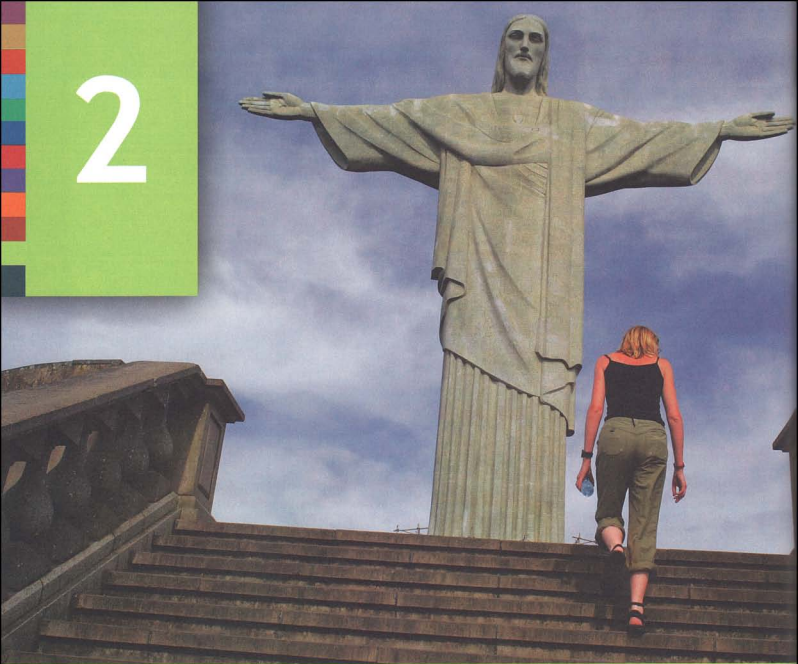


# Contents

■ 1 God's Revelation and Our Response	1
■ 2 Who Is Jesus Christ?	29
■ 3 Tracing the Historical Life of Jesus	59
■ 4 Jesus Christ's Revelation about God	89
■ 5 Jesus Helps Us to Understand the Trinity, Mary, and the Holy Spirit	113
■ 6 Jesus' Life Reveals His Mission	141
■ 7 The Church Knows Jesus by Many Names	165
■ 8 What Jesus Tells Us about Ourselves	189
■ 9 Friends and Disciples of Jesus	213
■ 10 Jesus Teaches Us to Pray	233
■ Catholic Handbook for Faith	258
■ Glossary	283
Index	291

2



# WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

*I am the way and the truth and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me.*

—John 14:6



## The Power of Words

Jesus Christ is the most important Word ever spoken, the Word of God.



## The Incarnation of Jesus

The fundamental belief of all Christians is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human nature, became man, and was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.



## Learning about Jesus

We learn about Jesus in history and through the inherited teachings of the Apostles that come to us in Scripture and the Church.



## Jesus, Resurrected Lord

The Risen Lord remains present to us in the Church—in Scripture, Sacraments, Prayer, and in the lives of Christians.




## The Mysteries of Christ's Life

Just as there are many mysteries about God the Father, there are also mysteries about Jesus, the Son of God.



## Jesus Proclaims God's Kingdom

Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God where all are welcome, especially the poor and the lowly.



## The Power of Words

The ability to create and use words to communicate is part of what makes us human. Language sets us apart from other creatures. We learn this truth in the Bible when God gave Adam the authority to name all the other marvelous creatures he had made (Gn 2:19–20).

Words can do so much good. Think of the words we use to express our love for someone. Consider the power in words we choose to tell the truth. The book of Proverbs puts it this way: “Pleasing words are a honeycomb, sweet to the taste and healthful to the body” (Prv 16:24).

But words can also do great harm. As the Irish statesman Edmund Burke (1729–1797) said, “A very great part of the mischiefs that vex this world arises from words.”

Among the many sayings about words that are worth pondering are these two:

“As a person grows wiser, he talks less and says more.”

“A major part of self-control is mouth-control.”

This last point suggests that we consider very seriously the advice of this famous saying:

Watch your thoughts, for they become words.  
Watch your words, for they become actions.

Watch your actions, for they become habits.  
Watch your habits, for they become character.  
Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

Another anonymous author has the secret recipe for human relationships when he tells us what are the most and least important words of all. His advice:

The six most important words:

“I admit that I was wrong.”

The five most important words:

“You did a great job.”

The four most important words:

“What do you think?”

The three most important words:

“Could you please . . .”

The two most important words:

“Thank you.”

The most important word: “We.”

The least important word: “I.”

This chapter begins with a reflection on words because it focuses on the most important word ever spoken—the Word of God, that is, Jesus. The Word of God became man in Jesus Christ. Everything about this unique Person reveals something about God because Jesus Christ is the Lord God. All events of his life are worthy of reflection and imitation.





## What about My Own Words?

Consider the important words discussed above by applying them to your own life. Identify people to whom they might apply. Then, in your journal, write a concrete plan for following up on your plans for the following important words.

1. *"I admit that I am wrong."* Which person needs to hear your honest confession? How will you go about asking for his or her forgiveness?
2. *"You did a great job."* Which person most needs your praise right now?
3. *"What do you think?"* Whose advice do you need right now? On what topic will you seek his or her opinion?
4. *"Thank you."* Who needs your gratitude? Why?
5. *"We."* Which ten people in your life would you include in the word *we*? Choose one of them and tell him or her how special he or she is to you.

## For Reflection

How do you describe the power of words?

