I MUSICI GEMELLI / ZAHI ISSA **JESUS OF NAZARETH** SPECIAL ART BOOK



ZAHI ISSA

born in Aleppo (Syria), in 1962, is a surrealist painter who has lived and worked in Puglia for many years. He began his artistic career at a very young age: at just thirteen, he held his first solo exhibition in Aleppo, marking the start of an intense exhibition schedule that would lead him to present his works in Italy and abroad. His artistic output, particularly original in its depiction of characters, places, and biblical themes, combines spirituality with expressive intensity, giving life to images capable of evoking emotion and reflection.

His works have been exhibited in prestigious venues, including: Palazzo Barberini (Rome), Palazzo Ducale (Potenza), Piazza del Plebiscito (Naples), Fiera dell'Arte (Ancona), and Valletta (Malta).

Throughout his career, he has received numerous international awards, including first prize in group exhibitions in New York (United States), Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Paris (France), Frankfurt (Germany), Athens (Greece), and Barcelona (Spain).

In Italy, he has won first prize in group exhibitions in Milan, Florence, Genoa, and Rome.



NATIVITAS CHRISTI

PLACE: Bethlehem is located in the hills of Judea, a few kilometres south of Jerusalem. In the 1st century, it was a relatively small settlement. Its importance in the Christian narrative does not depend so much on the size of the village as on its biblical connection with David, the great king of Israel.
Jesus' birth in Bethlehem links him to the line of David and to the messianic expectations found in the Scriptures. The contrast between the religious significance of the event and the simplicity of its setting is one of the strongest features of the Christian narrative.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Most of the population of Judea lived in small agricultural settlements.Families made their living through farming and livestock breeding. Houses were often built from local stone, with simple rooms and spaces also used for animals or domestic activities.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: Mary and Joseph are presented in the Gospels as a Jewish couple deeply connected to their community and to the religious traditions of the time. Joseph belonged to the line of David, a connection that plays a particularly important role in the account of Jesus' birth.



PRÆSENTATIO DOMINI

PLACE: The Temple of Jerusalem stood on a vast monumental platform expanded and renovated by Herod the Great from the late 1st century BC onwards. The complex included courtyards, porticoes, areas with regulated access and the sanctuary itself. It was not simply a building for prayer: it was the place of sacrifices, major pilgrimage festivals and the most powerful symbol of Jewish religious identity.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Jewish religious life was marked by the Sabbath, festivals, pilgrimages, prayers and the commandments of the Torah. Jerusalem became especially crowded with pilgrims during Passover. The presentation at the Temple shows Jesus as part of the history and religious practices of his people. Simeon and Anna recognise in the child a significance that goes beyond his family and concerns both Israel and the nations.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: Simeon is described as a righteous and devout man who awaits the consolation of Israel; Anna is an elderly prophetess who regularly visits the Temple. The priests belonged to families with specific religious duties. The presentation of Jesus takes place within the context of Jewish practices concerning childbirth and the firstborn son.



IESUS IN TEMPLO DOCET

PLACE: The episode takes place within the Temple complex during the Passover festival. The Gospel text does not specify a particular courtyard. The sanctuary and its porticoes were places of passage, prayer, gathering and teaching. During the festivals, the city welcomed pilgrims from Judea, Galilee and the Jewish diaspora.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: The Torah was the fundamental reference point for religious and community life. Its interpretation involved priests, scribes and teachers. Synagogues, widespread throughout inhabited areas, were places for reading the Scriptures, prayer and education; the Temple, on the other hand, retained its unique role as the central sanctuary.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: The teachers of the Law were experts in the Scriptures and their interpretation. In the account, twelve-year-old Jesus listens, asks questions and gives answers. This is the first Gospel episode showing Jesus publicly discussing the Scriptures. His identity is connected to his relationship with the Father, while remaining fully rooted in the Jewish world.



