



GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2025

The Cast of the First Christmas



'It takes one to know one,' goes the popular saying. Consequently, people made in the image of God (though sometimes far from God-like) should be well placed to recognise the imprimatur of their creator. While the God of scientific acumen is evident in the wonders of creation, when we alight on the Christmas story there are also signs—not so much of the God of science but of the God of artistry and poetry.

The skill of human artists and poets brings concentrated meaning through painting or verse; every aspect of the image, every careful selection of a word contributes powerfully to the whole. So it is with the key cast members which God assembled around the central event of the birth of his son.

Who can miss the significance of the impoverished environment, the contrast in social class between the shepherds and the magi; the association with the whole of creation—from lowly animals to a majestic star—and the tender loving gaze of mother and father upon the child. A simply wonderful form of highly concentrated communication that points clearly to the comprehensive plan God has in mind in arranging this earth shaking event.

Joy to the world! The Lord has come!

A View From The Chair



You might imagine that GTN would want to analyse Christmas in one way or another. After all, that's what we do... isn't it? Whether it's about the way the universe works or the way our bodies work, we analyse and interpret - in search of understanding. And time and again we find ourselves concluding, WOW!

And in all of that, the interplay between faith and understanding comes to the fore. There are many who insist that understanding needs to come first, before a person is able to believe but it was St Anselm who suggested that faith drives the desire to understand. GTN exists in the midst of that and we hope that 2025 has been a year in which you've enjoyed that interchange and been stimulated by it.

But this we know: there are aspects of our Christian faith which will never be subject to scientific enquiry and which only ever be marvelled at.

God stepping into our neighbourhood, in our human form, is at the top of that list. Yes, we believe that Jesus was fully human and so his heart would have pumped like ours; blood flowed through his veins and arteries, as with us, and he was subject to the complexities of the neurological pathways—as we are too.

And yet... and yet... God was uniquely in Christ. There are times when for us, the only response is to marvel and worship and to bow in humility.

On behalf of everyone at GTN I take this opportunity to wish you a wonderful wow-filled Christmas and a much-blessed New Year.

Very Rev Dr Martin Fair
Chair, Grasping the Nettle

Supporting GTN Financially

Thanks to all who support GTN by participating in events, promotion of activities and, not least of all, with financial support. Donations to GTN can be given at www.graspingthenettle.org/donate.



The resources provided through GTN—such as The Jesus Question—can only emerge as a result of grant funding from individuals and foundations. To donate to the productions write for details to office@graspingthenettle.org

GTN Online Recent and Future

Whereas Charles Dickens' ghosts of Christmas past, present and future were spectre-like and immaterial, GTN online past and future are definitely real.



Prof John Wyatt presented Matters of Life and Death

The Recent Past

And the nettles being grasped are of real significance to us all in days of substantial change in society.

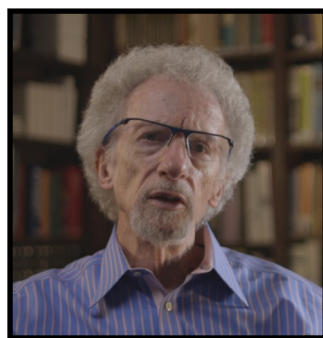
Our October 2025 session alighted on the changing social attitudes to end of life matters. Professor John Wyatt of UCL presented a balanced view of the issues with his personal assessment expressing deep concerns about the move towards assisted dying.

Our November event took a hard look at the mental health implications of society's increasing obsession with social media. Professor Glynn Harrison of Bristol University not only exposed the dangers of the allure of social media but addressed the question of what we can do about mitigating its harmful effects.

Both of the above sessions are available to view at www.graspingthenettle.org/watch.



Prof Glynn Harrison helped answer the question: Is Social Media Causing a Mental Health Crisis?



Philip Yancey will ask 'Where is God When it Hurts?'

The Near Future

In January we will turn to the Christian world's contemporary guru on the problem of suffering. Colorado-based Philip Yancey is a prolific author on the topic. It is a huge privilege for GTN to host him for our session on **Wednesday 21st January 2026**.

On **Wednesday 25th February 2026** we will face up to the Dawkins claim that 'the God of the Old Testament is the most unpleasant character in all of fiction'.

Leading our investigation will be Professor and author Paul Copan from Palm Beach Atlantic University. Some of his book titles indicate his credentials to speak on this topic "Is God a Moral Monster?"; "Did God Really Command Genocide?"

We will soon be inviting registrations for these sessions.



Prof Paul Copan will help us understand more about the ethics of the Old Testament.

