

## A Dangerous Season - Rev. Mary J. Luti

Christian Lent has historically been a rough season for Jews. The more closely Christians focused on the passion and death of Jesus, the more Jews suffered their wrath. Progressive western Christians no longer urge actual pogroms in Lent and Holy Week, but we do often indulge in careless readings and preaching of the texts of the season, reinforcing thereby some of the most stubborn Christian misunderstandings and slanders regarding 'the Jews.' This is the season when we are most likely to radically oppose Jesus to his own traditions, paint those traditions as wrong-headed, even pernicious, and subtly and not so subtly diss 'the Jews' (who cherished their traditions, texts, and practices enough to argue

vividly about them among themselves) as somehow oblivious to the self-evident messiahship of Jesus. Sometimes we don't even know we're doing it. Given the history of Christian calumny, oppression, and murder of Jews throughout the ages, however, we Christians have a special responsibility to teach ourselves how to preach a full-hearted gospel without slandering Jews and Judaism, and without turning Jesus the Jew into a progressive Christian, thus removing the 'scandal' of his particularity to the detriment of our incarnational commitments. Lent might be a good time to take stock, repent, and begin again...

If you want some help (and please feel free to add other resources in the comments):

[The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#) eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z Brettler

[Irreconcilable Differences? A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians](#), David Sandmel, Rosann M. Catalano, Christopher M. Leighton

[Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews](#), Ronald J. Allen Vander Meulen

[Christianity In Jewish Terms](#), Tikva Frymer-Kensky, et al.

[Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism As a Source of Christian Self-Understanding](#), Mary C. Boys

[Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation](#), ed. Mary C. Boys

[Christian and Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other](#), Mary C. Boys

[The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewishness of Jesus](#), Amy-Jill Levine

[The Historical Jesus in Context](#), Amy-Jill Levine

[Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of A Jewish Rabbi](#), Amy-Jill Levine

[Jesus, Purity, and the Christian Study of Judaism](#), Paula Fredriksen

# A Big Lie: A History of Blame for the Jews

By Jim O'Hanlon

For centuries there have been Christians who have said, "The Jews killed Jesus." There are a number of reasons why this is false. It has also proven to be a dangerous distraction and a deadly departure from our central message. It's an ugly and hateful ideology; it's also illogical.

**First**, it's wrong to say this because Jesus came in order to die. It was his mission, to die on a cross and rise again; to show divine, sacrificial love and to show God's ability to conquer death. It's wrong to make it sound as if some nefarious group prevented Jesus from what he came to do. No one diverted or defeated Jesus, he defeated sin and death. The day he died is called Good Friday because we know, despite the tragedy, it was done for us. There's no reason to blame anyone for Jesus dying.

**Second**, Jesus was sentenced to die by a Roman governor of a brutal, imperial, occupying force. Crucifixion was a Roman form of punishment. Rome's ruthless tactics were freely and frequently employed. Rome was in charge, it was a Roman cross. Rome had an occupying army and used violence to rule. The Temple authorities were chosen by Rome.

Part of the answer as to why Jesus was sentenced to death is that it wasn't hard to get yourself crucified in a Roman occupied land and the unfairness of the punishment for all who suffered it is part of why Jesus submits to it.

**Third**, to say the Jews killed Jesus, strongly implies that Jesus was not Jewish when he and all of his followers were completely Jewish and Jesus never broke from that faith nor did he say that he wanted a new religion or a new clergy and hierarchy. Religions and denominations are shaped by people in response to God's activity.

When people say that the Jews are responsible for killing Jesus, they do this partly in ignorance but often in order to gain political power. It shows ignorance for who Jesus was and what he was about, ignorance of why he came into the world. The assertion by White Nationalist Nazis and others that Jews today should be held in suspicion and punished is wrong, because it's mean and ignorant for the three above reasons, and also because the Jewish social structure and practices today are about as different from the Jews of Jesus' day as ours are. Shortly after Jesus' death and Resurrection, Jews were forced from their land and their Temple was destroyed (for a second time); Judaism then evolved.

Jews transformed a temple based system of government which focused on animal sacrifices into a group for community and family based worship and study which focused on their sacred scrolls and seeking to love God and neighbor. You might say Judaism also became a resistance movement. A new approach to those ancient scrolls also inspired the first Christians and those texts became an essential foundation of our Holy Bible.

Christians have been guilty of anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) teachings and actions. In 1994, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) issued a "Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community" in which our church repudiated Martin Luther's hateful and violent anti-Semitic writings.