

Session 3: Who is Jesus Christ?

HYMN: Crown Him With Many Crowns



Crown Him with many crowns:
the Lamb upon His throne.
Hark, how the heav'nly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
of Him Who died for thee,
and hail Him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.

Crown Him the Lord of lords,
Who over all doth reign,
Who once, on earth, th'incarnate
Word,
for ransomed sinners slain,
now lives in realms of light,
where saints with angels sing
their song before Him day and night,
their God, Redeemer, King.

Crown Him the Lord of Heav'n,
enthroned in worlds above;
crown Him the King to Whom is giv'n
the wondrous name of Love.
Crown Him with many crowns,
as thrones before Him fall;
crown Him, ye kings, with many
crowns,
for He is King of all.

Crown Him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those He came to save.
His glories now we sing
Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring,
and lives, that death may die.

Crown Him the Lord of love:
behold His hands and side —
rich wounds yet visible above
in beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me.
Thy praise shall never, fail
throughout eternity.

PRAYER:

See Eph 1:17-19.

Let us pray:

O God,
grant us a spirit
of wisdom and insight
to know You clearly.
Enlighten our innermost vision,
that we may know the great hope
to which You have called us,
the wealth of Your glorious heritage
to be distributed
among the members of the Church,
and the immeasurable scope
of Your power
in us who believe.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

— Amen

READING:

Lk 4:31-41

The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke— *Glory to You, O Lord*

Jesus then went down to Capernaum,
a town of Galilee.
He taught them on the sabbath,
and they were astonished
at His teaching
because He spoke with authority.

In the synagogue there was a man
with the spirit of an unclean demon,
and he cried out in a loud voice,
"Ha! What have You to do with us,
Jesus of Nazareth?
Have You come to destroy us?
I know who You are —
the Holy One of God!"

Jesus rebuked him and said,
"Be quiet! Come out of him!"
Then the demon threw the man down
in front of them
and came out of him
without doing him any harm.

They were all amazed
and said to one another,
"What is there about His word?
For with authority and power —

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He commands the unclean spirits,
and they come out."
And news of Him spread everywhere
in the surrounding region.

After He left the synagogue,
He entered the house of Simon.
Simon's mother-in-law
was afflicted with a severe fever,
and they interceded with Him
about her.
He stood over her,
rebuked the fever,
and it left her.
She got up immediately
and waited on them.

At sunset,
all who had people sick
with various diseases
brought them to Him.
He laid His hands on each of them
and cured them.
And demons also came out from many,
shouting,
"You are the Son of God."
But He rebuked them
and did not allow them to speak
because they knew
that He was the Messiah.
The Gospel of the Lord
— *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Jesus Christ is God the Son,
made Man for us.

He is truly God
because He has the same nature
as God the Father.
He was always God,
begotten of God the Father
from all eternity.

He is truly Man
because He has the nature of man,
having a body and soul like ours.
However, He has been Man only
from the time of His *Incarnation*,
by which we mean
that God the Son
took to Himself the nature of man:
"the Word was made Flesh."

Thus there are two *natures*
in Jesus Christ:
the nature of God
and the nature of man.
However, there is only one *Person*:

the Person of God the Son.
As God, Jesus Christ is everywhere.
As God made Man, He is in Heaven,
and (as we will discuss later)
in the tabernacle,
in the Blessed Sacrament.

God the Son was made Man
to redeem us from sin and Hell,
and to teach us the way to Heaven.
In fact, the very name *Jesus*
means "Saviour."
(The name *Christ*
means "Anointed.")

BIBLE READING

Gn 34-50

In the Bible this week,
you will see how Jacob
and about 70 descendants
went down to Egypt to escape famine.
This happened 1876 years
before God became Man
in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Next week, as we said,
we will look at
"The History of Our Salvation"
in its entirety.

This week, therefore,
your Bible reading
begins to diverge
from the topics of our sessions.

However, it is important
for you to continue it,
because it fills in
what we do not have time
to study in this course.

Who is Jesus Christ?

Introduction

Last week, we described how God created man and how man fell. Now we must describe how God responded — but first, we must know Who Jesus Christ is.

Jesus¹ Christ² is a Jewish Man born about 2000 years ago. His birth, life, and death are documented. He is mentioned briefly by a number of historians,³ but most of what we know of Him comes from the Bible, especially the four *Gospels*.⁴

The men who wrote the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, called the *evangelists*⁵ — were among Jesus' closest followers. They wrote — probably before the year 70⁶ — to record the facts for others.⁷

Christians believe that the whole Bible was inspired by God.⁸ Today, however, we will consider the Gospels simply as ordinary *literature*.

The Gospels as literature

How should we read the Gospels? What *kind* of literature do they claim to be?

For example, some people say that we should read them as myths or legends. But C.S. Lewis, who was a literary historian and a professional literary critic,⁹ says, "I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life.¹⁰ I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this."¹¹

The Gospels are not artistic enough to be legends, he says; they do not work up to things properly. For example, they say almost nothing about Jesus' early life at Nazareth, and they leave out a great part even of His public life.¹² No one, Lewis says, who was building up a legend would ever allow that to happen.¹³

There are only two plausible opinions about the Gospels as literature, he says. Either they are genuine reporting, "pretty close up to the facts" — though they may contain errors¹⁴ — or an unknown writer in the second century, working on his own, without known teachers or pupils, suddenly began to write realistic, novelistic fiction in a style that was never matched again until modern times.

For example, Lewis says, in the story of the woman caught committing adultery,¹⁵ "we are told that Christ bent down and scribbled in the dust with His finger." We are not told what He wrote. Nothing in the rest of the story depends

1 Latin for the Greek *Iesous* and the Hebrew *Jeshua* or *Joshua* ("Yahweh is salvation"). Gabriel told Mary, "You are to name Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).

2 From the Greek *Christos* ("anointed" or "anointed one").

3 E.g. Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter III, 3, and Tacitus: *Annals*, Book XV, 44.

4 "Good news," from the Anglo-Saxon *gōdspel*: from *god* ("good") plus *spel* ("tale").

5 From the Latin *evangelium* ("gospel").

6 The "textbook consensus" that dates Matthew's Gospel 50-55, Mark's 60-65, Luke's 62-70, and John's 70-90 "rests upon much slighter foundation" than many suppose, says J.A.T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament*, XI). He dates Matthew's Gospel c 40-60+, Mark's c 45-60, Luke's -57-60+, and John's c -40-65+. Philological analysis by Jean Carmignac (*The Birth of the Synoptics*) and Claude Tresmontant (*The Hebrew Christ*) supports the earlier dates. See Brant Pitre: *The Case for Jesus*, 7.

7 "The Gospels were written by men who were among the first to have the faith [i.e. to believe in Jesus] and wanted to share it with others" (CCC 515). John wrote his Gospel "that you may 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).

8 See the talk on "Divine Revelation."

9 Lewis obtained a "First" in English from Oxford University in 1923. On May 20 1925 he was elected a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, where he tutored in English Language and Literature for the next 29 years. In June 1954 he accepted the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalene College, Cambridge, resigning in the summer of 1963.

10 To see how much Lewis knew of this kind of literature, see his autobiography, *Surprised By Joy*.

11 "Read the dialogues: that with the Samaritan woman (see Jn 4:4-42) at the well or that which follows the healing (see Jn 9:1-38) of the man born blind" (C.S. Lewis: *Fern-seed and Elephants*, "Fern-seed and Elephants.") "Apart from bits of the Platonic dialogues, there are no conversations that I know of in ancient literature like the Fourth [John's] Gospel" (C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?"). "As a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are, they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing (C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ?").

12 See CCC 514. Also see the talk on "Divine Revelation," Appendix 2.

13 C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?"

14 See C.S. Lewis: *Fern-Seed and Elephants*, "Fern-seed and Elephants."

15 See Jn 8:3-11.

on it. No one has ever based a doctrine on it. It seems to be irrelevant. It looks like a detail "invented to make an imaginary scene more convincing," but that is an art never seen elsewhere until the modern novel.¹⁶

We can only conclude that *the thing really happened*, Lewis says. "The author put it in simply because he had *seen* it."¹⁷

The Gospels as history

As literature, then, the Gospels lay claim to be history. But is it *reliable* history?

Yes, says Lewis. "The evangelists have the first great characteristic of honest witnesses": they mention facts that seem, at first, to contradict their purpose.¹⁸

For example, after describing the end of the world, Jesus said, "The present generation will not pass away till all this takes place."¹⁹ Then He added, "As for the exact day or hour, no one knows it."²⁰ This looks like an error, followed by an admission of ignorance.

Another example is Jesus' cry from the cross: "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?"²¹ Jesus — forsaken by God?