The Jesus Question

A Brand New Major Resource from Search for Truth

Following on from the landmark **The God Question** series—which has spread around the world—Search for Truth Charitable Trust is fulfilling its long term plan to address two other related inquiries: **The Jesus Question** and **The Suffering Question**.

Jesus Question? What Question?

To Christians there is no more familiar figure than Jesus. It's estimated that 120-150 cinematic films have been made on his life. The story of the manger, the miracles, the parables, Jesus' death and resurrection—all part of the well known fabric of the Christian faith. So what's the question? You just accept it or you don't. Right? That might be the approach of the cinematic films but those which ask the deeper questions are much rarer.

Actually many questions bristle around the gospels themselves. *How reliable can they be, written decades after the events? How worrying is it that details (such as on the first Easter morning stories) vary significantly from one gospel to another? How revolutionary—including for us today—is the teaching of Jesus and have we underestimated what he demands?* Nevertheless, there is one query more fundamental than any other: *Did Jesus rise from the dead? If so, can we confidently claim he was God*

incarnate? Ultimately, that is The Jesus Question. How strong is the evidence?

Plan to Use The Jesus Question

As with the well established The God Question there will be a version of *The Jesus Question* for study in churches and in groups. Why not plan to use it during Easter 2026? For more information write to office@graspingthenettle.org.



The construction of The Jesus Question in full flow in the Kharis Productions edit suite.

Hear it Direct

If you would welcome a more extended introduction to *The Jesus Question* and its contents why not invite our Liaison Office Rev George Lind (opposite) to your church either as part of a service or in a separate session. Write to our office (see above) to arrange.

Gain more insight into this fascinating new production throughout the newsletter.



The Jesus Question

Was Jesus God in Human Form?

Is the evidence convincing?

Can we be sure that Jesus really existed?

Is the resurrection credible in a scientific age?

Did Jesus ever claim to be the Messiah?

What was Jesus' central message?

Can the resurrection be proved?

How can we explain discrepancies in the gospel accounts?

How certain can we be about what Jesus said?

Is the information given in the gospels reliable?
Where did it come from? How do we know?

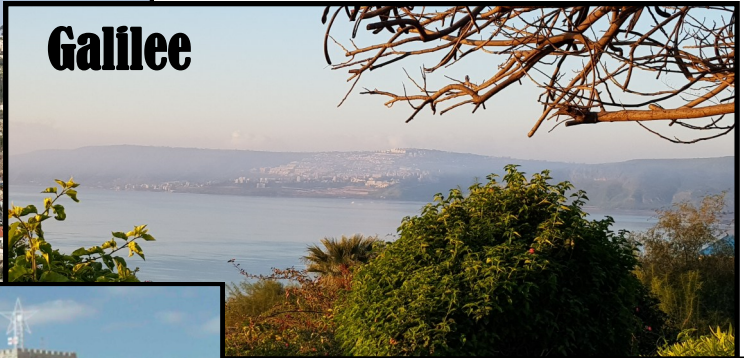
Journey with The Jesus Question

The Locations

Jerusalem



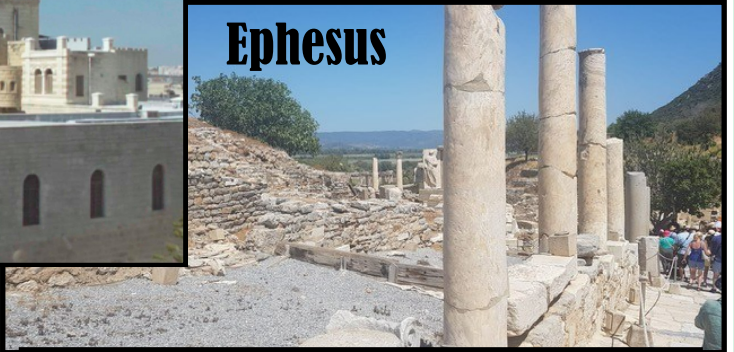
Galilee



Bethlehem



Ephesus



Site of the first Christian baptism in Europe



Iona



Qumran



Oberammergau Passion Play



The Roman Forum



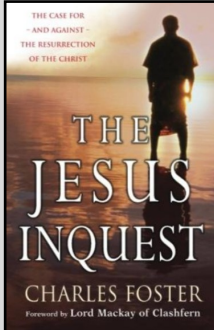
The Western Isles



Christmas Greet Easter

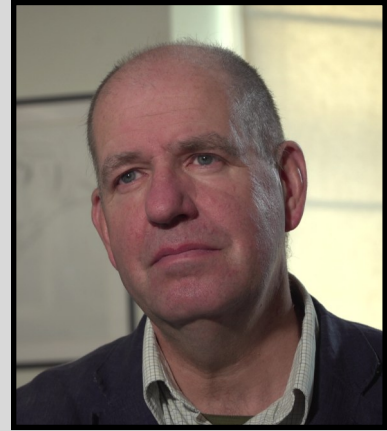
Meet the Cast of The Jesus Question

Charles Foster, Professor of Law, Oxford



"If Jesus rose from the dead then the universe is a radically different place."

