost at the beginning of this gospel we have one of the two descriptions in the bible of the birth of Jesus, but before that we have what is described as the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. So starting with Abraham, that great man of the Old Testament on whom God promised to build a nation, we have the line of sons going through Isaac and Jacob to Joseph (of the fancy coat), through Obed (whose mother was Ruth about whom one of the most beautiful books of the bible is written), through lots of the successful and unsuccessful kings of Judah, eventually arriving at Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, to Jesus himself. So, we can trace Jesus' descendants back, pretty much, all the way. So, if the question was put to Jesus, "who do you think you are?" he would surely have known – as do we.

Which all leaves us somewhat confused by the two questions Jesus asks in our gospel reading this morning. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" and then directly to his disciples, "But what about you, who do you say I am?" And it is that last question that I want to focus on this morning – if Jesus was to be physically in this building this morning, after all we are promised that one day Jesus will return and we must be ready for that, how would we respond if he asked us, "Who do you say that I am?"

But first let's try and clear up that first question a bit, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" "The son of man" is one of Jesus' favourite ways of naming himself – at least according to Matthew. So, his question is, "Who do people say I am" and the answer given is, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Why would people say one of these? Well, Herod had very recently had John the Baptist killed, and there were some people who really believed that John the Baptist had come back to, almost haunt, Herod. Not the most likely of stories, but that's probably where that came from.

And why Elijah. Well, it could be because the prophet Malachi – as told to us in the last 2 verses of what we now know as the Old Testament said, "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes."

And this would have been part of the people's scriptures at the times and some people quite possibly thought that Jesus was the promised returning Elijah. And similarly, there are other prophets in the Old Testament who we are told will return.

So, there was general confusion over who Jesus was. The people were divided. None of these "people" were correct. None of the people said, "The Son of God", or "The messiah".

Which all means the second question, "Who do you say that I am?" becomes the most important question that we as followers of Jesus Christ have to be able to answer. If we cannot answer that question, how do we say to other people who Jesus is?

Have you noticed that many people these days are very uncomfortable talking about Jesus? Yes, people are by and large happy to talk about God, probably because God is this great, almost unknown, almost indescribable, being – so indescribable that people are happy to give their views on God. But Jesus – oh that's a different question altogether.

Jesus, lived, died, and rose again from the dead – and pretty much everyone who has considered the evidence of what happened two thousand years ago, accepts that is what happened. There is no reason to question it except that people cannot get their heads around why it happened.

Who do you say that I am?

Most people don't appear to want to answer that question. Because of that I am not surprised that the vast majority of people want to secularise Christmas and Easter. Christmas is a holiday time for giving gifts. Easter – well let's replace Jesus with a bunny. Those two great Christian festivals – when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus, are sadly not important to most people anymore – and yet they so should be.

In working out our answer we are given some help by Simon Peter who says as his answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And just for once Simon Peter appears to have got something right as Jesus goes on to say that this answer was clearly revealed to him by God, and that Peter would have at least something key to do with the building of the church, and something to do with the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Huge responsibilities apparently because he gave a good answer to the question, but I don't know about you but that little speech by Jesus requires an awful lot of thinking about – which doesn't necessarily help us in our search for an answer this morning so let's focus on what Simon Peter actually said. Who do you say that I am – You are the Son of God. Well, that is a pretty good starting point isn't it in looking for an answer, and it isn't an answer we would get from that list of his descendants at the beginning of Matthew's gospel.

But how does that impact on who He is for you? Is he the Saviour? Is he your Saviour? Is he your personal Saviour? In the introduction to the baptism service this morning Angela talked about a journey, how baptism is the beginning of a journey in faith for Emelia and Bobby. The journey, over time, will bring them to the answer to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" That journey will bring them, as it will bring us all, to Jesus being our personal Saviour.

I actually think that it is a really good exercise for each and every one of us to do from time to time – to picture Jesus walking through that door, and working out what we would say in answer to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" and there isn't a right and wrong answer to that question, because it is perfectly reasonable that we can all have slightly different answers to the question. Jesus gave us lots of names for himself and some might help you with your answer, and some might not.

We started off today with Jesus calling himself "The Son of Man."

and then there is "the life"

After the feeding of many thousands of people Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"

To his friend Martha when talking to her about her dead brother Lazarus before raising him from the dead Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die"

And when Jesus was talking to his disciples about making a place for them in heaven and telling them that they knew the way to the place where he was going, and Thomas responded that they didn't know the way and how were they to find out the way, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life"

And there's loads more names that Jesus gave himself which may really speak to you:

I am the gate for the sheep, I am the good shepherd, I am the light of the world, I am the vine – you are the branches. Jesus really tries to help us see him in a way that is meaningful to each of us. But we have to work out what works for us, for each of us personally.

Yes it is good to spend times with our bibles, learning what happened when Jesus was on earth; learning about the early church, and learning all about what those old testament books teach us about Jesus – but what is just as important is that we make time in our lives for Jesus, to spend time with him in prayer – so that we can truly love him, and we can equally feel the love that he has for us. And we can answer the question for ourselves. But there are no short cuts. Welcome to that journey.

"Who do you say that Jesus is?"

Amen