

# “Who Do You **Say** That I Am?”

## INTRODUCTION



When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

—Matthew 16:13–16

# CHAPTER **OVERVIEW**

## OFFERING **A SON**

God's love for humanity is so great that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to live in our midst and to die for our sins.

## COMING TO KNOW **GOD AND JESUS**

God implanted in all of us a desire to know him.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE: **THE INCARNATION** *(CCC, 456–463)*

God the Father has revealed Jesus to us so that we can know the way to eternal life.

## LEARNING ABOUT **JESUS**

Setting Jesus in his historical context can help us to understand more of what the Church believes about Christ and how this knowledge can improve our faith.

## NAMES AND TITLES **FOR JESUS**

There are many titles for Jesus that, when analyzed, can help us to know and love him more deeply.

## Offering a Son

“But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me’” (Is 49:14).

In the second of the Suffering Servant Songs from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet shares perhaps the most dramatic example of divine love in the entire Bible. Speaking to a Chosen People held captive about liberation and restoration, the prophet reminds the people of God’s ever-faithful love:

Can a mother forget her infant,  
be without tenderness for the child of her  
womb?  
Even should she forget,  
I will never forget you. (Is 49:14–15)

It is true that human parents, for many reasons, are sometimes not able to offer care for their children. But the message of this passage is that divine love is so beyond human love that it constitutes one of the greatest mysteries of faith. Even still, the love of our parents only hints at the depth of God the Father’s love for all humans when he sacrificed his only Son, Jesus Christ, to bridge the gap between us and the eternal life of Salvation.

The Father sent us his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and death. So precious are we in God’s eyes that Jesus Christ came into human history, lived in our midst, and gave up his life for us.

What God has accomplished for us through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, is truly Good News. Jesus is salvation. A verse in the Gospel of John describes this love so well:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

John’s Gospel connects belief in Jesus as God’s Son to our achieving eternal life. This is the big reward for us—eternal life. The question of Jesus’ identity, then, is an important one. Certainly Jesus thought so when he asked

the Apostles what people were saying about him (see Matthew 16:13–16, quoted in the chapter opener). Note the various views his contemporaries had of him. Some saw Jesus as John the Baptist reincarnated. Others saw him as the famous Old Testament prophets Elijah or Jeremiah. Still others thought Jesus was a contemporary prophet who shared his origins with the other Old Testament prophets.

All of these were positive views about Jesus, but elsewhere the Gospels reveal that not everyone thought so highly of him. For example, some of the Jewish officials of his day thought of Jesus as a misguided rabbi who led the people astray. Some of the leaders even perceived him as a threat to the peace,





a fake king who raised false hopes for an oppressed people. They considered Jesus a danger and collaborated with the Romans to put him to death.

However, it was left to Peter to profess Jesus' true identity: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” This remarkable claim—“You are the Christ, the Son of God”—is an identity Peter did not discover on his own. Jesus told Peter,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. (Mt 16:17)

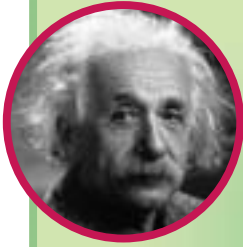
Who is Jesus of Nazareth, the person people of faith call “the Christ, the Son of God”? This important question is the subject of this book. Answering the question will require a perusal of the Gospels and their portrayal of Jesus. Also, the text will examine what the Catholic Church believes about this compelling person and discuss how we can meet Jesus today. More specifically:

- This Introduction stresses the importance of the Incarnation, discusses the historical context of Jesus' life and the Church's understanding of Jesus as Christ, lists where we can find Jesus today, and briefly touches on the meaning of the proper name *Jesus* and the titles *Christ*, *Son of God*, and *Lord*.
- Chapter 1 looks at the evidence for Jesus' existence and introduces the formation of the Gospels.
- Chapter 2 examines the world in which Jesus lived and other important information that will help us understand Jesus and his teaching.
- Chapter 3 offers a profile of Jesus, especially focusing on him as teacher, miracle-worker, and God-with-us (Emmanuel).
- Chapters 4 to 7 examine the four portraits of Jesus as presented in the Gospels of Mark (The Suffering Servant), Matthew (The Teacher), Luke–Acts (The Savior and Universal Messiah), and John (The Word of God).
- Chapter 8 focuses on what the writings of St. Paul reveal about Jesus.
- Chapter 9 investigates what the other New Testament writings reveal about Jesus and the meaning of the doctrines taught about Jesus by the early Church.
- Chapter 10 discusses how we can find and meet the living Jesus in our world today.

Before examining where you are right now in your belief about Jesus, here are some thoughts about him from some people through the ages:

Jesus whom I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God.

—**St. Athanasius** (ca. 293–373)



As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. . . . No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.

—**Albert Einstein** (1879–1955, physicist and atheist)

If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not even crucify him. They would ask him to dinner, and hear what he has to say, and make fun of it.

—**Thomas Carlyle**  
(1795–1881, Scottish essayist and historian)



He changed sunset into sunrise.

—**St. Clement of Alexandria** (150?–215?, a Father of the Church)

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**, (1893–1963, British author)



Not only do we not know God except through Jesus Christ; we do not even know ourselves except through Jesus Christ.