Now for people who believe that Christ was not just an ordinary man, these passages are embarrassing — difficult to explain. However, *for this very reason* they testify to the reporters' honesty. A writer driven by the desire to prove Christ super-human would probably have left them out. The evangelists included them out of honesty, a passion for accuracy — simply because *they happened*.

Passages like these "make up the strongest proof that the New Testament²² is historically reliable," Lewis concludes.²³

The evangelists also mention facts that are difficult to reconcile. For example, Luke presents Mary as Joseph's spouse,²⁴ but also stresses²⁵ her intention of remaining a virgin.²⁶ Had he been concerned to make this situation more plausible, he would probably have tried to explain it in human terms.²⁷ However, although he "is aware of the difficulty," he "merely notes the situation without offering any explanation" — a "sign of the historical reliability of the two pieces of information."²⁸

Some people object that the four Gospels are unhistorical because they disagree in timing and other details. But this is typical of eyewitness accounts. People observe, recall, and record differently. In fact, perfect agreement among the four Gospel accounts would strongly suggest that they had been made up.

Remember, the evangelists did not write the Gospels for some years after Jesus had died. They wanted to record the important things He had said and done for the benefit of those who had not known Him. They did not remember everything and they did not write down everything they remembered.²⁹

Jesus' claim to be the Messiah

As literature, then, the Gospels can be considered to be reliable history.

16 See C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?"

17 C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?"

18 That is, "their main contention" (C.S. Lewis: *The World's Last Night*, "The World's Last Night.")

19 Mt 24:36. Also see Mk 13:30.

20 Mt 24:36. Also see Mk 13:32.

21 Mk 15:34

22 The part of the Bible which records events from the time of Jesus on.

23 C.S. Lewis: *The World's Last Night*, "The World's Last Night"

24 See Lk 1:27.

25 See Lk 1:34.

26 See the talk on "Mary and Joseph."

27 Indeed, "the difficulty of accepting the sublime mystery of their spousal communion has led some, since the second century, to think of Joseph as advanced in age and to consider him Mary's guardian more than her husband. It is instead a case of supposing that he was not an elderly man at the time, but that his interior perfection, the fruit of grace, led him to live his spousal relationship with Mary with virginal affection" (Pope John Paul II: General Audience, August 21 1996).

28 Pope John Paul II: General Audience, August 21 1996

29 "There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them" (Jn 21:25).

Now if you once admit that, you have to come to terms with certain claims Jesus made. They are not always explicit, but the Gospels are full of them.

To appreciate them, you must realize that Jesus was familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures: what we call the Bible's "Old Testament."³⁰ For example, He often explained that things happened "to fulfil the Scriptures."³¹ He claimed that Scripture testified about Him³² and that Moses had written about Him.³³

Apparently, He also assumed that His hearers were familiar with Scripture.³⁴ "Have you not read?" He asked frequently. "Have you not heard?"

Now the Scriptures Jesus cited are full of hints about someone who, when he came, would gather Israel's scattered tribes and then, as King of Israel, conquer his enemies, gather the nations together, and restore God's lordship over creation.³⁵

The Jews called him the Messiah (in Hebrew, *Mashiach*),³⁶ meaning "anointed one," referring to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil when they took the throne.³⁷ The equivalent Greek is *Christos*, from which we get the English "Christ."

By Jesus' time, when Judea had come under Roman rule, the Jews had a lively expectation — derived from Daniel's prophecy³⁸ — that the Messiah would come soon.³⁹ Even secular⁴⁰ historians testify to it.⁴¹ Therefore, when Jesus proclaimed that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,"⁴² He was not merely "calling attention to general, timeless, spiritual truths" or "urging people to make a decision for God."⁴³ He was announcing that the Messiah had arrived and begun His work.

Throughout His public life, Jesus spoke and acted as the *Messiah* — gatherer, warrior, and king⁴⁴ — although not quite in the way the people had expected.⁴⁵

• Jesus showed Himself to be the gatherer by His inclusion of the marginalized. For example, He consorted with tax collectors,⁴⁶ ate with people "who disregard the law,"⁴⁷ spoke to a Samaritan woman,⁴⁸ and touched lepers⁴⁹ and corpses⁵⁰ without fear of becoming "unclean."⁵¹ He said He had come to heal the sick⁵²

30 See the Appendix.

31 See Mt 26:43; Mk 14:49; Lk 21:22, 22:37; Jn 17:12.

32 See Lk 24:25-27; Jn 5:39.

33 See Jn 5:46.

34 See Mt 12:3-5, 19:4-6, 21:16,42, 22:29-32; Mk 12:10,24-27; Lk 6:3. Also see Appendix 1.

35 For example, see Gn 3:15, 12:1-3, 18:17-19, 22:17-18, 26:4,24, 28:13-14, 49:10; Nm 24:16-19; Dt 18:15-22; 2 Sm 7:11-16; Ps 2:1-9, 45:3-10, 72:1-17, 110; Is 2:2-4, 7:10-16, 9:1-6, 11:1-9, 40:1-5, 42:1-7, 52:13-15, 53, 61:1-2; Jer 23:5-6, 33:14-18; Dn 7:9-14; Mi 4:1-3, 5:1-4; Zec 9:9-10; Mal 3:1-3. See also the article *Messiah* in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

36 The word is scarcely used in the Old Testament; yet, when a name was wanted for the promised one, who was to be both King and Saviour, it was natural to employ this synonym for the royal title, denoting at the same time the King's royal dignity and His relation to God. For example, see Mt 1:16-17, 2:4, 16:16; Lk 3:15; Jn 1:20,25,41, 4:25,29, 7:26-27,31,41-42, 10:24, 11:27, 12:34.

37 Priests and prophets were also anointed. See the talks on "Baptism and Confirmation" and "Holy Week."

38 Daniel had prophesied (see Dn 2:31-45) that Judea would be subject in turn to the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and then "the God of Heaven." Roman pro-consul Pompey besieged Jerusalem and made Judea a tributary kingdom of the Roman Empire in 63 BC; Judea was incorporated into the Roman province of Iudaea, under direct Roman rule, in 6 AD. See Brant Pitre: *The Case for Jesus*, 8.

39 For example, see Mt 2:1-6; Lk 3:15; Jn 1:41, 4:25,29, 7:26-27,31,40-42, 10:24, 11:27, 12:34.

40 Both non-Jewish and non-Christian.

41 See Tacitus: *Histories*, Book V, 13; Suetonius: *The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasian*, 4; and Josephus: *The Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, Chapter V, 4.

42 Mt 4:17. See also Mt 4:23, 9:35, 10:7, 12:28, 16:19; Mk 1:15; Lk 1:33, 4:43, 8:1, 10:11, 16:16.

43 Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 4.

44 See Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 4-6.

45 See Mt 5:3,5,10, 6:33, 16:22-23, 18:1-4, 19:14, 19:23-26, 20:20-28, 21:31; Mk 10:14-15; Lk 14:28-29, 16:16, 17:20-21, 18:16-17, 19:11; Jn 3:3,5, 18:36; Acts 1:6.

46 In Jesus' time, tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes from fellow-Jews for the Roman overlords. Many of them became rich by exacting more than they had to and keeping the difference. Other Jews despised them as traitors (see Mt 5:46) and compared them to "sinners" and "Gentiles" (see Mt 11:19, 18:17). In contrast, Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him (see Mt 9:9), stayed in the home of Zacchaeus (see Lk 19:1-10), and made a tax-collector the hero of a parable (see Lk 18:9-14).

47 See Mt 9:9-13.

48 See Jn 4:4-42.

49 See Mt 8:3.

50 See Mk 5:35-43.

51 See Lv 15:19 and Nm 5:2.

52 See Mt 9:12.

and to call "not the self-righteous, but sinners."⁵³ He described Himself as the Shepherd Who searches for lost sheep,⁵⁴ Who lays down His life rather than let the wolf snatch and scatter them.⁵⁵ He lamented over Jerusalem: "How often have I yearned to gather your children, as a mother bird gathers her young under her wings, but you refused Me."⁵⁶ At the end, He commanded His apostles⁵⁷ to "make disciples⁵⁸ of *all* nations."⁵⁹

- Jesus showed Himself to be the Warrior by His victory over Satan in the wilderness,⁶⁰ His frequent expulsion of demons,⁶¹ His scathing denunciation of sin,⁶² and His forceful cleansing of the temple.⁶³
- Finally, Jesus showed Himself to be the King by His preaching about the Kingdom of God.⁶⁴ The Jews already believed that God's Kingdom included "the whole of the cosmos,"⁶⁵ but Jesus announced that "the Kingdom of Heaven is *at hand*."⁶⁶ He implied that through His own "presence and action," God had "here and now entered actively into history in a wholly new way."⁶⁷ He claimed that "full authority" had been given to Him "both in Heaven and on earth."⁶⁸ A few days before He died, He entered Jerusalem riding on "a colt, the foal of a beast of burden,"⁶⁹ like the king described by the prophet Zechariah.⁷⁰ Thus Jesus *acted* like the promised Messiah, but He also made His claim explicit.
- In his home town of Nazareth, He read Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah.⁷¹ Then He announced, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."⁷²
- When the Samaritan woman said, "I know there is a Messiah coming," He replied, "I Who speak to you am He."⁷³
- When the people urged Him to tell them "in plain words"⁷⁴ whether He was the Messiah, He replied, "I did tell you, but you do not believe."⁷⁵
- Finally, He warned that "many will come attempting to impersonate Me," claiming, "I am the Messiah!"⁷⁶

Jesus' claim to be God

The Messiah, then, would be a gatherer, a warrior, and a king. However, some of the prophecies had implied that He would be divine as well as human, having God's nature as well as human nature.

