

MEDITATION IN PREPARATION FOR LITURGY

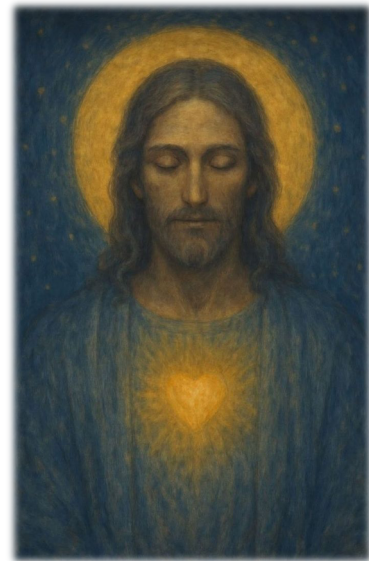
The Jesus Prayer

The Invocation of the Name or, more simply, the Jesus Prayer, is a prayer that can be traced back to the New Testament (Luke 18:10-14) with more explicit references dating to the early seventh century. The full form of the prayer is brief: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Yet as long as the Name JESUS is invoked, the prayer may be reduced to any portion of this invocation, as for example, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me [on us],” or “Lord Jesus Christ” or simply the Name JESUS. When praying the Jesus Prayer, one simply invokes the Name JESUS repeatedly in the heart. It may be whispered on the lips or invoked interiorly in silence.

[in breath] Lord Jesus Christ
[out breath] Son of God
[in breath] have mercy on me
[out breath] a sinner

Or

[in breath] Lord Jesus Christ Son of God
[out breath] have mercy on me



If it helps to overcome discursive thought one can pray the prayer in Aramaic:

Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner
Mar Isho Meshikha, bar Alaha, ith rakham alee, khataya.

**kh is an aspirated sound a bit harder than the ch in Bach or like the ch in l'chaim*

Or in Greek:

Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Υἱέ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλό
Kyrie Yesu Christe we-yay too Theh-oo elieson mey tohn hamartohlohn

The prayer is not prayed as if to call Christ from a distant place. It is prayed to the indwelling Christ of whose body we are extensions. It is prayed to Jesus, intimately present, and thus should be prayed quietly, whispered softly as if to our beloved, not forced or strained.

As thoughts, emotions, and memories (Gk. *logismoi*) arise you will find yourself distracted or you may realize at some point you have dropped the repetition of the Name. Do not become anxious or frustrated. Simply return to the invocation of the Name. Some find it helpful to associate the recitation of the Name with their breathing. This can help ground your prayer in the silence of your body rather than in the chattiness of your mind. Allowing the prayer to ride upon your breath grounds you in the present moment by keeping you conscious of your body—uniting both body and mind in the cell of your heart.



Inasmuch as Jesus is the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is the breath of God. Thus, as we invoke the Name of Jesus, so too do we breathe the Spirit, echoing the very love of God in whom Word and Spirit are spoken from all Eternity. Thus, the association of your prayer with your breath is a participation in the life of the Triune God within you, and should thus instill a sense of peace and interior recollection. As you pray, you need not strain your breathing in any way. Breathe naturally, and if it feels right, repeat the Name slowly and gently with each breath.

When invoking the Name, you need not attempt to conjure an image of Jesus but simply rest in his presence without any need for imaginative projections, thoughts, or concepts. With time and attention, you will find that the prayer begins to pray itself within you. With every breath you will find the Name breathing you. Over time the prayer begins to cultivate a pervasive intuition of the Divine Presence because to invoke Jesus, the Christ, is to invoke the Trinity. As St. Basil the Great observed, “The invocation of Christ is the confession of the whole, since it is clear that God is the one anointing, the Son is the one anointed, and the Spirit is the anointing, as we have learned from Peter in Acts: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit (10:38).’” Thus, to invoke the Name of JESUS is to call upon the triunity of God’s holy presence.

Consider praying the Jesus Prayer twice a day for 5, 10, or 20 minutes during the principal hours of morning and evening. Then throughout the day, return to the prayer whenever you wish as you go about your daily commitments, routines, and responsibilities. In this way your life becomes ever more deeply united to Christ in all you do.