—**Blaise Pascal**, (1623–1662, French mathematician and philosopher)

Life passes, riches fly away, popularity is fickle, the senses decay, the world changes. One alone is true to us; One alone can be all things to us; One alone can supply our need.

—**Cardinal John Henry Newman**  
(1801–1890, famous convert, writer, and defender of the faith)



## EXAMINING YOUR BELIEF ABOUT JESUS

As you begin your study of Jesus, evaluate your own personal beliefs about him. Write a journal entry detailing why you strongly hold one of the following beliefs or why you disagree strongly with any of the statements.

1. Jesus is my Lord and my Savior.
2. Jesus was the greatest person who ever lived, but not God.
3. Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God.
4. Jesus never claimed to be what Christians now believe about him.
5. Jesus is my best friend.
6. Jesus was a good philosopher and moral teacher, but not much different from other good philosophers and teachers.
7. Jesus died for the sins of humankind and is risen from the dead.
8. Jesus never existed.
9. Jesus is the "Alpha and Omega," the beginning and end of all humanity.
10. I simply don't know what to believe about Jesus. Tell me more.

## FOR REVIEW

1. Name some of the different views that Jesus' disciples offered about his identity.
2. How did Peter identify Jesus?
3. List three interesting facts about the Apostle Peter.

## FOR REFLECTION

Tell about an occasion from the news or your experience when someone gave up his or her life for another.

## LEARNING MORE ABOUT PETER

Peter was the Apostle who acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah and the Son of God. But Peter was not always the steadfast and dependable friend of Jesus. At times, he was weak and all-too-human. To learn more about St. Peter, read the following passages. Write answers to the questions that follow.



### Matthew 4:18–22

What was Peter's profession?  
Who was his brother?  
Who else were among Jesus' first Apostles?

### Matthew 8:5, 14

Where was Peter's home?

### Luke 9:28–36

Which other Apostles were at Jesus' Transfiguration?  
Who did the Apostles see with Jesus?  
What did Peter propose to do?

### Mark 14:27–31, 66–72

What did Peter say he would do rather than deny Christ?  
Why did the woman think Peter was Jesus' companion?  
What did Peter do when he realized he had betrayed Christ?

### John 21:1–19

What did Peter do once he saw Jesus?  
How many times did Jesus ask Peter to profess his love?  
How will Peter die?

- *For your journal:* Answer the question Jesus posed to Peter: "Do you love me?" Offer evidence for your personal response.

## Coming to Know God and Jesus (CCC, 27–142)

The Psalmist wrote, “As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My being thirsts for God, the living God” (Psalm 42:2–3).

The great theologian St. Augustine also penned these famous words: “You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised. . . . You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

Both of these quotations reveal an important truth: God, who created us out of love to share his life with him in eternity, made us in his own image and implanted in us a great desire to see him and to be united with him. “The desire for God is written in the human heart because man is created by God and for God” (CCC, 27).

It almost seems like God implanted a homing device deep within each of us to attract us to himself. For example, we all have a profound desire to be happy, yet no possession, award, amount of money can satisfy what for each of us is an unquenchable thirst for happiness. All true seekers find that only God can fulfill our deep cravings for happiness, for beauty and truth, for goodness and justice, and especially for love.

Human reason can discover with certainty God’s existence. St. Paul understood this when he wrote:

For what can be known about God is evident. . . . because God made it evident. . . . Ever since the creation of the world,

his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. (Rom 1:19–20)

For example, humans using their intellect alone have come to the logical and correct conclusion that there must be an almighty, all-good, Creator God who brought everything into existence out of nothing, a First Cause who was not caused by any other. He is the Supreme Being who brought into existence other beings. He is a Grand Designer who created all the beauty, symmetry, and power that can be found in the universe.

### *Divine Revelation*

As the existence of many varied and diverse religions throughout human history attests, human reason cannot plumb the depths of God’s great mystery. God’s ways are not our ways; his thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55:8). We need God to come to us, to enlighten us about things that we cannot understand. We also need God to give us certitude about those religious and moral truths our minds can grasp (like the precepts of the Ten Commandments, for example, “You shall not kill”), but which are prone to error.

Thankfully, out of his infinite love, goodness, and wisdom, God has indeed revealed himself to human beings. Revelation means “unveiling.” Through deeds and words, God freely chose to step into human history to reveal his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Through the story of Salvation History, passed on through the **Sacred Tradition** and the Sacred Scripture of the



**Sacred Tradition**—The living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church.

Church, we learn an awesome truth of God's communication with humanity: Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, all humans are adopted into the divine family as sons and daughters of our loving Father and brothers and sisters to his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

**Divine Revelation** is the free gift of God's self-communication by which he makes known the mystery of his divine plan. From the creation of Adam and Eve, God has revealed himself as a God of tremendous love, inviting our first parents into intimate union with him. However, their pride prevented them from accepting God's invitation. After the Original Sin, God did not cut off relations with them, but promised salvation for future generations. The subsequent story of God's saving activity in human history is known as **Salvation History**.

