

## **What is the Bible?**

The Bible presents to us the inexhaustible treasures of God's revelation and of his love for humanity.

St John Paul II

People read the bible for many reasons, some out of curiosity, some as part of a spiritual search, others because of its literary value, or its great cultural and historical significance. However, for Jews, the Hebrew Scriptures, and for Christians, the whole Bible, is the Word of God set down in human words. The sacred texts contained in it are fundamental to their faith.

The word Bible literally means "collection of books."

The Bible is not one great big book, but a small library of books. Between its covers the Bible gathers many different types of writings - history, stories, genealogies, laws, poem, prayers, love songs, letters, visions, prophecies and so on. They were produced by many different authors, writing mainly in Hebrew and Greek, over a period of more than 1000 years. A few brief passages are also written in Aramaic, an ancient language closely related to the Hebrew that was spoken in the area of Galilee where Jesus was from.

The Bible contains the record of 3000 years of Jewish and Christian culture. People of faith among the Jewish people recognised God's presence and action in their midst, both in the important events of history and in everyday situations, and expressed this experience in words.

Even before writing materials were invented, much of the material that came to be included in the Bible was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. After years of passing on stories, songs, prayers etc by oral tradition, someone within the community wrote them down. Later others contributed to the written texts, copying them, adding material, changing details and shifting the emphasis