For example, we read that God said to "His anointed"⁷⁷ (the Messiah), "You are My Son; this day I have begotten⁷⁸ You";⁷⁹ that "the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and shall name Him Immanuel,"⁸⁰ meaning "with us is God";⁸¹

53 Mt 9:13. "Sin" is related to "sunder" ("divide" or "scatter"). Both words come from the German *Sünde*.

54 See Lk 15:1-5.

55 Jn 10:11-12

56 Mt 23:37

57 His twelve closest followers, chosen by Himself (see Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:13-19; Lk 6:12-16; Jn 135-49).

58 From the Latin *discipulus* ("pupil," "follower," "one who is learning." or "one who has learned." In the New Testament, it means any follower of Jesus, but especially His twelve chosen aides, or apostles.

59 Mt 28:19

60 See Mt 4:1-11. This account must have come from Jesus Himself.

61 See Mt 8:16, 28-32, 9:32-34, 12:22, 17:14-18; Mk 1:23-26, 32-34, 5:1-13, 7:25-30, 9:14-26; Lk 4:33-35, 41, 8:26-33, 9:37-42, 11:14.

62 See Mt 15:1-7, 23:1-36.

63 See Mt 21:12-13, Jn 2:13-17.

64 He mentions it ninety times.

65 See Ps 47, 93, 96-99.

66 Mt 4:17. See also Mt 4:23, 9:35, 10:7, 12:28, 16:19; Mk 1:15; Lk 1:33, 4:43, 8:1, 10:11, 16:16.

67 Pope Benedict XVI: *Jesus of Nazareth, Part One, Three*

68 Mt 28:18

69 See Mt 21:1-11.

70 See Zec 9:9.

71 See Is 61:1-2.

72 See Lk 4:16-21.

73 Jn 4:25-26

74 Jn 10:24

75 Jn 10:25

76 See Mt 24:5.

77 Ps 2:2

78 The past participle of "beget," meaning what a father or mother does to create or procreate a child.

and that the Child will be called "God-Hero."⁸²

Jesus did not keep saying, "I am God." But He talked as though He were God as well as Man, having always existed as well as having been born 30 years earlier, having the nature of God and the nature of Man.

Sometimes He slipped it in so casually that it might be missed.

- In the middle of a severe criticism of the Jewish scribes and Pharisees,⁸³ He said that *He* was the One Who had sent the "prophets and wise men and scribes" to them over the centuries.⁸⁴
- When people asked Him why His followers did not fast, as God's law commanded, He said that no one had to fast while He was on earth.⁸⁵
- He said that "the queen of the South" had come a great distance "to listen to the wisdom of Solomon,⁸⁶ but you have a greater than Solomon here."⁸⁷
- He called His apostles "blest" because He was their Teacher, and said that "many a prophet" had longed for what they were seeing and hearing.⁸⁸
- When Philip asked Him to show them God the Father,⁸⁹ He replied, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father."⁹⁰
- When Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,"⁹¹ Jesus confirmed it: "No mere man has revealed this to you, but My heavenly Father."⁹²
- Jesus not only referred to God as His Father, but also *addressed* Him as "Father" in all His prayers, something not found in the Old Testament.⁹³
- He said to a paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven"⁹⁴ — not just offences against Himself, but offences against God. The Jews saw the point; they said, "He commits blasphemy! Who can forgive sins except God alone?"⁹⁵
- He called Himself the "Son of Man,"⁹⁶ a reference to what the prophet Daniel had seen in a vision: "one like a son of man coming on the clouds of Heaven" and receiving "dominion, glory, and kingship" from "the Ancient One."⁹⁷
- When Jesus said that His followers would "never see death,"⁹⁸ the Jews retorted, "Abraham⁹⁹ is dead. The prophets are dead.... Who do you make yourself out to be?"¹⁰⁰ Jesus replied, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he might see My day. He saw it and was glad."¹⁰¹ When the Jews objected that Jesus was not yet fifty, Jesus said, "I solemnly declare it: before Abraham came to be, I AM."¹⁰² (The first thing we notice is the change of tense: "I am," not "I was." But the first thing the Jews noticed was the name of God. For when Moses¹⁰³ had asked God what His name was, God had replied, "I am Who am.... Tell the Israelites: I

79 Ps 2:7

80 Is 7:14

81 See Mt 1:23.

82 See Is 9:1-6.

83 See Mt 23:1-33. The Pharisees were a strict Jewish religious party.

84 See Mt 23:34

85 See Mt 9:14-15.

86 See 1 Kgs 10:1-13.

87 Mt 12:42

88 See Mt 13:17.

89 Jn 14:8

90 Jn 14:9

91 Mt 16:16

92 Mt 16:17

93 See Mt 6:9, 26:39,42; Mk 14:36; Lk 10:21, 11:2, 22:42, 23:34,46; Jn 11:41, 12:27, 17:1,5,11,21,24,25. The only exception is Jesus' cry from the cross — "My God, why have You forsaken Me? — when He was praying Psalm 22:2. The use of the familiar Aramaic *Abba* ("Daddy") in the Greek of Mk 14:36, Gal 4:6, and Rom 8:15 suggests that Jesus Himself used it. The word had originated in the speech of children, but, by Jesus' time, was also used by adults. (See Joachim Jeremias: *The Prayers of Jesus*, 11, 13B.)

94 See Mk 2:1-5.

95 Mk 2:7

96 About eighty times in the four Gospels. See the Appendix.

97 See Dn 7:13-14.

98 Jn 8:51

99 Hebrew patriarch, father of the Jewish people, who had died about 1800 years earlier.

100 Jn 8:52-53

101 Jn 8:56

102 Jn 8:58

AM sent me to you."¹⁰⁴ Jesus, then, was taking God's name, and the Jews showed that they understood by picking up rocks to stone Him.¹⁰⁵

• After quoting¹⁰⁶ from the Ten Commandments, which God Himself had given to Moses,¹⁰⁷ Jesus added, "What I say to you is..."¹⁰⁸ Thus¹⁰⁹ Jesus repeatedly implied that He possessed the nature of God. And that is the message the people got. He left the crowds "spellbound," for "He taught with authority, and not like their scribes,"¹¹⁰ who always quoted from Scripture. For example, when an "unclean spirit" left a man at His command,¹¹¹ the people exclaimed in amazement, "What does this mean? A completely new teaching in a spirit of authority! He gives orders to unclean spirits and they obey!"¹¹²

Occasionally, Jesus made His claim explicit.

- After curing a blind man,¹¹³ He asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"¹¹⁴ The man said, "Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?"¹¹⁵ Jesus replied, "You have seen Him. He is speaking to you now."¹¹⁶
- He said, "The Father and I are One."¹¹⁷ When the Jews called it blasphemy, He retorted, "Do you claim that I blasphemed when, as He Whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, I said, 'I am God's Son'?"¹¹⁸
- At the end, when the high priest put Jesus on oath and asked Him directly, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"¹¹⁹ Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."¹²⁰ At that the high priest exclaimed, "You have heard the blasphemy!"¹²¹ and, when the Roman governor Pontius Pilate objected that he found no case against Jesus, the Jews replied that according to their laws He had deserved death because He had made Himself "God's Son."¹²²

What are we to make of all this? Could we have misunderstood what Jesus said?

No. The Jews certainly thought He was claiming to be God's equal;¹²³ and they actually heard Him, in their own language, in the light of their own Scriptures.