BAPTISMA DOMINI

PLACE: The River Jordan runs through the deepest depression in the region and connects the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The landscape alternates between green riverbanks, reed beds, cultivated areas and arid stretches. The Gospels do not identify the exact location of the baptism; Christian tradition has venerated sites along the southern part of the river, near the Dead Sea.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Ritual washings and baths played an important role in certain Jewish purification practices. Water could symbolise purification, preparation and renewal, but John's baptism had a specific character of repentance and conversion.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: John the Baptist was a preacher who called people to repentance and announced an imminent judgement. Those who came to him could belong to different social backgrounds. The baptism marks the beginning of Jesus' public life and, in the Gospels, is accompanied by the manifestation of the Spirit and the divine voice.



IESUS IN DESERTO A SATANA TENTATUR

PLACE: The Judean Desert is not a uniform expanse of sand. It is an area of limestone plateaus, gorges and steep slopes descending towards the Dead Sea.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: The desert occupies an important place in biblical memory: it is the setting of the Exodus, a place of trial, dependence on God and encounter with the divine word. Prophets and religious groups could associate isolation with spiritual preparation. Survival required knowledge of springs, routes and shelters.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: Satan is the adversary in the religious narrative. The temptations concern bread, power and the spectacular testing of divine protection. Jesus faces temptation without using his power to satisfy himself or dominate others. The episode presents how he intends to carry out his mission. The account recalls the trials faced by Israel during its journey through the desert. The number forty frequently appears in the Bible as a symbolic period of trial and preparation: Israel's forty years in the desert and Moses' and Elijah's forty days are important examples.



PRIMUM SIGNUM. IESUS AQUAM FECIT VINUM

PLACE: Cana is described in the Gospel of John as a village in Galilee. Its geographical identification remains debated: several locations have been proposed, including Kafr Kanna and Khirbet Qana.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Weddings were important community events. They brought together relatives, neighbours and friends and could last for several days. Hospitality was not a minor detail: providing enough food and wine meant honouring the guests and the host family. Wine was a normal part of meals and celebrations. Running out of wine could become an embarrassing situation for the host family. John does not present the transformation of water into wine merely as a miraculous act; the evangelist calls it a "sign", meaning an event that reveals something about Jesus' identity. The first sign in John's Gospel takes place in a family and festive setting. The account connects abundance, joy and the manifestation of Jesus' glory.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: The bride and groom are not named. Mary appears attentive to a practical problem affecting the celebration, while the disciples are present as the group accompanying Jesus. The master of the banquet checks the quality of the wine, while the servants carry out the instructions they receive.



BEATITUDINES EX SERMONE DOMINI IN MONTE

PLACE: Matthew places the Sermon on the Mount on an unnamed mountain. Christian tradition associates it with a hill near the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the area now known as the Mount of Beatitudes. The landscape consists of hills, fields, villages and roads connecting the communities around the lake.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Galilee was an agricultural and fishing region, with villages, markets and connections to other areas. Many families made their living through farming, crafts and fishing. Tax pressure and relationships with landowners could make the situation of small producers precarious.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: The crowd may have included disciples, farmers, fishermen, sick people, women and families. The Beatitudes mention the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness and the persecuted: groups whose circumstances had a concrete meaning in a world marked by inequality and economic dependence. The Beatitudes overturn ordinary standards of prestige and success. The discourse presents a vision of the Kingdom of God in which dignity and hope are also offered to those who hold no positions of power.



TRANSFIGURATIO DOMINI

PLACE: The Gospels speak of a "high mountain" without naming it. Christian tradition identifies the location as Mount Tabor, an isolated hill in Lower Galilee, but this identification cannot be proven on the basis of the Gospel texts.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Mountains and high places were settings for retreat, visions and encounters with God in biblical memory. Climbing a mountain involved both a physical and symbolic change: moving away from ordinary life, facing a journey and reaching a secluded place. The account contains elements that recall biblical theophanies: the cloud, light, voice and mountain. It is a scene of revelation rather than a public event witnessed by the population. The episode gives the disciples an early understanding of Jesus' glory and prepares them for their journey towards Jerusalem and the Passion.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: Peter, James and John are the three disciples who witness the scene. Moses and Elijah recall two central figures in Israel's religious history: the Law and the Prophets. They are not characters from everyday village life, but figures belonging to sacred memory.



