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Reading Jesus: A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels

Mary Gordon

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"If it's enlightenment you're after, Gordon is a thoughtful and stirring guide.... [A] brisk, provocative survey of the major events and statements of Jesus' life." —THE WASHINGTON POST

READING JESUS

A WRITER'S
ENCOUNTER
with
THE GOSPELS



MARY GORDON

author of CIRCLING MY MOTHER

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Mary Gordon : Reading Jesus: A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reading Jesus: A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful book for thinking believers. By Imogen13 Mary Gordon's faith is not the kind that is an armor of certainty, security, and clarity, but the kind that embraces doubt, the kind that allows itself to be troubled, to ask questions, to argue. A lapsed (it seems) Catholic, Gordon, novelist and lover of words, decided one day to read and reread the four Gospels, in different translations. This book is the fruit of

that reading; each chapter is a reflection on passages that either move or trouble her the most. In the first part, Gordon reflects on the passages from the Gospel that are closest to her heart. Here, Gordon is at her best, incisive, keen, thoroughly spiritual. She reveals the human Christ she knows and has rediscovered in this exercise. I was edified and at times moved almost to tears with her reflections. The second part is more intellectual. Gordon confronts those passages she finds most jarring and upsetting: the ones which paint a Jesus (not to mention, a Church) who seems less easy to follow, and maybe even less easy to love. Gordon closes the book with a reflection on what for Catholics, is the most profound mystery of all: the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. This book is an act of honesty and generosity. I imagine the book will be fruitful for all Christians who understand what it means to struggle with their faith.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. More than flowing robes and a beard
By Customer
To me, it is 5 star as a useful sharing of Gordon's personal insights to stimulate thinking about who Jesus really is rather than seeing only the traditional Jesus.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Review of Mary Gordon's Reading Jesus: A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels (and other comments)
By Robert J. Anderson, Holman 346
I have read through just about all of Mary Gordon's work and I must say that I am a Fan (with a capital F). I found a hard copy of *The Rest of Life*, her volume of three novellas among a bunch of books that I had left in my former office, and I just sat down and read the first one, the second one, and the third one. So, I decided to read her works in more or less chronological order, beginning with *Final Payments*, which of course led me to *The Company of Women* and *The Other Side* (and everything else up to *The Love of my Youth* which I finished in tears). She is a soul mate and a writer's writer (though she does not know she is a soul mate). Since reading *Reading Jesus* I read *Pearl* (which I had somehow missed and realized it is related to a story called "Temporary Shelter" in a volume of short stories with the same name). So what about *Reading Jesus*? I come to it as a Methodist who thinks it is unlikely that God really exists, but who believes that Jesus is absolutely essential and who defines for me who I am (however imperfectly, however ambiguously). Prof. Gordon understands that conundrum better than anyone I have read. She understands that Jesus is the essence of our 'faith' even as our faith is past the edge. She expresses what it means to say "Blessed are the poor in spirit" better than anyone I have read. Is it a perfect volume? Of course not. No one (not even John Wesley) knows what perfection is, nor would they recognize it if they saw it. But *Reading Jesus: A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels* is a must read for anyone who has thought of 'following Jesus,' or who has wondered why anyone would even give it a thought. You are much the poorer if you do not read it.

Reading Jesus is a personal journey through the fundamental Biblical stories. As celebrated author Mary Gordon ponders the intense strangeness of a deity in human form, unresolved moral ambiguities within the text, and the problem posed to her as an enlightened reader by the miracle of the Resurrection. What she rediscovers and reinterprets with her signature candor, intelligence, and straightforwardness is a rich store of overlapping, sometimes conflicting teachings that feel both familiar and tantalizingly elusive.