Jesus described Himself as "meek and humble of heart."¹²⁴ Could His claim to be God be a legend started by His followers?¹²⁵

No. Jesus' followers were Jews, members of the one nation on earth that believed there was only one God¹²⁶ and that He was in Heaven.¹²⁷ They were the people

103 Founder and lawgiver of Israel, who lived c. 1525-1406 BC.

104 Ex 3:14

105 See Jn 8:28,59. Stoning was the punishment ordained by God for blasphemy (see Lv 24:16).

106 See Mt 5:21,27,31,33,38.

107 See Ex 31:18.

108 See Mt 5:22,28,32,34,39,44. In *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus*, Rabbi Jacob Neusner says that while Jesus left nothing out of the Commandments, He did add something: *Himself*. For example, when a young man asked Jesus for advice, Jesus said, "Keep the Commandments," but, pressed further, said, "Follow Me" (see Mt 19:16-21). (See Pope Benedict XVI: *Jesus of Nazareth, Part One, Four, "The Torah of the Messiah."*)

109 There are other examples. When His followers reported that even demons had submitted to them on hearing His name, Jesus said, "I watched Satan fall from the sky like lightning" (Lk 10:18). From the cross, He said to the thief crucified next to Him, "I assure you, this day you will be with Me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). When the Pharisees complained that Jesus and His disciples did not observe the Sabbath day of rest (see Mt 12:1-2), Jesus replied, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Lk 6:5).

110 Mt 7:28-29

111 See Mk 1:23-26.

112 Mk 1:27

113 See Jn 9:1-34.

114 Jn 9:35

115 Jn 9:36

116 Jn 9:37. Remember that the title "Son of Man" referred to the one who had received "dominion, glory, and kingship" from "the Ancient One" (see Dn 7:13-14).

117 Jn 10:30

118 Jn 10:34-36

119 Mk 14:61

120 Mk 14:62

121 Mk 14:64

122 See Jn 19:6-7. Also see Jn 5:18.

123 See Jn 8:59, 10:31.

124 Mt 11:29

125 For example, see Richard Bach: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

126 See Dt 32:39.

least likely to start a legend that a mere man was God. Indeed, the Gospels make it clear that none of them found it easy to believe.

* * * * *

Miracles

Jesus, then, claimed to be "the Messiah, the Son of the living God,"¹²⁸ and that is what His hearers understood.

He backed up His claim by His miracles: healing people,¹²⁹ bringing dead people back to life,¹³⁰ changing water into wine,¹³¹ feeding thousands with a little food,¹³² and controlling the forces of nature.¹³³

"If I do not perform My Father's works, put no faith in Me," He said. "But if I do perform them, even though you put no faith in Me, put faith in these works, so as to realize what it means that the Father is in Me and I in Him."¹³⁴

What does He mean — "I perform My Father's works"?

God displays His activity throughout creation. Every year, for example, thousands are fed from the planting of a little seed and the spawning of a few fish, but we are so familiar with the activity that we fail to recognize it as God's. In feeding thousands with "five loaves and a couple of fish,"¹³⁵ Jesus did the same thing, "but at a different speed and on a smaller scale."¹³⁶

Many who say they "believe in Jesus" do not believe in His miracles, even though the Gospels describe them in the same historical style as everything else. There are various reasons for their unbelief.

- Some think that miracles are impossible, in the sense that $2 + 2 = 5$ is impossible. But miracles are not impossible in this sense. By definition, they are out of the ordinary,¹³⁷ but they are not opposed to reason or logic.¹³⁸
- Some think science *proves* that miracles cannot happen. But as we shall see,¹³⁹ the business of science is to *describe* what *normally* happens; it is beyond its competence to prove that something different *cannot possibly* happen.¹⁴⁰
- Others disbelieve in miracles because they have never seen one. But we all believe in many things we have not seen.
- Finally, many argue that so-called "miracles" always have more plausible

127 See 2 Chr 20:6. Jesus was executed, by Jewish law, because He had made Himself "God's Son" (Jn 19:7).

128 Mt 16:16

129 See Mt 8:1-4, 5-15, 9:1-8, 20-22, 27-34, 12:9-13, 15:21-28, 17:14-18; Mk 1:23-26, 29-31, 40-42, 2:1-12, 3:1-5, 5:1-43, 6:34-44, 7:24-37, 8:22-26, 9:14-27, 10:46-52; Lk 4:33-39, 5:12-13, 17-25, 7:2-10, 8:26-33, 40-56; 13:10-13, 14:1-5, 17:11-19, 22:50; Jn 4:46-53, 5:1-9, 9:1-6.

130 See Mt 9:18, 23-26; Lk 7:11-15; Jn 11:1-44.

131 See Jn 2:1-11.

132 See Mt 14:15-21; Mk 8:1-9; Lk 9:10-17, 37-43; Jn 6:1-13.

133 See Mt 8:23-27, 14:22-33; Mk 4:35-41, 6:45-52; Lk 8:22-26; Jn 6:16-21.

134 Jn 10:37-38. Also see Jn 11:42, 14:11.

135 See Mt 14:15-21.

136 See the talk on "Divine Revelation," Appendix 3. In *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or the Italian epics, there are miracles "so diverse that they can hardly be classified. Beasts turn into men and men into beasts or trees, trees talk, ships become goddesses, and a magic ring can cause tables richly spread with food to appear in solitary places.... If such things happened they would, I suppose, show that Nature was being invaded ... by an alien power. The fitness of the Christian miracles, and their difference from these mythological miracles, lies in the fact that they show invasion by a Power that is not alien.... They proclaim that He Who has come is not merely a king, but *the* King, her King and ours" (C.S. Lewis: *Miracles*, XV). "Since men had failed to know [God's] Providence revealed in the Universe, and had failed to perceive His Godhead shown in creation, they might at any rate from the works of His Body recover their sight, and through Him receive an idea of the knowledge of the Father, inferring ... from particular cases His Providence over the whole" (Athanasius: *De Incarnatione*, 19, 1).

137 The dictionary defines "miracle" as "a marvellous event due to some supernatural agency; a remarkable occurrence." But believers hold that *everything* is due to "supernatural agency"; that is, everything happens through the power of God — even common, familiar, everyday things (see the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith"). A miracle, then, is merely a marvellous or remarkable event; what makes us marvel and remark is that it is unusual or even unique.

138 You might argue that they are opposed to the "laws of science," but that, as we shall see, means nothing more or less than that they are not normal; for the "laws of science" are nothing more or less than patterns in what normally happens. See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

139 See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

140 Science, by its nature, is concerned only with what *normally* happens. Moreover, it only *describes* what happens; it cannot *dictate* what happens. By its nature, therefore, science can never prove that out-of-the-ordinary events cannot happen. See the talk on "A Place For Science in the Catholic Faith."

explanations.¹⁴¹ But what you consider to be more plausible depends on whether or not you admit the possibility of miracles.

For example, the Bible says that King Sennacherib of Assyria¹⁴² failed to conquer Judah¹⁴³ because one night, "the angel of the Lord went forth and struck down 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. The next morning, there they were, all the corpses of the dead."¹⁴⁴ But Herodotus,¹⁴⁵ speaking of the same event, says that "there swarmed by night upon their enemies mice of the fields, and ate up their quivers and their bows, and moreover the handles of their shields, so that on the next day they fled, and being without defence of arms, great numbers fell."¹⁴⁶

Which explanation is more plausible — angels or mice?

Angels, says Lewis. "Unless you start by begging the question, there is nothing intrinsically unlikely in the existence of angels or in the action ascribed to them. But mice just don't do these things."¹⁴⁷

"Tell no one"

Now if Jesus performed miracles to convince people "that the Father is in Me and I in Him,"¹⁴⁸ why did He tell people to keep quiet about them?¹⁴⁹

For example, when demons cried out, "You are the Son of God!" He "rebuked them and did not allow them to speak, because they knew that He was the Messiah."¹⁵⁰ When Peter said, in front of the other apostles, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"¹⁵¹ Jesus "strictly ordered" them not to tell anyone.¹⁵² After Peter, James, and John had seen Jesus in His glory, He told them not to say anything "until the Son of Man rises from the dead."¹⁵³

Pope Benedict explained that Jesus "insisted" on this "secrecy" because what was at stake was "the success of His very mission."¹⁵⁴ What was this mission?¹⁵⁵

First, Jesus had to proclaim the Gospel. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," He said; "therefore, He has anointed Me. He has sent Me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord."¹⁵⁶

As His renown spread, this became more difficult. For example, after He had

141 For example: that the sick Jesus "healed" were going to get better anyway; that the "dead" He "raised" were not dead, but in deep comas; that yeast naturally turns water into wine; that those Jesus "fed" merely shared the food they had with them; that the storm He "calmed" was just about over; or that the water He "walked on" was either frozen or thick with rushes or weeds. Alternatively, they invoke "the power of suggestion" or "mass hallucination." They also note that ancient people thought healing the sick to be miraculous because they had never seen it before; whereas to us it is quite natural because we, with our superior health care, see it all the time. If we knew more, they argue, we would see that all so-called "miracles" are really natural, being simply events we are not familiar with. This is what they imply when they quote, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, I, v, 166-167). But this is precisely what a miracle is: an unusual or even unique event. It is quite true that what is "miraculous" to one generation may become "natural" to another. It does not matter which label we use, for, after all, it is God Who does everything, miraculous or natural. And, in fact, Jesus said, "I solemnly assure you: the man who has faith in Me will do the works I do, and greater far than these. Why? Because I go to the Father, and whatever you ask in My name I will do, so as to glorify the Father in the Son" (Jn 14:12-13).