## The Incarnation of Jesus (CCC, 456-463)

Christians are Christians precisely because they believe that Jesus Christ is both God and man. Jesus is the unique Son of God. At the same time, he is the fully human son of Mary whom we call the Blessed Mother. This teaching about Jesus is known as the doctrine of the **Incarnation**. It is the distinctive and defining belief of Christianity. This doctrine teaches that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, "assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it" (CCC, 461). The Word of God took on

human flesh from his mother Mary by power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human.

## Scriptural Background: The Gospels of Luke and Matthew

In the Gospel of Luke, we learn of the **Annunciation**. At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would become the mother of the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary was to name this child **Jesus**, a name that means "YHWH is Salvation" or "Savior." A sign that God was at work in this great event was that Mary's distant relative, Elizabeth, had conceived a child in her old age. Elizabeth, who had been barren, conceived a child because "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37).

With great faith, Mary, who was already betrothed to Joseph, said

### Incarnation

The teaching that God became flesh through the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the child of the Virgin Mary.

### Annunciation

The announcement by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that God wanted her to be the Mother of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

### Jesus

A word that means "YHWH is Salvation" or "Savior."





“Yes” to God’s messenger. She freely entered into God’s plan of Salvation. She replied to Gabriel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Mary’s simple and humble response to God is a model for all believers. She did not know what would happen. But Mary’s cooperation allowed God’s divine plan of Salvation to move forward.

Mary was not living with Joseph when she conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, an up-right man, knew that the child was not his. But, he did not want to expose Mary to public shame. So, he decided to divorce her quietly. In a dream, however, Joseph saw that Mary’s child was divinely conceived. In his dream, an angel told Joseph not to be afraid. Joseph was to take Mary as his wife. He too was told to name this child “Jesus.” Matthew wrote that all these events took place to fulfill an old prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel” (Mt 1:23).

The **Nativity** or birth of Jesus Christ took place nine months after the angel’s announcement to Mary and Joseph. This feast day, the day of our Savior’s birth, is celebrated on Christmas Day. The newborn Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger in the town of Bethlehem in Judea. Every

circumstance related to his birth had been foreseen. The prophet Micah had predicted (5:1):

And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of  
Judah;  
since from you shall come a ruler,  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.  
(Mt 2:6)

Today, we associate Christmas with gift giving, and it should be. On that first Christmas, God gave humanity the greatest gift of all—his Son, Jesus Christ. Too often this greatest of all gifts is almost forgotten in the busy, commercial “holiday” season. Christians should try to remember the slogan “Jesus is the reason for the season.” We should never forget what we celebrate at Christmas. The Son of God was born into the human family. He became one of us so that we might share in his life, and in the life of the Trinity. Jesus Christ became man so that we might know and love God, and live with him forever.

## Joseph

The New Testament does not tell us too much about Joseph, the husband of Mary, and foster father or legal father of Jesus. In fact, it does not record a single word spoken by this important man in the life of Jesus.

Reportedly, Joseph lived for some periods of his life in Nazareth in Galilee but took his pregnant wife Mary to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Joseph then rushed his family away to Egypt when King Herod the Great ordered the killing of all male infants in Bethlehem. Later, after the death of Herod, Mary and Joseph and the very young Jesus returned to live in Nazareth. Joseph was a descendant of King David (see Matthew 1:6 and Luke 3:31) and he worked as a carpenter, a trade he also taught his son, Jesus. The Gospels (for example, Matthew 13:55, Luke 3:23, and John 6:42) confirm that Jesus was known to the people of his time as the son of Joseph, the carpenter.

Joseph and Mary traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover feast when Jesus was twelve years old. On this occasion, Mary and Joseph lost contact with Jesus and frantically searched until they found the boy Jesus in the Temple. Jesus was teaching the elders who “were astounded at his understanding and his answers” (Lk 2:47). The Gospels do not tell us about the death of Joseph. But, it’s likely that Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry. Mark’s Gospel hints at this. When the people of Nazareth would not accept Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue, they identified him as the carpenter, “the son of Mary” (Mk 6:3). This identification suggests that Joseph had already died.

Although Joseph did not utter a single word in the Gospels, his presence is strongly felt. A man of tremendous faith, he raised Jesus in the Jewish faith, and trained him in a trade—carpentry. Joseph also taught Jesus to be a *gentle* man. Surely, Jesus also saw the great love Joseph had for Mary. Joseph must have been a tremendous example for the boy, and then, the young man entrusted to his care. Much credit must go to Joseph when we see that Jesus was a loving, graceful, manly, hard-working, prayerful, and courageous man. The Church recognizes Joseph as the patron saint of workers and celebrates his feast day on March 19.

## Scriptural Background: John’s Gospel

The Prologue to the Gospel of John provides a beautiful theological description for the Incarnation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:1–4; 14)

The author of John’s Gospel used the expression “the Word became *flesh*” to state emphatically that Jesus took on human nature and became man. He did so to counteract a first-century heresy known as **Docetism**. This heresy taught that Jesus only “seemed” to be a man. (*Docetism* comes from a Greek word meaning “to seem.”) People who believed in Docetism could not believe that God would demean himself by becoming like us in all our weakness and humanity. For Docetists, Jesus was a ghostly figure who *appeared* to instruct us about godly things.

The danger of Docetism was that if Jesus only seemed to be human,



### Nativity

The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of the Virgin Mary.

### Docetism

A first-century heresy that taught that Jesus only seemed to be human.

then he only *seemed* to die and rise from the dead. These key events—Christ's Death and Resurrection—are the basis of our Salvation. If they are only phantasms and appearances, then we have not really been saved. Added to that, there is no more hope for our own resurrection from the dead.

