

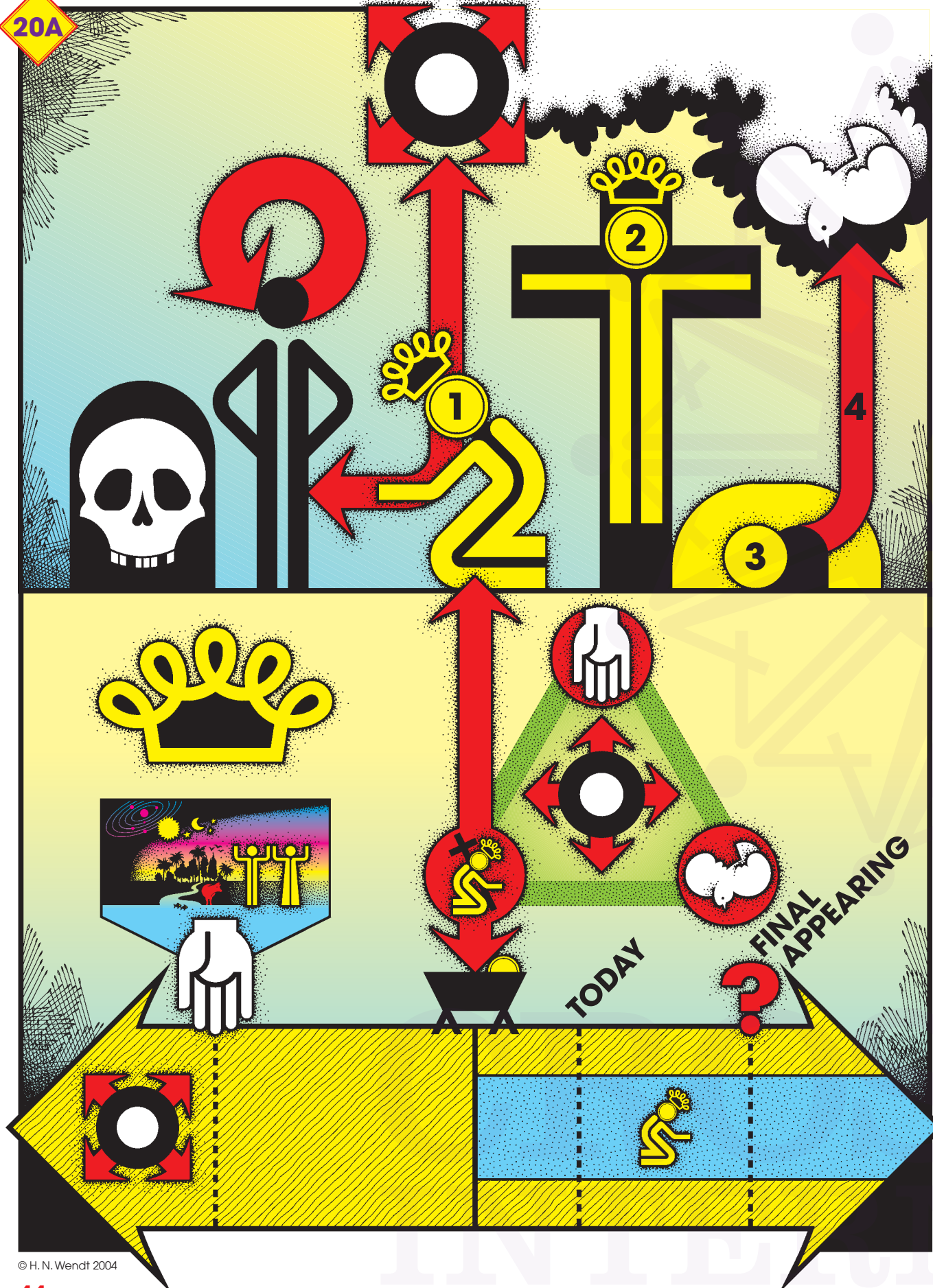
THE DIVINE DRAMA

OUR NARRATIVE

UNIT 20
Jesus the Messiah



CROSS
INTERNATIONAL



The Person & Work of Jesus the Messiah 20A

The biblical teachings about Jesus the Messiah are profound and challenging. Even so, the Bible empowers us to come to joyous and victorious faith in Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Messiah.