142 He reigned 705/704 - 681 BC.

143 In 701 BC.

144 See 2 Kgs 19:35-36.

145 A Greek historian who lived c 484 - 425 BC. He wrote his *Histories* c 450 BC.

146 Herodotus: *Histories*, Book 2, 141

147 C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "Miracles." "With respect to the requirements of art, a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable and yet possible" (Aristotle: *Poetics*, XXV, Critical Objections Brought Against Poetry, and the Principles on Which They Are To Be Answered).

148 Jn 10:38

149 See, for example, Mt 12:16, 16:20; Mk 1:25,44, 3:12, 7:36, 8:30, 9:9; Lk 8:56, 9:21.

150 Lk 4:41

151 Mt 16:16

152 See Mt 16:20.

153 Mt 17:9

154 Pope Benedict XVI: *Angelus address*, February 1 2009

155 I.e., what had God the Father sent Him to do? "Mission" comes from the Latin *missum* ("sent").

156 Lk 4:18-19. See Is 61:1-2.

expelled demons and cured the sick in Capernaum, the people tried to keep Him there, and He had to explain, "To other towns I must announce the good news of the reign of God, because that is why I was sent."¹⁵⁷ On another occasion, as the people began to recognize Who He was,¹⁵⁸ He "realized that they would come and carry Him off to make Him king, so He fled back to the mountain alone."¹⁵⁹ At one point, even His own relatives tried to restrain Him.¹⁶⁰

But the people jeopardized the second part of His mission, too. He knew that in order "to liberate humanity from the dominion of sin," He had "to be sacrificed on the cross."¹⁶¹ Accordingly, He began to tell His apostles "that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly there at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be put to death, and [be] raised up again on the third day."¹⁶²

However, Peter "began to remonstrate with Him," saying, "May You be spared, Master! God forbid that any such thing ever happen to You!" And Jesus turned on him and said, "Get out of My sight, you satan! You are trying to make Me trip and fall. You are judging not by God's standards, but by man's."¹⁶³

The Resurrection

Now let us consider the greatest miracle of all: the Resurrection. The evangelists claim that on the third day from Jesus' death — about thirty-six hours¹⁶⁴ after He had been flogged,¹⁶⁵ crucified,¹⁶⁶ and suffered a spear-thrust to His Heart¹⁶⁷ — He rose from the dead.¹⁶⁸

Many people think that the apostles made up this story to support their contention that Jesus was God. "It's simply wishful thinking," they protest. "The apostles were expecting Him to rise again because He had told them that He would."¹⁶⁹ They imagined that He had risen, or they talked themselves into it. Maybe they deliberately took His Body out of the tomb and hid It.¹⁷⁰

But the Gospels say that the apostles were fishermen¹⁷¹ and tax collectors:¹⁷² hard-headed, practical men. Jesus had had to rebuke and reproach them repeatedly

157 See Lk 4:42-43; Is 40:9.

158 See Jn 6:14.

159 Jn 6:15

160 See Mk 3:20-22.

161 Pope Benedict XVI: *Angelus address*, February 1 2009

162 Mt 16:21. See also Mt 17:22-23, 20:17-19.

163 See Mt 16:22-23. The Hebrew "satan" means "to plot against another."

164 On the third day.

165 See Mt 27:26.

166 See Jn 19:18.

167 See Jn 19:34. Jesus died unusually soon after He was nailed to the cross (see Mk 15:44); the other two crucified with Him were still alive. However, "since it was the Preparation Day, the Jews did not want to have the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, for that sabbath was a solemn feast day." Accordingly, "they asked Pilate that the legs be broken and the bodies be taken away" (see Jn 19:31). (A man who had been nailed to a cross would alternate between hanging from his arms, which would cause slow suffocation, and taking his weight on the nails through his feet. Breaking his legs, therefore, would cause him to suffocate sooner.) "Accordingly, the soldiers came and broke the legs of the men crucified with Jesus, first of the one, then of the other. When they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs." However, to make quite sure that He was dead, "one of the soldiers thrust a lance into His side, and immediately blood and water flowed out" (see Jn 19:32-35). "This testimony has been given by an eyewitness," John says — presumably himself (see Jn 19:26) — "and his testimony is true. He tells what he knows is true, so that you may believe" (Jn 19:35).

168 See, for example, Mt 28:7; Mk 16:9; Lk 24:5.

169 See Mt 27:63, Mk 8:31, Mk 9:31, Mk 10:34, Lk 18:33, and Lk 24:46. However, the apostles had never understood what He meant: see Mk 9:10,32, Lk 18:34, Jn 20:9.

170 This is the story agreed upon by the Jewish chief priests and the guards whom the Roman governor had set to watch the tomb for three days so that the apostles could not "go and steal Him and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead!'" (Mt 27:64). After Jesus' Resurrection, "some of the guard went into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened": that is, all about the angel, who had "paralyzed" them with fear so that they "fell down like dead men" (Mt 28:4). The chief priests "convened with the elders and worked out their strategy, giving the soldiers a large bribe with the instructions: 'You are to say, "His disciples came during the night and stole Him while we were asleep." If any word of this gets to the procurator'" — for guards can be executed for sleeping on duty — "'we will straighten it out with him and keep you out of trouble'" (Mt 28:12-14).

171 See Mt 4:18-22, 9:9.

172 See Lk 5:27.

for their *lack* of faith.¹⁷³

Moreover, the Gospels show that after Jesus' execution, the apostles did not await His Resurrection in a state of "mystical exaltation." The truth is the exact opposite: they were "demoralized and frightened."¹⁷⁴

Their faith in Jesus had been "drastically"¹⁷⁵ tested. Faced with the shock of His arrest, they had all run away.¹⁷⁶ Peter, their leader, had been so terrified for his own safety that he had denied even knowing Jesus.¹⁷⁷

When they first heard that He had been seen alive, they simply could not take it in. First, Mary Magdalene said she had seen Him, and that He had given her a message for them, but they flatly "refused to believe it."¹⁷⁸ Next, two of them saw Him as they were walking to Emmaus, "but the others put no more faith in them than in Mary Magdalene."¹⁷⁹ Finally, He appeared to ten¹⁸⁰ of them and "took them to task for their disbelief and their stubbornness."¹⁸¹

Even face to face with the risen Jesus, they were still "incredulous for sheer joy and wonder."¹⁸² In fact, "they thought they were seeing a ghost"¹⁸³ and Jesus had to eat some fish before their eyes to prove He was alive.¹⁸⁴ Thomas, who was not with the others on this first occasion, refused to believe for another week, until he had touched Jesus' Body for himself.¹⁸⁵

No; "the hypothesis that the Resurrection was produced by the apostles' faith (or credulity) will not hold up." On the contrary, "their faith in the Resurrection was born ... from their direct experience of the reality of the risen Jesus."¹⁸⁶ Only their experience of something "new, unexpected, and objective" can explain "the excitement that is apparent on practically every page of the New Testament."¹⁸⁷

Conviction

Only with a faith born of experience could the apostles begin¹⁸⁸ to challenge the Roman emperor by preaching what they called the *gospel of Christ*.

"Gospel" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *gōdspel*: "a good tale." "Gospel" and "good news" are translations of the Greek *evangelion*. In Jesus' time, the Roman emperors (who thought of themselves as lords, saviours, and redeemers bringing a lasting peace¹⁸⁹ to the world) described their own proclamations and edicts by the Latin equivalent, *evangelium* — "good news" for the whole world.¹⁹⁰

It was against this background that Peter boldly announced "the good news of peace proclaimed through Jesus Christ, Who is Lord of all";¹⁹¹ and Mark wrote, "Here begins the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."¹⁹²

173 See Mt 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20, Lk 17:5.

174 See CCC 643.

175 CCC 643

176 See Mt 26:56.

177 See Mt 26:69-75.

178 Mk 16:11

179 Mk 16:13

180 There had originally been twelve apostles, but Judas had betrayed Christ and then hanged himself (see Mt 27:5), while Thomas "was absent when Jesus came" the first time (see Jn 20:24); he did not see Jesus until a week later (see Jn 20:26).

