

**Jesus Is the
Way, the Truth,
and the Life**

Madonna and Child



► *Duccio di Buoninsegna*

In comparison with large-scale frescoes and other altarpieces of the day, the relatively small eight-by-eleven-inch painting *Madonna and Child* evokes even by its size an intimate look shared between the Infant Christ and his mother.

Because of its compact size, *Madonna and Child* was likely intended to be a source of prayerful meditation when placed in a church. The burn marks at the bottom of the painting are from candles placed under it. Painted by Duccio di Buoninsegna (ca. 1255–1260), an important Italian artist from Siena, the work reflects the influence of the medieval period. Yet it also gives a glimpse of how Duccio himself influenced the Renaissance, which was to come about a century after the completion of this painting.

The humanism present reveals a hint of the Renaissance; note the infant pulling the veil back from his mother's face in order to get a close and loving glimpse of her. On the other hand, Mary's expression is one of sadness as she knows what is ahead for her Son. The "fence" at the bottom of the painting is intended to draw the eyes upward to give full attention to the mother and child. The sharing of detailed human expressions, and even the crevices and folds of Mary's veil, are meant to communicate the mystery of God becoming man and participating in our world.

Duccio's *Madonna and Child* is now on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. After passing through private ownership for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the painting was acquired by the museum in 2004 at an estimated cost of \$45 million. The high price is due in part to the rarity of Duccio's works; there are only thirteen known surviving paintings by the artist in the world.

If you would like to learn more about when and where Madonna and Child was created, see Chapter 1 Review, Chapter Project 1.



Focus Question

How is Jesus both true God and true man?

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Introduction

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF TO US



No matter the hectic nature of your life—maintaining a GPA, participating in extracurriculars, working a part-time job, having a social life, living in a family—you are bound to sometimes look way out into your future and ask yourself “the big questions”: “Why am I here?” “What is the purpose of life?” “What happens after I die?” Asking these questions is not out of the normal. There is no escaping that you are hardwired for something more than any of your current tasks and goals.

The perennial big questions have been asked by people for all time. Neither is this by accident. You were, indeed, made for *much, much more*. You instinctively know that you are unique among all other people. Scientifically, it is a factual statement to say that no one else exists or has existed with your exact DNA. Your life didn’t come about by chance. There is a Creator who designed you and brought you into existence. The Almighty God who made you understandably wants you, his creation, to be connected with him. Think of the bond parents want with their children. God desires this connection on an even deeper level, a level called *communion*. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way: “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because [you have been] created by God and for God” (27).

Sometimes these big questions come to the forefront when you are disappointed by something or someone. Or you may even feel pensive in this way after successfully reaching a goal that you worked very hard to achieve. After a bit of jubilation, you may have thought to yourself, “Is that *it*?” Even people who achieve the highest levels of success in business, athletics, popular stardom—whatever—usually end up asking themselves that exact same question: “Is that *it*?” Typically, though, most of us brush off the thought and move on to the next goal. However, it *is* worth your time to give the

big questions of life some additional consideration. This course will provide information and resources to help you examine in greater detail someone Catholics profess to be the Incarnate Son of God who came to the earth to provide answers. That person is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Thomas asked Jesus a “big question” at the Last Supper: “How can we know the way?” Jesus replied, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:5, 6).

Waiting for the Messiah

Through human reason, people from all time have formed answers to questions about life, death, eternity, and God himself. Human reason allows us the capacity for understanding *some* of life’s mystery. For example, humans know instinctively that killing an innocent person is wrong. Human reason is not enough to understand the deepest and complete designs of God, however. God himself must reveal himself and the depths of the plans he has for human beings. God did so through the course of *salvation history*, the name for the account of God’s saving activity and intervention on humanity’s behalf. The events of salvation history are told in Sacred Scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

God’s Revelation progressed in response to the **Original Sin** of the first humans, named Adam and Eve, who rejected a life of communion with God.[∞] After their fall, he chose a specific ethnic people to be his own and began to reveal himself to them over centuries. Through a series of covenants

∞ Note

Redemption in Christ, which will be covered in more depth throughout this text, includes forgiveness of Original Sin and all personal sins in the Sacrament of Baptism. However, the other effects of Original Sin, including the struggle with concupiscence (inclinations to sin), remain and call people to maintain a constant spiritual battle with evil (see *CCC*, 409).