ILLUSTRATION 20A builds on the symbol for the Trinity used in **ILLUSTRATION 19A**. From the lower left circle of the Trinity triangle (in which is the *Servant-King carrying His cross*), a **short arrow points down** to what the Bible teaches about Jesus' *person*, and **another arrow points upward** to what the Bible teaches about Jesus' *work*.

Lower section

The Person of Jesus (Savior) Christ (Messiah)

- ◆ The lower portion of **ILLUSTRATION 20A** depicts the profound truth that in Jesus the Messiah, that which is fully God (John 20:28; 1 John 5:20) united itself with that which is fully human—but sinless, Luke 2:7; John 1:14.
- ◆ Jesus' *deity* or *divine nature* is depicted by the **yellow section**, with an **arrow pointing backward and forward**—to indicate that *Jesus is the eternal God, without beginning and without end*, Hebrews 13:8; John 8:58 (“I AM”; see Exodus 3:14). To the left is the **symbol for God**. Jesus, the eternal second Person of the Trinity existed before creation (*Creative hand of God, symbols of creation*), and will always exist.
- ◆ Halfway along the yellow section is a **manger**, a symbol of Jesus' birth—that event in which God clothed Himself in flesh. To the right of the manger is a **blue section** signifying Jesus' *human nature*. This union of the divine and the human *began* when Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, Matthew 1:18–25. Jesus *remains true man* as well as *true God today*, will show Himself as true-God/true-man at His *final appearing*, and will remain true-God/true-man to all eternity. The **question mark** serves to remind us that although Jesus *will reappear* at the end of history, we do not know *when* that event will take place.

Upper section

The Work of Jesus the Messiah

The numbers correspond to those in the upper section.

- 1 Jesus, the Messianic King (*Servant-King*), lived the life of an obedient servant, totally dedicated to doing the will of His heavenly Father (**arrow going up to symbol for God linked to arrow pointing to neighbor**), 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 4:4,5. Jesus served sinful humanity (*person in posture of indifference, symbol for sin*), subject to death and condemnation (*tombstone with skull*).
- 2 Jesus the Messiah finally surrendered Himself to crucifixion (**cross**) and burial (**tomb**) to endure the punishment the world deserves for its sin, 1 John 3:8; 2 Timothy 2:10; Romans 5:19.
- 3 God raised Jesus from the dead (**open tomb**) to vindicate (to say “Yes!” to) Jesus' Messiahship, and to declare victory and authority over death and the grave, 1 Corinthians 15:51–57.
- 4 In His ascension (**arrow rising into cloud**), Jesus did not *withdraw* His presence but *transformed* it. Jesus remains among us through the Holy Spirit (**dove; cloud of the divine presence**).

All that Jesus accomplished, He did *for us*. As the God-Man, Jesus was the *representative for the human race* who lived the life we were meant to live, *but cannot*, and suffered the death we deserve to suffer, *so that we need not*. In grace, God offers us all that Jesus was, is, and accomplished to possess as our very own. We receive and lay hold of God's gracious saving gifts in faith.



Humiliation and Exaltation

ILLUSTRATION 20C expands on **ILLUSTRATION 20B** to depict the profound truths embedded in the short statements of the Apostles' Creed, and to relate them to Jesus' *humiliation* and *exaltation*. The Creed declares:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who...

Steps Down in Jesus' HUMILIATION

- 1 was conceived by the Holy Spirit (**dove**, Luke 1:35),
- 2 born of the Virgin Mary (**manger**, Matthew 1:20–23),
- 3 suffered under Pontius Pilate (**scourge or whip**, John 18:28ff),
- 4 was crucified (**cross**, John 19:18),
- 5 died, and was buried (**sealed tomb**, John 19:30,42).