181 Mk 16:14

182 Lk 24:36

183 Lk 24:37

184 See Lk 24:41-43.

185 See Jn 20:24-29.

186 CCC 644

187 Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 6

188 Especially after Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-41).

189 The *Pax Romana*.

190 See Pope Benedict XVI: *Jesus of Nazareth, Part One*, Three. Josephus says that the prophecies the Jews understood as the "good news" of a Messiah Who would come from their own nation actually referred to the "good news" of the Emperor Vespasian, who was appointed emperor in Judea (see Josephus: *The Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, Chapter V, 4). Tacitus says that the prophecies referred to the Emperors Vespasian and Titus (see Tacitus: *Histories*, Book V, 13). Suetonius says that they referred to a Roman emperor, "as the event showed" (see Suetonius: *The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasian*, 4).

191 Acts 10:36

192 Mk 1:1

Their "application of this phrase to Jesus' preaching had a strongly critical meaning, as if to say [that] God, and not the emperor, is Lord of the world, and the true gospel that of Jesus Christ."¹⁹³ And that is how the Roman emperors understood it, for, starting with Nero in 64 AD,¹⁹⁴ they began to persecute Christians, often on the grounds that they refused to worship the emperor.¹⁹⁵

Martyrdom

Jesus had been put to death by the Romans at the request of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council. If that had been the end of Him, surely it would have proved to everyone that He had been only a "pseudo-Messiah," no different from the many other claimants to the title.¹⁹⁶

One councillor, Gamaliel,¹⁹⁷ said as much to the others. "Not long ago a certain Theudas came on the scene and tried to pass himself off as someone of importance. About 400 men joined him. However, he was killed, and all those who had been so easily convinced by him were disbanded. In the end it came to nothing."¹⁹⁸ Next came Judas the Galilean,¹⁹⁹ at the time of the census. He, too, built up quite a following, but likewise died, and all his followers were dispersed.²⁰⁰

The case of Jesus and His followers, Gamaliel predicted, would be similar. "If their purpose or activity is [merely] human in its origins, it will destroy itself," he said. "If, on the other hand, it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them without fighting God Himself."²⁰¹

But the apostles persisted. Despite orders to keep quiet about it,²⁰² despite flogging,²⁰³ imprisonment,²⁰⁴ persecution,²⁰⁵ and martyrdom,²⁰⁶ they could not help speaking of what they had heard and seen.²⁰⁷ In fact, all the apostles except John suffered death rather than deny it.²⁰⁸

193 Pope Benedict XVI: *Angelus address*, January 27 2008

194 "AD" is an abbreviation for the Latin *Anno Domini* ("In the year of our Lord").

195 See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "Persecutions, Early Christian."

196 Pseudo-Messiahs arose periodically from the end of Judea's Hasmonean dynasty in 37 BC, when Rome started to crush the country's independence, until well into the 1700's. Some of them "were impostors seeking to exploit the credulity of the masses for selfish purposes; others, victims of their own beliefs or delusions. All of them had as their goal the restoration of Israel to its native land. Some sought to accomplish this through penitence, fasting, and prayer, and looked forward to miracles to assist them; others appealed to arms. In connection with their Messianic role, some enacted the part of religious reformers, introducing innovations and even trying to subvert the existing Judaism.... Their influence was mostly local and temporary; some, however, succeeded in attracting large numbers of followers, and created movements that lasted for considerable periods. The effects of these Messianic movements were pernicious. Many of these Messiahs and their followers lost their lives in the course of their activities; and they deluded the people with false hopes, created dissensions, gave rise to sects, and even lost many [from] Judaism" (*Jewish Encyclopedia: Pseudo-Messiahs*).

197 A highly regarded Pharisee (see Acts 5:34) and the teacher of Paul (see Acts 22:3).

198 The "Theudas" mentioned in Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XX, Chapter V, is a different man.

199 Not the Judas who betrayed Jesus.

200 Acts 5:37. See Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter I; Book XX, Chapter V. See also Josephus: *The Wars of the Jews*, Book II, Chapter VIII.

201 See Acts 5:38-39.

202 See Acts 4:18; 5:28,40.

203 See Acts 5:40; 16:22; 2 Cor 11:25.

204 See Acts 5:17-18; 12:3-5; 16:23; 22:4.

205 See Acts 8:1; 11:19; 12:2; 13:50.

206 See Acts 12:2.

207 See Acts 4:20.

208 The apostles "saw the Lord Jesus Himself hanging on the cross; they grieved at His death, were astounded at His Resurrection, loved Him in His power, and shed their own blood for what they had seen. Just think, brothers and sisters, what it meant for men to be sent through the wide world, to preach that a dead Man had risen again and ascended into Heaven; and for preaching this to suffer everything a raging, raging world could inflict: loss of goods, exile, chains, tortures, flames, wild beasts, crosses, painful deaths. All this for Heaven knows what!... I mean, really, my brothers and sisters, was Peter dying for his own glory, or proclaiming himself? One man was dying that Another might be honoured, one being slain that Another might be worshipped. Would he have done this, if he hadn't been on fire with love, and utterly convinced of the truth?" The apostles "had seen what they were proclaiming.... Would they have been willing to die for something they had not seen? Should they have denied what they had seen? They did not deny it; they preached a dead Man, Whom they knew to be alive" (Augustine: *Sermon 311*, 2, delivered on the birthday of the martyr Cyprian, September 14 405).

Resurrection

Calling themselves "witnesses"²⁰⁹ — the Greek word for which is *martyr* — the apostles asserted that Jesus had undergone *Resurrection*.

They did not mean that He had been taken up to God, like Elijah²¹⁰ or Enoch.²¹¹ They did not mean that He was fondly remembered, like the Maccabean martyrs.²¹² They did not mean that His soul had ascended from His Body, as Platonists believe. Their language had different words for those ideas.²¹³

By "resurrection," they meant a restoration to a transformed physical existence.²¹⁴ It was something they had believed in but thought no one would see until the end of the world:²¹⁵ something which now, in Jesus, they had seen with their own eyes and touched with their own hands.²¹⁶

And the apostles knew that Jesus' resurrection makes all the difference. As Paul told the Corinthians, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content and your faith is empty too."²¹⁷

"If the resurrected Christ were but a projection of the disciples' desires, a fantasy, a fond memory, a vague sense of being forgiven, or the content of a spiritual experience, we would still be in our sins."²¹⁸

Christ's resurrection makes all the difference between a defeated, condemned, executed criminal whose followers soon disperse, and the living Messiah and Lord, Whose every word is *evangelium*.

Trust

Jesus said that He will come again "in His glory, accompanied by all the angels of Heaven."²¹⁹ No one will be able to ignore Him or disbelieve in Him then, for just "as lightning from the east flashes to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be."²²⁰ Then "He will sit upon His royal throne, and all the nations will be assembled before Him"²²¹ for judgement. It will be Christ without disguise.

Until then, however, there will always be, *in the logical sense*, room for doubt, just as there is in a relationship like friendship or marriage. But that room for doubt is a space for *trust* — and trust is essential to love.

"To love involves trusting the beloved beyond the evidence. No one is our friend who believes in our good intentions only when they are proved. No one is our friend who is not very slow to accept evidence against us."²²² Imagine what would become of our marriage if our spouse always demanded incontrovertible evidence that we were faithful!²²³

Jesus wants a loving *interpersonal relationship* with us. He asks us, therefore, for the magnanimity and generosity that will "trust on a reasonable probability."²²⁴ As we have seen, trust is what God asked of Adam and Eve.²²⁵ Trust is the precise mode, and the only mode, in which we can respond to Jesus in love.

209 See Acts 1:22, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39,41 13:31.

210 See 2 Kgs 2:11.

211 See Gn 5:24.

212 See 2 Mc 7.

213 See Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 6.

214 See Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 6.

215 Some of the Jews believed in the resurrection, like Martha (see Jn 11:24), but others did not, like the Sadducees (see Mt 22:23).

216 See 1 Jn 1:1.

217 1 Cor 15:14

218 Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 6. See 1 Cor 15:17.

219 Mt 25:31. See also Mt 24:23-26.

220 Mt 24:27

221 Mt 25:31-32

222 C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "On Obstinacy in Belief"

223 Even in a school, where it is appropriate for students to demand proof, the teacher-student relationship would be quite different if the students always demanded it. Similarly, trust is essential for peace, as Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli pointed out during the Cold War. As the bumper-sticker said, we have to risk peace, or we risk war.

