

## Topic 10: Jesus

### The Essential Truth About Christ

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”

—Colossians 2:9

We are exploring what it means to be a disciple (or follower) of Jesus Christ. A disciple is a person who follows Jesus—to *know* Jesus and his teaching; to *grow* more like Jesus; and to *go* for Jesus, serving others and making new disciples.

Discipleship isn't a short course; it's a lifelong journey. It involves three aspects:

- ▶ a “learning” part—knowing and believing certain truths
- ▶ a “character” aspect—undergoing genuine transformation from the inside out

- ▶ a “serving” component—serving God and others

Thinking about *what disciples believe*, let's turn our focus to Jesus.

Who is he? Is Jesus truly God's son? Why do hundreds of millions of people worldwide claim allegiance to him? What do we know about him, really? More importantly, what do we *need* to know and believe about him, in order to follow him?

Let's look first at the *nature* of Jesus. Then, during our Bible Study, we'll examine the *life* of Jesus.

### The Nature of Jesus Christ

For two millennia, people have argued and puzzled over Jesus. Was he merely human? Was he divine? Could he really have been the Creator walking among his creation? Here's what the Bible says: Jesus was both God and Man.





The Humanity of Jesus	The Deity of Jesus
<p><b>He was a direct descendant of King David</b> Matthew 1:1</p>	<p><b>Isaiah prophesied the Messianic child to be born would be "mighty God"</b> Isaiah 9:6</p>
<p><b>Mary, a human woman, was his mother</b> Matthew 1:18; Galatians 4:4</p>	<p><b>He himself claimed a unique relationship with God the Father</b> Matthew 11:27</p>
<p><b>He felt hunger</b> Mark 11:12</p>	<p><b>He claimed the authority to forgive sins</b> Mark 2:5-7</p>
<p><b>He got tired</b> John 4:6</p>	<p><b>The apostle John, Jesus' most intimate earthly friend, called him God</b> John 1:1</p>
<p><b>He experienced stress</b> Matthew 26:38</p>	<p><b>He claimed and demonstrated authority over death</b> John 2:19</p>
<p><b>He had a fleshly, touchable human body</b> John 1:14; Luke 7:38; cf. 1 John 1:1</p>	<p><b>He claimed to be from heaven and sent by God</b> John 3:13; 6:38, 13:3; 17:8</p>
<p><b>He felt human grief</b> John 11:35</p>	<p><b>He called God his father, making himself equal with God</b> John 5:18</p>
<p><b>He ate and drank</b> Luke 7:34</p>	<p><b>He called himself by the name God used to reveal himself to Moses</b> John 8:58</p>
<p><b>He slept</b> Mark 4:38</p>	<p><b>He claimed his death was his choice, not the result of a human plot</b> John 10:17</p>
<p><b>He sweat</b> Luke 22:44</p>	<p><b>He claimed oneness with the Father a statement the Jews regarded as blasphemous and tantamount to making himself out to be God.</b> John 10:30</p>
<p><b>He experienced thirst</b> John 19:28</p>	<p><b>He claimed that those who saw him, had essentially seen God the Father</b> John 14:9</p>
<p><b>He bled</b> John 19:34</p>	<p><b>He claimed ownership of all that God owns</b> John 16:15</p>
<p><b>He died</b> 1 Corinthians 15:3</p>	<p><b>He accepted Thomas referring to him as "My God"</b> John 20:28</p>
<p><b>The apostle Paul, who encountered Jesus, referred to him as a man</b> 1 Timothy 2:5</p>	<p><b>The apostle Paul referred to him as God, "in very nature" as the "image of the invisible God" and said that he possessed "all the fullness of God ... fullness of Deity"</b> Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-17, 19</p>
<p><b>The writer of Hebrews described Jesus as "fully human in every way"</b> Hebrews 2:17</p>	<p><b>The writer of Hebrews called Jesus "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" and described him as unchanging</b> Hebrews 1:3, 13:8</p>
<p><b>He faced all common human temptations</b> Hebrews 4:15</p>	



A disciple reads these Scripture verses and concludes that Jesus was and is *God incarnate*—God in the flesh, God embodied, the unique God-Man. This is *not* to say he is two persons or two identities or two wills in one body. Jesus is *not* a hybrid being, half God and half man.