Original Sin Refers to the personal sin of the first two people, called Adam and Eve, which, in an analogous way, describes the fallen state of human nature into which all generations are born. Adam and Eve transmitted Original Sin to their descendants. Jesus came to save the world from Original Sin and all personal sin.



The Last Supper.

(see accompanying infographic) with the Israelites (later called the Jews), God offered human beings a new chance not only to know him but to know him better. Within the Sinai Covenant with Moses, for example, God provided a Law to help them better understand how they should live moral lives. This was something other nations did not possess. Ultimately, God offered the promise of **redemption**, which many Israelites understood would come from a chosen prophet, king, or messiah.

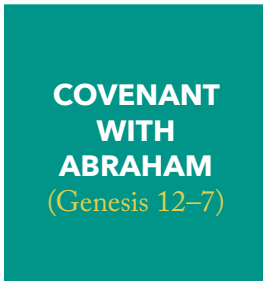
The New Testament period of the early first century AD was high in messianic expectations. Most Jews believed that God would send his Chosen One, the Messiah, very soon. The Hebrew word *masiah* translates to the Greek word *Christos* (Christ), which means “anointed one.” At first, the title messiah applied to the king of Israel (i.e., King David and his successors). However, David’s successors were mostly weak and corrupt.

Even when the monarchy era ended for the Jews, the belief in God’s promise to provide a messiah never died among them. By the time of Jesus, many Jews increasingly believed that a messiah would usher in God’s Kingdom or reign. Various Jewish sects in Jesus’s day (e.g., the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes) had different expectations about who or what kind of person the Messiah would be. Most Jews expected a political or military leader

redemption The name for Christ’s sacrificial Death on the Cross that paid the price to free us from the slavery of sin.



**COVENANT
WITH
NOAH**
(Genesis 8–9)



**COVENANT
WITH
ABRAHAM**
(Genesis 12–7)



**SINAI
COVENANT**
(Exodus 19–20)



**COVENANT
WITH
DAVID**
(2 Samuel 7)



**JESUS
CHRIST,
THE NEW
COVENANT**
(Hebrews 1:1–2)



like King David who would lead them to reestablish a strong, independent nation of Israel and help usher in God's Kingdom on earth. Some Jews (possibly including John the Baptist) fully expected the coming of the Messiah to be accomplished in a dramatic, *apocalyptic* event, which would point to the Messiah's identity and the glorious establishment of God's Kingdom.

The Uniqueness of Jesus

What none of the Jews or anyone else of the first century could have imagined was that the Messiah would be a God/Man. Jesus is unique in that in his one Divine Person he brings together the human and divine natures. This is called the *hypostatic union*.[∞] Jesus is not “part man, part God.” He is not a mixture of the two. Nor is he sometimes God, sometimes man, as if he could turn one or the other on and off as with a light switch. **Jesus became truly man while remaining truly God.** This truth about Jesus, the Messiah, means

that he is *most unique* in all human history; the Incarnation—that is, the coming of God in human form to this planet—happened only once. As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, “If he were only a wise man like Socrates, if he were a ‘prophet’ like Muhammad, if he were an ‘enlightened’ like Buddha, without any doubt he would not be what he is. He is the one mediator between God and humanity. He is mediator because he is both God and man.”¹

Questions about the relationship between Jesus Christ’s humanity and divinity are the focus of *Christology* and the subject of this course. All the Gospels address Christological questions, always with the purpose of helping us to know more about Jesus and understand that he is the Son of God. For example, the prologue of John’s Gospel (1:1–18) stresses very strongly Jesus’s heavenly origins, his fundamental identity as the Son of God, and his preexistence as the Word of God. While the synoptic Gospels also share several examples of Jesus’s heavenly origins, their starting point is the concrete memories of Jesus of Nazareth and his impact on people. They then move on to develop his story as an ascent to heavenly glory through his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

All of God’s Revelation is contained in the **Deposit of Faith**, which is the body of truths of Catholicism. The Deposit of Faith is contained in Sacred Scripture *and* Sacred Tradition. The study of Christ in this text will focus on the teachings of both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which is the Church’s doctrine, life, and worship as preserved by the Magisterium and passed on to every generation. Christ is the completion of God’s Revelation and of salvation history. This includes teachings about Christ studied and taught

∞ Note

Hypostatic comes from a Greek term that means “which lies beneath as basis or foundation.” The term was used by Greek philosophers to distinguish what can be seen on the surface from the reality that lies below.