224 C.S. Lewis, quoted in Sheldon Vanauken: *A Severe Mercy*, IV.

To refuse to trust Him is to invite the frightful end of the dwarfs in Lewis' *The Last Battle*, who, having once been taken in by a false Aslan, now utterly refuse to trust the true Aslan. "They have chosen cunning instead of belief," Aslan says. "Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison, and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out."²²⁵

A friend told me that her mother, a lifelong agnostic, looked up from her deathbed, said audibly, "Follow You? Yes, I'll follow You," and died.

Who knows what made her trust, at the very end? Whatever it was, we can be sure that God will give us the same chance.

In this life, "we see indistinctly, as in a mirror," St. Paul said.²²⁷ Logically, there is always room for doubt. Nevertheless, as our relationship with Jesus grows, He gives us more and more assurance that our trust is *not* misplaced.

So Who is Jesus Christ?

God had told Moses His name:²²⁸ "I am,"²²⁹ but the Jews, out of respect, had always used His title instead: "Lord."²³⁰ In the Old Testament, then, "Lord" had come to indicate the divinity of Israel's God.

Now, especially after the Resurrection, the apostles began giving Jesus the same title, thus recognizing Him as God. "My Lord and My God!" Thomas said.²³¹ "It is the Lord!" John said to Peter.²³² Paul referred to the "Lord Jesus" almost seventy times in thirteen letters.²³³

Accordingly, we say in the Nicene Creed²³⁴ that the "one Lord Jesus Christ" is "the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages." However, "for us men and for our salvation,"²³⁵ He came down from Heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was [made] incarnate²³⁶ of the Virgin Mary, and became Man.

Briefly, then, "Jesus Christ is God the Son, made Man for us."²³⁷

In another Creed,²³⁸ we say that Jesus Christ is one and the same Person as God the Son: truly, fully, and perfectly God and truly, fully, and perfectly Man. As God, He is consubstantial²³⁹ with the Father; as Man, He is consubstantial with us, possessing a rational soul²⁴⁰ and a human body, like us in all things except sin. As God, He is begotten by the Father without any beginning; as Man, He was born into the world for us and for our salvation.

In the Person of Jesus Christ, Who is one and the same Person as God's only begotten Son, the nature of God and the nature of man are united without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between the two natures was not abolished by their union; rather the character of each nature was preserved as they came together in the one Person.

This Creed stresses that Jesus Christ is not "part God and part Man"; nor is He "a confused mixture of the divine and the human." When "God the Son took to Himself the nature of Man"²⁴¹ in that "unique and singular event"²⁴² we call the *Incarnation*, "He became truly Man while remaining truly God."²⁴³

225 See CCC 397. See also the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

226 C.S. Lewis: *The Last Battle*, Chapter 13

227 1 Cor 13:12. Mirrors in his day must have been polished metal.

228 See Ex 3:14.

229 In Hebrew, *Yhwh*.

230 In Hebrew, *Adonai*; in Greek, *Kyrios*.

231 Jn 20:28

232 Jn 21:7

233 See CCC 446, 448-449.

234 From the Latin *credo* ("I believe").

235 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

236 "[Made] flesh," from the Latin *in* ("in") plus *caro, carnis* ("flesh," "meat").

237 *The Penny Catechism*, 32

238 This Creed is not used at Mass. In what follows, the English of CCC 467 has been simplified, updated, and clarified by reference to a different translation.

239 The word means "having exactly the same nature." It was promulgated by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

240 Like ours, it carries out the "operations of intellect and will" (see CCC 470).

241 *The Penny Catechism*, 40

242 CCC 464

"Christ's human nature belongs, as His own, to the divine Person of the Son of God, Who assumed it." Everything that Christ is and does in His human nature, Body and Soul, derives from His divine nature. Working with human hands, thinking with a human mind, acting with a human will, and loving with a human heart, He "expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity."²⁴⁴ In Him, then, "we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see."²⁴⁵

How do we answer?

Jesus asks each of us the question He asked His apostles: "Who do you say that I am?"²⁴⁶

Can we say that He is just a great moral teacher?

No. Other religious leaders have claimed to shed light on things, to explain life, to show us how to rise above death, to point out the way, to teach the truth, or to tell us how to get in touch with God.²⁴⁷

But Jesus said, "*I am* the light of the world";²⁴⁸ "*I am* the Bread of life";²⁴⁹ "*I am* the Resurrection";²⁵⁰ "*I am* the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."²⁵¹

Can we say that He is just a brave and sincere Man Who died for His belief?

No. The belief for which the Jews had Him crucified was that He was God the Son.²⁵² If He was not, He must have been either a lunatic or possessed by a devil.²⁵³

Otherwise, Peter's answer to His question is right: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."²⁵⁴

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243 CCC 464

244 CCC 470

245 CCC 477

246 Mt 16:15

247 Asked whether He was "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One," Jesus said, "I am" (see Mk 14:62). In contrast, Lewis says, if you asked Buddha, "Are you the son of Brahmah?" he would say, "My son, you are still in the vale of illusion." If you asked Socrates, "Are you Zeus?" he would laugh. If you asked Mohammed, "Are you Allah?" he would rend his clothes and then cut your head off. If you asked Confucius, "Are you Heaven?" he would probably reply, "Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste" (see C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock, "What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ?"*).

248 Jn 8:12

249 See Jn 6:35,48,51.

250 Jn 11:25

251 Jn 14:6

252 See Mk 14:61-62.

253 As some of the Jews charged (see Mt 12:22-24, Jn 10:20).

254 Mt 16:16

Appendix

Jesus and the Old Testament

In identifying Himself as God the Son, the Messiah, Jesus frequently quoted or alluded to "Scripture" — what Christians today call the Old Testament.

Clearly, Jesus was familiar with Scripture. He said that events occurred "to fulfil" it¹ and He claimed that it testified about Him.² Moreover, in citing passages that referred to Him, He frequently asked, "Have you not read?" or "Have you not heard?" Apparently, He assumed that His hearers, too, were familiar with it.³

Jesus often alluded to Scripture in words that were close enough to the original to stir His disciples' memories (see Table 1) or quoted it directly (see Table 2).

Where did Jesus get this knowledge? Of course, He was God the Son, but He was also fully human. As a human, how did He learn Scripture?

From His mother

First, He learned it from His parents. We can assume that Joseph, His legal father, had learned Scripture as a boy in the local synagogue, but we can see from Luke's Gospel that Mary, His mother, was familiar with it, too.

Immediately after Mary conceived Jesus, she went to assist her cousin Elizabeth in her last three months of pregnancy.⁴ When Elizabeth greeted her as "the mother of my Lord," she replied with the hymn of praise to God that we now call the *Magnificat*,⁵ largely drawn from Scripture.⁶

In the *Magnificat* — "a portrait, so to speak, of [Mary's] soul," we see "how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with what ease she moves in and out of it," Pope Benedict XVI noted. "She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate."⁷

In the synagogue

However, Jesus must also have learned Scripture at the elementary school that would have been attached to the synagogue at Nazareth.⁸

According to the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, synagogues (Greek for "meeting places") apparently came into existence during the Babylonian captivity (605-537 BC), when the Jews were deprived of the Temple services in Jerusalem and instead began meeting in small groups for prayer and Scripture reading.

After the exile, back in Israel, synagogues spread rapidly and so did the associated elementary schools, usually presided over by the synagogue "attendant," or *hazzan*. They taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, but their primary purpose was religious: to teach the Hebrew Scriptures. Even before Jesus' time, they had been established in practically every important Jewish community.

Boys usually began school at age five, spending at least a half day, six days a week, for about five years. Boys who wanted training beyond that would go to scholarly scribes. For example, Saul of Tarsus (later St. Paul) received advanced theological training "at the feet of Gamaliel" in Jerusalem.⁹ Apparently, Jesus had no such training, for "the Jews were filled with amazement and said, 'How did this Man get His education when He had no teacher?'"¹⁰

1 See Mt 26:43; Mk 14:49; Lk 21:22, 22:37; Jn 17:12.

2 See Lk 24:25-27; Jn 5:39, 46.

3 See Mt 12:3-5, 19:4-6, 21:16,42, 22:29-32; Mk 12:10,24-27; Lk 6:3.

4 See Lk 1:26-57.

5 Lk 1:46-55; see the talk on "Mary and Joseph," Appendix 1.

6 See Gn 17:10; 1 Sm 2:1-10; Jb 5:12, 22:18; Ps 75:8, 103:17, 107:9, 113:7, 138:6.

7 Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 41

8 We see Jesus in such a school, at Jerusalem, in Lk 2:41-50.

According to Shmuel Safrai (1919-2003), Professor of Jewish History of the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods at Hebrew University, "the Scriptures were known almost by heart by everyone. From quite early in the Second Temple period (530 BC - 70 AD), one could hardly find a little boy in the street who didn't know the Scriptures."¹¹

He quoted St. Jerome (342-420), who, living in Bethlehem and learning Hebrew from its Jewish residents in order to translate the Scriptures into Latin, said: "In childhood they acquire the complete vocabulary of their language and learn to recite all the generations from Adam to Zerubbabel with such accuracy and facility as if they were simply giving their names."¹²

"Individual and group study of the Bible, repetition of the passages, etc., were often done by chanting them aloud," said Safrai. "There is the frequent expression, 'the chirping of children,' which was heard by people passing close by a synagogue as the children were reciting a verse.

