Assignment 3.

1. Choose one of the New Testament titles of Jesus Christ (Prophet, Priest, King). What are the implications of this title on your life, the Church and Salvation?

**Priest, Old testament**

In order for us to give Jesus the title Priest we need to look a little closer at the meaning of the word, what it meant in the Old Testament and what it meant in the New Testament and to us today.

The dictionary meaning of Priest says; “*Christianity a person ordained to act as a* ***mediator***,(emphasis mine) *between God and humankind in administering the sacraments, preaching, blessing, guiding etc.[[1]](#footnote-0)*

Therefore we need to look at the Jewish priesthood and sacrificial system.

The first time we see a sacrifice, performing the role of a priest, is recorded in the Bible in Gen 8:20, *‘then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it’*. [[2]](#footnote-1) Then following from Noah we have Abraham and the other patriarchs building altars and offering sacrifices.

However the first time the word ‘priest’ is mentioned is in Gen 14:18, *‘then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth”. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand”.*

Melchizedek was a priest-king who enjoyed intimate contact with God. He was a priest of a Canaanite sanctuary. He blesses Abraham and does so in God’s name. [[3]](#footnote-2) There isn't much known about Melchizedek regarding his parentage etc and priests later in the bible will come from the line of Aaron the Levite, Moses' brother. (see below), Exo. 28;1, 30;33.

In Leviticus. 1-7, God tells Moses that the burnt offerings brought before the LORD should be a male bull without defect. Then Aaron was to lay hands on the head of the animal, this was to represent the transferring of guilt from the person offering the sacrifice to make atonement. This meant appeasement with God. The blood of the animal was then splattered on the altar, signifying that it belonged to God. There were also other instructions regarding skinning the animal, burning all the fat and washing internal organs. The priest's job was to prepare the altar and arrange the animal on it. Sheep, goats, doves or pigeons were also offered.

Werner Dommershausen basically sums up the teaching and cultic functions of priesthood; ‘The various priestly duties share the common basis of mediation; in oracles and instruction, the priest represents God to the people; in sacrifice and intercession, he represents the people to God. In other words, priestly mediation runs in two directions; from God to people and from the people to God. [[4]](#footnote-3)

By the time the Isrealites returned from exile, priests became important to the Jewish life and became more central. So because of this it was important to have a priestly lineage. Priests belonged to the tribe of Levi and descended from the family of Aaron, known as Aaronites. According to Ezra 7:5 Aaron was the chief priest. One of the functions of the high priest was to enter the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement.[[5]](#footnote-4) The Holy of holies was separated by a large thick curtain.[[6]](#footnote-5)

This was a sacred time when the priest cleansed the sanctuary and made atonement for the sins of the people. The high priest had to bring an offering for himself first, wear priestly garments and bathe. He was then to offer a bull, and two goats. The goats were to be offered as a sin offering, a ram for a burnt offering. One of the goats was to be let go, called a scapegoat, which carried the sin away, and out of the city. Once the purification had taken place then the blood from the sin offering would be sprinkled on the altar to signify purification/atoning for the people. [[7]](#footnote-6)

We can now see from this that the role of the priest has become exclusive. Only the priest can perform this Godly mediation.

**Priest, New testament**

Hebrews 3:1 first mentions Jesus as apostle and high priest. The writer of Hebrews (unknown) states, “*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest”.*

Heb. 7:14, “*for it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests”*. Here the writer is suggesting that Jesus is not from the original lineage of priests in the Jewish custom, ie. Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi. So Jesus did not qualify as priest according to Jewish custom. However the writer is presenting Jesus as the eternal High Priest. [[8]](#footnote-7)

Psalm 110 by King David is also seen as pointing the way to Christ, and is frequently cited in the New testament, (Ac 2:34-35; 1Co 15:25;Eph 1:20, Col3:1; Heb 1:3, 7:17, 21; 1Pt 3:22), although the psalm addresses the Davidic dynasty, it is only realised in the Messiah. [[9]](#footnote-8)

The writer of Hebrews calls Christ ‘priest’ six times and ‘high priest’ 10 times. [[10]](#footnote-9)

Heb. 13:12, *“And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood”.* Jesus being the ultimate sacrifice became the scapegoat for the people's sin.