Salvation History reveals how God, out of his infinite love, established a series of covenants with humankind. A covenant is a sacred agreement between God and humans. God promised to be faithful to us forever while humans were to

remain faithful to him. He promised to save and redeem us and give us eternal life. One important covenant was with Abraham, to whom God promised many descendents. Another was with Israel, whom God chose as his special people, freeing them from slavery and giving them the Law on Mount Sinai. When Israel fell into sin, the prophets told how God would redeem the people and save all the nations through a promised Messiah who would be from the family of King David.

The climax of Salvation History was, in fact, the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's Revelation. He is God's total Word-made-flesh who lived among us. He taught us in word and deed about God and completed the Father's work of salvation. Since the coming of Jesus Christ, God's final Word, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, Revelation is complete. There will be no further revelation after him.

**Divine Revelation**—God's self-communication whereby he makes known the mystery of his divine plan. God most fully revealed himself when he sent us his own divine Son, Jesus Christ.

**Salvation History**—The story of God's saving activity in human history.



## LEARNING MORE ABOUT JESUS

"Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"  
(Mk 4:41)

—The Apostles after  
Jesus calmed the storm

Interview at least ten Christians to find out how Jesus has been revealed to them. Ask them to name a specific experience that helped them to know and believe in Christ.





### *Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition*

The Church teaches that there is a single sacred “deposit” of the Word of God. Christ entrusted this deposit to the Apostles. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they handed it on through their preaching and writing until Christ will come again. Today, this deposit is found in the Sacred or Apostolic Tradition of the Church and in Sacred Scripture (the Bible). Together they are like two streams that flow from the same fountain of Divine Revelation.

*Sacred Tradition* is the living transmission of the Church’s Gospel message of Jesus Christ, which started from the first days of Christianity through the Apostles’ preaching, witness, institutions, worship, and sacred writings inspired by the Holy Spirit. Today, we find this Tradition in the Church’s teaching, life, and worship. Our blessed Lord and the Holy Spirit handed on (*tradition* comes from a word that means “handed on”) the Word of God to the Apostles. The Deposit of faith is given to the whole Church, but it is the special task of the Apostles’ successors—the pope and bishops—to “faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching” (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, No. 9, quoted in *CCC*, 81).

*Sacred Scripture* (the Bible) is a library of divinely inspired writings, consisting of the Old and New Testaments. It is the written record of salvation that teaches without error what is necessary for salvation.

**Magisterium**—The official teaching authority of the Church that resides in the pope (the successor of Peter) and the bishops in communion with him.

When we say that Scripture is inspired, we mean that the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors to use their unique talents to put into writing what God wanted written and nothing more. “The books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures” (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, No. 11, quoted in *CCC*, 107).

Christ entrusted to the Church leaders the important task of interpreting God’s Word—both Scripture and Tradition—authentically. This Christ-appointed teaching authority, which resides in the pope and the bishops in communion with him, is known as the **Magisterium** (from the Latin word for “teacher”). With the help of the Holy Spirit, the Magisterium serves the Word of God by listening to, guarding, and explaining it faithfully. The criteria for reading and interpreting Sacred Scripture involves (1) reading it with attention to the content and unity of the entire Bible; (2) reading it within the living Tradition of the Church; and (3) reading it by paying attention to the analogy of faith, that is, by attention to the inner harmony that exists among the various truths of the faith.

More information about the Old Testament and how it prepared us for the coming of Jesus Christ will be presented in the next chapter.



### FOR REVIEW

1. Name some ways that human reason can reveal with certainty the existence of God.
2. What is the necessity of Divine Revelation?
3. Define *covenant*.
4. What is the sacred “deposit” of the Word of God, or faith?
5. What is the function of the Magisterium?

### FOR REFLECTION

What is an experience you have had that has helped to reveal God to you?

## The Fundamental Doctrine: The Incarnation (CCC, 456–463)

The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his great love for mankind, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.

—St. Irenaeus

The fullness of Divine Revelation took place when God became man, when the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to live with us, to teach us, and to die and rise to new life for us and for our salvation. This is the mystery of the **Incarnation**. Belief in this mystery is a distinctive sign of Christian faith.

The essential Catholic **dogma** of the Incarnation holds 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, Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man.

The prologue to John’s Gospel provides the strong scriptural basis for the doctrine of 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)

You might find the expression “the Word became *flesh*” a bit strange to state that Jesus became a man. Scholars believe the Gospel writer selected the word “flesh” to counteract a first-century heresy—*Docetism*—that taught that Jesus only *seemed* to be a man. (Docetism comes from a Greek word meaning “to seem.”) Adherents of this heresy simply could not accept that God would so demean himself by becoming like us in all our weakness and humanity. To Docetists, Jesus was a ghostly figure who only *appeared* to instruct us about the divine.

A prime danger of Docetism is that if Jesus only *seemed* to be a man, then he only *seemed* to die and resurrect from the dead. These key events—Jesus’ Death and Resurrection—are the basis of our salvation. If they were only phantasms and appearances, then we have not really been saved. Additionally, there would be no hope for our own resurrection from the dead.

By using the Greek word *sarks*, which the Latin translates with the root *carne* (meaning “flesh” or “meat”), the author of John’s Gospel was insisting that Jesus was one of us. A human person cannot be a *human* being without a body. Thus, Incarnation literally means that God became flesh.