Deposit of Faith The body of saving truths and core beliefs of Catholicism that are contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and are faithfully preserved and handed on by the Magisterium. The Deposit of Faith contains the fullness of God’s Revelation.

by the Church.[∞] The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, is the protector of Sacred Tradition. It is the Church who teaches about Christ and with Christ's own authority.

∞ Note

The Second Vatican Council teaches, "The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (*Dei Verbum*, 2).

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. How did Jesus answer the Apostle Thomas's question, "How can we know the way?"
2. Name the major Old Testament covenants God made with the Jewish people.
3. What was a common Jewish expectation of a messiah in Jesus's time?

Vocabulary

4. What are two parts of the *Deposit of Faith*?

Reflection

5. What is a "big question" you have often asked yourself? What kind of answer did you formulate?

Section 1

HOW IS JESUS TRUE GOD?



“Is Jesus of Nazareth God?” was one of the most pressing questions faced by the first disciples. Imagine being raised a faithful Jew and having to explain to your parents and family members that you have come to believe that an itinerant preacher, the son of a carpenter from an out-of-the-way village, is God in the flesh.

John’s Gospel, the final Gospel written, provides a source to help answer the question of Jesus’s divinity. One way that John’s Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus is to show him always present with the Father and in control of all things, including creation. In fact, this focus on Jesus’s divinity is present in the famous prologue at the very beginning of John’s Gospel:

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 1:1–5, 14)

John used the expression “the Word became flesh” to state emphatically that God assumed human nature and became man. John may have done so to counteract a first-century heresy known as **Docetism** (see the subsection “Jesus’s Humanity Is Confirmed” in Chapter 1, Section 4). Docetists did not believe that God would demean himself by taking on all the weakness of humanity. To Docetists, Jesus *seemed* to be a man or *seemed* to take on the appearance of a man but not the reality of a man—that is, his body was an illusion. The presence of this heresy indicates that, for many, it was difficult to comprehend that God the Son assumed a human nature with a human body without losing his divine nature.

The Gospels provide other evidence of Jesus’s divinity. For example, Jesus asked his disciples who they and others believed him to be: “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk 8:27). The disciples replied with various answers, saying that he was John the Baptist, Elijah, or other prophets. **When Jesus directly asked the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered correctly, “You are the Messiah” (v. 29), but was then chastised by Jesus for contradicting what being the Messiah really entailed.** The next time Jesus asked the disciples for reactions to his explanation of his identity, “they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him” (Mk 9:32). When Jesus was charged with blasphemy and questioned by the Jewish court as to whether he was “the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One” (Mk 14:61), he responded “I am,” indicating the traditional Jewish name, YHWH, for God.

Interestingly, some people who were not followers of Jesus could also recognize his divinity. These were people who were possessed by demons. In Luke’s Gospel, a man in a synagogue plagued with an evil spirit shrieked, “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Lk 4:34). Jesus told him to “Be quiet!” Then the man was healed. The demon threw the man to the ground and “came out of him without doing him any harm” (v. 35). Other examples of demons recognizing the divinity of Jesus are recorded in Mark 1:21–28 and Luke 4:31–37; 8:26–39. Demons identified who Jesus was by perceiving his holiness, which was a threat to the evil of Satan. As the holy

Docetism A first-century heresy that taught that Jesus only “seemed” to be human. Docetism comes from a Greek word meaning “to seem.”

Son of God, Jesus came to save humankind from all that is not good, right, and just—that is, all evil—even Satan, the father of evil.

After the apostolic era, the Church addressed heresies about Jesus that claimed just the opposite of Docetism. Rather than denying his humanity, other heresies denied Jesus’s divinity. A priest from Alexandria, Arius (AD 250–336), held that Christ was God’s greatest creature, who was made before time but a creature nonetheless. He taught that Christ did not take on human flesh, arguing that if he *had* taken on human flesh, he could not be God. He also falsely taught that if Christ was God, there would be two gods. **Arianism** had grave consequences for the Church’s teaching on salvation. The Church responded to Arianism and other false teachings at gatherings, or councils, of bishops and church leaders (see the subsection “Jesus’s Divinity Is Confirmed” in Chapter 1, Section 4), clarifying the Church’s belief that Jesus Christ is both truly man and truly God.



