

Finding Christ in Narnia: Experiencing Gospel Truths in C. S. Lewis's Fiction

Our focus will be on the Chronicles of Narnia. But Lewis wrote a number of other fictional works: *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, a science-fiction trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*), and “a myth retold,” *Till We Have Faces*.

Main points in today's session

This session aims to demonstrate how the fiction of C. S. Lewis—especially in the Chronicles of Narnia—not only represents important gospel truths but helps us come to know and love the Savior more deeply. Lewis does this by showing us both what Christ does and who he is and by giving examples of characters who come to know Christ and as a result undergo a process of transformation, a process that starts them on the journey toward becoming like Christ. Lewis's fiction teaches us about and helps lead us to Christ even more effectively than his non-fiction, first, by getting past our resistance and then by affecting our imaginations, emotions, and spirits and thus reaching deeper than our conscious minds.

- **How the stories came about:** See “What Lewis was doing in the Chronicles of Narnia” below.
- **What Christ does and who he is:** The Chronicles of Narnia represent what Christ does (the creation; the atonement; the defeat of the forces of death and evil; and personal mentoring of individuals) and who he is (powerful—“not a tame lion . . . but good”; in harmony with eternal law; wise; loving; holy).
- **How characters—and readers—come to know Christ:** The Chronicles of Narnia present examples of characters who repent, come to Christ, and undergo transformation—for instance, Edmund in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The stories assist us in coming to Christ as we identify with such characters and as we come to know Aslan throughout the Chronicles.
- **Is it possible to love Aslan too much?:** Some have worried that they might love Aslan too much. Lewis assured a child with this concern that “the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really did and said” (*Letters to Children* 52). Similarly, at the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Aslan says that the children must come to know him in their own world by another name: “This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”
- **Why Lewis wrote fiction, especially children's stories:** Lewis explained that he chose to write children's stories because they could get past the resistance many put up against religion and because they can reach us at a deeper level than non-fiction. Lewis argued that “symbols are the natural speech of the soul” (“Edmund Spenser, 1552-99,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*). Hence, symbolic fiction can communicate not just with our conscious minds but also with our imaginations, emotions, and spirits.
- **Elder Maxwell on discipleship vs. doctrine:** Elder Neal A. Maxwell said that, while he did not “look to Lewis” for doctrine, “I find his *depiction* of discipleship especially articulate and helpful” (*C. S. Lewis: The Man and His Message* 9). Though Lewis is often right about doctrine, I would argue that the greatest value of his work is in helping us know and love the Savior.

What Lewis was doing in the Chronicles of Narnia (writing “supposals” with Christian meaning)

From a letter to Anne Jenkins (5 March 1961):

The whole Narnian story is about Christ. That is to say, I asked myself 'Supposing there really were a world like Narnia and supposing it had (like our world) gone wrong and supposing Christ wanted to go into that world and save it (as He did ours) what might have happened?' The stories are my answer. Since Narnia is a world of Talking Beasts I thought he would become a Talking Beast there, as he became a Man here. I pictured Him becoming a lion there because (a) the lion is supposed to be the King of beasts: (b) Christ is called 'The Lion of Judah' in the Bible: (c) I'd been having strange dreams about lions when I began writing the books. The whole series works out like this:

The Magician's Nephew tells the Creation and how evil entered Narnia,

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe - the Crucifixion and Resurrection,

The Horse and His Boy - the calling and conversion of the heathen,

Prince Caspian - restoration of the true religion after a corruption,

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader - the spiritual life (especially in Reepicheep),

The Silver Chair - the continuing war against the powers of darkness,

The Last Battle - the coming of Antichrist (the ape). The end of the world and the last judgement."

In a letter to “Fifth Graders” (29 May 1954) he wrote:

"I did not say to myself 'Let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a Lion in Narnia'; I said, 'Let us suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as he became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen.'" (*Letters to Children* 44-45)

In a letter to a girl named Patricia (8 June 1960) he wrote:

“All your points are in a sense right. But I’m not exactly ‘representing’ the real (Christian) story in symbols. I’m more saying, ‘Suppose there were a world like Narnia and it needed rescuing and the Son of God (or the ‘Great Emperor oversea’) went to redeem it, as He came to redeem ours, what might it, in that world, all have been like?’ Perhaps it comes to much the same thing as you thought, but not quite.

1. The creation of Narnia is the Son of God creating a world (not specially our world).
 2. Jadis plucking the apple is, like Adam’s sin, an act of disobedience, but it doesn’t fill the same place in her life as his plucking did in his. She was already fallen (very much so) before she ate it.
 3. The stone table is meant to remind one of Moses’ table.
 4. The Passion and Resurrection of Aslan are the Passion and Resurrection Christ might be supposed to have had in that world – like those in our world but not exactly like.
 5. Edmund is like Judas a sneak and traitor. But unlike Judas he repents and is forgiven (as Judas no doubt w[oul]d. have been if he’d repented).
 6. Yes. At the v.[ery] edge of the Narnian world Aslan begins to appear more like Christ as He is known in this world. Hence, the Lamb. Hence, the breakfast – like at the end of St. John’s Gospel. Does not He say ‘You have been allowed to know me in this world (Narnia) so that you may know me better when you get back to your own’?
 7. And of course the Ape and Puzzle, just before the last Judgement (in the Last Battle) are like the coming of Anitchrist before the end of our world.
- All clear?" (*Letters to Children* 92-93)