From Publishers Weekly
Novelist and memoirist Gordon (*Circling My Mother*) examines her faith by closely reading, in a kind of literary *lectio divina* (sacred reading), the four Christian gospels that recount the life of Christ. The accounts by evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John of the life of Jesus have a common subject and amazingly different treatments. Gordon tackles the power and puzzle of the Christian gospels with measure and imagination, providing welcome relief for those left cold by scholarly or fundamentalist parsing. Raised Catholic, she writes as a layperson and cradle believer thrilled and troubled by these history-shaping texts, unafraid to articulate questions: what does it mean to be perfect? what exactly is a miracle? Her savoring of particular lines is poetic and amplifies the beauty and sometimes ambiguous challenge of the language, stories and injunctions of the gospels. Gordon writes to find out what she thinks and lets readers listen in. Those whose faith is infused with humanism and love of the power of words will love Gordon's words about matters and mysteries of faith. (Oct. 27) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. If its enlightenment you're after, Gordon is a thoughtful and stirring guide. . . . [A] brisk, provocative survey of the major events and statements of Jesus' life. . . . *Reading Jesus* should appeal to anyone in that multitude of thoughtful or lapsed Christians who feels the Scriptures growing stale and ossified, anyone who wants to wrestle with the uncomfortable problems and irreconcilable paradoxes of the New Testament. The Washington Post
Deep and impassioned. . . . A book of questions for, quibbles with and tributes to the sometimes inscrutable protagonist of the Gospels. The New York Times
Book (Editors Choice)
Insightful. . . . Provocative. . . . [Gordon's] questions are challenges to orthodox conventions about faith and the man Christians deem the son of God. The Boston Globe
Gordon, from her perch at the nexus of the intellectual and religious worlds, makes a convincing argument for the importance of the Gospels. . . . Like the best fiction, the truth of the Gospels story is bigger than the sum of its parts. . . . What Gordon loves about the Gospels is not the pat lessons of Sunday school. She loves what a writer loves: paradoxes and inconsistencies, moments of high drama and plot twists. Newsweek
A welcome change from the din of the never-ending culture war. . . . Gordon reaffirms the notion that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. . . . This book will appeal to readers who are leery of Rick Warren's pious platitudes and Christopher Hitchens' free thinking smarminess. . . . [Gordon] proposes no answers; she just raises a lot

of interesting questions. The Miami Herald A remarkable record of a mind grappling with a constantly changing relationship with religion. . . . The questions [Gordon] raises have lives of their own. The Columbus Dispatch Gordon makes the gospels and their characters real in ways that are immensely refreshing. . . . In so many ways we take for granted the stories that are all we have left of Jesus in this world; to have a writer of this caliber and honesty and spirit dive headlong into those same stories is a real gift. Would that more of the best American Catholic novelists and essayists poked into scripture with their storycatcher-sensitivities set to stun. U.S. Catholic Gordon asks us, in Reading Jesus, to go back and look at story as a way to truly understand what Jesus was telling us, can still tell us today. . . . [She] points out the virtues not mentioned are as important as the ones Jesus includes. . . . People looking for platitudes may be shocked by Gordons cogent analysis. The News Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina) Gordon tackles the power and puzzle of the Christian gospels with measure and imagination, providing welcome relief for those left cold by scholarly or fundamentalist parsing. Publishers Weekly Believers may be refreshed by Gordons take on familiar stories. . . . A book club would enjoy taking on Reading Jesus. There is never a dull moment when Gordon is holding the pen. The Charleston Gazette (West Virginia) Reading the Gospels like a book . . . [Gordon] personalized the experience, adding her own voice and her own interpretations to one of the most well-known, yet nevertheless elusive, stories in history. Booklist A fresh and human take on the Gospels. Gordons approach is aware of, but not burdened by, doctrine. Her many insightful questions give expression to thoughts which have, for many readers and for many years, been waiting to be asked aloud. Mark Jarman, author of Epistles About the Author Mary Gordon is the author of six novels, including The Company of Women, Final Payments, and Spending; the memoirs The Shadow Man and Circling My Mother; and a collection of short stories. She is the recipient of a Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Writers Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the 1997 O. Henry Award for best story. She teaches at Barnard College and lives in New York City.