**Incarnation**—A core Catholic teaching that the Son of God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

**dogma**—A central truth of Revelation that Catholics are obliged to believe.

### *The Purpose of the Incarnation*

According to Church teaching, the Incarnation resulted in many benefits for all human beings:

- *First*, the Word became flesh to save us by reconciling us with God. Because of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, humans inherited a fallen nature and were prone to sin, sickness, and death. Jesus' great sacrifice of love heals our human nature, overcomes sin, and has won for us everlasting life.
- *Second*, as God's Son, Jesus reveals God's love to us.
- *Third*, as God-made-man, Jesus serves as 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 man, the Word of God makes 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 statements emphasize the need for us to learn all we can about Jesus. Moreover, it is vitally important to *know Jesus himself*, the Living Lord who calls each of us by name. A primary intention of this text and course is that those who read it and participate in it will learn more about Jesus and get to know him more personally.

### **BECOMING ONE OF US**

Many years ago, in a land far away lived a wise and good king who loved his people. He wanted to understand his people and learn how they lived. He wanted to endure their same hardships. Many times he would dress in the clothes of a beggar or a lowly worker and visit the home of his poor subjects. Little did they know that their visitor was their king.

One time he called on a desperately poor man who lived with his family in a run-down shack. He ate the meager dinner the poor man offered him. He spoke kindly to the man's family and treated them with profound respect and dignity. Then he returned to his palace.

Some time later the king stopped by to see the poor man again and revealed his true identity. "I am your king!" he said. The king was surprised that the poor man did not request some gift or money. Instead the man said, "You left your glorious dwelling to visit me and my family in this dank hovel. You ate the barely edible food we ate. You have made me very happy. To others in the kingdom you have given your rich gifts. But to me, you have given yourself!"

**—Anonymous**

The king in this story is a symbol for Jesus Christ. Through an incredible act of humility and love, God's Son took on human nature so that we might have eternal life. In the words of St. Athanasius, the "Word was not degraded by receiving a body. . . . He deified what he put on; and, more than that, he bestowed this gift upon the race of man."





## EXTENDING EMPATHY

By means of the Incarnation, God displayed tremendous *empathy* for human beings. Empathy implies understanding and entering into another's feelings. You mirror God's act of entering into human life—the Incarnation—every time you empathize with another. Empathy can often be a profound act of love. In the following days, practice one of the following exercises in empathy:

- Seek out a lonely classmate and invite him or her to eat lunch with you; listen carefully and attentively to what the person says to you.
- Spend time helping a younger sibling with homework or offer to play with him or her.
- Call a grandparent and ask how things are going and offer to help with a chore.
- Encourage a teammate who has been having a rough time lately.



## FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss one view from outside of Christianity that people have had about Jesus through the ages.
2. Why does the human heart long for God?
3. Explain how human reason can discover the existence of God.
4. What is Divine Revelation?
5. Where can we find the Deposit of faith?
6. What is Salvation History?
7. How must the Magisterium interpret Scripture?
8. What are the meanings of the terms Incarnation and dogma?
9. What scriptural passage highlights Catholic belief in the dogma of the Incarnation?
10. Who were the Docetists? What follows from their false concept about Jesus?
11. Discuss one benefit of the Incarnation for mankind.

## FOR REFLECTION

Write a reflection on what for you is the most convincing proof of (1) God's existence and (2) God's love for you.

## Learning about Jesus

(CCC, 422–429)

Who is the real Jesus?

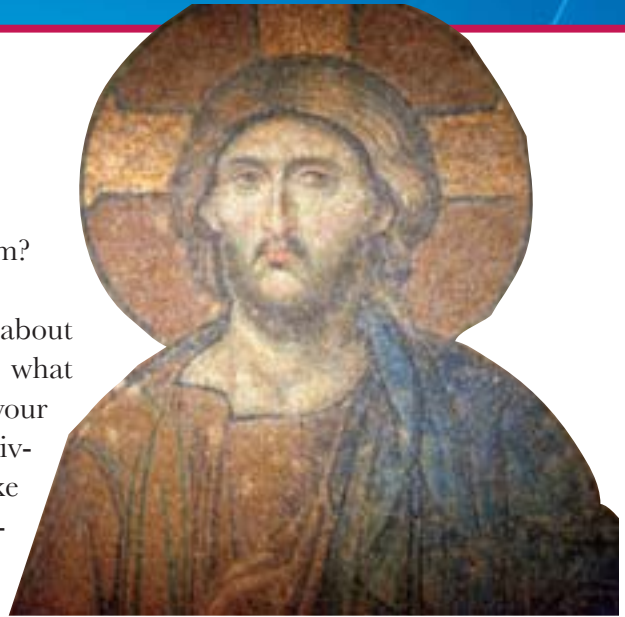
How do you learn about him?

Where do you find him?

Examine your knowledge about Jesus. You probably learned what you know about Jesus from your parents, your teachers, talks given at retreats, priests who spoke about Jesus in homilies, television shows that dealt with Jesus, movies that depicted his life, and books and articles that you have read.

And where did these people and sources get their information? From similar people who came before them, especially the bishops and the popes who made sure through the ages that what was passed on was accurate knowledge.