The author of John's Gospel used the Greek word *sarx* to declare that Jesus really was one of us. This word *sarx* was like the Latin word *carne*, which is translated as "flesh." Obviously, a person cannot be a human being without having a human body.

So, the word *incarnation* means "God becoming flesh, or human." Jesus is truly God. He is the Word of God who was always with God. But Jesus is also truly man with the body of a man. Jesus is God-man. (Chapters 4–7 discuss in greater depth the theological meaning of Jesus as God and man.)

## The Purpose of the Incarnation

Catholics understand that the Incarnation of God's Son, Jesus, brought about many blessings for all human beings.

- First, the Word became flesh to reconcile us with God. Because of the Original Sin, humans inherited a fallen nature and were prone to sin,

ignorance, sickness, and death. Christ's great and loving sacrifice heals our human nature. Jesus also overcame sin and won everlasting life for us.

- Second, as God's Son, Jesus clearly showed God's love to us.
- Third, as God-made-man, Jesus became the perfect model of holiness. He is "the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6) who teaches that the path to holiness is for us to give ourselves to others in imitation of him. "Love one another as I love you" (Jn 15:12).
- Fourth, by becoming human, the Word of God made it possible for us to share in God's nature. "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God" (St. Athanasius quoted in CCC, 460).

These blessings convince us that it is good to learn all we can *about* Jesus. Moreover, it is extremely important to know Jesus himself. Jesus is the living Lord who calls each of us by name.

## For Review

1. What is the Incarnation?
2. What does the word "Jesus" mean?



## Quotations about Christ

Do an Internet search on the topic, "Quotations about Jesus Christ." Read at least fifty quotations. Then transcribe five of your favorite quotations. Display them on an attractive poster board for posting in your classroom or study area at home. Here are three sample quotations to get you started:

How sweet, the presence of Jesus to the longing, harassed soul!  
It is instant peace, and balm to every wound.

—St. Elizabeth Seton

Invisible in his own nature God became visible in ours.  
Beyond our grasp, he chose to come within our grasp.

—St. Leo the Great

What good is it having someone who can walk on water  
if you don't follow in his footsteps?

—Author Unknown



3. What is the feast of the Annunciation?
4. What was Docetism and why does the Church see it as a heresy?
5. Name three blessings for all human beings that result from the Incarnation of Jesus.

## For Reflection

- Choose a character that interests you from the “Christmas passages” in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Expand on the Gospel story and write a short “eyewitness” account of the birth of Jesus from the point of view of one of these characters—for example, Joseph, Mary, a shepherd, one of the Magi, a villager from Bethlehem. Later, share this Bethlehem story with your classmates.
- Write a sixty-second public service essay for a radio station on the real meaning of Christmas—God’s gift to humanity. Consider sending it or an audio recording of it to a local radio station that welcomes essays from local writers.

## Learning about Jesus (CCC, 422-426)

Who is the *real* Jesus? Where do we learn about him? Where do we find him? The answer to all of these questions is in some ways simple. The Jesus we read about in the Bible is the real Jesus. The Jesus we meet in the Church is the real Jesus. The Jesus we receive in the Eucharist and the other Sacraments is the real Jesus. We also learn certain basic facts about Jesus from history.



## Many Ways to Know Jesus

Think about your own knowledge of Jesus. You probably learned what you know about Jesus from your parents, teachers, retreats, priests who spoke about Jesus in homilies, or from television programs, films, books, and articles about Jesus.

But where did those people get their information about Jesus? They learned about Jesus from other people who came before them, and from the bishops and Popes who made sure that what was passed on was accurate and faithful teaching.

Where did all of that knowledge about Jesus come from?

If you follow this process all the way back, you will find that what we know about Jesus came from the Apostles. Those twelve Galileans had direct contact and experience with Jesus. They knew him as a teacher and as a healer who walked with them over the dusty roads of Palestine. The Apostles were witnesses of his arrest and condemnation as a criminal. Most important of all, they saw Jesus after his Death—after he had been raised in power and glory.

These first followers of Jesus experienced the power of the Risen Lord in their own lives. At Pentecost, they were transformed from frightened cowards into bold people who boldly proclaimed the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus Christ. These men

were so convinced of the truth of their message that they didn't hesitate to surrender their own lives in order to preach the simple message, "Jesus is Lord!"

As explained in Chapter 1, the testimony of the Apostles about Jesus Christ comes down to us through the Tradition of the Church and through the writings of Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels. Both are part of the Deposit of Faith. Both are accurate sources of knowledge about Jesus Christ. Tradition and Sacred Scripture preserves the authentic message about Jesus. Knowledge of the Bible, especially the Gospels, is essential for anyone who wants to "know" Jesus Christ.

## *The Jesus of History*

Historical records verify that there was a real man known as "Jesus, the Carpenter," "Jesus, the son of Joseph," and as "Jesus of Nazareth." More

information about the historical accounts of Jesus will be presented in Chapter 3. This Jesus lived most of his life in Nazareth in Galilee and learned the trade of carpentry from his foster father, Joseph. Jesus actively practiced his Jewish religion. He was a circumcised man. He studied the Old Testament writings, faithfully worshipped on the Sabbath, recited his daily prayers and the psalms. He also celebrated the great religious feasts in the Temple, and kept the precepts of the Mosaic Law.

Around AD 28, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, an itinerant preacher and prophet. After that, Jesus withdrew to a nearby desert to prepare for his own public ministry. After forty days, Jesus emerged from the desert and preached through the countryside. His message was about repentance, the coming of God's Kingdom, and the need to put one's faith in the Gospel.