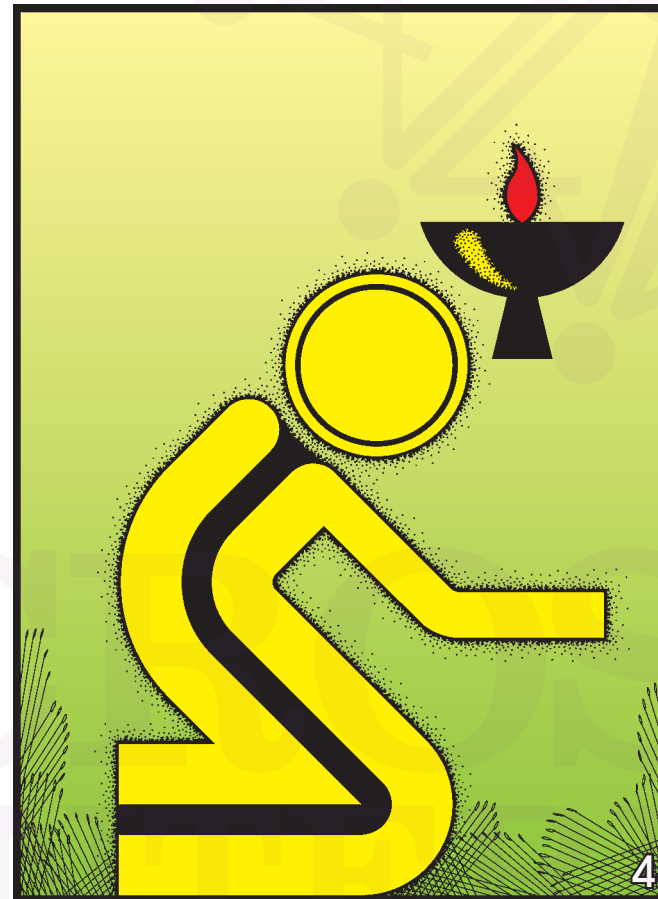
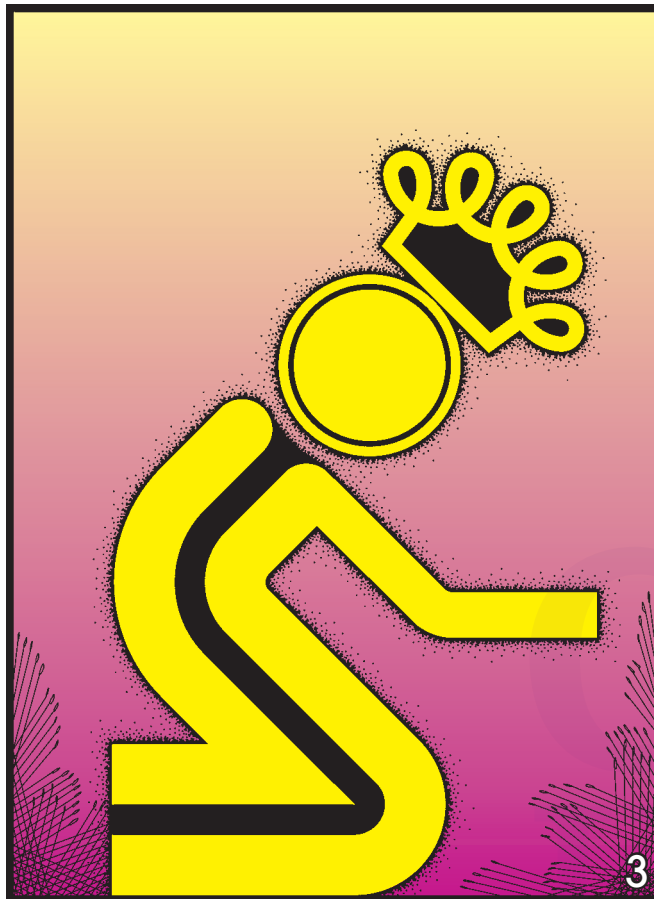
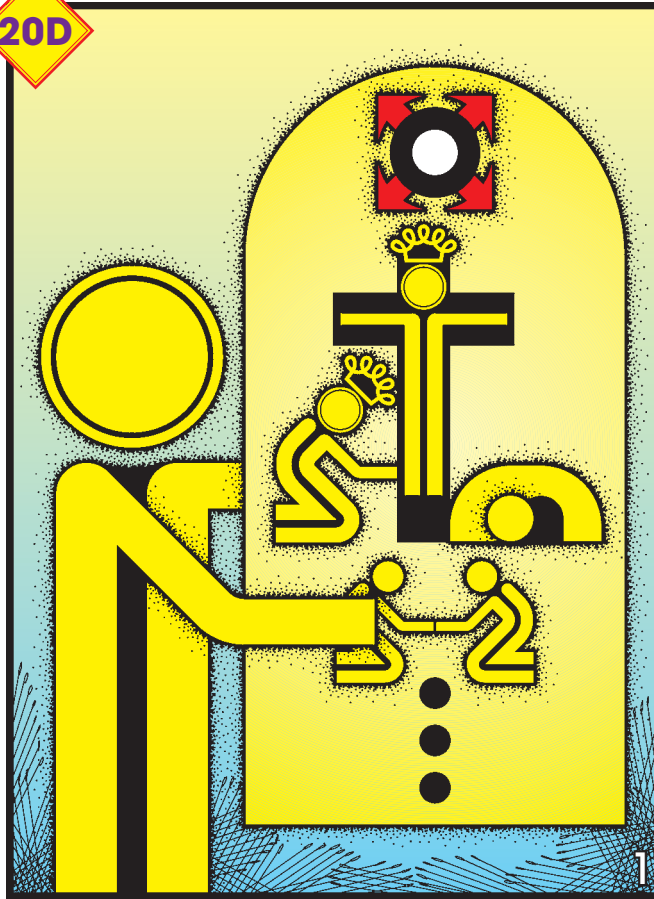
Note the suggested additional "step" (beyond the reference to Jesus' birth) which proposes that a useful purpose would be served if the Creed also confessed, "*walked the way of a humble servant without limit.*"

