

# Local Jews and Christians discuss Messiah ideas

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The discussion by Jews and Christians of the Messiah issue, the key point that divides them, "shouldn't frighten us because we only wish to continue to grow and to understand."

This idea was presented by Sister Teresa Bretthauer, minister of religious education at Holy Family Catholic Church in Mobile, during the latest dialogue between an estimated 100 Jews and Christians who have formed a dialogue group in the Port City.

Sister Teresa presented the idea of the Messiah from a Christian perspective. The Messiah from a Jewish perspective is to be discussed Feb. 16 at 7:30 p.m. in a meeting of the dialogue group at Spring Hill Avenue Temple at which the speaker will be Rabbi Steven Jacobs, spiritual leader of the temple.

Sister Teresa, in presenting a survey of early Jewish thoughts about the Messiah, said the "image of the long-awaited Messiah was not clear. There were many interpretations of how he would look or in fact how many there would be."

First "and probably the strongest and most developed was the belief that this long-awaited ruler would emerge from the Davidic line of kings," she said.

The Jews who believed in such a Messiah remembered David as a great king and looked to the future with a "longing for an ideal ruler who would establish a reign of peace and righteousness throughout the world. . . This is called Dynastic Messianism."

Said Sister Teresa, "The Psalmist has described the

Messiah as a king who governs with justice that becomes the rule, a savior of the poor and needy, victorious over his enemies and the enemies of his people. His reign will bring prosperity, and thus the hope of the Jewish nation would regain a political prestige that it had once enjoyed under David and Solomon."

However, according to the speaker, "a later stage develops in understanding this Messianic hope with a series of wicked kings that have dimmed the glory of the Davidic line.

"With the loss of confidence in their king and finally the destruction of their kingdom, Israel began to see the eternal promise fulfilled, not in the restoration of a dynasty, but in a personal Messiah." But that was not the only Messianic belief.

Eventually, according to the Catholic sister, "the priest seemed to inherit the mantle of the Davidic kings. . . This is called Priestly Messianism."

Another idea comes from the Essene community of Jews. Members of this community, Sister Teresa said, "were distinct in their expectations of two Messiahs. They looked for a Messiah of Aaron and a Messiah of Israel. The Messiah of Aaron was to be anointed high priest while the Messiah of Israel would be anointed Davidic king."

Still another belief, said Sister Teresa, was that the Messiah would be a prophet, or the idea of Prophetic Messianism.

Finally, an idea some had of the Messiah was one "who was to be slain on the battlefield," or a warrior Messiah, according to Sister Teresa.

While the image of the Messiah was not clear, "the detail of the Messianic age was clear," said the sister. It

would be an age of peace and justice.

These were the kinds of thoughts among the Jews when "Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived, taught and died," she said.

She discussed Jesus in relation to the Messianic concepts of the early Jews.

The early church, she said, viewed Jesus as the Messiah and used the word "Christ" to express such a belief.

"This means the church bestowed on Jesus a title which he himself in life did not take on, did not find acceptable. One thing is clear about Jesus of Nazareth and that is that in his preaching it centered on the proclamation of the kingdom of God. He does not seem concerned about titles or positions."

Said Sister Teresa, "Jesus rejected the kingly image of a Messiah and refused to work for the restoration of the fortunes of Israel." His idea of ruling was "turning the other cheek and washing feet."

Further, said the speaker, Jesus "claimed not to be a warrior Messiah. Rather he preached peace, but it was a peace that the world cannot give, an inner peace."

She said, "Jesus is more than anything a man of hope. The early Christian community believed that Isaiah spoke of this man of hope when he spoke of 'the servant of the Lord, a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow, familiar with suffering.'"

The title of king of the Jews, which Jesus rejected, according to Sister Teresa, "is the title under which he suffers and dies."

Nevertheless, she said, "the defeat of life somehow gets turned into victory. . . He lived and still lives. 'The Lord is truly risen,' proclaimed his early followers. They encountered him once again very much alive and could

not explain it, and neither can we, but it did happen. This is the Easter event."

The sister talked about why the early Christians called Jesus the Messiah, or the Christ: "For one reason, this was the name that had given heart to generations of pious and faithful Jews who had been looking for the kingdom of God. . . Secondly, this was the title under which Jesus had suffered and died, even if given him wrongly."

She said scholars say it was "a universal concept of this Christ or Messiah that was the name bestowed on Jesus by the early church."

Continuing, she said, "It is important to remember that the Messiahship of Jesus, God's anointed one, is only fully manifest with the Christians in the cross and resurrection. It is after these events that the believing community comes to recognize and confess Jesus as Messiah."

The term "Messiah" was the only adequate one for Jesus, said the speaker. Terms such as "rabbi," "prophet" or "teacher" were inadequate.

The Christian community, she said, "must continue to struggle to find a still more adequate answer to the question posed by Jesus, 'Who do men say that I am?' For the believing Christian, this is a continual search."

Sister Teresa said that because Christians believe God "has broken through and touched our world," then "we must be willing to look critically at the challenge that comes to us from the Jewish believer. . . Has God stepped in radically? Where is his saving work?"

She said Christians believe "love and trust will win in the end, but we don't know when that will take place and we will have the accomplished victory. As Christians we have been challenged to continue to work in the world to make visible the reign of God. . . We are confident that God is faithful and that it will be Easter once again."