## **Adopting "Kingdom Attitudes"**

Jesus taught that God's Kingdom had already come. He said that this Kingdom calls people to a new way of living both as individuals and as communities. God's Kingdom brings Salvation from sin and a share in God's life. God's Kingdom is truly Good News because it brings love, justice, compassion, and forgiveness for all people. We know that this Kingdom of God or Reign of God is only partially experienced here on earth. We see that there is still pain and violence, sickness and death all around us. It will be fully realized only in heaven. Nonetheless, Jesus wanted all of his followers to know that in the Kingdom of God, peace, justice, and joy would abound for all people. In this Kingdom, everyone would see that all people are sisters and brothers, children of God.

Take a few minutes to quietly consider your life and your relationships—family members, friends, teammates, classmates, and neighbors. It's true that no one can "download" the Kingdom of God into our lives and culture today. But, you can cultivate "Kingdom Attitudes" in your own life. You can encourage others to do the same.

In your journal or notebook, list and describe three "Kingdom Attitudes" you can adopt and make a part of your life.



“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mk 1:15)

## ***The Miracles and Ministry of Jesus***

Besides preaching about the coming of God’s Kingdom, Jesus also performed wonderful works and miracles. These miracles supported the claim Jesus made that God’s Kingdom had already broken into human history. Jesus cured lepers, restored sight to blind people and hearing to deaf people. He fed the crowds with a few loaves of bread, and exorcised demons from the possessed. He also called his Apostles to witness firsthand his life, his teachings, and his miracles. Jesus also commissioned his Apostles and all of his followers to carry on his work when he was gone. In addition to his twelve Apostles, Jesus also gathered many other disciples around him.

## ***The Humanity of Jesus***

Without a doubt, Jesus was a man who truly experienced human pain, fatigue, and a variety of emotions. The Gospels report his experience of hunger (Mk 11:12), thirst (Jn 4:7), and weariness (Jn 4:6). He showed anger at the moneychangers (Mt 21:12–13) and experienced deep sorrow (Mk 14:34) and heart-wrenching distress that led to tears at the death of his friend, Lazarus (Jn 11:34–35). He suffered great physical and emotional pain during his Passion and Death (Mt 27:50). Moreover, he exhibited great compassion and love for everyone he met, especially those who were suffering. “At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36).

Obviously, Jesus had a strong and charismatic personality. Those who met him had to decide what to do about his challenging message. Jesus made statements about how life should be lived that couldn’t be ignored. For example, he said that everyone would

have to decide whether or not they would turn from their sins and accept God’s love. Those who heard Jesus had to make an important decision about believing in him. The way Jesus preached and his actions led some people to think of him as a great prophet. But not everyone agreed with this. Even some of his relatives thought that Jesus was crazy or unstable (Mk 3:20–21).

Some of the things Jesus did, and some of his teachings threatened and angered the authorities. He spoke with a unique authority and didn’t quote other Jewish teachers to verify what he said. Then, he associated with prostitutes and tax collectors. That horrified and distressed many people. Jesus also gave novel interpretations of the Law. He claimed to speak for God.

Eventually the Jewish authorities conspired to have Jesus arrested. One of his followers betrayed him for money. The other Apostles abandoned him. Some Jewish officials tried Jesus and found him guilty of blasphemy because he claimed to be God’s Son. They turned him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect, who sentenced him to the cruelest form



of capital punishment—crucifixion. This execution took place either in AD 30 or 33. It was alleged that Jesus claimed to be “King of the Jews,” a crime interpreted under Roman law as sedition against the Roman Emperor Tiberius.

These basic facts present historical information about the life of Jesus and provide evidence that he is the most compelling human to walk the face of the earth. As the famous British writer, H. G. Wells (1866–1946), put it,

I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history. Christ is the most unique person of history. No man can write a history of the human race without giving first and foremost place to the penniless teacher of Nazareth.

## For Review

1. Where did knowledge about Jesus originally come from?
2. How have Catholics received the testimony of the Apostles about Jesus?
3. Name several facts that are known about Jesus from historical records.
4. What was the central theme of Jesus’ teaching?
5. Name some deeds done by Jesus that verified that the Kingdom of God had come.
6. How did the actions and teachings of Jesus anger Jewish authorities?

## For Reflection

- Think about the many people who have helped you to learn about Jesus. Describe at least two of those people and tell

about what you learned about Jesus from them.

- Imagine that you are a Jew living in the time of Jesus. You have heard of his miracles and teachings. What would convince you that the Kingdom of God he talked about really was beginning? Would it be the healing of a blind man? Would it be a miraculous multiplication of bread and fish? Or would it simply be his compassion? Share your thoughts.

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## Jesus, Resurrected Lord (CCC, 427-429)

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Jesus is much more than a famous and influential person who lived long ago. The Church’s teaching on the Incarnation leads us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus came to save us by dying and then rising from the dead. We believe that Jesus is alive now. Like belief in the Incarnation, belief in the Resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental belief for every Christian. The **Resurrection** is the rising of Jesus from the dead on the third day after his Death on the cross.

God raised his own Son, Jesus, from the dead. The Resurrection and glorification of Jesus reveal his true identity as God’s Son, a Son who fully shared the Father’s superabundant life and glory. Moreover, with his Father, the Risen Christ sent the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of believers. That empowered them to live lives of love and service in imitation of Jesus.