But where did the original knowledge about Jesus come from? If you press it all the way back to Jesus' time, we conclude that it came from Sacred or Apostolic Tradition. This living transmission of the Gospel message is based on the Apostles, who had direct and personal contact with Jesus. They knew him when he was a teacher and healer walking in their midst. They witnessed his fate as a condemned criminal. Moreover, they claimed to have seen him *after* his Death, risen in power and glory. They experienced the power of the Risen Lord in their lives that transformed them from frightened cowards into bold proclaimers of the Good News (**Gospel**) of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. They were so convinced of the



truth of their message that they surrendered their own lives in preaching the simple message “Jesus is Lord!”

Their testimony is preserved in Sacred Scripture, most specifically in the four Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament, written within a generation of Jesus' ministry. They are an accurate source of knowledge about Jesus Christ. Preserved and interpreted through the ages by the Magisterium of the Church, Sacred Scripture preserves the authentic message about the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Knowledge of Scripture is essential for anyone who wants to know Jesus Christ.

### Tracing Jesus Christ in History

(CCC, 422–423)

History shows that there was a real man named Jesus (see Chapter 1). In his lifetime, he would have borne the name *Jesus bar Joseph* (Jesus, son of Joseph), *Jesus the Carpenter* (people were known by their professions), or *Jesus of Nazareth* (one's surname was often based on place of residence). He was born a Palestinian Jew in Bethlehem

**Gospel**—Literally, “Good News.” Gospel refers to (1) the Good News preached by Jesus; (2) the Good News of salvation won for us in the person of Jesus Christ (he is the Good News proclaimed by the Church); (3) the four written records of the Good News—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

of a woman named Mary. His birth year was probably between 4 and 6 BC, while King Herod the Great ruled in Palestine under the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus.

Jesus lived a hidden life in Nazareth in Galilee. He learned the trade of carpentry from his foster father, Joseph. He practiced his Jewish religion faithfully by worshiping on the Sabbath, reciting daily prayers, celebrating the great religious feasts, and observing the precepts of the Jewish Law.

After being baptized by the prophet John the Baptist, perhaps sometime in AD 28, he began his own public ministry. He wandered the countryside teaching a message of repentance, the coming of God’s Kingdom, and the need for all people to believe in him and his teachings:

This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel. (Mk 1:15)

He performed works at which the people marveled. He cured lepers, restored sight to those who were blind and hearing to those who were deaf, fed the crowds with a few loaves of bread, and exorcised demons from the possessed. He gathered and formed disciples who were eyewitnesses to his life, teachings, and miracles.

Jesus was provocative. He asked for people to make a clear choice to turn from sin, accept God’s love, and believe in him. His manner of preaching and his actions led some of the people to think of Jesus as a great prophet. But not everyone thought this way. Even some of his relatives thought he was crazy (Mk 3:20–21).

Also, a few of Jesus’ words and actions threatened and angered the authorities. For example, he spoke with unique authority in his teachings, quoting no one. He gave novel interpretations of the Law. He claimed to speak for God. He performed marvelous deeds (miracles) that some attributed to the devil. And he associated with prostitutes and tax collectors.

Eventually the authorities colluded to arrest Jesus. One of his own Apostles betrayed him. The rest abandoned him. Some Jewish officials brought Jesus to trial 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 death penalty 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 bare-bones facts highlight the life on earth of Jesus, a man that most open-minded persons would agree lived and taught approximately 2000 years ago. This Jesus is the most compelling person to walk the face of the earth. Some of the quotes given earlier in this chapter testify to this fact, as does this one:

I find the name of Jesus Christ written on the top of every page of modern history.

—George Bancroft

(1800–1891, famous American historian)

## WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

In the sixth century, a Roman monk and mathematician, Dionysius Exiguus, or Dennis the Short, attempted to calculate a chronology of the Christian faith for Pope John I.

Dennis began the new Christian calendar in the year AD 1, or *Anno Domini* (“in the year of the Lord”). He set Jesus’ birth in the year 754 on the Roman calendar. This date was problematic since the year 754 was at least four years after King Herod died. Since the Gospels mention Jesus’ persecution at the hands of Herod, it is safe to assume that Jesus was actually born at least four years earlier than calculated, that is, approximately 4 to 6 BC (“Before Christ”) on the Christian calendar.

### *Belief in Jesus Christ*

Jesus is much more than simply a famous, influential person from the past. Catholics believe that God raised this man Jesus from the dead. The belief in Jesus' Resurrection claims that after his Death and burial, Jesus entered into God's powerful life and that he now shares that life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, with those who are willing to receive it through faith and Baptism.

Catholic faith also holds that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is himself God. His Resurrection and Glorification reveal his true identity as God's only Son who fully shares the Father's superabundant life and glory. Moreover, with his Father, the Risen Christ sends the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of believers, empowering them to live Christ-like lives of love and service for others.

The real Jesus of faith is the resurrected Jesus, a living person, whom God has revealed as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

This is the Jesus you have been hearing about ever since you learned his name. He is the same Jesus who lived on this earth over two thousand years ago. But if it were not for the earth-shattering event of Jesus' Resurrection to a superabundant life with God, it is highly unlikely anyone would take note of his existence. Jesus of Nazareth would be a mere footnote in history.

