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Bishop of Orlando
August 22, 2008

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Call to Faith The Trinity

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What's inside

1 **GOD** Is Trinity 2

2 **JESUS** Word of God 12

3 **HOLY SPIRIT** Comforter and Guide 22

4 **JESUS** Reveals the Trinity 30

5 **WE ARE** Christ's People 40

6 **TEMPLE** of the Holy Spirit 50

Faith in Action 60

Prayers & Practices 62

Where to Find It 64

2 JESUS

Word of God

WHAT'S the ISSUE?

People can be so shallow and judgmental!

Do I judge people too quickly?

How do I know what someone is really like?

How can someone know the real me?

"She hates me." Maria's voice sounded harsh. Maria saw red—literally. She glared at the sea of red marks Mrs. Monroe had made on her essay. "Look, you're not special," Jenn said. "She shreds everybody's papers." "Whatever," Maria muttered under her breath.

Maria knew that Jenn was right: Mrs. Monroe had a reputation as a demanding teacher. And that's why Maria had been working extra hard in Mrs. Monroe's class. An "A" from her really meant something. She wanted an "A" so badly she could taste it.

As she changed her clothes for volleyball practice, Maria thought as she tied her shoes, "Forget her." But then she made an angry promise to herself to give Mrs. Monroe a hard time in class the next day as a "payback."



The next day, on her way to join Jenn and their friends in study hall, Maria noticed Mrs. Monroe walking and talking to a freshman girl who was crying. She had her arm around the girl's shoulders and her face was lowered, speaking quietly to her, keeping her back to the hallway so passing students couldn't see the girl crying.

Sitting with her friends, Maria told them what she had just seen, how Mrs. Monroe had comforted the girl. "Wow. That was cool of Mrs. Monroe," Jenn replied. "I don't care what she did," Maria said. "She's still awful to me." But the harsh words rang in Maria's ears later. She felt more confused than angry now that she had seen another side of her teacher. "What would people think of me if all they saw and heard was what I did in class?" she wondered.

That night, while studying, Maria thought about Mrs. Monroe. How could she be so mean as an English teacher and so nice as a person? She snatched up the paper and forced herself to read the comments. As she read, Maria began to see the weak areas in her writing. She had to admit that the comments were probably true. If she took them as advice instead of criticism, her paper would be better. Maybe I misjudged her, Maria thought to herself. "I wonder what I'd think of her if I came to her for advice and wasn't worried about my grade?"



WHAT ABOUT IT?

- ▶ Discuss what happened in this story.
- ▶ What does Maria discover about Mrs. Monroe and about herself?

WHAT About YOU?

- ▶ How do you show different parts of yourself when you're in different roles, for example, as a son or daughter, a big brother or sister, a student or an athlete?
- ▶ Are any of these *not* the real you or are they *all* the real you? Explain.
- ▶ How do you remain true to who you are?
- ▶ When you're getting to know someone else, how do you get to know the real person?



O God, let your Word be alive in me.

WHAT does FAITH SAY?

CONNECT

In the story, Maria's experience of Mrs. Monroe expanded when she saw her console a freshman girl. It is easy to rush to judgment about others without truly knowing who they are. In time, we come to know the authentic and true person. Spending time with Jesus helps us to know his identity as truly divine and fully human. Jesus, the Son of God, reveals who God the Father is. He saves us and brings us back into relationship with the Father.



SCRIPTURE

GO TO THE SOURCE

Read **John 1:1-14**. Why do you think Jesus is called "the Word"? What does that symbol mean to you?

▼ Madonna and Child



THE ETERNAL WORD

What is the "eternal Word"?

As humans, we are called by God to be authentic, which means to be true to who we really are. But, our personalities have many different dimensions. We are complex. Sometimes, we are not easy to understand. So God the Father sent Jesus as our model of being authentic. He was always true to who he was, even when there was a cost.

It takes time to see the complexity of a person, especially someone you want to be friends with. So it is with Jesus. He too was complex. He was fully human and fully divine at the same time. Getting to know the true nature of Jesus takes time and study. The Bible holds the information we need.