The “real Jesus” of Christian faith is the resurrected Jesus, a living person whom God has revealed as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). This real Jesus lives in his Body, the Church (see also Chapter 1). Through the Church, he continues to live in the world.



This Jesus you have heard about is the same as the Jesus of history who lived on this earth over two thousand years ago. When all is said and done, Christian faith is a response to a living God. This God is powerfully at work in his Church, and among its members, through the resurrected Jesus Christ.

## Meeting Jesus Today

Because Jesus is alive as Risen Lord, we can meet him today. *You* can meet him today!

You can meet Jesus in the Bible, the written record of Revelation. Remember, Revelation is God's self-communication to us. You can especially meet Jesus in the New Testament writings, most notably in the four Gospels. They record many of the important deeds that Jesus performed. They also contain many teachings that guide us toward loving service for others. The Gospels and other New Testament writings would never have been written if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, and if the Spirit had not later come to the disciples of Jesus. The Gospels were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The evangelists set down a written record of the Good News about Jesus Christ, Son of God. The Gospels were written to build and support our faith:

But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. (Jn 20:31)



Besides in Scripture, there are several other ways to meet and know Jesus today. These are covered in the next sections.

## Jesus in the Sacraments

The Risen Lord left his Church seven visible signs of invisible grace called Sacraments. Sacraments are “efficacious” signs, meaning they bring about the spiritual realities to which they point. Christ instituted the Sacraments and made them “of the Church” because they are “by her” and “for her.” As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it:

The sacraments are “by the Church,” for she is the sacrament of Christ’s action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are “for the Church” in the sense that “the sacraments make the Church,” since they manifest and communicate to men, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with

## Resurrection

The rising of Jesus from the dead on the third day after his Death on the cross. Jesus was able to conquer death because he is God.

the God who is love, One in three persons.  
(CCC, 1118)

In the Sacraments of the Church, Jesus comes to us in very special moments in our life:

- when we are initiated into the Church (Baptism);
- when we need the special strength of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life (Confirmation);
- when we receive—even daily if we choose—the sign of love we call the Holy Eucharist;
- when we are sick and in need of spiritual and physical healing (Anointing of the Sick);
- when we have sinned and need to be forgiven and welcomed back into the Church (Penance);
- when we are called to serve God as special ministers to the Church (Holy Orders);
- and when we commit ourselves to a lifetime of sharing life and love with a spouse (Matrimony).

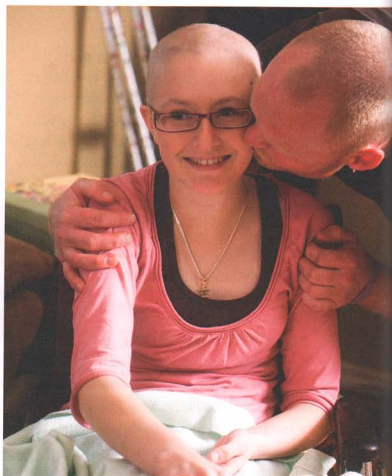
These Seven Sacraments are powerful signs of Christ's love. They are guaranteed encounters with the Risen Lord.

## Jesus in Prayer

We can also meet the living Lord in prayer. We can talk to him whenever we want. In our hearts, we can talk to Jesus as we would talk to any friend. We can meet him when we assemble with other believers, especially in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. As Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

## Jesus in the Body of Christ

In addition to all that, Jesus lives in the Body of Christ, the Church. Jesus is the Head of this Body. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, he lives in each member of this Body. Because God became man in Jesus Christ, all of humanity has tremendous dignity. That is, we have tremendous value and worth. *You* are indeed precious in God's eyes. However,



that also means that we have a great responsibility to serve other people—just as Jesus did.

In a very particular and memorable way, Jesus identified himself with the lowly, the outcast, and the marginalized. He warned that we shall be judged on how we have welcomed the stranger, fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, visited the sick and imprisoned.

He will answer them, "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. (Mt 25:45–46)

Jesus reminded his followers that when we respond to the least of these, we are responding to him. He is in every one of us, especially the poor.

## For Review

1. Why is belief in the Resurrection of Jesus a fundamental belief for Christians?
2. What are three different ways that we can meet Jesus in the Church?
3. What part of the New Testament is the best place to meet Jesus?
4. Why does the text call the Sacraments “guaranteed encounters” with Jesus?
5. How did Jesus put himself into the story in Matthew 25, a story about caring for the poor and outcast?

## For Reflection

- Describe how Easter, the greatest of feasts, could be celebrated in new ways by your family, your school, your parish, and your community.
- Different ways to meet Jesus are listed in the text. What way works best for you? Do you prefer to meet Jesus through the Scriptures, the Sacraments or in other people, that is, in the Body of Christ?

## The Mysteries of Christ's Life (CCC, 512-570)

A **mystery** is a truth about God that will always be beyond human understanding. God's greatness, his eternal omnipotence, and all of his other perfections are beyond our grasp. We will never really comprehend these realities, even when we ourselves are in Heaven. The word (*mysterion* in Greek) also refers to God's saving plan that was gradually revealed in human history.

We also use the term “mystery” when we talk about Christ's life. Jesus is the link between God and his saving plan. Human beings saw God most fully when he became man in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is the Son of God who came to redeem us, “Christ's whole earthly life—his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking—is *Revelation* of the Father” (CCC, 516). It is in Christ's whole life—from the Incarnation, through his total sacrifice on the Cross, and in the final victory of the Resurrection—that we are redeemed.

Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Every aspect of Christ's life, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is related to his mission of Redemption. Jesus redeemed us once and for all by his Death on the cross. His whole life, however, paints a picture of God, Our

### **mystery**

A truth about God and his saving plan that will always be beyond human understanding.