Faith is a gift of God. It is primarily a response to a living God who is powerfully at work among all people through the resurrected Jesus Christ. Before we can exercise our faith, we must have the grace of God and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit.



### *Meeting Jesus Today*

Because the Jesus who once lived on earth is alive as the resurrected Lord, it is possible, through the help of the Holy Spirit, for us to meet, know, and believe in him. Such faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for our salvation. Several ways to know Jesus are listed below.

*Sacred Scripture.* One way to meet Jesus is in the Bible. As noted above, Sacred Scripture is the written record of Revelation, that is, God's self-communication to humanity. Jesus is most present in the New Testament writings, most notably in the four

Gospels. They record many of the miracles that Jesus performed for our sake and contain many of his teachings. The Gospels and other New Testament writings would never have been written had Jesus not been raised from the dead and the Spirit come to enflame the hearts of Jesus' disciples. The Gospels came into being to set down a written record of the Good News about Jesus Christ, Son of God. The author of John's Gospel wrote it this way:

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)

*Sacraments.* The Risen Lord comes to us in the very special moments of our life:

- when we are initiated into the Catholic Church (Baptism);
- at a time when we need the special strength of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life (Confirmation);
- when we are sick and in need of spiritual and physical healing (Anointing of the Sick);

- when we have sinned and need to hear the Divine Physician forgive us and welcome us back into the community of the faithful (Penance);
- when we are called to serve God as special ministers (Holy Orders);
- when we commit ourselves to a lifetime of sharing life and love with a spouse (Matrimony);
- and, most remarkably, on a daily basis, if we partake in the sign of love we call the holy Eucharist.

These Seven Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and given to the Church. Through the sacraments, divine life is dispensed to us through the Holy Spirit.

*Prayer.* We can meet the living Lord in prayer by the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. We can talk to him any time as in a conversation with a friend. We can meet him when we come together with other believers, because, as he said,

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Mt 18:20)

*In others.* Jesus lives in each of us. This remarkable truth gives us tremendous dignity. Yet, it also imposes on us the tremendous responsibility to be Christ for others.

In a special way, Jesus identified himself with the lowly, the outcast, the marginalized. He taught that we will be judged on how we welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and visit 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)



## WHAT THEY THOUGHT ABOUT JESUS

Read the following Gospel passages. Write what certain contemporaries of Jesus thought about him.

John the Baptist (Jn 1:29)

Jesus' relatives (Mk 3:21)

The people (Mt 21:10–11)

Herod Antipas (Mk 6:14–16)



## FOR REVIEW

1. List five significant historical facts about Jesus.
2. What might Jesus' surname have been?
3. What are the probable birth and death dates for Jesus?
4. Identify Dionysius Exiguus.
5. Why is Jesus more than just a famous person from the past?
6. Who is the "real Jesus"?
7. Name five different ways you can meet Jesus Christ today.

## FOR REFLECTION

- Tell about a person who taught you about Jesus. How did he or she teach you?
- List five statements you know are absolutely true about Jesus.
- Which person most reminds you of Jesus? Why?
- If Jesus were your age and attending your school, what would he be like?
- What would you most like to learn about Jesus?



## Names and Titles for Jesus

Theologians tell us that people pray as they believe. But people also believe as they pray. A famous prayer, called the “Jesus Prayer,” is a wonderful example of both the believer and pray-er expressing his or her faith.

Each word of this prayer conveys profound meaning: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The following text sections analyze the important words of the prayer more deeply.

### *Jesus (CCC, 430–435; 452)*

Jesus was a relatively common proper name in the first century, a late form of the Hebrew name *Joshua* (Yehoshua). Several New Testament persons bore this name, including a “Jesus the Just” (Col 4:11) and a prophet with the surname “Bar-Jesus” (Acts 13:6). An ancient manuscript even gives the first name of the criminal Barabbas as Jesus, a name probably dropped from most Gospel manuscripts because the Church did not want this known insurrectionist associated with Jesus the Savior.

It is not accidental that the Lord was named Jesus because, like all Hebrew names, it had profound significance. Jesus means “God saves” or “Yahweh is salvation.” The author of Matthew’s Gospel caught this meaning when he quoted the angel who appeared in Joseph’s dream:

[Mary] will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Mt 1:21)

The Old Testament revealed a God of salvation. Yahweh delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt and forgave sin. In God’s plan, it was most appropriate that the Son of God made man should bear the name Jesus. This special name shows that the very name of God is present in the person who would redeem and save humanity from its sins and ultimately from death.

By the end of the first century, the name Jesus fell out of favor for both Jews and Christians. Jews

stopped naming their boys Jesus because of the conflict with Jewish Christians who they thought were misled by the prophet Jesus from Nazareth. Various New Testament letters and even the Gospels themselves point to some of the tensions between Jews and Christians of the first century, tensions that led to a definitive break between the two groups sometime after the First Jewish Revolt in AD 66–70.