Ethiopian Christians annually celebrate the Baptism of Jesus at the Timkat Festival. Timkat is the Ethiopian word for Baptism.

Arianism A heresy common in certain times and places during the early Church that denied that Jesus was truly God. It is named after Arius (AD 250–336), a priest and popular preacher from Alexandria, Egypt.

Jesus Fulfilled Old Testament Prophecies

The Old Testament contains many prophecies about the coming Messiah. A careful reading of the Gospels makes a clear case that Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies concerning God's Anointed One. These include the prophecies that declared:

- ✔ He would be born of the tribe of Judah (Gn 49:10).
- ✔ He would be of the House of David (Is 11:1–2).
- ✔ He would be born in Bethlehem (Mi 5:1).
- ✔ He would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14).
- ✔ He would be worshipped by kings from afar (Ps 72:10).
- ✔ His Death and the manner of his suffering were also foretold:
- ✔ He would be betrayed (Ps 41:10).
- ✔ He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zec 11:12–13).
- ✔ He would suffer for the sins of humankind (Is 50:6).
- ✔ He would be led like a lamb to slaughter (Is 53:7).
- ✔ He would have his hands and feet pierced (Ps 22:17).

Jesus himself also made prophecies that were fulfilled. For example, he predicted that he would be condemned to death by the religious authorities, mocked by Gentiles, betrayed by one of his Apostles, and denied three times by Peter. He also predicted the destruction of the Temple, an event that occurred during the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70).

The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus's own prophecies does indeed offer evidence that he truly is the Son of God, sent by the Father, to be the Savior of the world. As Jesus said when predicting his betrayal by Judas, "From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM" (Jn 13:19).

Jesus Performed Miracles

Another clear sign of Jesus's divinity is this: Anyone who has the power demonstrated by Jesus's miracles—the power over nature, sickness and death, Satan, and sin itself—must be God. The greatest sign of all was the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. All four Gospels cite miracles of Jesus. By definition, the miracles are “extraordinary and observable events that cannot be explained by human abilities or known natural forces.” Miracles can only be explained by divine intervention. That is why the miracles of Jesus point to who he really is.

The miracles worked by Jesus attest that he came from the Father. They invite belief in him. To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask. So miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God (see *CCC*, 548).

The number and variety of miracles Jesus performed were great (see Mark 1:32–34). There were physical healings, nature miracles (e.g., Jesus's walking on water), exorcisms (expulsion of evil spirits), and the raisings of people from the dead. In one dramatic example, Jesus raised his friend Lazarus, whose body had already been decaying in the tomb for several days when



Christ Walking on the Water (1840?) by Aleksandr Ivanov.

Jesus brought him back to life (see John 11:1–44).

The synoptic Gospels use the Greek word *dynamis*, which means “act of power,” to describe Jesus’s miracles. John’s Gospel uses two Greek words, *ergon* (work) and *semeion* (sign), to indicate miracles. Jesus’s “works and signs” reveal his glory, purpose, identity, and relationship to God the Father. His miracles were both *powerful* and *significant*.

The vast majority of people who witnessed Jesus’s miracles knew something spectacular was happening. They saw these miracles with their own eyes or were blessed to be healed themselves. Yet many other people doubted or misinterpreted the miracles. Some called Jesus a prophet. Others said he committed evil, as when he healed the man born blind on the Sabbath (see John 9:1–41). Some of his opponents said that the power of Jesus was emanating from Satan.

Jesus offered an explanation for why he performed miracles: “These works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me” (Jn 5:36). His miracles were intended to help those who witnessed them to conclude that he is the Son of God.



“[Jesus] cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, ‘Untie him and let him go’” (Jn 11:43–44).

Jesus Forgave Sins

Jesus also demonstrated his divine nature by forgiving people’s sins. For example, note that the forgiveness of sins accompanied the healing of the paralytic (see Mark 2:1–12; Matthew 9:1–8; Luke 5:17–26). The connection between the forgiveness of sins and the cure of the paralytic was based on a common

Jewish belief of Jesus's time that illness and physical disabilities were the result of a person's own sin or the sin of his ancestors (see Exodus 20:5).