### Epiphany

The celebration of the manifestation of God in human form; the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles or non-Jews.

### Presentation in the Temple

The presentation of the infant Jesus by Mary and Joseph in the Temple took place forty days after his birth. This ritual observed the Law of Moses and marked the end of forty days of purification for the mother after childbirth. This presentation also completed the “redemption” of a firstborn son with a ritual offering.



Father, and his infinite love and mercy for us.

Consider the following fact. Through the Incarnation, the Almighty God became poor, small, and vulnerable by becoming one of us. This great act of humility greatly enriched us because it made it possible for us to share in his life. In quiet submission to Mary and Joseph, Jesus modeled perfect humility and obedience for us. Later, through his public life of preaching and teaching the Word of God, Jesus shouldered even more of our sad human realities. When he healed and cast out evil spirits, as the Scriptures tell us, “He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Mt 8:17). Finally, in his Resurrection, he justified us (see CCC, 517).

In summary, Jesus Christ is the perfect man. On earth, he lived his life for us. He is our model. He teaches us how to be humble, how to pray, how to serve others, how to endure suffering, how to love. Reflecting on the various mysteries in Christ’s life as they are revealed in Scripture teach us how to be his disciples.

Read the suggested Scripture passages named in the following sections in their entirety. Then, you will begin to see how a particular mystery in the life of Jesus reveals God’s love.

## The Birth and Infancy of Jesus

In Matthew 2 and Luke 2, we find the “Christmas stories” that are so familiar. Jesus, these Gospel passages

tell us, was born in poverty. He came into the world as one of the lowly and poor.

The first to see him after Mary and Joseph were the shepherds. Pious Jews referred to this lowly group as “the people of the land.” Because they were constantly herding sheep, shepherds could not faithfully observe religious rituals required by the Law. Yet, these simple, earthy people who were more or less despised by the Jewish establishment were among the first to see the Redeemer.

The Magi from the East who visited Jesus were not Jews. The story of their coming appears only in Matthew. Traditionally, we remember these Magi as “the three kings.” However, they were probably from the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. The manifestation of Jesus to non-Jews reveals that Jesus came as the Savior of all people. This is the message and meaning of the **Epiphany**.

In the **Presentation in the Temple**, we read that Joseph and Mary presented the infant as Jewish law required. Jesus was seen as a firstborn son for this couple. A firstborn son, in Jewish thinking, belonged to God. In the Temple, the aged prophets Simeon and Anna recognized Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. They thanked God for allowing them to see this promised Savior. They predicted his future Death on the cross and warned Mary of future sorrows (“the sword of sorrow that will pierce Mary’s heart”).

The Flight into Egypt and the Slaughter of the Innocents are also part of this Christmas story. These events



## PROPHECIES ABOUT THE MESSIAH

Check the following eight Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Then read the New Testament “fulfillment” of the prophecies. In your notebook or journal, briefly tell about each Old Testament prophecy, and how Jesus fulfilled it through his birth, life, ministry, and Death.

### Old Testament Prophecy

1. Genesis 3:15
2. Deuteronomy 18:15-19
3. Psalm 2:7
4. Psalm 16:10-11
5. Psalm 22:8
6. Psalm 41:10
7. Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16
8. Isaiah 35:5-6

### New Testament Fulfillment

1. Galatians 4:4
2. Acts 3:22-23
3. Luke 3:22
4. John 20:11-16
5. Luke 23:11, 35-39
6. John 13:18
7. Luke 1:32-33
8. Matthew 11:3-6

took place because of the jealousy of the worldly ruler, Herod the Great. Herod was an extremely brutal Jewish king. The Holy Family's forced flight into Egypt took place because Herod ordered the killing of infant and toddler boys in Bethlehem.

The forces of evil were at war against Jesus from the very beginning of his life. These events also show how God protected his Son. Jesus needed to grow into adulthood to accomplish his mission of saving all of humanity.

## The Hidden Life of Jesus

The “hidden life of Jesus” refers to his life as a child, adolescent, and young adult in Nazareth. The response of Jesus to his parents and other authorities was one of respectful obedience. We can easily see a contrast here with Adam's disobedience to God. This obedience of Jesus to Mary and Joseph shows us how the Fourth Commandment should be observed. Jesus showed what it means to “honor your father and your mother.” His obedience to his earthly parents reflected his perfect obedience to his heavenly Father. All throughout these hidden years of formation, Jesus also grew in knowledge of his Jewish faith.

Scripture makes it clear that Jesus regularly attended religious festivals in Jerusalem. During one of these pilgrimage journeys to the Holy City, the

twelve-year-old Jesus was separated from his parents and their companions. Later, Mary and Joseph found Jesus addressing teachers in the Temple. These educated men were astounded at the wisdom of this boy from Nazareth. Even as a boy, Jesus was already totally consecrated to his mission as God's Son. His growth and development in a remote Galilean village was quite ordinary in most respects though in others it was extraordinary. Jesus was both God and man. His growth was also full of wonderful mystery.

## The Baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:1-17)

The public life of Jesus began with his baptism by John the Baptist. John's mission was to prepare the way for Jesus. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was without sin and did not need to be baptized for that purpose, which John immediately recognized. However, by freely submitting to baptism, Jesus accepted and launched his mission to be God's Suffering Servant. When Jesus humbly submitted to John's baptism, he was showing solidarity with all human beings who *do* need forgiveness. On his shoulders, Jesus bore the guilt of humanity and took it down into the waters of the Jordan River.

The identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Redeemer was revealed at his baptism. The Holy Spirit appeared above Jesus as a dove, and a heavenly voice proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased" (Mt 3:17). This baptism pointed to our Christian Baptism. In the Sacrament of Baptism, we go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him. We are reborn in water and the Spirit. We become a new child of the Father and can then "walk in newness of life" (CCC, 537).

## The Temptations of Jesus (Mt 4:1-11)

After he was baptized, Jesus retreated into the desert for forty days of prayer and fasting. This desert time helped Jesus prepare for his ministry. In the desert, Satan tempted Jesus three ways. The first temptation challenged Jesus to satisfy his hunger by turning rocks into bread. The second asked him to use his divine powers and throw himself from the Temple parapet. Angels could catch Jesus and many adoring followers would be won over to him. The third temptation promised Jesus worldly power if he would just worship Satan.

Jesus refused all three of Satan's temptations. Instead, he gave the Evil One three wonderful responses: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test" (Mt 4:7). And "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve" (Mt 4:10).

Jesus was tempted. This means that he *could* have made choices that contradicted his Father's will. Unlike us, however, Jesus never gave into any temptation. Jesus never sinned. Think of Jesus as the New Adam, the sinless Adam before the Fall. Jesus was like Adam before he listened to and yielded to Satan's lies. By repudiating Satan, Jesus remained faithful to God. Unlike the Chosen People who often turned from God during their forty years in the desert, Jesus was always obedient.



## ● Handling Temptations Today

What is the greatest source of temptation for people today? With a partner or in small groups, discuss these types of temptation. Along with the five temptations given, add one more that you think young people often face. Then, put these temptations in ranking order of frequency. (1 for most commonly experienced temptation and 6 for least commonly experienced temptation.) Once you have ranked these six temptations, share your ranking with other groups in the class.

- Temptation to dishonesty
- Temptation to be greedy
- Temptation to make fun of those who are different
- Sexual temptation
- Temptation to use alcohol or drugs
- Temptation to \_\_\_\_\_

## For Review

1. What is a mystery?
2. Describe one of the mysteries in the life of Jesus.
3. What is the Epiphany? What did this event communicate about the ministry of Jesus?
4. Describe two events that took place during the "hidden life" of Jesus.
5. Why was John the Baptist surprised that Jesus came to him for baptism?
6. How did the Holy Spirit identify Jesus as God's Son at his baptism?
7. What were the three temptations presented to Jesus in the desert?

## For Reflection

- What are some things you would like to ask Jesus if you could travel back in time to Nazareth during the years when he was your age?
- The temptations that Jesus faced involved food, fame, and power. What are some areas of temptation that you and your peers most often face?

## Jesus Proclaims God's Kingdom (CCC, 543-550)

According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus began his ministry after John the Baptist was arrested. Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. Matthew quotes Isaiah who prophesied that the Messiah would begin his preaching ministry in Galilee. Matthew's attention to geographical detail emphasizes that Jesus really was a historical person who taught in a specific place at a specific time.

## Christ's Ministry Begins in Capernaum (Mt 4:12-25)

Matthew summarizes Jesus' essential message this way: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). Mark's Gospel gives a slightly fuller version of the same message, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15).

**Kingdom of God** and **Kingdom of Heaven** are synonymous terms.

The first part of this message calls for conversion and repentance, a true sorrow and turning away from sin, with a firm purpose to sin no more in the future. The second part explains *why* this is necessary. God's power, judgment, and rule are now taking hold in human history. God's presence is active in love, forgiveness, healing, compassion, works of justice, and

### Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven

The beginning of God's new reign on earth which was to bring the forgiveness of sins, the healing of the sick, and the establishment of a time of peace and joyful living for all. Jesus, the Redeemer, initiated this new Kingdom.

## Main Ideas

- Jesus is the Word of God, the most important word ever spoken. (p. 30)
- Scriptural background for the Incarnation is presented primarily in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. (pp. 31–32)
- The Incarnation is the belief that the Word of God became flesh as Jesus Christ. (p. 31)
- Belief in the Incarnation is a distinctive belief of Christianity. (p. 31)
- The Annunciation is the angel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin Mary that God wanted her to become the Mother of the Redeemer. (p. 31)
- The name *Jesus* means "YHWH is Salvation" or "Savior." (p. 31)
- The Nativity was the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Redeemer. (pp. 32–33)
- Joseph was the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus. Joseph taught Jesus about Judaism and the trade of carpentry. (pp. 32–33)
- Docetism was a heresy that taught that Jesus only seemed to be human. (p. 33)
- Because of the Incarnation, God's great act of love, human beings can have everlasting life. (p. 34)
- We learn about Jesus through Church Tradition and Sacred Scripture; both comprise the Deposit of Faith. (p. 35–36)
- History verifies that a man named Jesus did live and teach in Galilee and was executed near Jerusalem. (p. 36)
- The "real Jesus" of Christian faith is the resurrected Jesus. (pp. 38–39)
- Through the Seven Sacraments of the Church, the Risen Jesus remains with us. (pp. 39–40)
- We can also meet Jesus in prayer, in the institutional Church, and in other people. (p. 40)
- A "mystery" is a truth about God that human minds can never fully grasp or appreciate. (pp. 41–42)
- There are many mysteries about the Incarnation, Nativity, and Epiphany of Jesus. (pp. 41–43)
- Because little is known about the childhood and youth of Jesus, this period is called "the hidden life" of Jesus. (p. 43)
- The baptism of Jesus began his public ministry and showed his desire to be in solidarity with human beings. (pp. 43–44)
- Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert in three different ways. (p. 44)
- Jesus began to minister and preach in Capernaum after his baptism. (pp. 45–46)
- The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven refer to God's reign on earth and the Salvation of all through Jesus. (pp. 45–46)
- The Kingdom of God is open to all, including the poor, Jesus said. (p. 46)
- Jesus used parables, paradoxes, and vivid images in his teaching. (pp. 47–48)
- Jesus performed four different kinds of miracles—physical healings, exorcisms, nature miracles, and the raising of people from the dead. (pp. 48–49)
- Jesus was charged with blasphemy when he told a paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven. (p. 49)
- The Transfiguration revealed the divine glory of Jesus. (pp. 49–50)
- The Paschal Mystery is the saving Passion, Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension of Jesus Christ. (pp. 50–51)