Out of reverence for the holy name, most Christians stopped naming their boys after our Lord. Today, you will sometimes meet believers, most often of Spanish heritage, who will give the name Jesus to their boys. This practice has an interesting history. In the thirteenth century there was a heretical group known as the Albigensians who ritually mocked the Lord’s name. To counteract this blasphemous practice, the Council of Lyons in 1274 prescribed a devotion to the Holy Name. The preaching of a certain Spanish Dominican, Didacus of Victoria, two centuries later led to the founding of a religious order that



## NEW TESTAMENT NAMES

Use a dictionary or book of names to match the meaning of these New Testament names with the description that fits from the box at the right.

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Joseph    | 6. Matthew |
| 2. Mary      | 7. Martha  |
| 3. John      | 8. Andrew  |
| 4. Elizabeth | 9. Susanna |
| 5. James     | 10. Philip |

- |                          |                                    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. “let God protect”     | f. “may God add”                   |
| b. “virile one, manly”   | g. “friend of horses”              |
| c. “bitter” or “grieved” | h. “lady or mistress of the house” |
| d. “lily”                | i. “God has shown favor”           |
| e. “God is fullness”     | j. “gift of God”                   |

Complete the following assignments:

- Check a book of names and find the meaning of your baptismal or confirmation name. How does it convey special meaning to you?
- Look up a biography of a saint whose name you bear (or a favorite saint) and prepare a short report on his or her life. Sample biographies are given at <http://saints.catholic.org/index.shtml>.

we know today as the Society of the Holy Name of Jesus. Early Spanish members of this Society began the practice of using the holy name Jesus at the baptism of children. Their reasoning was that if we call on the saints to protect the newly baptized Christian by naming a child after them, why not call on the Lord himself in the same way?

In his Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul cites an early Christian teaching about how we should revere the name Jesus:

God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9–11)

### *Christ* (CCC, 436–440; 453)

Christians get their name from one of Jesus’ most important titles—**Christ**. The word “Christ” derives from the Greek *Christos*, which, in turn, translates the Hebrew word Messiah. Christ means “anointed.”

The Messiah was God’s anointed one, the promised one born into the lineage of King David who would fulfill all the divine promises made to the Chosen People. Many contemporaries of Jesus thought the Messiah would be a political ruler. But the Father anointed Jesus with the Spirit to inaugurate God’s Kingdom as a reign of peace, love, and service. Jesus accomplished his mission of suffering service through the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king:

- As *prophet*, Jesus was the Word of God who spoke for his Father and taught through his words and deeds the full message of salvation.

**Christ**—A title given for Jesus that means “anointed one.” It translates the Hebrew word for Messiah.

- As *high priest*, Jesus was the mediator between God and humanity. He offered his life for all on the altar of the cross. Today, Jesus the Christ continues his priestly role at each celebration of the Eucharist.
- As *king*, Jesus, the rightful ruler of the universe, does not lord it over others. He did not come to be served, but to serve through suffering and dying for us and thus accomplish our salvation. Jesus rules with gentleness, compassion, and love. Along with the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christ's example inspires us to love and serve others in imitation of him.

### *Son of God* (CCC, 441–445; 454)

The Old Testament sometimes referred to angels, the Chosen People, and the children and kings of Israel as “sons of God.” It did so to show that God had special love for these creatures whom he adopted into a unique relationship.

Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God, that Jesus shares the same divine nature as God the Father. As John's Gospel teaches:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
(Jn 1:1)

The divinity associated with the title is what Simon Peter meant when he professed Jesus to be the Son of God. It is what St. Paul meant when he proclaimed in the synagogues that Jesus is the “Son of God.” And this is the truth that the Father revealed at

Jesus' baptism and Transfiguration, when the heavenly voice was heard saying that Jesus is “my beloved son” (see Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

A hallmark of faith is the profound truth that Jesus is the unique Son of God. Jesus' miracles and his words reveal him to be such. He alone knows the Father. And although he teaches his followers to call God “our Father,” Jesus also reveals a distinction between “my Father and your Father.”

After his Resurrection, it became clear to the Apostles what Jesus meant when he said, “The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30). Catholics hold that Jesus Christ is God's only Son. There is no one like him.

### *Lord* (CCC, 446–451; 455)

In New Testament times, the title **Lord** could refer to a ruler or some powerful person. It was also used as a form of address similar to our salutation *sir*. Some people may have used it this way when they were talking with Jesus, especially when they were asking him for a favor.

However, when believers apply this title to Jesus, it means something entirely different. Lord translates the Greek word *Kurios*, which, in turn, renders the Hebrew word *Adonai*. This was the word the Chosen People used whenever the most holy name for God—Yahweh—would appear in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Therefore, to give Jesus the title Lord is to state quite boldly that *he is God*. Catholics believe that Jesus has the same sovereignty as God and that his Death and Resurrection have won

**Lord**—A title for Jesus which translates the Greek word *Kurios*, which rendered the Hebrew word for God. To call Jesus “Lord” is to call him God.

for us eternal life, a gift that only God can bestow. Jesus is the Lord of life, the One who deserves their total devotion and obedience. The power, honor, and glory that are owed God the Father are also due

Jesus. It would be hard to find a more lofty and important title than Lord to affirm Jesus’ divinity.

