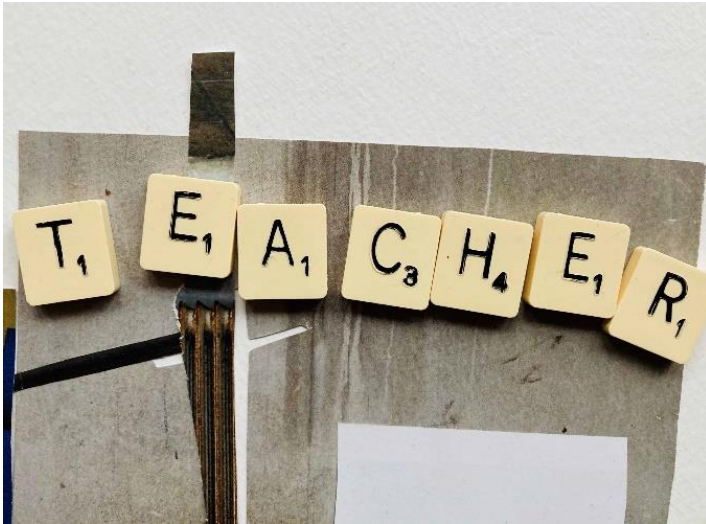


# Advent Thought for the Day 1-4 December by Melanie Seward

## Tuesday 1 December

*And he was called... 'Teacher'*



*When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, he said, "We know that you are a teacher who has come from God" (John 3. 2).*

Jesus was called 'teacher' by everyone, including the crowds of ordinary people. He taught in ways that connected to their daily living; he used images from farming, shepherding and fishing. He used ordinary, everyday incidents from the lives of the rich and the poor and even those of women!

But the fact that such large numbers gathered to listen demonstrates that it was more than this. In Matthew's Gospel, the people respond to the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount not with politeness or interest or even thankfulness, but with 'amazement'. Why? Because "He taught as one having authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Matthew 7. 29). There was something about his

teaching that hit people between the eyes and rang true in the depths of their hearts.

He did not sound like the teachers they knew who were always quoting each other by rote. They recognised something of God. And not just in his words, but primarily in the way he lived his life being with them.

He taught by example, prompting thoughts, explaining again, listening with compassion, showing the Way to living a new life. And he still teaches us today in the same way, if we will walk with him.

## Wednesday 2 December

And he was called... **'Master'**



In Mark 10. 51, when Jesus encounters a blind man and asks the man if he wants to receive his sight, the man answers, "*Master, let me receive my sight.*"

In the time of Jesus, the title rabbi carried the meaning 'Great one' or 'My master'. It was given to teachers of advanced understanding, gained from considerable extended study, often undertaken while working to support themselves. Rabbis commanded significant respect, many of them travelled and taught at local synagogues. They became the teachers of the teachers. The Mishnah, the recorded oral explanation of the Torah, saw thirty years as being the age when a man had the authority to teach others. This fits with what we know of Jesus.

People turned out in huge numbers, other teachers wanted to question Jesus and some people made a commitment to follow and travel with him. These disciples soaked up his words and observed his actions, sensed his love of God and

compassion for others. They saw him befriend the vulnerable and the outcast, put individuals before rules and institutions. They witnessed a Master who was interested in people and who loved them; a Master who washed their feet and allowed himself to be sacrificed for the good of all peoples. A Master who was, and is, defined not just by authority but by love and service. Their eyes were opened to a new way of believing and living with God.

Called to be disciples today, we are invited to get to know Jesus and his teaching, to become apprentices in living His Way, to learn from the expert teacher of all teachers, 'the Master'.

*O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my Guide.*

(Hymn by John Ernest Bode)

## Thursday 3 December

*And he was called... 'Son of Man'*



*'As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.'* (Matthew 26. 2)

'Son of man' was used in the Old Testament in a similar way as 'Son of Adam' – to mean 'like a man' or 'human being'. Some of Jesus' statements use the phrase to point to his humanity, in that we are all sons (and daughters) of men (and women). In addition, 'Son of Man' can be understood to allude to a figure found in the Book of Daniel. Here the 'Son of Man' comes with clouds of heaven and is to build an everlasting kingdom. The ancient of Days (God) gives him dominion and glory. His kingdom will enfold all peoples (Daniel 7. 13-14).

Many people identified Jesus as Messiah – the anointed one sent by God, descended from King David, who would be the salvation of His people. However, most saw Jesus the Messiah as a military and political power who would overcome the

might of the Roman Empire. Jesus is a very different kind of Messiah, so Jesus uses 'Son of Man' (the one who comes with the clouds of heaven) to speak of the nature of his mission and his future role.

We can all imagine a Jesus in terms of our own prejudices and needs. This Advent, we can take the opportunity to peel back the layers and look for Jesus, the Son of Man. How is he working with humanity to build the Kingdom of God today? And can we be inspired by a divine plan to bring all peoples together rather than turn to nationalism and military might?

## Friday 4 December

*And he was called... 'Child'*



*'After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshipped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.'* (Matthew 2. 11)

The New Testament tells us little about Jesus as a child beyond the birth narratives. Hints consist of an elderly man and woman who recognise Jesus as the Messiah, a mention of 'His increasing wisdom' and His visit to the Temple aged 12, where he shows an aptitude for study. People wanted to know more and assumed the childhood of Jesus must have been miraculous. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Pseudo-Infancy 'Gospels' claimed a demon-possessed child was cured by contact with Jesus' swaddling clothes and others healed by Jesus' bathwater. Jesus recites the Hebrew alphabet before it's taught to him. Jesus makes clay animals that move, eat and fly.

But they were missing the whole point - God comes down to earth and is born as a Child. He grows up just like us - albeit he has Mary as a Mother. He does not arrive as a mini superman-god able to use his powers to click his fingers and magic the earth. Instead, he experiences the fullness of humanity with all its joys and sorrow, challenges and frustrations. He doesn't take any shortcuts.

In Christ, God becomes fully man and fully human. When, as a baby, Jesus falls - he will cry with pain and shock. When, as a grown man, he is nailed to the Cross - he will endure an agonising death that is no less real for being Emmanuel, God with us. We have a God who knows what it is to be us - this should give us confidence that we are understood and loved. Our God will hear us.