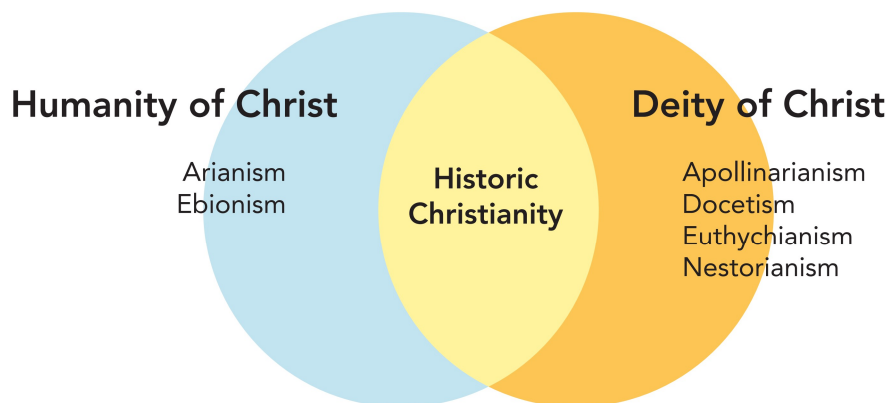
Historic, orthodox Christianity teaches that Jesus is one person with two distinct natures—a one-hundred percent divine nature and a one-hundred percent human nature. Theologians refer to this as the “hypostatic union”:

**Jesus Christ is fully God (the Son of God) and fully man (the son of Mary), inseparably united in one person forever.**

How could this be? Theologian Charles Ryrie explains: “The virgin birth was [the] special miracle performed by the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, whereby the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, took to Himself a genuine, though sinless, human nature and was born as a man, without surrendering in any aspect, His deity.”

So, incarnation means the Second Person of the triune Godhead stepped out of eternity into time, he “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). The Creator entered his creation. Or, as one man quipped, “God moved into the neighborhood.” This is a big deal! Theologian John Walvoord, in his book, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, says, “The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends.”

Because such an idea is supra-logical—beyond human ability to understand—and because some people are unable to live with not knowing, attempts have been made to “solve” this theological riddle of Christ’s nature—leading to errors and heresies. Some of these attempts are shown in the diagram below. If you are curious, you can use the Internet to look up information about each of these “isms.”



## Bible Study



Jesus asks us the most important question ever:

### “Who Do You Say that I Am?”

And beliefs and opinions about him run the gamut.

- Legend or myth
- Archangel become man (Jehovah’s Witness)
- Avatar or way-shower (New Age)
- Ethical teacher (Humanism)
- Miracle worker or healer
- Peasant revolutionary
- Spiritual mystic
- Prophet (Islam)
- Bringer of knowledge (Gnosticism)
- Controversial rabbi
- Man upon whom the divine Christ-spirit descended
- Manifestation of God (Bahai)
- Political martyr
- Victim of a religious perfect storm
- Populist preacher
- Hebrew shaman
- Religious reformer
- Freedom fighter for social justice
- Reincarnation of Horus—the son of the god Osiris
- Nazarene carpenter
- God-man
- Jewish messiah
- Son of God
- Savior of the world

1. What beliefs have you heard others express about Jesus?

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2. What are your biggest questions about Jesus?

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## The Life of Jesus Christ

Almost everything we know of Christ's birth is eyebrow raising. We know his mother was a young, unwed mom who had pledged herself to marry a poor, Jewish carpenter from Nazareth (Matthew 13:55). There are claims of angelic visits, a miraculous conception, and feed trough for a baby crib.

On the big night, there was a surprise visit by a group of wild-eyed shepherds. Beyond that, Luke makes it clear that Jesus' birth did *not* generate much fanfare beyond a couple of elderly folks at the temple making a few startling statements about him a week or so later (Luke 2:25–38).

In his gospel, Matthew focuses on a delegation of foreign dignitaries who showed up at a later date (Matthew 2:1–12). They brought expensive gifts to Jesus because they viewed him as special, even royalty. Their arrival greatly disturbed the paranoid King Herod. Those sketchy details from Matthew and Luke are the extent of what we know about Jesus' entrance into the world.

