

# The History of The Church

**A Complete Course**



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## CHAPTER 1

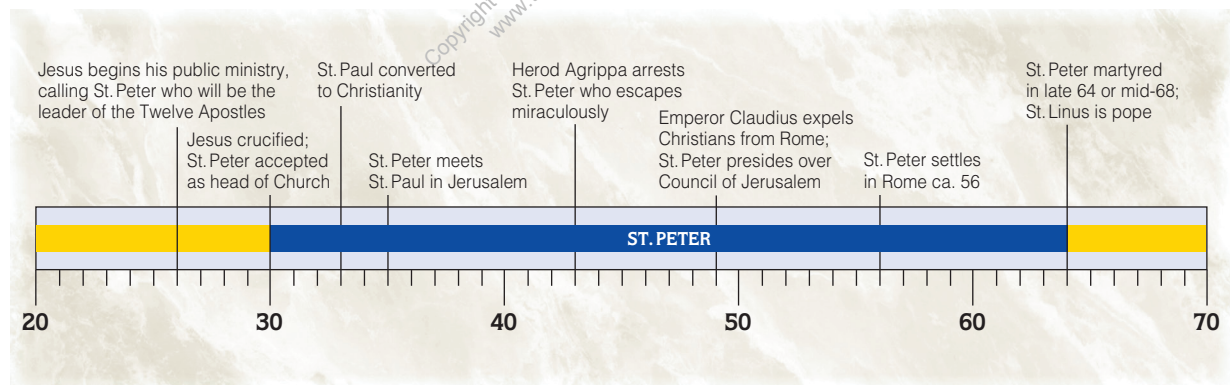
# Jesus Christ and the Founding of the Church

**Loving Christ means loving the Church. The Church exists for Christ,  
so as to continue his presence and witness in the world.  
Christ is the Spouse and Savior of the Church. He is her Founder and her Head.  
The more we come to know and love the Church,  
the nearer we shall be to Christ.**

**– St. John Paul II, Homily, Brisbane, Australia, November 25, 1986**

In the days directly following the crucifixion of Jesus, his disciples were afraid. The Sanhedrin had condemned their Master to death, and the disciples believed that they would be the next targets of persecution. They feared for their safety and were uncertain of the future, being for the first time without their leader. At first the Resurrection appearances only increased doubt and fear among the disciples. Though their Master had returned to them, he remained among them for only a short time. After the Ascension, the Apostles, Mary, and other followers of Jesus were again suddenly alone.

But God did not leave His infant Church alone and unguided. Before departing, Christ declared to his disciples that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit. Ten days later on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and subsequently resolved all their doubts, fears, and worries. The Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, were certain that the Church of Christ would stand throughout all time as a living Sacrament of his love, truth, and power. Christ is the cornerstone of his Church, and St. Peter is “the rock,” Christ’s vicar, upon whom the Church would be built. In the years following the Resurrection, the Apostles, filled with the grace of the







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Holy Spirit, boldly set about the great task of building the Church. They proclaimed the Good News that the long-awaited messiah had come and that he had paid in full the terrible price required for the redemption of all mankind. Christianity began to spread quickly through the ardent and intrepid preaching of the disciples. They carried all over the known world the message of salvation proclaimed by Jesus. Thus began the history of Christianity—a unique history that, simply stated, reflects Christ's constant presence in the Church that at all times interfaces with human history. The history of the Church is a record of the life and actions of men and women under the guiding light of the Holy Spirit acting in the Church. This narrative about the development of Christ's kingdom on earth is forged as the Church interacts and responds to every culture and historical situation.

This chapter will explore the saving work of Christ, the meaning and significance of Pentecost, the nature of the Church, and the unique status and missionary lives of the Apostles.



## PART I

## The Life of Jesus Christ

**If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Mt 16:24)**

Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem in Judea around the year 4 BC. In the humblest of surroundings, the Word of God became Incarnate; love and mercy found perfect expression, and the vessel of God's salvation was born into human history. The foundational principles of Christianity were present there in the quiet little stable in Bethlehem with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Peace, simplicity, material poverty, spiritual abundance, God's love, and sacrifice are the chief message of Christ's Birth.

The Bible only records a few key events concerning Jesus' childhood. One of them is the Presentation in the Temple. After the birth of Christ, in accordance with the Jewish Law, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be consecrated to God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, an old man named Simeon, to whom it had been revealed that he should not die until he had seen the Messiah, recognized the infant, blessed his parents, and spoke of Jesus' destiny. Anna, an elderly prophetess, was also present and, recognizing the messiah, began to speak about the child to all who were waiting for him (Lk 2:22–39).

Shortly after the birth of Jesus, Joseph was warned in a dream by an angel that Herod, the King of Judea, had learned of the birth of the messiah and planned to murder the baby. The angel instructed Joseph to flee immediately to Egypt with Mary and Jesus so that the Holy Child would escape Herod's wrath. When Herod failed to discover the precise location of Jesus, he sent his soldiers to kill every male child in Bethlehem aged two and under. Known as the "Slaughter of the Innocents," this dreadful massacre was the first shedding of blood among countless unnamed martyrs for the Christian Faith (Mt 2:16–18). After some time in Egypt, an angel appeared to Joseph in a second dream, telling him that it was safe for the Holy Family to return to Israel. Ever obedient, Joseph began the journey back to Israel with Jesus and Mary. Upon hearing that Herod's son Archelaus was now king of Judea, Joseph did not return there, but went to Galilee instead, and settled his family in Nazareth (Mt 2:19–23).

After the Holy Family returned to Nazareth, the Gospels record very little of their lives. One can assume that their lives were very ordinary, consisting of work, observance of the Jewish Law, finding joy in the company of one another and of their friends. Joseph was a carpenter, and Jesus most likely trained in the trade of his father, learning to work with wood and build with his hands. Until the beginning of his public ministry, the only event the Gospels describe is the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus speaking with the elders in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Holy Family traveled to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, and when they set out to return home, Jesus was lost for three days. After frantically looking for their son, his parents finally discovered the child Jesus in the temple, which the boy called his "Father's house." The young Jesus was confidently conversing with the elders, whom he astounded with his wisdom and understanding (Lk 2:41–52).





## PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF CHRIST



The Jordan River entering the Sea of Galilee