Steps Up in Jesus' EXALTATION

- 6 He descended into hell (**shattered tombstone with skull**, 1 Peter 3:19–20),
- 7 the third day He rose again from the dead (**open tomb**, Matthew 28:1–10),
- 8 He ascended into heaven (**arrow rising into cloud**, Luke 24:50,51),
- 9 and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty (**glorified Jesus at God's right hand**, Ephesians 1:19–22),
- 10 from there He will come to judge the living and the dead (**sheep and goat separated**, John 5:28,29; Matthew 25:31–46).

The Descent into hell

Step 6 in the *exaltation* segment does not mean that Jesus went to hell to suffer. Jesus' suffering for the sins of the world came to an end when He cried, "It is finished," John 19:30. Many interpret 1 Peter 3:19 to mean that, after returning to life, Jesus proclaimed His Lordship and authority also over the realm of the dead—often called *Sheol* in the Old Testament. (Note that the Sadducees believed that those who died went to the abode of the dead where they were cut off from God, and forgotten by God, Psalm 88.) Jesus' return to life took place before His descent into the abode of the dead. However, Jesus showed His disciples that He was alive *after* the descent—hence the order of the statements in the Apostles' Creed.



Aspects of Jesus' Work

20D

It is traditional to speak of Jesus' work as *Prophet*, *Priest*, and *King*. **ILLUSTRATION 20D** adds a fourth—Jesus as *Wisdom*.

1 Prophet

ILLUSTRATION 10A and the accompanying text in *The DIVINE DRAMA—The Biblical Narrative* discussed the role of the prophet in the life of Old Testament Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus proclaimed, or “forth-told,” with His lips and life the mind and will of God, John 17:8. As God proclaimed the Old Covenant through Moses at Sinai, so Jesus established and proclaimed the New Covenant relationship between His Father and humanity, Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 8:6–12; Exodus 24:3–11 and Mark 14:22–25. (For the details on the *covenant symbol* depicted, see **ILLUSTRATION 16B**, *DIVINE DRAMA—The Biblical Narrative*.)

