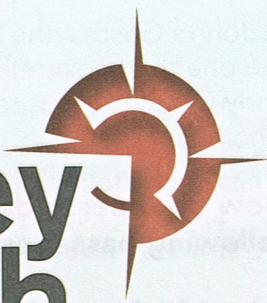


Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Jesus is fully human and fully divine.
- Christ is the way to the Father and salvation.
- Your relationship with Jesus grows through sharing and reflection.



beliefs, traditions, and worship all make a rich and meaningful whole. Each element is related to all the others so that together they make up a complete picture. And the picture they form is a picture of Christ. Our faith isn't a list of separate, abstract truths. Our faith, our Church, rests in the living person of Jesus Christ.

How Do We Come to Know the Person Jesus Christ?

Two thousand years ago, there were no devices to record the words and actions of Jesus or the internet to spread his message quickly. Reports could only be spread by word of mouth. Nonetheless, we might expect that the **miracles** recorded later in the Gospels would have exploded throughout the known world.

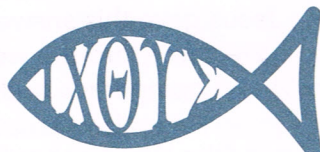
Although Jesus was mentioned by both Jewish and pagan historians, most of what we know about him comes from the Gospels. You and many others may wonder why this is. If Jesus really did perform all those miracles and everything else the Gospel writers claim, why did his life end in humiliation? And why didn't more people write about a man doing such extraordinary things?

The answer is that while Jesus was extraordinary, he wasn't extraordinary in the way the Jews of his time expected the **Messiah** to be. They were awaiting the Messiah, their savior, but a Messiah who came as a mighty warrior. They never imagined their savior would be born into near poverty, the son of a simple carpenter. It took years for the followers of Jesus to realize who he was, so it's not surprising Jesus went unrecognized by so many. It's no wonder few could accept him as the long-awaited savior.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

What do you see in the image at right? Early Christians used the fish symbol as a secret code indicating they were

followers of Jesus. Sometimes the fish's eye was a tiny cross. You also see the Greek acronym **ichthys**. Each letter (*iota, chi, theta, upsilon, sigma*) begins the words in the title "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." When early Christians saw the fish or ichthys, they knew immediately they had met another Christian and were safe from persecution. They belonged to each other and to the Lord.



Like the Jesus fish, the Catholic Church is made up of many elements that illustrate deeper truths. In the case of the Jesus fish, these elements are letters that stand for a greater message. In the case of the Church, these elements are doctrines and beliefs, prayers, and liturgies, and a vast and diverse community of believers. When looked at separately, doctrines, prayers, and individuals give us only a glimpse of the Church.

But when we stand back and look at the big picture, we can see how the Church's doctrines,

Even the Gospel stories were not recorded until years after the death of Jesus. Each Gospel came from a distinct oral tradition (see Q5, “The Bible”), some of them from more than one, and each Gospel was written for a different audience. For this reason, when we study the four Gospels, we find four unique portraits of the man Jesus. Unlike a photo that gives us an exact likeness, a portrait reflects the artist’s unique understanding of the subject and is able to give us a glimpse into the subject’s personality through the artist. When we study the four Gospel portraits, we get a very good idea of who Jesus was, the things he valued, and the truths he taught, but they aren’t exact transcripts of everything Jesus said and did.

- *Why do you think some of the Jews weren’t ready to accept Jesus as Messiah?*
- *Why were they disappointed in him?*



The True Identity of Jesus

Historical research has established the approximate date of Jesus’ birth, the place, and so on. These are the details we commonly use to establish the identity of any ordinary person. But Jesus was no ordinary person. These details don’t explain why the Christian faith is among the most popular in the world. The historical facts about Jesus don’t explain why, thousands of years after his death, he continues to influence the lives of so many.

The Gospels themselves are largely unconcerned with historical facts. They aren’t concerned with describing what Jesus looked like, what he wore, or what he possessed. The authors of the Gospels were only interested in telling us who Jesus was and is so that we might come to know him and model our own lives after his.

In John’s Gospel (the last to be written and therefore the one that most reflects the developing faith of the early Church), Jesus reveals important details about who he is.

How does Jesus describe himself in the following passages?

John 4:25–26

Matthew 19:28–29

John 8:12

Luke 15:1–7

Each of these passages tells us something very important about who Jesus is. In John 14:6–7, Jesus gives us everything necessary for our own happiness—both here on earth and eternally in heaven. He tells us that he is “the way and the truth and the life”—and to know him is to know God.

Jesus Is the Way

When meeting someone for the first time we often ask, “Where are you from?”

The fact that Jesus came from Nazareth was puzzling to those who met him. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46). To those who followed him, Jesus gave this answer: “I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father” (John 16:28).

Jesus is “the Way” not only because of his teachings (which were already familiar to the Jews and found in the Old Testament) but because he is the Son of God. Through Jesus, we come to know and understand God. Christ’s life reveals the goodness of God. This is what, through all of history, makes Jesus unique.

