



**Blaise Pascal 1623-1662**

Blaise Pascal was a French genius who in his lifetime made numerous world-changing discoveries. He grew up in Paris and was home schooled by his father. He showed early promise. At age eight he wrote his first scientific paper; at 16 he wrote a mathematical essay that broke new ground in the field of geometry. When he was 19, Pascal invented a calculating machine; at 23 he made major discoveries in physics and proved the existence of the vacuum. This paved the way for hypodermic syringes, the barometer, and hydraulic devices. He also came up with the mathematical theory of probability and helped shape the field of calculus. He is also considered to be the inventor of the wristwatch.

From his teens, he often suffered great pain in his legs; as an adult he became partially crippled. Although Pascal knew very well the power of the mind and the potential for human reasoning, he also knew that people cannot solve the deepest mysteries and needs of life alone. He understood that mankind is at the same time very great, and very flawed.

Through various personal trials, Pascal became more and more a religious man. He was much affected when his niece was miraculously healed of a tumor. After he was nearly killed in a carriage accident, he was converted to a deep relationship with Jesus Christ. The day on which he found peace with God was so important to him that he wrote a reminder of it on parchment and sewed it into the lining of his coat. He kept this coat for the rest of his life, and the note was found there when he died at age 39.

In it he told of how he had come to know "the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob." He ended by writing, "I will not forget thy Word." In 1662, from the room where he lay painfully dying, Pascal observed the plight of the poor in the streets, having to trudge long distances while the rich rode comfortably. One of his last great ideas was the bus – public transportation.

Besides being a great scientist and mathematician, Blaise Pascal was a great Christian thinker, and one of France's greatest writers. In his religious writings, called the *Pensees*, a literary masterpiece was formed. In them he observed that man is a paradox of greatness and weakness. He knew life's deepest questions are: Who is my Maker? Can I know Him? He also wrote, "What a vast distance there is between knowing God and loving Him . . . Human things must be known to be loved; but Divine things must be loved to be known."