2 Priest

The Old Testament priests acted as mediators (go-betweens) between God and the Israelites in the worship and sacrificial rituals conducted at the shrines in ancient Israel. Jesus is now the mediator between God and humanity. Jesus sacrificed Himself as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” John 1:29,36; Hebrews 9:11–14; Romans 8:34. (*Servant Jesus wearing a priest's hat, and carrying his cross.*)

3 King

The New Testament, especially the Gospels, refers frequently to Jesus' role as King, John 18:33–19:22. Jesus (*Servant-King*) rules a three-fold kingdom:

- Kingdom of *power*: Jesus has been declared Lord of the universe, Ephesians 1:20,21.
- Kingdom of *grace*: Jesus is Lord of God's people, the church, Ephesians 1:22.
- Kingdom of *glory*: Jesus is Lord of the world to come, Colossians 1:15–20.

4 Wisdom

The Old Testament contains a number of books known as wisdom writings—Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Wisdom writers taught that there is a divine plan to the universe, and an answer to the meaning of life. This divine plan, this answer, can be discovered. People who know and build life around it possess wisdom, and are equipped to live in harmony with the Creator and creation.

In Matthew 12:42, Jesus refers to Himself as “One greater than Solomon.” Little wonder that the wise men from the East paid homage to Jesus as the greatest of all wisdom teachers, Matthew 2:1–12; see also 1 Kings 4:34, 10:23–25. Jesus not only *taught* wisdom—His life was a *living display* of true wisdom. Paul also refers to Jesus as “the wisdom of God,” 1 Corinthians 1:24. (*Servant Jesus, the lamp of wisdom above his head.*)



Visible Son Reveals the Invisible Father 20E

- 1 John 14:8–11 tells of a conversation between Jesus and His disciples. It might be summarized as follows:

Philip: *Lord, show us what God is like. God is invisible. We cannot see God. If we could see God and know what He is like, we would find this very helpful.*

Jesus: *I have been with you for quite some time, Philip, and you still do not know who I am? If you have seen me, you have seen the invisible Father. I make Him visible through my Person, words, and works.*
 - 2 What Jesus teaches in John 14 is taught elsewhere in the New Testament:

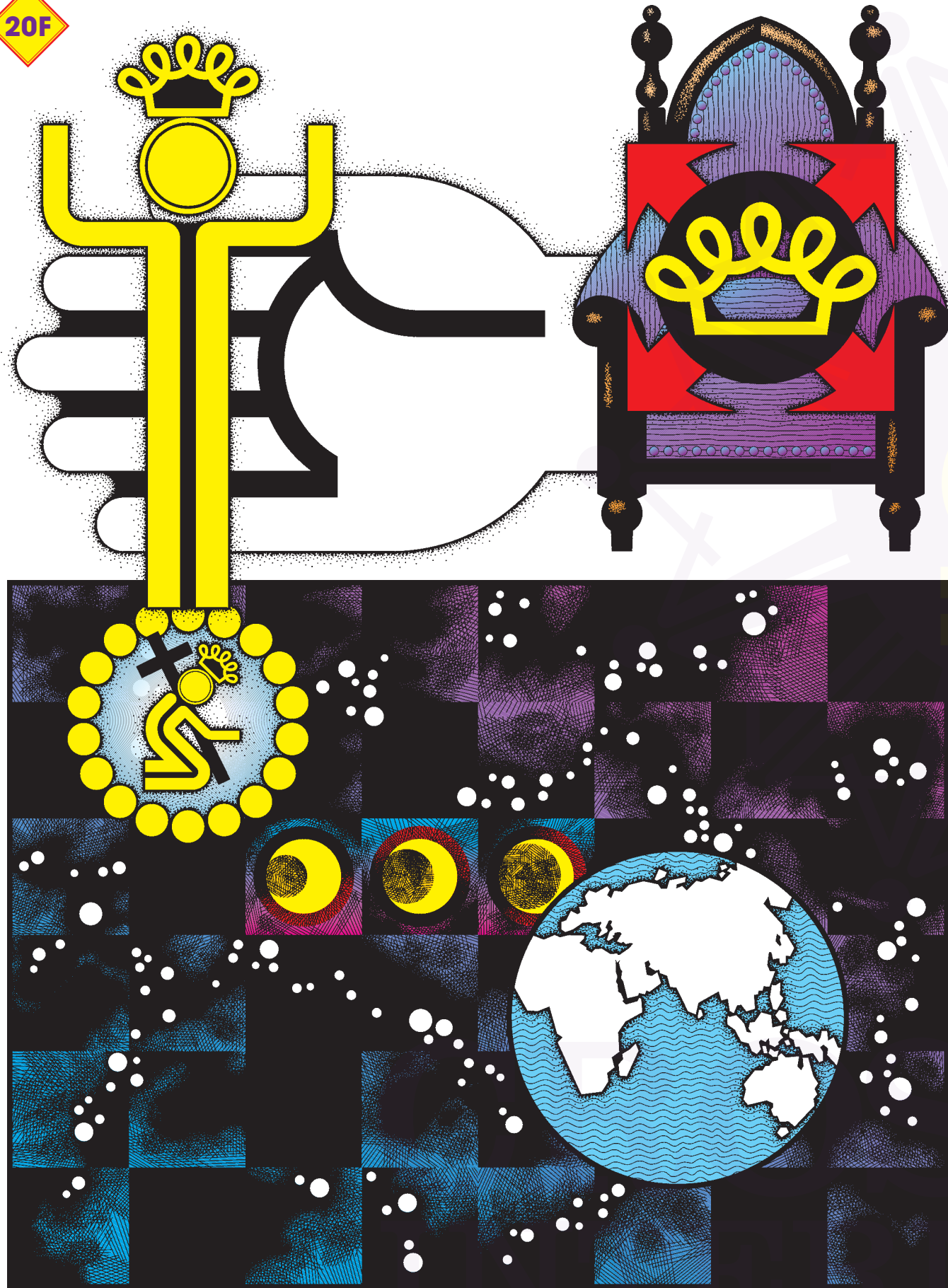
Jesus the Messiah is the image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15)