"For the resurrection to be true the tomb has to be empty, but if the tomb is empty that doesn't necessarily imply that there was a resurrection."



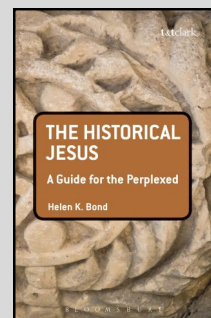
Helen Bond, Professor of Christian Origins, Edinburgh



"Jesus is arguably the most influential person who ever lived."

"The gospels are about making the choice: 'are you going to follow Jesus?' You can't just dabble."

"We do have evidence that followers of Jesus were talking about a resurrection very, very early."



Loveday Alexander, Theologian and Historian, Chester



"It's like a meteorite hitting the earth...What you're left with tells you something extraordinary happened."

"Everybody in the ancient world is just as sceptical and unbelieving. You don't have to be a modern scientist to know that people don't rise from dead."

"It isn't just nice stuffioso and you can get on with your lives; it's actually going to transform your life."

Christmas Greet Easter

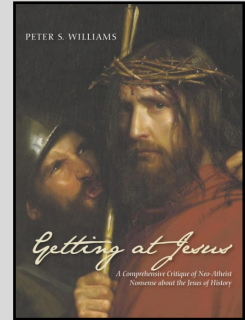
Meet the Cast of The Jesus Question (continued)

Peter Williams, Philosopher and Author

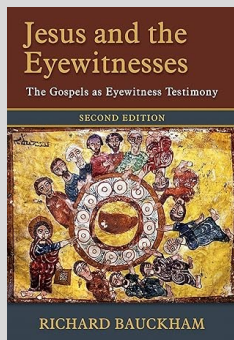


"Nothing in history is 100% certainty but there is more evidence to show that Jesus existed than many other figures of history."

"The resurrection is a really dangerous dastardly con trick or the most marvellous revelation of truth."

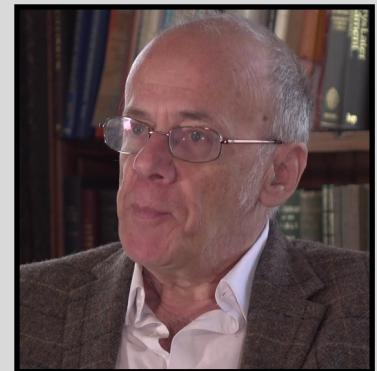


Richard Bauckham, Theologian and Historian, Cambridge

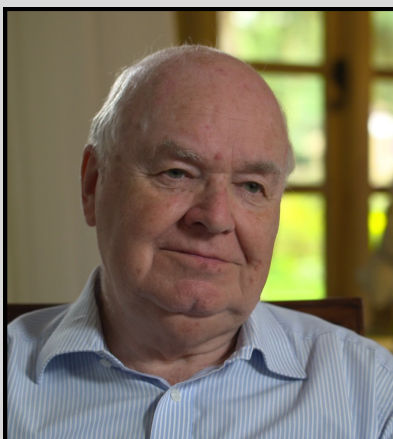


"The text of the gospels ... is quite closely based on the way the eye witnesses, the people who knew Jesus ... witnessed the events."

"Jesus didn't write anything as far as we know. He did all his teaching orally. But he formulated it in ways that would be memorable."



John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics, Oxford



"If there were no resurrection there would be no Christianity."

"God becomes man, and that God man – Jesus - is designated the saviour of the world."

"If people hadn't turned up in the first century claiming that they had met Christ risen from the dead, Christianity just wouldn't have occurred."

Christmas Greet Easter

Meet the Cast of The Jesus Question (continued)

Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Coptic Church

"The church of Jerusalem is considered to be the mother of all churches. Why? Because it was from here that the church expanded all over the world."

"Now maybe there are people that don't accept the divinity of Jesus Christ but none nobody can deny the historicity of this person."



Alister McGrath, Professor of Science and Religion, Oxford



"One of the biggest questions is not so much whether there is a God but what is that God like? And obviously every religion, every worldview, gives its own answer."

"God is like Jesus. In other words, to have seen Jesus is to have seen what God is like."

"For Christians this is all to do with the idea that in some way Jesus Christ is God incarnate. This is the image of the invisible God."

