**Jesus Through the Eyes of Matthew**

**The human face of God**

If Jesus in Mark’s gospel was hidden, enigmatic, absent; Matthew’s Jesus is transparent and explicit. Matthew gives us the revelation of God, in the presence of Jesus. The symbol always associated with Matthew’s gospel is the human face. In the ancient near east, human form symbolized revelation and intelligence. Jesus comes to reveal God to us. He is quite literally the “human face of God.”

**Painting 1: Rembrandt: *The Face of Jesus* 1648**

The painting on the board is one from a series of 5 that Rembrandt painted and can now be found in galleries in Europe and America. Rembrandt asked a Jewish friend to model for him so that he could paint from still life, a technique not commonly used in his day. He has become one of us, that we might be become like him.

**Human and divine he is worshipped**

In Matthew, Jesus’ divinity and humanity are made explicit right from the first chapters. The first 17 verses of the gospel are a genealogy emphasizing his Jewish heritage, with a couple of gentile women included, Ruth and Rahab, pointing to his mission being wider than Israel. The birth narratives are told from Joseph’s point of view, through events and dreams, with Jesus’ divinity being made clear through the meaning of his names. Jesus – God is Salvation; Emmanuel – God is with us. Being worshipped by wise men, lepers, women and disciples, further reveals his divine identity.

**Painting 2: Edward Burne Jones: *The Star of Bethlehem* 1890**

This painting I could go and see in my lunch hour when I was a social worker in Birmingham. Completed by Burne Jones in 1890, it is the largest watercolour of the 19th century, standing at 8 ½ft high and 12ft wide. It was commissioned by the City of Birmingham for their new art gallery at the time. In the painting the angel holds the star, while the wise men pay homage. The attention to fine and intricate detail within this painting becomes the artist’s worship.

**The new Moses – teacher of Israel**

Having established his credentials, his ministry is one of teacher, as he is understood as the new Moses. His 5 sermons (chapters 5-7, 20,13,18, 23-25) are viewed as the new Pentateuch and, being delivered from mountains, mirror Mount Sinai and the giving of the law. Instead of God, present in the cloud above the mountain, God is now present in human form as Jesus, teacher amongst the people.

**Painting 3: Laura James: *The Sermon on the Mount* 2010**

Laura James lives in The Bronx and paints in an Ethiopian style. This painting is found in the illustrated gospel, called *The Book of the Gospels,* which includes 34 vibrant images of the life of Christ. In this multi cultural painting, Jesus teaches the people about the role of the church. Matthew is the only gospel that uses the word church, making clear that it is to be characterised by humility, compassion, and forgiveness and its role is to call everyone to the Kingdom.

**The Cross – The teacher of Israel opens the Kingdom to everyone.**

In Matthew, Jesus goes to the cross by choice in order that scripture should be fulfilled and his cry of dereliction from the cross, *My God why have you abandoned* *me*, is answered with supernatural response. There is earthquake and the temple curtain is torn in two. Even the gentiles may now have access to the Holy of Holies. In this account, all the bystanders along with the centurion, acknowledge him as the Son of God.

**Painting 4: Unknown Artist: *The Temple Curtain in Torn in Two***

I have used this painting on several occasions in my work with young people, to recount the events of Holy Week. Note the ripped patterning on the curtain including the menorah and the angels reminiscent of those found on the Ark of the Covenant. It symbolically captures the decisive moment, when God’s inclusive love and mercy break through and the old covenant is transformed into the new, open to all people.

**The Resurrection – death is transformed**

The brief account of the resurrection found in Mark’s gospel is transformed in chapter 28 of Matthew’s account and is once again characterised by supernatural activity. Both the women visiting the tomb and the guards witness another earthquake and an angel descending from heaven to roll back the stone. We see again that everything is clear, transparent and witnessed and the women rush off to tell the disciples and share their joy.

**Painting 5: Joseph Zacek: *Period of Light* 1988**

I have to confess that I do find abstract art stimulating and this, along with the Rembrandt, is probably one of my favourites. It can be found in The Gallery of Modern Art in Roudnice in the Czech Republic and was influenced by the artist’s own spiritual journey at the time of the “Velvet Revolution.” The light radiates into the darkness as a beacon of hope, having no source except itself. The central rectangle of light is surrounded by the shadow of a cross, Christ’s death and resurrection cannot be separated and it is only through entering into both that we can share in His new life. Through the framing of the cross, a door is created; on one level referencing the empty tomb, but on another level calling the observer to enter through the portal into risen life with Christ - beautiful creative symbolism.

**Go and teach others as I have taught you.**

Finally, Matthew’s Jesus makes it very clear what our role and task is to be and in chapter 28 we learn that, as we have been taught, so we should go and teach others. Embodying his name Emmanuel - God is with us, given in chapter 1 – he states that He will be with us always.

**Painting 6: Unknown Artist: *The Great Commission***

This colourful lively multicultural painting shows people from all the nations, focused on Jesus, the Teacher, Saviour and Commissioner, who will be with them until the end of time.

**Rev Julia January 2016**