

But the best place to get at that truth if you are new to it probably isn't in the cinema or the TV, nor even through reading the Bible on your own, but through the Church, which has had two thousand years to think about what the death and resurrection of Jesus mean for us.

Every Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter) most churches will include at least one complete reading of what we call the Passion Story, as well as reflections on these central texts through hymns, sermons and prayers, and the chance to talk about all this with other people who are asking the same questions, but perhaps are further along in the journey of understanding.

Why does it still matter?

When Jesus went to the cross, he experienced the very worst that human beings are capable of doing to each other. And yet the resurrection shows us that such sin and evil do not have the last word, and that renewal, new life, complete forgiveness and a genuine fresh start are possible with God. The cross shows that, like a Father, God would go to any lengths to save us, his precious children. Because of God's great love for us in sending Jesus to do what he did, this sort of fresh start and new life are available to everyone who asks, and we too can enjoy a relationship with God that will change our lives.

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Why did Jesus die?



Maybe you have seen Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of the Christ' or the BBC 'The Passion' series (first shown March 2008), and they have left you with more questions than answers, or perhaps it is a question that has always bothered you? It is a question with lots of possible answers!

The gospels tell of a plot by the religious leaders because of Jesus' (to their ears) offensive claims to be the Son of God.

But Jesus was crucified (nailed to a cross), a method of execution employed chiefly by the Romans, who ruled the Holy Land at the time. To them, Jesus was a political trouble-maker, who could rouse the oppressed Jewish people into rebellion.

The risk of unrest was very real: Jesus died at the Passover, a time when Jerusalem was flooded with visitors from elsewhere in the Holy Land, emotions and religious fervour were running high, and the Romans may have had good reasons to be worried about keeping the peace.

A small-scale unsuccessful rebellion would have been disastrous for the Jewish community – the Romans were not known for being merciful to the nations they occupied. (in fact, in AD70, around 40 years after Jesus' death, this is exactly what happened). Did the Jewish leaders silence Jesus to guard against the risk of Roman retaliation for a rebellion?

Crucifixion was a deliberately cruel, public way of executing someone, and was used as a warning by Romans, to show people what would happen to those who stepped out of line. So crucifixion is just the supreme example of the sort of cruelty and desire for power that can be found in all human cultures, and Jesus therefore died as a result of the sheer cruelty that human beings are willing to inflict on each other – in short, as a result of human sinfulness, pride and fear.

And what about Jesus' own motivations for acting in the way he did? He acted in a way that would encourage the crowds to claim him as the prophesied Messiah knowing that this was an action almost guaranteed to get him into trouble. He predicted his own death (and resurrection) several times, explaining what it meant. And he refused to defend himself at his trial. These are not the actions of a victim of circumstance, but the considered decisions of someone who knows that they have a vocation to fulfill, no matter what the personal cost.

Is it true?

The films about the Passion of Jesus contain much that is true to the gospel accounts, and also quite a bit of poetic license! Anyone who has seen any of the films should consider reading 'the book of the film' – the Bible's four different gospel accounts of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection.

But more importantly, is the story of Jesus true?

The answer is undoubtedly yes. Aside from the archaeological evidence, there is a wealth of corroborating textual evidence that demonstrates that the bare bones of the Passion and Easter story are indeed true. The very fact that the four gospel accounts differ in their detail suggests that they are using independent sources, and independent sources are unlikely to coincide on the main points if they're the product of lies or delusions.