- *Is there a particular Gospel story that helps you better understand God? Why?*



Jesus Is the Truth

What do we mean when we say that Jesus reveals God to us? Do we mean that, because Jesus comes from God, he can give us inside information we can't get anywhere else? Not quite. He says: "I am the Truth," not "I speak the truth" or "I reveal the truth," but "I *am* the Truth."

Jesus had a message and he went about Palestine proclaiming it. But he didn't just ask people to believe his message; he asked them to believe in him. And this was something completely new. Unlike the prophets and teachers of the past, Jesus had not come merely as a messenger to tell people about God. In Jesus, God is made present to us all. In every word and action, Jesus reveals God to us. He shows us, in ways we can understand, the true nature of God.

This is particularly true in the miracles Jesus worked. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is shown healing the sick, curing lepers, feeding thousands, even raising the dead. But Jesus did not perform miracles just to add authority to his teaching or to convince unbelievers. Nor did he perform them simply to demonstrate he had special power.

Far from using miracles to impress large crowds, Jesus performed most of them in the presence of only a few people, and he usually asked his disciples not to tell anyone about what they had seen. Jesus himself tells us, "The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36).

Jesus' miracles are signs of his mission, signs that God loves us and is present and at work in the world. They are signs that Jesus is "the Truth."

Truth is often difficult to recognize and even more difficult to accept. Truth demands that we take a close look at ourselves. Truth often asks that we grow and change.

- *Can you think of a time new information caused you to change your beliefs? Was it difficult or easy to accept? Why?*



Jesus Is the Life

We can never forget that the greatest treasure we have—life itself—is fragile. In the face of death, we are powerless, none of our earthly possessions matter. It was this awareness that made the Jewish people hunger for a savior. They longed for the gift of everlasting life.

At the start of his public preaching, Jesus said: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). As time went on, he began to explain to his followers that the life that truly matters is life everlasting.

At Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so we might have the courage to follow him and be light for a dark world. Jesus knows how hard it is to be like him today. Instead of retaliation, we must forgive. Instead of hate, we must love. Instead of harboring prejudice, we must accept. Instead of seeking the company of those with money, fame, or power, we must protect and care for the poor. Instead of accumulating things, we must strive for simplicity. This is how we show that Jesus is "the Life."

These things are not only the keys to everlasting life, they are also the keys to human happiness here and now. In doing our best to be very like Jesus, we not only find everlasting life, we find—and are part of—the reign of God here on earth today.

As a class or with a partner, pick two or three of the following Scripture stories and determine:

(1) what the miracle is and (2) what that miracle might mean for your life.

Luke
1:26–38;
2:1–7

John
2:1–11

Matthew
8:1–4

Luke
7:1–10

Mark
5:21–43

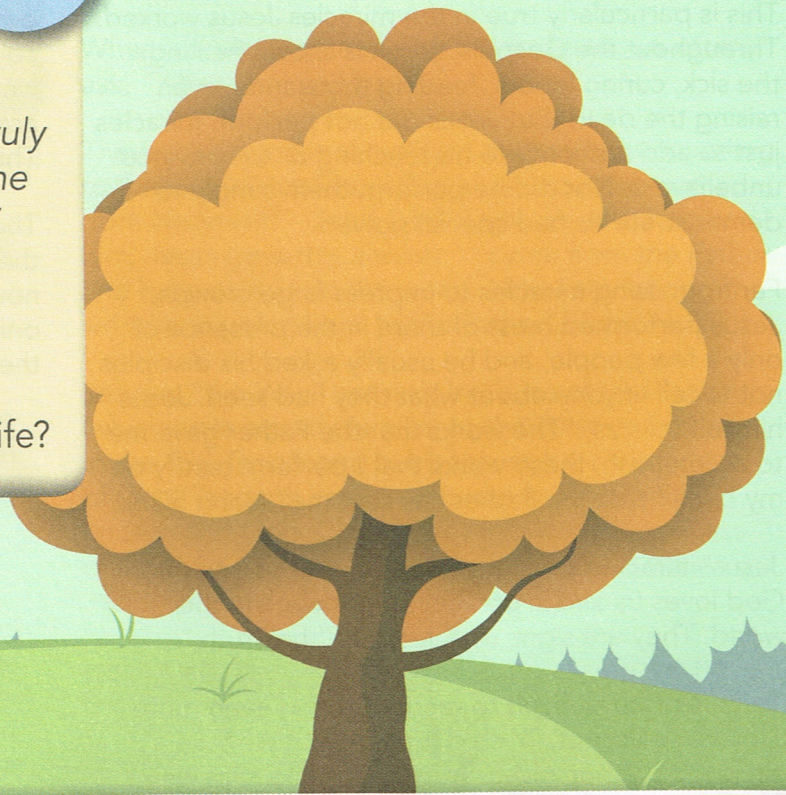
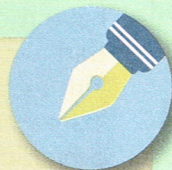
Luke
9:12–17

Matthew
14:22–33

Jesus left his followers with these beautiful words of wisdom and hope:

"If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
John 8:31–32

What does it mean to you to be a disciple of Jesus? How does your relationship with Jesus impact your life?



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