## MORE NEW TESTAMENT TITLES FOR JESUS

Complete each of the following assignments:

1. Read the Scripture reference and briefly state what each title means.
  - Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11)
  - Living Water (Jn 4:14)
  - Bread of Life (Jn 6:35)
  - Light of the World (Jn 1:4–5, 9)
  - Divine Physician (Mt 9:12–13)
  - Judge (Acts 17:31)
2. Name a contemporary title for Jesus that might appeal to people today.
3. Which titles do you feel most comfortable using to address Jesus?



## FOR REVIEW

1. Write out the “Jesus Prayer.”
2. What is the meaning of the name *Jesus*? Why is it appropriate for him to have this name?
3. What is the meaning of the term *Christ*? What kind of Messiah was Jesus?
4. What does it mean to call Jesus the Son of God? the Lord?

## FOR REFLECTION

- How do you revere the name of Jesus at home? at church? in a public setting?
- What are ways you show special reverence for the Lord’s name?
- Compose your own version of the “Jesus Prayer.” Use at least two of your favorite titles for Jesus.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY POINTS

- It was Simon Peter who identified Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, when asked by Jesus about his identity.
- The human heart craves union with God, who implanted in each of us a desire to know and to love him.
- The human intellect can discover God’s existence. However, out of his infinite love, goodness, and wisdom, God revealed himself in human history by making known the mystery of his divine plan.
- Jesus Christ is the fullness of God’s Revelation, God’s Word-made-flesh who completed the Father’s work of salvation.
- We can find the single sacred deposit of Divine Revelation in Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, the two streams that flow from the same fountain of Divine Revelation.
- The doctrine of the Incarnation holds that the Son of God became man in the person of Jesus Christ.
- The heresy of Docetism denied the essential humanity of Jesus, claiming that he only seemed to be a human being.
- From the very first moment of the Incarnation to his redemptive Passion and Death, Jesus Christ reconciles us with God, reveals the Father’s love to us, demonstrates a perfect model of holiness to us in his person, and makes it possible for us to share in God’s nature.
- Jesus of Nazareth was born in 4–6 BC and died in either AD 30 or 33 at the hands of Pontius Pilate.
- Catholics believe in the resurrected Jesus Christ, whom they hold to be the Lord and Savior.
- Catholics believe that the resurrected Lord is the “real” Jesus who shares God’s life with us right now through the power of the Holy Spirit.



- Catholics believe that we can meet the living Jesus Christ in his Word (the Sacred Scriptures), the Seven Sacraments, prayer, other people, and, in a special way, through the poor and outcast.
- The “Jesus Prayer”—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”—reflects many profound truths Catholics hold about Jesus.
- The proper name *Jesus* means “God saves” or “God is salvation.” This appropriate name reveals the mission Jesus accomplished for us.
- The title *Christ*, or *Messiah* in the Hebrew, means “anointed one.” Anointed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus serves as the High Priest, God’s perfect prophet, and as a king who leads through compassionate service.
- The title *Son of God* reveals Jesus’ unique relationship with God the Father, sharing his very nature from the beginning of time.
- By proclaiming Jesus *Lord*, Catholics hold that Jesus is God himself.



## LEARN BY DOING

1. **Hearing St. Peter.** Acts 2 records an important “kerygmatic” sermon preached by Peter to those in Jerusalem after the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. The term **kerygma** refers to the essential preaching of salvation through the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Read this sermon and then outline its basic points in your journal.
2. **God’s Love.** Create a PowerPoint® presentation of pictures that you download from the Internet, scan, or take yourself that powerfully illustrate for you that God exists. For example, you might select pictures that highlight the awesomeness, beauty, and organization found in creation. Or you might select pictures that depict God’s love shown in his most magnificent creation: the human being. Select an appropriate piece of background music for your presentation and words of praise from an appropriate creation Psalm like Psalms 8, 104, 139, or 148.
3. **Read and report** on the classic book *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin. It recounts how the author, a white man, darkened his skin by medication and dye and “incarnated” himself in the Deep South of mid-twentieth-century America to experience personally the discrimination suffered by blacks at the hand of racial prejudice and Jim Crow laws. A riveting story even today, Griffin’s book is a classic in empathy and race relations.

**kerygma**—The core teaching about Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.



## PRAYER LESSON

Thanksgiving and humility are two attitudes every believer can take from meditating on the doctrine of the Incarnation.

First, we should *thank* God for all his great gifts—life, health, family, friends, and the eternal life won for us by his Son, who became one with us. A Christian who forgets the language of gratitude cannot be on speaking terms with God. At the least, God’s giving of his Son deserves our thanksgiving for his great gift.

Second, we should imitate Christ’s *humility*. He bent low to raise us high. Our task as Christians is to bend down and help raise up others who are too weak, powerless, or lonely to help themselves. Let us learn from Christ’s humility, celebrated so beautifully in this ancient hymn quoted in Philippians:

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

—Philippians 2:6–11

Lord, it is beyond our power of imagination to realize  
fully what you have done for us by taking on human flesh.  
All we know is that you can feel what we feel,  
not only our joys and simple pleasures,  
but especially our sufferings in both body and spirit.  
We turn these over to you as a gift and as an offering.  
May our good feelings be a sign of our gratitude for all you have given us.  
May our sufferings be an offering of atonement for the times we have  
failed to be your friend.  
Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.