The Son of God

The Gospel according to John begins differently from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Instead of starting with the birth of Jesus or with his ministry on earth, it goes back to the beginning of time to tell us about Jesus before the world began. That is a side of Jesus we might not think of at first.



SCRIPTURE

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."

—John 1:1-2

Jesus is the Word. He was with God the Father before creation. Then the Son of God became human, like us. What had been invisible, existing above and before all else, became visible. God's loving presence was now in the flesh. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, is the eternal (everlasting) Word.

The Wonder of the Incarnation

The **Incarnation** is what we call the mystery that the Son of God took on a human nature. This word literally means “in the flesh,” and it shows our understanding that Jesus Christ has two different natures—human and divine—united together in one divine Person. Jesus is like us in all things but sin.

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Only Jesus has this unique relationship with God the Father. The Son of God not only has the same divine nature as his heavenly Father, but also shares in our human nature. Jesus is both truly God and truly man.

What's in a Name?

The name *Jesus* literally means “God saves” (*Matthew 1:21*). Jesus entered the world to bring salvation to all people. Being Christian means believing that Jesus is not just some wise prophet or miracle worker, but that he is the only Son of God. That is why we call him “Lord.”

In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus using many “I am” statements that teach us about who he is and how he relates to his Father and to us.

“I am the bread of life”

John 6:35

We are fed by Jesus in the Eucharist.



“I am the light of the world”

John 8:12

With Jesus, we never have to walk in darkness or confusion.



“I am the gate”

John 10:7

We must go through Jesus to be with God.

“I am the good shepherd”

John 10:11

Jesus watches out for us and risks himself for us.

“I am the vine, you are the branches”

John 15:5

We must remain attached to Jesus to live.



GOD IS WITH US

How did Jesus change our relationship with God?

Long before the birth of Jesus, God used the prophets to speak to his people. Then, in an ancient promise God made to the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him ‘Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’” (See *Matthew 1:23*.) God fulfilled that promise of closeness to his people through the Incarnation of his Son Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation is amazing news for us. It means that God is not at all distant or removed from our daily lives. In the wonder of the Incarnation, God the Father speaks directly to us in his Son Jesus. Christ lives among us and invites us to follow him, to make our lives like his own in love.

God the Son became human to lead us back into a friendship with the Father and harmony with one another, to restore God’s creation. He comes to bring back all things to himself in love. But how does this great mystery of the Incarnation happen? How can it be that the almighty God who existed first and forever is revealed in Jesus?

▼ *Annunciation*, by Lorenzo di Credi (c. 1459–1537)



The Holy Spirit Prepares

Jesus is God and shares in the divine nature. But Jesus came from somewhere—he didn't just show up, already made. He entered the world much like any other human being: He was born. However, Jesus' conception is very different from ours.

First, Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, the messenger from heaven, who announced to her that she would be the Mother of God and give birth to the Savior. We call the angel's visit to Mary the **Annunciation**. All of human history hinged on Mary's reply. Because she said "yes" to God's plan, she became the most important woman in history. In conceiving Jesus, Mary helped in God's plan to turn his people back to the good ways he had always intended for us.

Second, Mary became the Mother of God because God the Holy Spirit made it possible. From before Mary was born, the Holy Spirit was acting in her so that through her the Son of God could become man. By the power of the Holy Spirit, not by human means, Mary became pregnant. Jesus Christ was born to Mary and the world at the right time, through the power of God.

Mary—Mother of God and Our Mother

By cooperating with God's plan, Mary was already helping her Son, Jesus, in his work as Savior. Before he started his ministry of preaching and healing among the people, Mary became her Son's first and foremost disciple. By saying "yes," Mary anticipated and took part in all the things her Son would do for us.

Mary, Mother of God, is *our* spiritual mother, also. She received the Lord in her heart before he was conceived in her womb. And when he was on the cross, Jesus gave Mary to his beloved disciples and all of us. Just like any mother, she shows us the way to live by her example. Her life shows us the way to Jesus.