No one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:18)

The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

He [Jesus] is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. (Hebrews 1:3)
 - 3 **ILLUSTRATION 20E** depicts the truths expressed above. The *eye* in the illustration is *our* eye. When we look at what the New Testament teaches about Jesus' visible Person, life, teaching, and ministry (*Servant-King carrying His cross*), we learn more about the invisible God (*cloud depicting the presence and glory of God*).
- As Jesus was on earth, the Father is now. As Jesus treated people then, so the Father treats us now. As Jesus' disposition was, the Father's disposition is. As Jesus was and is and always will be, so the Father was and is and always will be. Jesus and the Father are one, John 17:11,20–22. **To know Jesus is to know the invisible God.**
- 4 The Gospels offer many insights into Jesus' personality:
 - a. His compassion in dealing with outcasts, Matthew 8:1–4.
 - b. His kindness toward those burdened by sin, Luke 7:48–50.
 - c. His boldness when confronted by the demonic, Mark 1:25.
 - d. His composure when dealing with opponents, John 8:42–47.
 - e. His loving patience with confused disciples, John 21:15–17.
 - f. His courage in the face of imminent death, Mark 10:32–34.

When we understand how Jesus related to people during His earthly ministry, we understand how God relates to us today.



At the Right Hand of the Father

20F

In Ephesians 1:19–23, Paul says the almighty power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is also at work in the hearts and lives of those who believe in Jesus. Paul goes on to say that after the Father raised Jesus from the dead, “God seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,” 1:20. What does this statement mean?

In the ancient world, the ownership of a nation or city was assigned to a particular god. However, that god did not rule the nation or city directly, but used an earthly ruler as the representative to do so. Accordingly, in statues and illustrations, the earthly representative was depicted standing at the god’s right hand; to stand at the right hand was to be in the position of authority.

Paul’s point in Ephesians 1:19–23 is that after the Father raised Jesus from the dead, *He gave Him the place of honor and authority in the universe*. Jesus rules the universe for His Father, and does it with the welfare of His people in mind, “for the church,” 1:22.

Upper section

The **symbol for God** is superimposed on a **throne**. The **glorified Jesus** the Messiah is at God’s “**right hand**,” the place of authority.

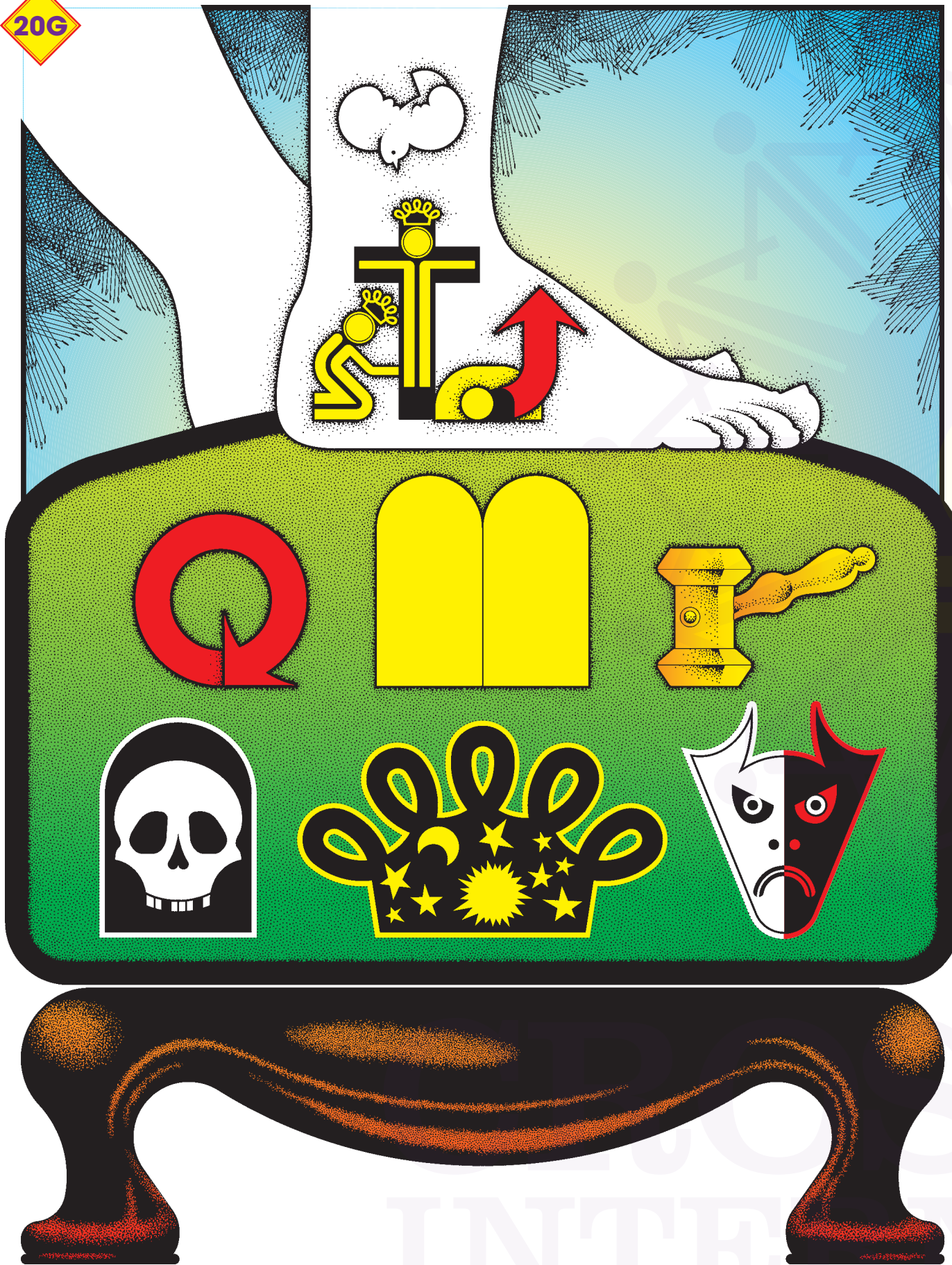
Lower section

The lower section of the illustration depicts **a corner of the universe**, with **Planet Earth** and **phases of the moon enlarged**.

In the upper left, Jesus’ new community, the new and true Israel, gathers around its Lord, Jesus the Messiah (**circle of small circles around the Servant-King carrying His cross**).

The truths depicted in **ILLUSTRATION 20F** are a source of great comfort to Christians. Jesus the Messiah has authority over the universe, the church, and our lives. We know the Person “in charge,” and we know that He is for us, Romans 8:1. We can have an inner peace in all we do, Philippians 4:4–7.