We know even less about his childhood and youth, except that he was precocious (Luke 2:47), and that at some point he entered his stepfather's carpentry trade (Mark 6:3).

Most of what we know about Jesus happened *after* he began his public ministry. In his early thirties, the carpenter hung up his hammer and became a transient teacher within the Jewish faith community. He assembled some followers—disciples or students. He made claims of being the long-awaited Messiah—veiled at first, but over time his claims were more overt. His teachings were wild and provocative, revolutionary, and even life-altering.

If you've never read the gospels, it is strongly suggested that you do so. Reading the gospels leads to five conclusions about Jesus' life. Let's explore those conclusions.

### Conclusion 1

Consider what Jesus said and did in the following situations:

▶ ***When a small group brought their paralyzed friend to him . . .***

"And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'

"But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?'"  
(Mark 2:5–7, NASB)

3. Why were Jesus' listeners so shocked by his words here?

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The story continues . . . .

“‘But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.’

“And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’” (Mark 2:10–12, NASB)

4. What would have been your reaction had you witnessed this event in person?

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► ***When he suddenly found himself in the middle of a sudden storm on the Sea of Galilee . . .***

“And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?’

“And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Hush, be still.’ And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.” (Mark 4:37–39, NASB)

5. If you were one of the men on the ship with Jesus, how would you explain the experience to others?

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► ***When he happened upon a funeral procession . . .***

“Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the



only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

“When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’

“And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise!’

“The dead man sat up and began to speak. And *Jesus* gave him back to his mother.”  
(Luke 7:12–15, NASB)

6. What do you make of such words and deeds? Journal your impressions here:

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***Conclusion 1: Jesus lived an extraordinary life!***

## **Conclusion 2**

Now, consider these biblical statements by and about Jesus:

- ▶ “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46).
- ▶ “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- ▶ “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15).
- ▶ “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).
- ▶ “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

7. From these verses, what do you know about the nature and character of Jesus?

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***Conclusion 2: Jesus lived a sinless life!***



### Conclusion 3

For three years Jesus said unbelievable things. He did undeniable miracles. His words and works thrilled the masses . . . and infuriated the religious establishment. The Jewish

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. 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 the 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, *Mere Christianity*

scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees saw Jesus as a problem at best, a heretic at worst. Working with the hated Roman authorities, they arrested and tried Jesus, and got him sentenced to death. On a Friday, in the spring of AD 33, Jesus was crucified. His followers were terrified. The “Jesus movement” appeared to be over.

Take a few minutes to read and ponder these verses that speak of Jesus’ death:

“But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5–6, NLT)

“As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside privately and told them what was going to happen to him. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘we’re going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die. Then they will hand him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip, and crucified. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead.’” (Matthew 20:17–20, NLT)

- ▶ “Then some [the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin] began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards took him and beat him.” (Mark 14:65)
- ▶ “Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, ‘Ha! You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!’” (Mark 15:29–30, NASB)





- ▶ “He was handed over to die because of our sins” (Romans 4:25, NLT)
- ▶ “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. . . . He suffered physical death.” (1 Peter 3:18, NLT)
- ▶ “Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16)

8. What details do these assorted passages reveal about the death of Christ?

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**Conclusion 3: Jesus died a gruesome death—for us!**

#### Conclusion 4

Now read these two passages, describing what happened *after* Christ’s crucifixion:

- ▶ “But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

“The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, ‘Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.’” Luke 24:1–7, NLT)

- ▶ “For I delivered 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (The apostle Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, ESV)

Just days after Jesus’ gruesome death, a wild rumor began to sweep through Jerusalem. The followers of Jesus were suddenly, excitedly, and boldly claiming *Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead*. Sure enough, no one could find his body. Over the next month or so, more than 500 people claimed encounters with the risen Christ.



Despite threats to stop broadcasting this news and spreading the message of Christ—or else—the disciples of Jesus didn't stop. A new faith community, called the Church, sprang up. Flowing out of the ancient Jewish faith, this new way of knowing, serving, and loving God became known as "the way" of Jesus (Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22).