"Adults too, in individual and group study, often read aloud; for it was frequently advised not to learn in a whisper, but aloud. This was the only way to overcome the danger of forgetting."¹³

Table 1 — DIRECT ALLUSIONS TO SCRIPTURE BY JESUS		
	New Testament	Old Testament
Abraham	Jn 8:39-40	Gn 12:1 - 25:11
Abomination	Mt 24:15-16; Mk 13:14	Dn 9:27
According to our deeds	Mt 16:27	Ps 62:13; Jer 17:10
Angels descending	Jn 1:51	Gn 28:12
Circumcision	Jn 7:22	Gn 17:1-14
Come up higher	Lk 14:7-11	Prv 25:6-7
Cup of suffering	Mt 20:22-23, 26:42; Mk 13:36	Is 51:17,22
Day cannot be predicted	Mt 24:37; Lk 17:26-27	Gn 6-8, 18
Deadly things	Lk 10:19	Ps 91:13
Departure of Jesus	Lk 9:30-31	Ex 12-15
Destruction of cities	Mt 11:23; Lk 10:15	Is 14:14-15
Devil brought death	Jn 8:44	Wis 2:24
Division	Mt 10:35-36; Lk 12:5	Mi 7:6
Divorce	Mt 19:8	Dt 24:1-4
Elijah's return	Mt 11:14, 17:10-13; Mk 9:11-13; Lk 1:17	Mal 3:23-24
Evildoers hate light	Jn 3:20	Jb 24:13-17
Faithful steward	Lk 12:42	Gn 41:39-43, 42:6
Forgive each other	Mt 5:23-24, 6:12,14-15; Mk 11:25; Lk 11:4	Sir 28:1-5
Greet no one	Lk 10:4	2 Kgs 4:29
Good shepherd	Jn 10:11,14	Ez 34:15-16,23
Healing of leprosy	Mk 1:44; Lk 5:14	Lv 14:1-32
I AM	Jn 8:28,58, 18:5,8	Ex 3:14

(continued)

9 See Acts 22:3.

10 Jn 7:15

11 Shmuel Safrai, in a lecture delivered June 5, 1985

12 Jerome: *Commentary on [Paul's] Letter to Titus*, 3:9

13 Shmuel Safrai: *The Jewish People in the First Century* 2:953

I AM	Jn 8:28,58, 18:5,8	Ex 3:14
I was hungry	Mt 25:35-36	Is 58:7; Ez 18:7
Jonah	Mt 12:39-41, 16:4; Lk 11:29-30,32	Jon 1 - 4
Judging the nations	Mt 25:31-33	Ez 34:17,20,22
Keys of the kingdom	Mt 16:19	Is 22:22
Last days	Mt 24:21; Mk 13:19	Dn 12:1
Son of Man lifted up	Jn 3:14-15	Nm 21:4-9
Mercy	Mt 9:13, 12:7	1 Sm 15:22; Hos 6:6
Manna and bread	Jn 6:32	Ex 16
Moses and Jesus	Jn 5:46	Dt 18:15
Mustard seed	Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:31-32; Lk 13:18-19	Ez 17:23
Oaths	Mt 5:33	Lv 19:12; Nm 30:3
Parables	Mt 13:13; Mk 4:11	Ps 78:2
Persecution of prophets	Mt 5:12, 23:35; Lk 11:50-51	Gn 4:8; 2 Chr 24:20-21 ¹⁴
Poor always with us	Mt 26:11	Dt 15:11
Prophets not accepted	Lk 4:25-27	1 Kgs 17; 2 Kgs 5
Queen of Sheba	Mt 12:42; Lk 11:31	1 Kgs 10:1-13
Sabbath	Mt 12:3,5,11; Mk 2:23-28	Dt 22:4; 1 Sm 21:5-7; 2 Chr 23:4-6; 2 Kgs 11:5-7
Satan's fall	Lk 10:18	Is 14:12
Sodom and Gomorah	Mt 11:23-24; Lk 17:28-32	Gn 19:1-29
Son of Man	Mt 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8,32,40, 13:37,41, 16:13,27,38, 17:9,12,22, 19:28, 20:18,28, 24:27,30,37,39,44, 25:31, 26:2,24,45,64 Mk 2:10,28, 8:31,38, 9:9,12,31, 10:33,45, 13:26, 14:21,41,62 Lk 5:24, 6:5,22, 7:34, 9:22,26,44,58, 11:30, 12:8,10,40, 17:22,24,26,30, 18:8,31, 19:10, 21:27,36, 22:22,48,69, 24:7 Jn 1:51, 3:13,14, 5:27, 6:27,53,62, 8:28, 9:35, 12:23,34, 13:31	Dn 7:13-14
Testimony	Mt 18:16; Jn 5:31-47; Jn 8:17-18	Dt 17:6, 19:15 Nm 35:30
Vineyard of God	Mt 21:33-41; Mk 12:1-9 Lk 20:9-16; Jn 15:1-2	Is 5:1-7
What you are to say	Mt 10:19; Lk 12:11-12	Ex 4:11,15; Jer 1:6-9
Who are you? (John)	Mt 11:3-5; Lk 7:20-22	Is 61:1

¹⁴ The prophet Zechariah who is stoned here "in the court of the Lord's temple" is called the son of Jehoiada, not the son of Barachiah, but otherwise the resemblance is complete.

Table 2 — DIRECT QUOTATIONS OF SCRIPTURE BY JESUS		
	New Testament	Old Testament
Beatitudes	Mt 5:5	Ps 37:11
Betrayal by a friend	Jn 13:18	Ps 41:10
Blessed is He Who comes	Lk 13:35	Ps 118:26
Blood of the covenant	Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24	Ex 24:8
Cleansing the temple	Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-17; Lk 19:45-46	Is 56:7, Jer 7:11
Coming on the clouds	Mt 24:30, 26:64	Dn 7:13
Commandments	Mt 19:18-19; Mk 10:19 Lk 18:20	Ex 20:1-17; Dt 5:1-21
Cosmic signs	Mt 24:29; Mk 13:24-25	Is 13:10, 34:4; Ez 32:7-8; Jl 4:15
Counted as wicked	Lk 22:37	Is 53:12
David's son	Mt 22:41-46; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:41-44	Ps 110:1
Eye for an eye	Mt 5:38	Ex 21:23-24; Lv 24:19-20
Forsaken by God	Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34	Ps 22:2
Fourth Commandment	Mt 15:4; Mk 7:10	Ex 21:17; Lv 20:9
God of Abraham	Mt 22:32; Lk 20:37-38	Ex 3:6
Hear but not understand	Mt 13:14-15; Mk 4:12 Lk 8:10; Jn 12:40	Is 6:9-10; Jer 5:21; Ez 12:2
Hell	Mk 9:48	Is 66:24
Hypocrisy	Mt 15:8-9; Mk 7:6-7	Is 29:13
In the name of the Lord	Lk 13:35	Ps 118:26
Into Your hands	Lk 23:46	Ps 31:6
John the Baptist	Mt 11:10; Lk 7:27	Mal 3:1
Judges called gods	Jn 10:34	Ps 82:6
Living water	Jn 7:38	Jer 2:13
Love God and neighbour	Mt 22:37-38; Mk 12:29-31	Dt 6:4-6; Lv 19:18
Lord says to my lord	Mt 22:42-45; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:41-44	Ps 110:1
Marriage	Mt 19:4-6	Gn 2:24
Mission of Christ	Lk 4:17-21	Is 61:1-2
Praise from children	Mt 21:15-16	Ps 8:3; Wis 10:21
Scatter the sheep	Mt 26:31; Mk 14:27	Zec 13:7
Stone that is rejected	Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10-11; Lk 20:17	Ps 118:22-23
Taught by God	Jn 6:45	Is 54:13
Temptation of Jesus	Mt 4:4,7,10; Lk 4:8,10,12	Dt 6:13,16, 8:3, 13:5
Woe to Israel	Lk 23:30	Hos 10:8