


two thousand years ago in the ordinary village of Nazareth a peasant woman by the name of Mary believed something extraordinary was about to happen in her life. Unmarried and dragged away from home because of a census being conducted throughout the country, she gave birth to a baby boy. He was born in a cave on a Judean hillside just outside the royal city of Bethlehem.

To this day millions from around the world squeeze into the sweaty grotto built on the site where they believe this baby was born. Carols learned at their mother's knee are sung with enthusiasm and fervour as they make the trip of a lifetime to the origins of their Christian faith.

But just who was this baby and what was the significance of the man he became?

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE HE IS
THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.



WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS it anyway?



It is quite easy among all the arguments about the Dome at Greenwich, the preparation for the New Year parties and the dash to be in the right place to welcome in the new millennium, to forget just whose birthday it is we're celebrating.

Christian Evidence Society

(Incorporated)

For the proclamation, defence and study of the Christian Faith

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THE family returned home to Nazareth. The baby Jesus became the young man who worked alongside his father in the village carpenter's shop. No one took much notice. Why should they? Like many young men, he left home. He made for the lakeside village of Capernaum in the north of the country. There he gathered around him the strangest bunch of men and women one could imagine. Some local fishermen, a collector of taxes and a few ne'er-do-wells.

WHY he captured their imagination we can only guess at. Some gave up their jobs, others left their homes and families.

JESUS travelled around the area, helped and supported by this odd collection of twelve men and some women preaching about "the Kingdom of God." He believed he was the Messiah who had been promised for generations. The Jews had been looking forward to the Messiah's coming with great excitement for centuries.

UNFORTUNATELY what people hoped for and what he provided didn't quite match up. Any casual observer will realise that's a potent recipe for disaster!

HE spoke about the importance of peace, humility and gentleness - and that certainly wasn't going to appeal to people anywhere, living under the thumb of the Roman occupying power.

THEN there were the amazing miracles. The deaf heard, the blind saw and the hungry were fed. It was said that Jesus even shared a few loaves and fishes with a huge crowd so that no one went hungry. Anyone experienced in crowd control knows that's not an easy operation.

HE even shocked people by challenging the traditional ideas about the Sabbath. That was bound to get him into trouble and sure enough it did.

HE was arrested, flogged, unfairly tried and sentenced to death. He finished up on a roadside cross, unable to push himself up for his last gasp of air. That might have been the end of the story. But his friends said that on the third day he was raised from the dead.



NOW how you explain that one isn't easy, but they were quite convinced they were right. The grave was empty and they were certain that something extraordinary had happened, and that he appeared to them in person again.

WE invite you to make up your own mind. Many world dictators would have loved to have had their birthdays commemorated every year. But that honour has been accorded only to this Jewish carpenter who wrote no books, led no violent revolutions and died as an apparent failure.

AS millions around the world welcome in the new millennium, Christians know that since the birth, death and resurrection of the baby of Bethlehem the world has never been the same. It has become a place where new possibilities have been opened up by him.

HE confronted evil in the world and in the hearts of individuals. He showed that good is stronger than evil, and that love triumphs over hatred.

TO follow his way is to get a life. A life that lasts beyond the grave.