The healing and forgiving of the paralytic showed that Jesus had the power to heal both the inner brokenness of human beings—their sins—and their bodily ailments. This connection between physical healing and forgiveness of sins helped to establish Jesus's divinity. However, some scribes who heard Jesus forgive the man's sin accused him of blasphemy. This was a charge that Jesus would ultimately be convicted of by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. During that trial, Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest, shouted to Jesus,

"I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him in reply, "You have said so. But I tell you: From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?" They said in reply, "He deserves to die!" (Mt 26:63–66)



"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'?" (Mk 2:9).

Jewish authorities sentenced Jesus for claiming to be something that no ordinary man could claim to be. For them, the claims of Jesus were an outrage, punishable by death under Mosaic Law. Notice that Jesus never said they were mistaken in their accusation.

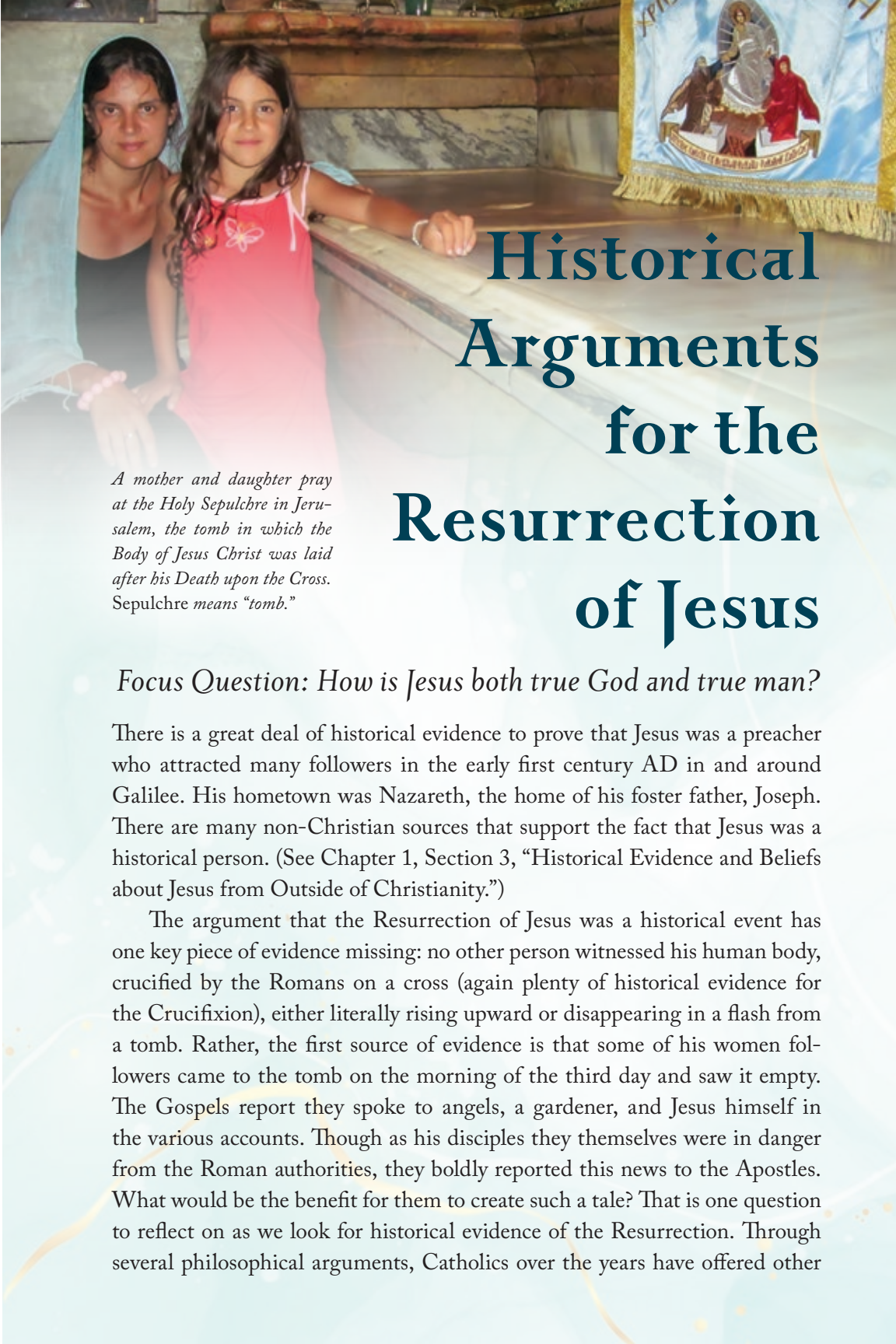
Greatest Evidence: The Resurrection

While Jesus’s “deeds, miracles, and words all revealed that ‘in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’” (*CCC*, 515, quoting Colossians 2:9), the most powerful evidence for Christ’s divinity is provided by his Resurrection. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “The Resurrection of the crucified one shows that he was truly ‘I AM,’ the Son of God and God himself” (653).

The Resurrection is a historical event involving the whole of Jesus’s humanity (see the feature in Section 1, “Historical Arguments for the Resurrection of Jesus”). **The Father raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.** “After his Resurrection, Jesus’s divine sonship becomes manifest in the power of his glorified humanity” (*CCC*, 445). During the forty days he was on earth after the Resurrection, Jesus’s glory remained partially hidden “under the appearance of ordinary humanity” (*CCC*, 659). St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Cor 15:3–6)

While Jesus historically rose from the dead within this world, the power by which he was resurrected was not an earthly or human power. The Father raised him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once Jesus had risen in glory, the disciples could see and touch him and he could eat and speak as a human, yet he was no longer subservient to the laws of the created world. His risen body also showed the marks of his Passion. And yet, his Resurrection was not merely resuscitation or a return to earthly life (like the miracle of Lazarus); instead, his body was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and thus transformed. This real body possessed the new properties of a



Historical Arguments for the Resurrection of Jesus

A mother and daughter pray at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the tomb in which the Body of Jesus Christ was laid after his Death upon the Cross. Sepulchre means "tomb."

