

## INTRODUCTION



The young college student boarded the subway heading for her internship in downtown Washington, DC, just as she had every day that summer. Following her now-typical routine, she squeezed into the crowded train for the half-hour ride to her office and opened her small Gideon Bible to the Gospels. Twenty years of Sunday Masses had given her a certain familiarity with the stories of the Bible, especially the accounts of the life of Jesus. Yet for some reason, in these months something was different. Instead of rehashing lifeless tales, she was discovering beautiful details about our Lord that she had never perceived. Whereas before the Gospels were dry narratives floating somewhere in the back of her consciousness, now the inspired words of Scripture leapt off the small pages and entered her heart. In a summer of grace, she was changed forever as she unlocked the mysteries of Scripture and encountered Christ in those sacred pages.

This true story reflects the power of the Bible, and especially of the Gospels, to lead us into an encounter with Christ that changes our lives. The inspired Word of God can lead us to a direct experience with the incarnate Word of God. It is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). But too often our reading of the Bible becomes stale and ineffective, leading us nowhere. Our initially exciting reading of the Sacred Word wanes over the years into a monotonous routine. How often have we heard the Word of God proclaimed in our churches and forgotten the words two minutes later? How often do we read a passage from our Bibles without it having any impact on our lives? Yet the Scriptures

contain the mysteries of life and the means to joyful living! They are a primary avenue to encounter Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6).

The transformative power of the Scriptures has been proved in every generation: saints throughout the centuries have allowed the Bible to be the “two-edged sword” it proclaims itself to be. St. Anthony of the Desert abandoned his wealthy lifestyle in an instant after hearing the Gospel passage about the rich young man. St. Francis of Assisi wanted to make the Gospels the rule for his new order and spent his whole life conforming himself to the Jesus he found in those four books. These and many other saints were able to unlock the mystery of the Bible in such a way that it had life-changing implications. What is that mystery? *Every page of the Bible contains the potential for a life-changing encounter with Christ.*

How can we then unlock that mystery so that our own lives can be transformed? This book is intended to help you do just that.

In these pages I hope to lead you to a glimpse of the unbounded treasures of the Sacred Page, so that after glimpsing what it contains — whether for the first time or the thousandth — you will be able to more deeply explore the Scriptures for all their wonder and beauty. And there is no greater treasure to be found in the Bible than Jesus Christ himself. Christ is waiting to be discovered in the pages of the Bible, and it is of course in the Gospels where we meet him, as it were, face-to-face.

It is vitally important then to continually focus on the Gospels. The Church values these four documents more than any other writing, for only there can we find the words of Jesus himself. These incomparable and inspired writings reveal in a unique way aspects of the identity of Jesus, for, in addition to containing the very words of Christ, they offer the accounts of those who encountered him during his time on earth. They open a window into the realm of the person of Jesus, allowing us to see him as those who knew him did. Who did they think this man was? What were their hopes

and dreams and fears regarding him? By examining Jesus through the eyes of his contemporaries, we can become more intimate with our Lord.

And yet the Gospels are not to be isolated from all the other sources of information about Christ, such as the writings of the Church Fathers, the lives of the saints, and the prayers of the Church. Each Gospel was written in the context of a believing and worshipping community founded by Christ himself, and was compiled with the purpose of demonstrating Christ's unique position in the plan of salvation. They were handed on from generation to generation, studied, and interpreted by saints and scholars in both East and West. But they are not simply dry texts insipidly studied by scholars; in every generation, men and women have been transformed by the inspired words they have found in the Gospels. By looking at centuries-old interpretations of these books — interpretations both written and lived — we are given fresh insights into their meaning. For these reasons, this book will make use of the entire tradition of the Church to dig deeper into the Sacred Word.

There are many ways to approach a study of Jesus in the Scriptures. Here, I take but one: an examination of the titles and names given to Jesus by those who knew him, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. In each chapter I study a single title or name, from the exalted (“Son of God”) to the erroneous (“Ghost”), and reflect on how that appellation and the context in which it occurs deepen our understanding of the person of Jesus. Why does Jesus refer to himself as the “bridegroom”? What does it mean for us that the people of Nazareth dismiss him as a simple “carpenter’s son”? What are the consequences of Christ being the “Lord of the Sabbath”? These and all the titles given to Jesus represent a single facet of the multidimensional person of the God-man. By restricting ourselves to the study of just one Gospel, we can

explore that author's intentions in recording these specific titles. The evangelists had a myriad of names for Jesus they could have documented in their Gospels, but they chose the ones that would convey the overall picture of Christ they had in mind. Why does Matthew only record the title "Rabbi" on Judas' lips? What overall point did he want to communicate by his usage of the title "Son of God"?

As we examine each title and name given to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, I pray that you will unlock some of the mysteries in the Gospel of Matthew and thereby encounter Christ in a new way, coming to a deeper appreciation of the beauty and grandeur that is our Savior.

And if you are wondering what happened to that young woman who read her Bible each day on the subway, she still loves to read the Scriptures. How do I know? A few years after that summer, I married her.