SCRIPTURE

GO TO THE SOURCE

Read **Matthew 1:18–23**. What did God want from Joseph? How did Joseph respond to God's call?

CHECK THIS OUT!

Mary responded with a joyous song after the angel Gabriel's Annunciation to her that she would become the mother of the Son of God. This great hymn is commonly called the Magnificat (from the Latin for the opening words, "My soul magnifies the Lord"). (See **Luke 1:46–55**.) When we sing it at Evening Prayer, or vespers, we hear the Lord's call to stand with the poor and oppressed, as Mary did.

CONNECT YOUR FAITH

What are some ways we, as Christians, have been asked to be the disciples of Jesus? Create a poster or a visual display showing ways you can follow Mary's example and say "yes" to God.

SIGNS OF BEING GOD

How did Jesus' actions show he was the Son of God?

CATHOLICS TODAY

We profess faith in Jesus' divinity and in the Blessed Trinity by reciting together the words of the Nicene Creed every time we gather for Sunday Mass or on Holy Days. There are three major sections to the Creed. Each one pertains to a specific Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Creed has been translated into almost 1,300 languages all around the world.

The wording of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed changed slightly when the English translation of the Third Edition of the *Roman Missal* was introduced in the first week of Advent in November 2011. These revisions were made to correspond with the wording of the Third Edition of the *Roman Missal* in Latin (2002).

In his public ministry, Jesus worked miracles. A **miracle** is a sign, wonder, or action that can only take place through the power of God. When Jesus worked miracles, it was obvious something extraordinary was happening through him. People experienced God's power in amazing ways that changed their lives and led many of them to believe in Jesus and have faith in him as the Son of God.

Jesus healed people of their diseases. He cast out demons. He restored the dead to life. All four Gospels record this miraculous power in Jesus. For example:

- ▶ Jesus gave sight to a man who had been blind from birth. Because he did so, the man came to believe that Jesus is Lord. He "saw" Jesus for who he truly is and bowed down before him in worship. (See *John* 9:1–41.)
- ▶ Jesus restored the ability to walk in a paralyzed man. As he did so, he performed an even greater healing. He forgave the man's sins. To prove that he has this power to forgive sins, the Lord commanded the man to walk—which the man did. The crowd gave glory to God. (See *Luke* 5:17–26.)
- ▶ Jesus raised a widow's dead son to life again. The Lord stopped the funeral procession on its way out of the city gates and commanded the young man to rise. The man sat up and began to speak. At first the crowd was fearful; then, they praised God's power, saying "God has looked favorably on his people." (See *Luke* 7:11–17.)

These miracles, and others like them, show us the awesome divinity of Jesus. At the same time, they show us the human nature of the Son of God. How? Many of these accounts of Jesus' miracles also tell us about his emotions, like compassion or pity (see *Matthew* 20:34, *Mark* 6:34), anger (see *John* 11:33), and tears. (See *John* 11:35.)

Faith Walk

God the Father wants us to get to know him better. And God does have a Word (with a capital "W") that fully describes who he is. God's Word is Jesus Christ. What this means is that God expresses himself in Jesus. Jesus gives us the most perfect description of God that we humans can understand. No wonder it is so important to get to know Jesus! He shows us God.

The Two Natures of Jesus Christ: Divine & Human



Jesus Who Worked Miracles
(See *Luke 5:1-11*)



Jesus Who Provided Breakfast for His Disciples
(See *John 21:7-13*)

What do the passages and their images tell you about who Jesus is?

Reflect on your own image of Jesus. What does that image tell you about who God is?

Next Step

CATHOLICS BELIEVE

Because Jesus is the Son of God, truly divine and truly human, he saves us and brings us back into relationship with God the Father.

- ▶ The Son of God has existed for all time, and through the Incarnation, became fully man while remaining fully God.

- ▶ Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God was born to Mary, who is a model of trust and discipleship for all of us. Her acceptance of God's will brought Jesus into the world.
- ▶ Jesus showed that he was divine in many ways, particularly through the working of miracles, which also give us a glimpse into his human nature and emotions.