The writer of Hebrews insists on telling us that Jesus' sacrifice was the once-and-for-all, no need for other sacrifices from then on. Heb. 7:27 tells us , *“Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his one sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once and for all when he offered himself”. [[11]](#footnote-10)*

Jesus being the faithful ‘high priest’ was a true model of faith. Heb. 12.2, “*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”.* It was through the ‘eternal Spirit’ that Jesus was able to offer himself without blemish to God (the father). Heb. 9:14, “ *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”.*

Perhaps the ‘eternal Spirit’ is to be read in lower-case, Harold Attridge states Christ's spirit of self- offering and not the Holy Spirit.[[12]](#footnote-11)

Hewbrews mentions 3 times that Christ an eternal priesthood, ‘*according to the order of Melchizedek’.* Heb. 5:6, “*And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek”.* Heb. 5:10, “ *and was designated by God to be high priest in order of Melchizedek”.* Heb. 6:20, “*where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek*”.

The priesthood of Melchizedek was earlier and greater than the levitical priesthood. And because the Bible does not mention Melchizedek’s ancestors (as mentioned above), he remains a priest forever. Heb. 7:3, “*Without a father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains priest forever”.* Heb. 7:24-25, “*but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*”. So therefore because Jesus holds the priesthood forever he is able to make intercessions for those people who, ‘approach God through him’[[13]](#footnote-12)

**Jesus High Priest in my life.**

Jesus had no sin, he did not come from the line of Adam so therefore had not inherited sin. We however do and have. By Jesus dying on the cross, the unblemished lamb, the ultimate sacrifice for us, has made a way for us to have a relationship with God the father through Jesus. The veil was torn on the day of crucifixion so that we could now enter the holy of holies, no need to offer sacrifices or to have a priest be our mediator. Jesus on this day became our mediator once and for all. Rom. 8:38-39 are some of my favourite in the Bible, “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future,nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.*

**Jesus as High Priest of the Church.**

Churches today have leaders no matter what their denomination. This is helpful as points of contact, guidance, teaching, preaching and pastoral care. The title priest still exists in some denominations but more common and inclusive names would be Minister or Vicar. The danger here is that if that person’s role changes from helping the Church with their personal relationship with God, through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to becoming an obstacle. As Romans above states nothing should separate us from the love of God. All a modern day priest should be doing today is contributing and assisting the Church in their closeness, their individual and corporate relationship to God. Jesus has already made the way, and today sits at the right hand of God, interceding for every believer. Jesus is clearly our High Priest.

**Jesus High Priest of Salvation.**

The definition of salvation in Christianity; Deliverance by redemption from the power of sin and from the penalties ensuing from it[[14]](#footnote-13)

Jesus was sinless, the unblemished lamb. 1 Pet. 1:19, “ *but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish.”*  Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice and took on all our sin and guilt when he died on the cross. At this point Jesus was separated from God. Jesus went to hell (Hades or Gehenna) on our behalf.[[15]](#footnote-14)

In doing this Jesus became the ultimate mediator between us and God. He did this so that we could have a personal relationship with God once and for all. That we would also receive eternal life, that we will see Jesus face to face. We as Christians must tell people of this hope and salvation we have through Christ Jesus.

1. Collins complete dictionary, loc 360778 of 528007. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. All Biblical references are from the NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Ex.26:33, Num. 18:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. CSB study bible, Lev. 16:1-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.45 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. CSB study bible, Psalm 110, study notes [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.46 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.47 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.48-9. H.W.Attridge, The Epistle of the Hebrews (Philadelphia:Fortress Press,1989), 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Gerald O’Collins, SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Jesus Our Priest, Oxford University Press, p.53 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Collins complete dictionary, loc 400133 of 528007 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Richard Bradbury, It’s the End of the World as we know it!, loc 3505 of 4114. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)