**Conclusion 4: Jesus experienced a glorious resurrection!**

**Conclusion 5**

9. In your heart and mind, which of the following is the most compelling evidence that Jesus rose from the dead?
- A. The empty tomb—in spite of its being guarded by Roman soldiers
  - B. The number of eyewitnesses (including some who were hostile or skeptical—and others who were still alive when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians)
  - C. The changed lives of the eyewitnesses
  - D. The fact that the first Jewish believers changed their day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the first day of the week (Sunday)

Why?

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10. Lastly, consider these statements by and about Christ regarding the future:
- ▶ "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (Matthew 24:44)
  - ▶ "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:3, ESV)
  - ▶ "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:28)
  - ▶ "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
  - ▶ "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people



according to their deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Revelation 22:12, NLT)

Based on these passages, what are some of the reasons Jesus will return to earth? And what should be our mindset in this time of waiting?

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***Conclusion 5: Jesus is coming again some day!***

# Take-Home Reflections



## 30 Reasons Jesus Came to Earth

1. To fulfill the law	Matthew 5:17
2. To call sinners to repentance	Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32
3. To seek the lost	Luke 19:10
4. To save the lost	Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15
5. To preach the gospel	Mark 1:38
6. To “explain” God, to reveal him to the world	John 1:18; 14:9
7. To bring judgment	John 9:39
8. To serve	Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45
9. To give his life as a ransom for sin	Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45
10. To save the world, not judge it	John 3:17; 12:47
11. To bring light, to enlighten people	John 1:9; 12:46
12. To give abundant life to the world	John 6:33, 50; 10:10
13. To do the will of the Father	John 6:38; Hebrews 10:9
14. Because he was sent by the Father	John 3:16; 6:39; 7:28; 8:42; 9:4; 16:28
15. To testify to the truth	John 18:37
16. To be a king	John 18:37
17. To suffer and die	John 12:27
18. To bring blessing to the world by turning people from sin to God.	Acts 3:26
19. To bestow power for new creatures to live new lives, as God intended	Romans 8:3–4
20. To confirm the ancient promises of God	Romans 15:8
21. To redeem sinners from the curse of the law and adopt them into God’s family	Galatians 4:4–5
22. To be a merciful and faithful high priest for sinners	Hebrews 2:17
23. To atone for our sins	Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 4:10
24. To give us an example to follow	1 Peter 2:21
25. To destroy the works of the devil	1 John 3:8
26. To break the power of the devil and cast him out	Hebrews 2:14; John 12:31
27. To proclaim good news to the poor	Luke 4:18
28. To set prisoners and the oppressed free	Luke 4:18
29. To give sight to the blind	Luke 4:18
30. To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor	Luke 4:18



For all these reasons, a disciple believes this about Jesus Christ:

**Fully God and fully human, Jesus is the Lord of the universe and the Savior of all who trust in Him.**

- ▶ He lived an extraordinary—and sinless—life!
- ▶ He died a gruesome death—for sinners!
- ▶ He experienced a glorious resurrection!
- ▶ He is coming again one day!

## Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, Colossians 2:9:  
 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."
2. Talk with a non-believing friend about this study of Christ. Decide together to have an honest dialogue, not a heated debate. Ask a lot of questions and listen. See what his or her objections are to the gospel—the good news of Jesus. Ask if you may share what you are learning. Do so in a humble, non-preachy way. Remember, it is not up to you to "save" anyone or change hearts and minds. That's the Holy Spirit's work (we'll talk about him in the next session). Make sure you pray for your friend before and after your discussion.
3. Wrestle with one or two of these questions:
  - ▶ If you could choose to have been an eyewitness at any event in Christ's life here on Earth, which event would you choose? Why?
  - ▶ Why do you think the religious leaders in Jesus' day got so angry with him, and the irreligious people were so attracted to him?
  - ▶ Why is Jesus' sinlessness so crucial?
  - ▶ After the resurrection, the disciples seemed to be galvanized and strengthened in their faith. Why do you think this is? How can we make the resurrection more real in our experience?
  - ▶ What's one question that still bugs you about Jesus?
  - ▶ When have you felt closest to Christ in your life? What were the circumstances?