Anthony Giambrone, Professor of New Testament, Ecole Biblique

"God in his infinity dwindled to infancy. This is the mystery of the manger, the mystery of the entire life of Christ."

"Christianity is not presented as a kind of poetic fantasy. It's presented as something that people saw."

"This is the significance of the resurrection. It's the lightning strike and we're waiting for this roll of thunder in which all the dead will be raised."



Judaism, Islam, Atheism

We address their perspectives too

David Rosen, Rabbi



"The person of Jesus of Nazareth shows a loyal, devout Jew who didn't want to be seen as anything other than that."

"There was an empty tomb ... But it's irrelevant to my life and is not of any consequence in how I live my life today."

Usama Hasan, Imam



"Muslims take a lot of the Christian stories or claims with a pinch of salt."

"God cannot be man and a human being cannot be God."

"Ultimately we find out on the day of judgement after death whether we've done enough or not."

Peter Atkins, Professor of Chemistry, Oxford

"God is totally unnecessary."

"Religion asks you to believe in a whole collection of absurdities like resurrections, after-lives and miracles. It's just absurd to believe in them. I think so."



Sam Harris, Public Commentator

"The whole thing is just scandalously imponderable and embarrassing when you're standing outside the faith."

"I think it's much more of a historical accident."

"It's just a feast of ridiculous propositions."



Christmas Meets Easter



The crucifixion scene in the Oberammergau Passion Play, featured in *The Jesus Question* documentary

Couldn't We Tell a 'Sweeter' Story?

Think how much 'sweeter' the Christian narrative would be if God had come from heaven—yes via the manger—to bring us the good news about himself. Excise the gory stuff about the cross, the nails the spear and the whole passion week story.

Islam can help out in that connection. Offering his perspective on **The Jesus Question**, Imam Usama Hassan states that the Romans got it wrong, mistakenly crucified someone else in Jesus' place so illustrating that God delivered Jesus from this awful fate. For Islam the resurrection question is therefore irrelevant.

Rabbi David Rosen, for Judaism, accepts unequivocally that Jesus was crucified, claims that whether or not Jesus was raised from the dead is of no consequence. *"It makes no difference to my life"*. For atheists such as Peter Atkins resurrection is impossible to believe in a scientific age; miracles don't exist.

In relation to all of it Christianity disagrees. The 'gory stuff' is fundamentally important in terms of how, by satisfying God's justice, the crucifixion opened up the way to heaven for sinners; the resurrection is vital because it demonstrated that death was conquered. Both are requirements for eternal life. 'Not so' responds Islam and Judaism. Your good deeds, when weighed in the divine balances, will reveal whether you are 'in or out'. It's fundamentally different stuff; just one of the agenda items explored in **The Jesus Question**. It's huge! Look out for more information about progress and release during early 2026.

Your Church Curriculum 2026

Grasping the Nettle is an initiative of Search for Truth Charitable Trust. It has a wealth of resources, many designed for church use. Remind yourself of them by accessing this brief compilation of materials. Access it directly [here](#).

Exploring the God Question with churches	TELEVISION, ONLINE, VIDEO AND PRINT RESOURCES from SEARCH for TRUTH ENTERPRISES LTD	Introducing the God Question with schools
 In 6 parts with Study Guide and Leader's Guide. Also available in Spanish. Based on the TV series.	DOES GOD EXIST? The God Question series takes 3 fascinating journeys in the company of world renowned theists and sceptics investigating whether the wonders revealed by science undermine or support the work of a creator.	 In 6 parts with Study Guide and Teacher's Guide. Linked to UK and IB curricula.
THE GOD QUESTION The landmark TV series which has been broadcast around the world. 3 programmes: The Cosmos, Life and Evolution, Mind and Consciousness. It now has a new global version.	SCIENCE AND THE ULTIMATE QUESTION The new global TV series adding scientific and religious perspectives from both East and West	SCIENCE AND GOD THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND TRUTH The online global series for groups and individuals. Also available in Traditional and Simplified Chinese.
THE GOD QUESTION FOR STARTERS The fast-track version for churches, individuals and schools Three programmes each containing 10 short excerpts for discussion.	Bible Studies for churches and individuals ENCOUNTERING THE CREATOR GOD Genesis - Revelation Eight Scripture Engagements on the theme of creation, opening up a dialogue between theology and other forms of learning including science.	The Story of (Nearly) Everything For children in churches, schools and in the family home In Production: a 10 part children's animation series engaging the audience in an entertaining way with the big questions.



GTN is an interdenominational initiative of churches in Scotland, using Exploring the God Question as its key resource. It is administered by Search for Truth Charitable Trust (Charity No: SC039465. Company No: SC340300), a registered charity and private limited company registered in Scotland.