WHAT NOW?

LIVE OUR FAITH

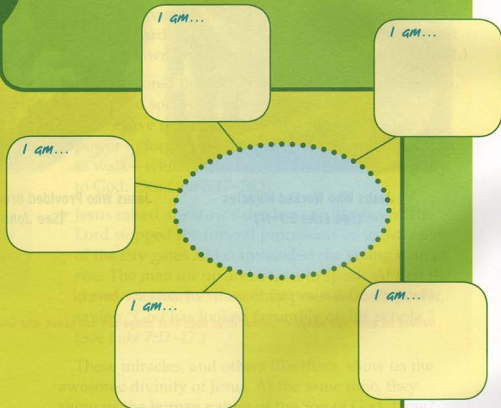
- *For one week, look for new aspects of your friends' personalities.
- *Ask Jesus to help you to be true to yourself.
- *Name your favorite Scripture passage that shows Jesus as both divine and human.
- *Speak to an adult who has said "yes" to God as Mary did.

WHAT ABOUT IT?

WHAT about YOU?

Write your name in the center space of the web diagram below. In the surrounding spaces, write "I am" statements that are authentic to yourself and show ways you are living a Christian life.

What is your definition of the word "authentic"? Describe a person you know who is authentic.



FAITH at HOME

Spend some time with the Word of God this week. Open up the Bible, and read a favorite Gospel story with your family. Talk about what the story tells you about who God is.



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PRAYER

In the beginning, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. May the Word of God dwell in us. Amen.

St. Maria Zhao-Guo (mother)

St. Rosa Zhao (daughter)

St. Mary Zhao (daughter)

When our authenticity is tested, we look to Jesus as our example of how to face those tests.

Maria Zhao-Guo and her daughters Rosa and Mary found themselves facing such a test in China in the summer of 1900. Even though they were persecuted, their faith in God stayed strong. They gave their lives rather than give up their faith and deny what they believed in so strongly.

For centuries, China's culture and civilization thrived, but it was isolated from the Western world. That all changed by the mid-1800s, when China was invaded and controlled by some of the most powerful nations of Europe. The invaders plundered the nation's natural resources and mistreated its people. However, not all the Westerners who came to China were there to get rich and harm people. Jesuit missionaries and others introduced Christianity to China. The Zhao family was one of the families who believed their message and became Christian converts in the late nineteenth century.

Many Chinese people resented the culture of the Western nations that had invaded their homeland and been cruel to their people. In 1900, this resentment exploded into the Boxer Rebellion. The Boxers wanted to drive the foreigners out of China and return to the old ways of life. Because Christianity was introduced by Westerners, the missionaries and converts to Christianity were targeted by the Boxers.

Maria Zhao and her daughters, Rosa and Mary, were being chased by a band of Boxers, so they tried to hide by jumping into a well. The Boxers dragged them from the well and tried to force them to deny their faith. Rosa's defiant answer was, "We have already made up our minds that we would rather die than deny our faith." Then she turned to her mother and sister, telling them to pray to Jesus, asking for help and strength to give up their lives for the faith.

Even when a relative tried to help them, Rosa told him, "Uncle, don't waste your time trying to save us. Because we want to keep our faith, we are happy to die for it."

The Boxers took them to the Zhao family cemetery, where they were executed. The Zhaos, along with more than fifty other Chinese martyrs, were beatified by Pope Pius XII in 1955. Pope John Paul II canonized them on the centennial of their martyrdom in 2000.

Jesus calls us to be true to him and true to ourselves. This is what it means to be "authentic."



Global Data

- China is the most populous nation in the world with 1.3 billion people and is the second largest in land area.
- China has a civilization dating back approximately 5,000 years.
- China has been under communist rule since 1949, with no official religion, but restrictions on missionary activity have been eased in recent years and its Christian population is growing.
- China recognizes Catholicism as one of five sanctioned religions.
- China has approximately 12 million Catholics, according to the Vatican.