At times, history seems to be “just one fool thing after another.” Even so, the Bible insists that Jesus guides all history so that we, Jesus’ brothers and sisters, are given the opportunity to live, not necessarily *comfortably*, but *usefully*—in a way that reflects Jesus’ attitude towards the Father, the created order, and humanity.



All Things Under Jesus' Feet

In Ephesians 1:22, Paul writes:

And He [God] has put all things under his [Jesus'] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church.

Ancient practices color Paul's statement. In the ancient Near East, a king had the faces or figures of conquered enemies carved or embroidered onto his footstool, and then placed his feet on it. The implication was obvious; the king had authority over those whose images appeared on his footstool.

ILLUSTRATION 20G depicts *Jesus' feet resting on a footstool*. On Jesus' feet are symbols of the **Servant-King**, a **cross**, an **open tomb**, and a **rising arrow** symbolizing Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Above these is a **dove**, a symbol for the Holy Spirit.

The six symbols on the footstool are (reading clockwise from upper left corner):

- 1 **The power of sin (symbol for sin):** Throughout His life, Jesus the Messiah submitted to the will of His Father, not to the power of sin, John 8:46; Luke 22:42. In so doing, Jesus broke sin's hold on the human race. Jesus is sin's master! Jesus declares our sins forgiven!
- 2 **The law (law-codes):** Jesus, the God-Man, was perfectly obedient to His Father's will for humanity. In Colossians 2:13–15, Paul uses the picture of a Roman general, returning in triumphant procession after conquering his foes, to depict Jesus' as having "conquered" all law-codes—including those set forth in the Old Testament. Jesus alone may declare God's disposition towards sinners. Jesus alone may declare what God requires of humanity in terms of obedience and discipleship.
- 3 **Judgment and condemnation (gavel):** Jesus' dealings with, and victory over, all law-codes, including those set forth in the Old Testament, destroyed their authority to judge and condemn those who put their trust in Him, Romans 8:1,2,33,34.
- 4 **Satan (satanic face):** Jesus' ministry throughout His life on earth was a battle with Satan and his realm. Jesus won the battle, Mark 3:22–27; 1 John 3:8.
- 5 **The heavenly powers (crown with the astrological symbols):** The reference is to terms Paul uses in Ephesians 1:21, 6:12; Colossians 1:16; Romans 8:38,39. In these passages, Paul states that Jesus has authority over every so-called power in the universe. (Further reference will be made to these powers in Unit 30.)
- 6 **Death (tombstone with skull):** Jesus is Lord over death. The grave must obey when Jesus finally commands it to yield up its victims, Luke 7:11–17; John 5:25–29; 11:25,26,43,44.

Paul vividly sums up Jesus' Lordship when he writes:

Therefore God also highly exalted Jesus, and gave Him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11)



- 20A** At Jesus' conception, God united Himself with humanity in one person, Jesus the Messiah. As the God-Man, Jesus lived the life we were meant to live but cannot, and died the death we deserve to die so that we need not.
- 20B** Although from His conception to His burial, Jesus was true God as well as true man, He did not *always or fully* use His power as God (*humiliation*). However, Jesus has *always* done so after returning to life in the tomb (*exaltation*).
- 20C** The Apostles' Creed refers to both Jesus' *humiliation* and *exaltation* (*humiliation*: from "was conceived by the Holy Spirit" to "was crucified, died, and was buried"; *exaltation*: from "He descended into hell" to "to judge the living and the dead").
- 20D** The New Testament speaks of Jesus' roles as Prophet, Priest, King, and Wisdom.
- 20E** Although we cannot see God in His glory and majesty, Jesus' life and teachings reveal His Father's heart and character.
- 20F** After God raised Jesus from the dead, God gave Jesus authority over the created order and the course of history. Jesus directs all things so that His Father is glorified—often in ways humanity does not readily understand.
- 20G** The New Testament states that Jesus has authority over all powers and authorities in the universe, and directs them to the glory of God and for the welfare of God' people. Christians find great comfort in knowing that Jesus is both Savior and Lord, and that Jesus is *for us* in time and eternity.