INGRESSUS GLORIOSUS IESU IN HIERUSALEM

PLACE: Jerusalem was the religious and political centre of Judea. The city was dominated by the Temple complex and included residential districts, markets, streets and monumental areas. The entrance described in the Gospels is connected to the Mount of Olives and the eastern gate.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: The Jewish Passover commemorated liberation from Egypt and attracted pilgrims from many regions. The increase in population made the city more vulnerable to tensions and unrest. Rome governed Judea through a prefect and maintained military garrisons; local authorities cooperated, within a complex balance of power, to maintain order.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: The crowd acclaims Jesus with words drawn from the tradition of the Psalms and with gestures that recall the welcoming of a king. His entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey recalls prophetic images of a humble and peaceful king, particularly Zechariah 9:9. The episode therefore has a symbolic as well as a narrative dimension. The religious and Roman authorities had reasons to pay close attention to any public gathering during the festival. The entrance marks the beginning of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem. The crowd's acclamations and the contrast with political power prepare the way for the events of the Passion.



IN COENA DOMINI

PLACE: The Gospels speak of a large, furnished room in Jerusalem. The Cenacle on Mount Zion is the place venerated by Christian tradition, but the building that can be visited today cannot be identified with certainty as the room from the 1st century. The city's layout has changed considerably over time.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Meals were important social and religious occasions. The seating arrangements, shared food and gestures of hospitality communicated relationships of friendship, authority and belonging. The Jewish Passover was a family and community festival connected to the memory of the Exodus; the precise relationship between the Gospel supper and the Passover calendar differs among the Gospels.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: The disciples are the group closest to Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus washes their feet: an act of service that overturns the usual social hierarchies. Judas is associated with betrayal, while Peter appears unable to fully understand his master's gesture. Foot washing was an act associated with service and hospitality, often performed by people of lower social status. Its performance by a master therefore takes on a particularly powerful meaning. In Christian memory, the supper becomes the moment of self-giving, service and the institution of the Eucharist, as described in the Synoptic Gospels and in the tradition of the Church.



PASSIO ET CRUCIFIXIO CHRISTI

PLACE: The Passion takes place across several locations in Jerusalem: Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, the areas associated with judicial authority and Golgotha, the place of crucifixion. Golgotha was outside the city walls of that time and close to an area of passage. The traditional location is preserved within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Judea was under Roman administration. The prefect was responsible for public order and judicial authority, especially in cases considered politically sensitive. Crucifixion was a public, degrading and painful Roman punishment, used mainly against slaves, rebels and people considered a threat to imperial order.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea between 26 and 36 AD. Caiaphas was the high priest during those years. The Gospel accounts describe tensions between Jesus and certain authorities, but they do not justify blaming the Jewish people as a whole for Jesus' death: Jesus, his disciples and the authorities involved all belonged to the Jewish world, which was far from uniform. Crucifixion served as a deterrent: the condemned person was publicly exposed. The title placed on the cross, "King of the Jews", had a political meaning in the context of Roman rule, as it could be interpreted as a competing claim to kingship.

RESURRECTIO CHRISTI

PLACE: The Gospel accounts describe a tomb carved into rock, located in a garden or near the place of crucifixion. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre preserves the place venerated by Christian tradition as Golgotha and Jesus' tomb. In the 1st century, the area lay outside the city walls; Jerusalem's walls were expanded at a later date.

THE WORLD OF THE TIME: Jewish burials during this period could take place in rock-cut tombs containing burial niches or benches. Wealthier families could afford elaborate tombs, while other forms of burial were simpler. Caring for the body and remembering the dead were important practices.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY: The Resurrection is at the centre of the Christian faith. Mary Magdalene is one of the central figures in the accounts of the empty tomb. Other women also appear in the Gospels, although their accounts differ among the evangelists. Their presence as the first witnesses is a significant element of the narrative.

