

[sec]Introduction

[a]God Reveals Himself to Us

[image: Thomas questioning Jesus at the Last Supper (not post Resurrection)]

No matter the hectic nature of your life—maintaining a GPA, participating in extracurriculars, working a parttime job, having a social life, living in a family—you are bound to sometimes look way out into your future and ask yourself “the big questions”: *Why am I here? What is the purpose of life? What happens after I die?* Asking these questions is not out of the normal. There is no escaping that you are hardwired for something more than any of your current tasks and goals.

The perennial big questions have been asked by people for all time. Neither is this by accident. You were, indeed, made for *much, much more*. You instinctively know that you are unique among all other people. Scientifically, it is factual statement to say that no one else exists or has existed with your exact DNA. Your life didn’t come about by chance. There is a Creator who designed you and brought you into existence. The Almighty God who made you understandably wants you, his creation, to be connected with him. Think of the bond parents want with their children. God desires this connection to an even deeper level, to a level called *communion*. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way: “The desire for God is written on the human heart, because [you have been] created by God and for God” (CCC 27).

Sometimes these big questions come to the forefront when you are disappointed by something or someone. Or, you may even feel pensive in this way after successfully reaching a goal that you had worked very hard to achieve. After a bit of jubilation, you may have thought to yourself, “Is that it?” Even people who achieve the highest levels of success in business,

athletics, popular stardom—whatever—usually ending up asking themselves that exact same question: “Is that *it*?” Typically, though, most of us brush off the thought and just move on to the next goal. However, it *is* worth your time to give the big questions of life some additional consideration. This course will provide information and resources to help you to examine in greater detail someone Catholics profess to be the Incarnate Son of God who came to the earth to provide answers. That person is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Thomas asked Jesus a “big question” of Jesus at the Last Supper: “How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:5, 6).

[b]Waiting for the Messiah

[image: recreate covenant infographic from current Jesus 2, page 8, with new images and design; place within this “b” section]

[SL 76]Through human reason, people from all time have formed answers to questions about life, death, and eternity and God himself. Human reason allows us the capacity for understanding *some* of life’s mystery. For example, humans know instinctively that killing an innocent person is wrong. Human reason is not enough to understand the deepest and complete designs of God, however. God himself must reveal himself and the depths of the plans he has for human beings. [SL 1]God did so through the course of *salvation history*, the name for the account of God’s saving activity and intervention on humanity’s behalf. [SL 2]The events of salvation history are told in Sacred Scripture, in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

[SL 98]God’s revelation progressed in response to the **Original Sin** of the first humans, named Adam and Eve, who rejected a life of communion with God.<sup>1</sup> After their fall, he chose a specific ethnic people to be his own and began to reveal himself to them over centuries. Through a series of covenants (see accompanying infographic) with the Israelites (later called the Jews), God offered human beings a new chance not only to know him but to know him better. Within the Sinai Covenant with Moses, for example, God provided a Law to help them better understand how they should live moral lives. This was something other nations did not possess. [SL 32]Ultimately, God offered the promise of **redemption**, which many Israelites understood would come from a chosen prophet, king, or messiah.

The New Testament period of the early first century AD was high in messianic expectations. Most Jews believed that God would send his Chosen One, the Messiah, very soon. The Hebrew word *masiah* translates to the Greek word *Christos* (Christ), which means “anointed one.” At first, the title messiah applied to the king of Israel (e.g., King David and his successors). However, David’s successors were mostly weak and corrupt.

Even when the monarchy era ended for the Jews, the belief in God’s promise to provide a messiah never died among them. By the time of Jesus, many Jews increasingly believed that a messiah would usher in God’s Kingdom or reign. Various Jewish sects in Jesus’ day (e.g. Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes) had different kinds of expectations about who or what kind of person the Messiah would be. Most Jews expected a political or military leader

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<sup>1</sup> Redemption in Christ, which will be covered in more depth throughout this text, includes forgiveness of Original Sin and all personal sins in the Sacrament of Baptism. However, the other effects of Original sin, including the struggle with concupiscence (inclinations to sin), remain and call people to maintain a constant spiritual battle with evil (see CCC 409).

like King David who would lead them to reestablish a strong, independent nation of Israel and help usher in God's Kingdom on earth. Also, some Jews (possibly including John the Baptist) fully expected the coming of the Messiah to be accomplished in an **apocalyptic** event which would be dramatic, pointing to the Messiah's identity and glorious establishment of God's Kingdom.

#### [b]The Uniqueness of Jesus

[SL 18]What none of the Jews or anyone else of the first century could have imagined was that the Messiah would be a God/Man. Jesus is unique is that in his one Divine Person he brings together the union of human and divine natures. This is called the *hypostatic union*.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is not "part man, part God." He is not a mixture of the two, like an orange and water in a blender to make orange juice. Nor is he sometimes God, sometimes man, as if he could turn on and off one or the other as with a light switch. Jesus became truly man, while remaining truly God. This truth about Jesus, the Messiah, means that he is *most unique* in all human history; the Incarnation, that is the coming of God in human form to this planet, happened only once. As St. John Paul II wrote in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*:

If he were only a wise man like Socrates, if he were a "prophet" like Muhammad, if he were an "enlightened" like Buddha, without any doubt he would not be what he is. He is the one mediator between God and humanity. He is mediator because he is both God and man.

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<sup>2</sup> *Hypostatic* comes from a Greek term that means "which lies beneath as basis or foundation." The term was used by Greek philosophers to distinguish what can be seen on the surface from the reality which lies below.