

Who Is Jesus Christ?

With the human race fallen and depraved, God had three options: He could destroy it; He could simply ignore it in its fallen state and let it self-destruct; or He could offer a way of salvation man could either accept or reject. Since God's nature is love, grace, and mercy, He chose the latter course of action. To bridge the gap between God and man (which was created by man's sin), God took on the form of a man. He literally became flesh and blood in the Person of Jesus Christ.

One of the first attempts to explain who Jesus Christ is was the symbol of the fish. It is probably the oldest symbol of Christianity, even pre-dating the cross. The fish came to stand for Christianity because the first letters in the Greek words for Jesus, Christ, God's Son, and Savior, form the word ICHTHUS (ik'-thoos) or "fish" in Greek. A word formed from the first letters of a series of words is called an "acronym." (Example: SCUBA—Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus). No acronym could better express who Jesus Christ is than the word ICHTHUS.

To discover who Jesus Christ is, we cannot simply begin with His birth, as we would with any other person, because Jesus existed before He was born. His life on earth was simply an advent. Therefore, we will first look at His preexistence, and then His incarnation, His life, His death, and His resurrection.

I. His Preexistence

Jesus came into the world from a preexistent state as described in John 1:1–18. In this passage John tells us that if we are to really know who Jesus Christ is we must begin in eternity past. Two basic facts about Jesus from eternity past up to His advent in the flesh are given. Explain them below:

Jesus' relationship to God the Father (John 1:1–2)

Jesus' relationship to the physical world (John 1:3)

In John 8:58 Jesus says, Before Abraham was, I am. The verb was is a translation of a Greek verb referring to "becoming" or "being born." However, the verb am comes from the Greek verb EIMI (i-mee'), which refers to "existence" with no reference to "origin." Therefore, this statement could be translated: "*Before Abraham was born, I always was.*"

Now that we have an understanding of the preexistence of Christ, let's examine ...

II. His Incarnation

“Incarnation” means taking a body of flesh and blood. The preexistent Son of God came to earth and clothed Himself in a human body (Jn 1:14). Paul stated it like this in Philippians 2:6–7, (NLT) ⁶ *Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.* ⁷ *Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,*

This is what is known in theological circles as the “kenosis” (self-emptying) of Jesus Christ. “Kenosis” means He voluntarily limited the use of some of His attributes, particularly omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence.

However, Jesus did not give up, or surrender, these attributes because He did use them in a limited way at various times during His earthly ministry to verify the fact that He was God in the flesh.

The incarnation and kenosis are only possible because of the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ has been difficult for many to accept, but the Bible clearly teaches it from beginning to end. Read the following verses, and explain how they relate to the Virgin Birth:

Genesis 3:15 _____

Isaiah 7:14 _____

Matthew 1:18 & Luke 1:26–35 _____

Jesus’ Virgin Birth was not widely questioned until the rise of modern liberalism, which seeks to explain everything. However, the very first question concerning the Virgin Birth was raised by the Virgin Mary herself when she asked, *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* (Lk 1:34). What was God’s answer to this question, which so many have asked since that time (Luke 1:37)?

Jesus was genuinely and totally divine—God Incarnate, but we must also understand that at the same time He was totally human. This truth is clear throughout the New Testament. Examine the following passages, and state what they tell us about Jesus’ human nature:

Luke 2:52 _____

Mark 6:6 & 13:32 _____

John 4:6 _____

Luke 19:41 _____

As paradoxical as it may seem, Christ was totally divine and totally human at the same time. The divine-human nature of Jesus Christ is incomprehensible to our finite minds (Rom. 11:33 & 16:25–27). Therefore, let's move on to ...

III. His Life

As strange as it may seem, the human advent of Jesus Christ confirms His deity. For what greater evidence could one present than to live a perfect life. We read in Hebrews 4:15: *He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*. Jesus could stand before His enemies and challenge them to name a single sin of which He was guilty (Jn 8:46). The conclusion of Pilate is the verdict of the ages: *I find no fault in this man* (Lk 23:4). Even those who deny His deity will commend His goodness. However, if He is not who He claimed to be, He cannot be good—He can only be the greatest fraud in history.

Having examined the preexistence, the incarnation, and the life of Jesus Christ, let's now consider ...

IV. His Death

Jesus Christ's death was vicarious, which means it was on behalf of others. His death accomplished for us what we could not do for ourselves. Read Romans 3:23 and 1 John 2:2, and explain what His death did for us:

However, there is more to our study of who Jesus is, for we must finally look at ...

V. His Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most authenticated event in the history of the world. Efforts to prove it a sham stumble all over themselves. The authenticity of the Gospels, along with other New Testament records, has remained unshakable for centuries. Moreover, it is psychologically impossible apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to explain the faith that led all eleven disciples to their deaths. Also, the remarkable change in the apostle Paul cannot be explained apart from the power of the resurrected Savior.

Why is Christ's resurrection so important? First, it is the distinguishing quality of Christianity because there have been scores of great men and many remarkable teachers. Buddha lived hundreds of years before Christ, established a religion, and then died. And, he is still dead. Mohammed lived centuries after the time of Christ and set up a religion. He too died and is still dead.

Christ died, but He rose again. Read the following scriptures, and explain why His resurrection is such an integral part of Christianity:

Matthew 28:18–20 & 2 Timothy 4:17 _____

1 Corinthians 15:17 _____

John 14:19 _____

In 1 Corinthians 15:20 the Bible says, *But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. The firstfruits were offered by Jews unto the Lord as an expression of their assurance that God would provide a harvest. So, the resurrection of Christ is the assurance of the resurrection of the dead* (1 Cor. 15:22–23). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides the way for fallen humanity to regain the state that God originally intended, as we shall see in the next lesson.

Write in your own words who Jesus Christ really is:

MEMORY VERSE: John 1:1