## Terms, People, Places

Match the following terms with the definitions below.

- A. Annunciation
- B. Blasphemy
- C. Docetism
- D. Epiphany
- E. Incarnation
- F. Jesus
- G. Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven
- H. Mystery
- I. Nativity
- J. Paradox
- K. Paschal Mystery
- L. Presentation in the Temple
- M. Resurrection
- N. Transfiguration

1. \_\_\_\_ God becoming flesh.
2. \_\_\_\_ A rich image of the Church from St. Paul.
3. \_\_\_\_ The victory of Christ over death.
4. \_\_\_\_ Occurred forty days after the birth of Jesus.
5. \_\_\_\_ A word that means "YHWH is Salvation."
6. \_\_\_\_ The birth of Jesus.
7. \_\_\_\_ The announcement to Mary that she would be the Mother of the Savior, Jesus Christ.
8. \_\_\_\_ A truth about God and his saving plan that will always be beyond human understanding.
9. \_\_\_\_ A statement of disrespect for God's name or sacred truths.
10. \_\_\_\_ The Passion, Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension of Jesus Christ.
11. \_\_\_\_ A heresy that taught that Jesus only seemed to be human.

12. \_\_\_\_ A figure of speech or statement that seems contradictory but actually contains a hidden truth.
13. \_\_\_\_ The celebration of the manifestation of God in human form.
14. \_\_\_\_ An event reported in the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus manifested his divine identity.

## Primary Source Quotations

*Our Unity with the Son of God*

If Christ is with us, who is against us? You can fight with confidence where you are sure of victory. With Christ and for Christ victory is certain.

—St. Bernard

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

—C. S. Lewis

Welcome Christ into your lives. Without the experience of this interior meeting with Christ, life can all too easily be wasted on illusory and consumerist experiences. These obviously include the suicidal experience of drugs or the egoistic one of using our neighbor and rejecting solidarity.

—Pope John Paul II

Write down five things you believe about Jesus Christ. Rank your beliefs in order beginning with the belief you hold the strongest. Share your list with a classmate.

## Ongoing Assignments

As you cover the material in this chapter, choose and complete at least three of these assignments.

1. View the film *The Nativity Story*, a film released in 2006 that stars Keisha Castle-Hughes as Mary and Oscar Isaac as Joseph. Write a film review from the perspective of how accurately it portrays the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke.
2. Report on some of the traditional views of the identity of the Magi. Begin your research by reading an overview of the subject in the entry found in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.
3. Report on the Christmas customs from three different countries around the world.
4. Draw a map of the probable flight of the Holy Family into Egypt.
5. Create a PowerPoint presentation on some of the biblical sites associated with Bethlehem and Nazareth.
6. Create an illustrated lecture on St. Joseph in art through the ages.
7. Jesus always showed respect for others and was a model of obedience toward his parents and other rightful authorities. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to share what you've learned from the life of Jesus about respect and obedience.
8. Write a profile of King Herod the Great. Report on some recent archaeological finds associated with him, for example, his tomb.
9. Construct a two-page newsletter—*The Bethlehem Gazette*—describing the birth

of Jesus. Include articles on the shepherds, the Magi, and the political situation at the time. Include at least one graphic.

10. After reading Matthew's account of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion (Mt 26–27), retell the Passion story from the point of view of one of the Apostles or one of the soldiers who arrested, mocked, and crucified Jesus.
11. Read the following poetic Old Testament passage about honoring parents—Proverbs 6:20–23. Consider this Bible message carefully: children should show respect for their parents throughout their whole lives, especially when their parents are old, weak, and unable to care for themselves. In your journal, list five ways that you can show respect for your parents now.

## Prayer

The famous Jesus Prayer, also known as the Prayer of the Heart, goes back to the fifth century. A faith-filled prayer, it invokes the power of the name of Jesus and begs his mercy. Emphasizing the humility of the one praying, the Jesus Prayer should be recited repeatedly as a form of meditation. Many Christians, especially Eastern [Catholic] Churches and Orthodox Christians, pray it often throughout the day to fulfill St. Paul's instruction to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5:17).

A famous version of the Jesus' Prayer goes like this:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

In this profound prayer, we proclaim:

- Jesus is God (Lord).
- Jesus is the Savior (the name *Jesus* means "God saves").
- Jesus is the Son of God.
- Jesus is merciful.

- We are sinners in need of our Lord's help and forgiveness.
- *Reflection:* What most needs forgiveness in your life right now? How do you most need Jesus?
- *Resolution:* Recite the Jesus Prayer slowly and thoughtfully at least twenty times. Reflect on the meaning of each word. Thank and praise the Lord for his forgiveness and love of you.