Focus Question: How is Jesus both true God and true man?

There is a great deal of historical evidence to prove that Jesus was a preacher who attracted many followers in the early first century AD in and around Galilee. His hometown was Nazareth, the home of his foster father, Joseph. There are many non-Christian sources that support the fact that Jesus was a historical person. (See Chapter 1, Section 3, "Historical Evidence and Beliefs about Jesus from Outside of Christianity.")

The argument that the Resurrection of Jesus was a historical event has one key piece of evidence missing: no other person witnessed his human body, crucified by the Romans on a cross (again plenty of historical evidence for the Crucifixion), either literally rising upward or disappearing in a flash from a tomb. Rather, the first source of evidence is that some of his women followers came to the tomb on the morning of the third day and saw it empty. The Gospels report they spoke to angels, a gardener, and Jesus himself in the various accounts. Though as his disciples they themselves were in danger from the Roman authorities, they boldly reported this news to the Apostles. What would be the benefit for them to create such a tale? That is one question to reflect on as we look for historical evidence of the Resurrection. Through several philosophical arguments, Catholics over the years have offered other

step-by-step responses to arguments against the Resurrection as a historical event. Five such arguments and their responses² are briefly named below:

The disciples made up the story of Jesus's Resurrection.

As mentioned, why would the disciples fabricate this account? Basically, they were cowards as evidenced by their lack of appearance near Jesus's trial or at Golgotha where he was crucified. They had everything to lose and nothing to gain by sharing this story.

Jesus died, but the Apostles and other disciples were deceived in some way. Maybe those who had encountered people at the tomb hallucinated. Maybe the Apostles themselves hallucinated Jesus's appearance to them in the forty days after his Crucifixion.

Hallucinations do not last for forty days! To accept this argument, we would have to believe that hundreds of ordinary people with plenty of common sense all hallucinated.

The Resurrection of Jesus was a myth that the Apostles concocted to explain Jesus's message after he had died.

The problem with this argument is that the Resurrection accounts were written down within thirty to sixty years after Jesus's life. Each of these accounts includes the names of real historical people that others would either know or know of. Also, the Resurrection accounts do not read like a myth. There are no fantastical symbols or magical characters. The accounts read as history. Even more evidence from Scripture comes from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (written approximately fifteen years after the earthly life of Jesus). In it he wrote a very precise and detailed account of appearances of the Risen Jesus: "[H]e appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom