

[working title]

Who Is Jesus Christ (Course II)

Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God — the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who “efflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature,” in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” This spiritual beauty of God is reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels, and saints. Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2502

We will begin each chapter with a short study and reflection on a piece of sacred art in order to visually portray an important aspect of our faith and to pass on this wonderful tradition of our Catholic faith.

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[ch]1 Jesus Is the Way, the Truth, and the Life



[image: add small inset photo of Duccio's *Madonna and Child*]

By comparison to large scale frescoes and other altarpieces of the day, the relatively small 8" x 11" painting the *Madonna and Child* evokes even by its size an intimate look shared between the infant Christ and his Mother.

Because of his compact size, the *Madonna and Child* was likely intended to be a source of prayerful meditation when placed in a church. The burn marks at the bottom of the painting are from candles placed under it. Painted by Duccio di Buoninsegna, an influential Italian artist from Siena, the artist was influenced by the Medieval period from his past but also an influencer himself of the Renaissance which was to come about a century after the completion of this painting.

The humanism present reveals a hint of the Renaissance; note the infant pulling the veil back from his Mother in order to get a close and loving glimpse of her. On the other hand, Mary's expression is one of sadness as she knows what is ahead for her Son. The "fence" at the bottom of the painting is intended to draw your eyes upward to give full attention to the Mother and child. The sharing of detailed human expressions, and even the crevices and folds of Mary's veil, are meant to communicate the mystery of God becoming man and participating in our world.

The painting today is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. After passing through private ownership for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the painting was acquired in 2004 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for an estimated cost of \$45 million dollars. The high price is due in part to the rarity of Duccio's works as there are only thirteen known surviving paintings by Duccio in the world.

If you would like to put the Madonna and Child painting into context of when and where it was created see Chapter Project 1 (page 000).

[fh]Focus Question

How is Jesus both true God and true man?

[chapter outline]

Introduction	God Reveals Himself to Us
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[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.¹ 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

¹ 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*.² 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.

² *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.

Questions about the relationship between Jesus Christ's humanity and divinity are the focus of **Christology** and the subject of this course. All the Gospels address Christological questions, always with the purpose of helping us to know more about Jesus and understand that he is the Son of God. For example, the prologue of John's Gospel (1:1-31) stresses very strongly Jesus' heavenly origins, his fundamental identity as the Son of God, and his preexistence as the Word of God. While the **synoptic Gospels** also share several examples of Jesus' heavenly origins, their starting point is the concrete memories of Jesus of Nazareth and his impact on people. They then move on to develop his story as an ascent to heavenly glory through his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

[SL 2] All of God's Revelation is contained in the **Deposit of Faith**, which is the body of truths of Catholicism. The Deposit of Faith is contained in Sacred Scripture *and* Sacred Tradition. The study of Christ in this text will focus on the teachings of both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which the Church's doctrine, life, and worship is preserved by the Magisterium and passed on to every generation. Christ is the completion of God's Revelation and of salvation history. This includes teachings about Christ studied and taught by the Church.³ [SL 11] The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit is the protector of Sacred Tradition. It is the Church who teaches about Christ and with Christ's own authority.

[fh]Section Assessment

Comprehension

³ The Second Vatican Council teaches: "The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (*Dogm. Const. Dei Verbum*, n. 2).

1. How did Jesus answer the Apostle Thomas's question "How can we know the way?"?
2. Name the major Old Testament covenants God made with the Jewish people.
3. What was a common Jewish expectation of a messiah in Jesus's time?
4. Explain in your own words how Jesus is unique in his one Divine Person.

Vocabulary

5. How did the need for *redemption* change after the *Original Sin*?
6. What was the connection some Jews made between the coming of the Messiah and an *apocalyptic* event?
7. Define *Christology*.
8. What are two parts of the *Deposit of Faith*?

Reflection

9. What is another "big question" you have often asked yourself? What kind of answer did you formulate?

[sec]Section 1

[a]How Is Jesus True God

[SL 18] [SL 44] “Is Jesus of Nazareth God?” was one of the most pressing questions faced by the first disciples. Imagine being raised a faithful Jew and having to explain to your parents and family members that you have come to believe that the itinerant preacher, the son of a carpenter from Nazareth, an out-of-the-way village, was God in the flesh.

John’s Gospel, the final Gospel written, provides a source to help answer the question of Jesus’ divinity. One way that John’s Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus is to show him always present with the Father and in control of all things, including creation. In fact, this focus on Jesus’ divinity is present from the famous prologue at the very beginning of John’s Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came to be through him,

and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be

through him was life,

and this life was the light of the human race;

the light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness has not overcome it. . . .

And the Word became flesh

and made his dwelling among us,
 and we saw his glory,
 the glory as of the Father's only Son,
 full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:1–5, 14)

[SL 45]John used the expression “the Word became flesh” to state emphatically that God assumed human nature and became man. John may have done so to counteract a first-century heresy known as **Docetism** (see also pages 00–00). Docetists could not believe that God would demean himself by taking on all the weakness of humanity. To Docetists, Jesus *seemed* to be a man or *seemed* to take on the appearance of a man but not the reality of a man; that is, that his body was an illusion. The presence of this heresy indicates that, for many, it was difficult to explain that, without losing his divine nature, God the Son assumed a human nature with a human body.

The Gospels provide other evidence for Jesus' divinity. For example, Jesus asked his disciples who they and others believed him to be: “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk 8:27). The disciples replied with various answers, saying that he was John the Baptist, Elijah, and other prophets. When Jesus directly asked the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered more correctly: “You are the Messiah,” but was then chastised by Jesus for contradicting what being the Messiah really entailed. The next time Jesus asked the disciples for reactions to his explanation of his identity, “they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him” (Mk 9:32). When Jesus was charged with blasphemy and questioned by the Jewish court as to whether he was “the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One” (Mk 14:61), he responded “I AM,” indicating the traditional Jewish name, YHWH, for God.

Interestingly, some people who were not followers of Jesus could also recognize his divinity. These were people who were possessed by demons. In Luke's Gospel, a man in a synagogue plagued with an evil spirit shrieked: "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!" (Lk 4:34). Jesus told him to "Be quiet!" Then the man was healed. The demon threw the man to the ground and came out of him without doing him any harm. Other examples of demons recognizing the divinity of Jesus are recorded in Mark 1:21–28 and Luke 4:31–37; 8:26–39. Demons identified who Jesus was by perceiving his holiness which was a threat to the evil of Satan. As the holy Son of God, Jesus came to save humankind from all that is not good, right, and just—that is, all evil—even Satan, the father of evil.

[SL 38]After the apostolic era, the Church addressed heresies about Jesus that claimed just the opposite of Docetism. Rather than denying his humanity, other heresies denied Jesus' divinity. A priest from Alexandria, Arius (AD 250–336), held that Christ was God's greatest creature, who was made before time but a creature nonetheless. He taught that Christ did not take on human flesh, arguing that if he *had* taken on human flesh, he could not be God. He also falsely taught that if Christ was God, there would be two gods. **Arianism** had grave consequences for the Church's teaching on salvation. The Church responded to Arianism and other false teachings at gatherings, or councils, of bishops and Church leaders (see page 00), clarifying the Church's belief that Jesus Christ is both truly man and truly God.

[b]Jesus Fulfilled Old Testament Prophecies

The Old Testament contains many prophecies about the coming Messiah. A careful reading of the Gospels makes a clear case that Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies concerning God's Anointed One. These include the prophecies that declared:

- He would be born of the tribe of Judah. (Gn 49:10)
- He would be of the House of David. (Is 11:1–2)
- He would be born in Bethlehem. (Mi 5:1)
- He would be born of a virgin. (Is 7:14)
- He would be worshiped by kings from afar. (Ps 72:10)

His Death and the manner of his suffering were also foretold:

- He would be betrayed. (Ps 41:10)
- He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver. (Zec 11:12–13)
- He would suffer for the sins of humankind. (Is 50:6)
- He would be led like a sheep to slaughter. (Is 53:7)
- He would have his hands and feet pierced. (Ps 22:17)

Jesus himself also made prophecies that were fulfilled. For example, he predicted that he would be condemned to death by the religious authorities, mocked by Gentiles, betrayed by one of his Apostles, and denied three times by Peter. He also predicted the destruction of the Temple, an event that occurred during the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70).

The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus' own prophecies does indeed offer evidence that he truly is the Son of God, sent by the Father, to be the Savior of the world. As Jesus said when predicting his betrayal by Judas: "From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM" (Jn 13:19).

[b]Jesus Performed Miracles

[photos: beautiful art depicting Jesus' miracles, such as "The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes" by Tintoretto; "The Raising of Lazarus" by Piombo; "Healing of Peter's mother-in-law" by Bridges; "Christ healing the paralytic at Capernaum" by Rode; "Christ Healing" by Rembrandt; "Christ cleansing a leper" by Doze]

[SL 20]Another clear sign of Jesus' divinity is this: Anyone who has the power demonstrated by Jesus' miracles—the power over nature, sickness and death, Satan, and sin itself—must be God himself. The greatest sign of all was the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. All four Gospels cite miracles of Jesus. By definition, the miracles are "extraordinary and observable events that cannot be explained by human abilities or known natural forces." Miracles can only be explained by divine intervention. That is why the miracles of Jesus point to who he really is.

The miracles worked by Jesus attest that he came from the Father. They invite belief in him. To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask. So miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God (see CCC, 548). The number and variety of miracles Jesus performed were great (see Mark 1:32–34). There were physical healings, nature miracles (e.g., Jesus' walking on water), exorcisms (expulsion of evil spirits), and the raisings of people from the dead. For example, Jesus raised his friend Lazarus, whose body had already been decaying in the tomb for several days when Jesus brought him back to life (see John 11:1–44).

The synoptic Gospels use the Greek word *dynamis*, which means "act of power," to describe Jesus' miracles. John's Gospel uses two Greek words *ergon* ("work") and *semeion* ("sign") for

miracle. Jesus' "works and signs" reveal his glory, purpose, identity, and relationship to God the Father. His miracles were both *powerful* and *significant*.

The vast majority of people who witnessed Jesus' miracles knew something spectacular was happening. They saw these miracles with their own eyes or were blessed to be healed themselves. Yet many other people doubted or misinterpreted the miracles. Some called Jesus a prophet. Others said he committed evil, as when he healed the man born blind on the Sabbath (see John 9:1–41). Some of his opponents said that the power of Jesus was emanating from Satan.

Jesus offered an explanation for why he performed miracles: "These works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me" (Jn 5:36). His miracles were intended to help those who witnessed them to conclude that he is the Son of God.

[b]Jesus Forgave Sins

[image of the paralytic being lifted down through the roof to see Jesus]

[SL 20] Jesus also demonstrated his divine nature by forgiving people's sins. For example, note that the forgiveness of sins accompanied the healing of the paralytic (see Mark 2:1–12; Matthew 9:1–8; Luke 5:17–26). The connection between the forgiveness of sins and the cure of the paralytic was based on a common Jewish belief of Jesus' time that illness and physical disabilities were the result of a person's own sin or the sin of his ancestors (see Exodus 20:5).

The healing and forgiving of the paralytic showed that Jesus had the power to heal both the inner brokenness of human beings—their sins—as well as their bodily ailments. This connection between physical healing and forgiveness of sins helped to establish Jesus' divinity. However,

some scribes who heard Jesus forgive the man's sin accused him of blasphemy. This was a charge that Jesus would ultimately be convicted of by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. During that trial, Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest, shouted to Jesus:

"I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him in reply, "You have said so. But I tell you: From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?" They said in reply, "He deserves to die!" (Matthew 26:63–66)

Jewish authorities sentenced Jesus for claiming something that no ordinary man could claim to be. For them, the claims of Jesus were an outrage, punishable by death under Mosaic Law. Notice that Jesus never said they were mistaken in their accusation.

[b]Greatest Evidence: The Resurrection

[image: artwork of the resurrection, such as those by Fra Angelico, Basaiti, Bellini, Bronzino, Garofalo, Master M S, Passignano, Veronese, Wolgemut)

[SL 20] [SL 56] [SL 96] While Jesus' "deeds, miracles, and words all revealed that 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily'" (CCC 515, quoting Colossians 2:9), the most powerful evidence for Christ's divinity is provided by his Resurrection. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "The Resurrection of the crucified one shows that he was truly 'I AM,' the Son of God and God himself" (CCC 653).

The Resurrection is a historical event involving the whole of Jesus' humanity (see "Historical Arguments for the Resurrection of Jesus, page 000). The Father raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. "After his Resurrection, Jesus' divine sonship becomes manifest in the power of his glorified humanity" (CCC 445). During the forty days he was on earth after the Resurrection, Jesus' glory remained partially hidden "under the appearance of ordinary humanity" (CCC, 659). St. Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
(1 Corinthians 15:3–6)

While Jesus historically rose from the dead within this world, the power by which he was resurrected was not due to an earthly or human power. The Father raised him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. Risen in glory, the disciples could see and touch him and Jesus could eat and speak as a human, yet he was no longer subservient to the laws of the created world. His risen body also showed the marks of his Passion. And yet, his Resurrection was not merely resuscitation or a return to earthly life (like the miracle of Lazarus); instead, his body was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and thus transformed. This real body possessed the new properties of a glorious body: "not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills; for Christ's humanity can no longer be confined to earth, and belongs henceforth only to the Father's divine realm" (CCC, 645).

The significance of Christ's Resurrection cannot be overstated. It is the confirmation of Jesus' divinity and of his words and teachings, along with promises of the Old Testament. Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM" (Jn 8:28). Indeed, "all truths, even those most inaccessible to human reason, find their justification in Christ by his Resurrection has given the definitive proof of his divine authority, which he had promised" (CCC, 651). Furthermore, Christ's Resurrection is a promise of your own resurrection:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life." (1 Cor 15:20–22)

[separate feature with "b" section above]

[fh]Historical Arguments for the Resurrection of Jesus

Focus Question: How is Jesus both true God and true man?

There is a great deal of historical evidence to prove that Jesus was a preacher who attracted many followers in the early first century AD in and around Galilee. His hometown was Nazareth, the home of his foster father Joseph. There are many non-Christian sources that support the fact that Jesus was a historical person. (See Section 3, page 00)

The argument that the Resurrection of Jesus was an historical event has one key piece of missing evidence: no other person witnessed his human body, crucified by the Romans on a Cross (again plenty of historical evidence for the crucifixion), either literally rising upward or disappearing in a flash from a tomb. Rather, the first source of evidence is that some of his

women followers came to the tomb in the morning of the third day and saw it empty. The Gospels report they spoke to angels, a gardener, and Jesus himself in the various accounts. Though they themselves were in danger from the Roman authorities as one of his disciples, they boldly reported this news to the Apostles. What would be the benefit for them to create such a tale? That is one question to reflect on as you look for historical evidence of the Resurrection. Through several philosophical arguments, Catholic over the years have offered other step-by-step responses to arguments against the Resurrection as a historical event. Five such arguments and their responses are briefly named below⁴:

- **The disciples made up the story of Jesus' Resurrection.**

As mentioned, why would the disciples fabricate this account. Basically, they were cowards as evidenced by their lack of appearance near Jesus' trial or at Golgotha where he was crucified. They had everything to lose and nothing to gain by sharing this story.

- **Jesus died, but the Apostles and other disciples were deceived in some way.**
Maybe those who had encountered people at the tomb hallucinated. Maybe the Apostles themselves hallucinated Jesus' appearance to them in the forty days after his crucifixion.

Hallucinations do not last for forty days! To believe this argument we would have to believe that hundreds of common people with plenty of common sense all hallucinated.

- **The Resurrection of Jesus was a myth that the Apostles concocted to explain Jesus' message after he had died.**

⁴ Paraphrased from "Evidence for the Resurrection" by Fr. Dwight Longenecker, May 4 2020, *Catholic Digest*.

The problem with this argument is that the Resurrection accounts were written down within thirty to sixty years after Jesus' life. Each of these accounts includes the names of real historical people that others would either know or know of. Also, the Resurrection accounts do not read like a myth. There are no fantastical symbols or magical characters. The accounts read as history. Even more evidence from Scripture comes from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (written approximately fifteen years after the earthly life of Jesus). In it he wrote a very precise and detailed account of appearances of the Risen Jesus: "[H]e appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostle. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me" (1 Cor 15:5-8).

- **The Apostles stole Jesus body in order to make up tales about the Resurrection (for some unknown reason).**

After Christ died on the Cross, the high priest asked Pontius Pilate to secure the burial site. Pilate authorized the use of a four-man guard. It is inconceivable that the disciples could have come to the tomb and moved the heavy stone while all four guards were sleeping at the same time.

- **Jesus didn't really die on the Cross. Maybe he just went into a coma or fainted.**

This argument would mean that Jesus would have had to survive a brutal scourging, being nailed to the Cross, and being stabbed in the side. Even if that were possible, he would then, in this injured state, had to have been able to push the stone away from the cave by himself. Also, when Mary Magdalene and the disciples encountered a man they

understood to be Jesus outside of the tomb, they conversed with him in a normal conversation. If he was badly injured and left for dead, it seems likely that Mary and the disciples would have gone to get medical help.

The most assured evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus comes from the Gospels themselves. Be careful not to dismiss the historical aspect of the writing because they were authored by Jesus' disciples. One scholar points out that there are three markers that we can use to test whether the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels can be taken literally: 1) They have a history of being composed following an oral telling of the accounts; 2) They are set in a specific historical time and place; 3) They are written to convey historically accurate information, not as a homily to build up the faith of those who already believed.⁵

[b]Comprehension

1. Why did the disciples have nothing to gain by “making up” a story about Christ's Resurrection?
2. How would it have been virtually impossible for the disciples to have stolen Jesus' body from the tomb?
3. Counter the argument that Jesus might not have been dead and removed the stone himself?

[b]Reflection

⁵ Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus by Michael Joseph Carzon. (*Misio Dei*, October 3, 2022)

- Which argument of Jesus' Resurrection is least convincing to you? Which argument is most convincing? Explain.

[end feature]

[fh]Section Assessment

Comprehension

1. Name two Old Testament prophecies Jesus fulfilled.
2. What are two Old Testament passages that predicted the type of suffering Jesus would experience?
3. Name one prophecy Jesus made about himself that was fulfilled.
4. What was Jesus' explanation for why he performed miracles?
5. Why is Jesus' response to the charge of blasphemy against him in itself a sign of his divinity?
6. What is the greatest evidence of Jesus' divinity?

Vocabulary

7. Define *Docetism*.

Reflection

8. Write at least one question you have for each of the five arguments for the historical nature of Jesus' Resurrection.

[sec]Section 2

[a]How Is Jesus True Man

[SL 45] [SL 16] [SL 31]In philosophy, the term *nature* refers to what something is. For example, trees possess the nature of being trees, elephants share the same nature as other elephants, and human beings share the same human nature as one another. Also, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share the same divine nature as the one God.

At the Incarnation, human nature was assumed or taken on by Christ, the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity. It was not absorbed by him. “What he was, he remained and what he was not, he assumed,” proclaims an ancient Church liturgy. This means that Jesus, the Son of God, did not redefine human nature when he became human. He didn’t become a “different kind of human.” Nor was human nature absorbed by his divine nature. Instead, Jesus assumed human nature and everything that goes with it—emotions, pain, work, sickness, and even death. Everything that belongs to Christ’s human nature belongs to the Divine Person of the Son of God who assumed it.

In becoming fully human, Christ raised in all people a dignity that is beyond compare. He united himself with each individual. As the Second Vatican Council taught:

[He] worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22, quoted in CCC, 470)

Christ indeed is like us in all things but sin. Christ had human knowledge of everything relating to God, including the private thoughts of other people. Christ knew of God’s eternal plan for

salvation. In the words of seventh-century theologian St. Maximus the Confessor: “The human nature of God’s Son, not by itself but by its union with the Word, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God” (quoted in CCC, 473).

We can learn more about what it means to be a human by knowing Christ. Since all human beings—the billions who are alive now—possess a human nature, each person, although different, possesses two qualities that make him or her a human being. These two qualities are

1. possessing a human body, and
2. possessing a human soul.

The soul is “the spiritual principle of human beings” (CCC, Glossary). The soul and body together form one human nature. To be a human, then, means having a body and an immortal soul. Jesus, the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity, assumed these qualities too.

[b]Jesus: Human in Both Body and Soul

[image: 'Vitruvian Man', Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of what he believed was the perfect body; image of the woman with a hemorrhage touching Jesus' cloak.]

[SL 45]As the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity, Jesus possessed a divine nature. His Divine Person assumed a human nature at the time of the Incarnation. This means that Jesus took on a human body and a human soul, the two qualities that make up a human being. Except for being free from Original Sin **and its effects** as well as from all personal sin, Jesus’ human body was like ours in many ways:

- He was very hungry—for example, when he fasted in the desert (Mt 4:2).

- He was thirsty—for example, when he met and talked with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:6–29) and when he hung on the Cross (Jn 19:29).
- He was tired. He said, “Foxes and dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head” (Lk 9:58).

All human bodies are also corruptible. From the moment you are born, your body is at once growing to full maturity and also beginning a process that culminates in its death. Jesus suffered death. In fact, Jesus endured one of the cruelest forms of capital punishment. The actual cause of his Death could have been asphyxiation, brought about when he could no longer raise his chest to inhale and fill his lungs as he hung on the Cross. Jesus’ suffering and Death bore a new understanding of what happens to the human body after it dies. Understanding Jesus’ suffering and Death is connected explicitly to his Paschal Mystery (see pages 00–00).

Regarding Jesus’ human soul, you will recall the mention of several heresies concerning Jesus’ human and divine nature that arose in the early Church. A related heresy erupted in the fourth century. Apollinaris the Younger, the bishop of Laodicea, taught that, though Jesus had a human body, he had no human soul. This heresy is known as *Apollinarianism*.

Though the doctrine of hypostatic union had not been formally defined in the fourth century, Pope Damasus I responded to Apollinarianism at the Council of Rome in 382, stating that Jesus did have a human soul that “is endowed with a true human knowledge” (CCC, 472). This is why, in fact, Jesus was able to grow in “wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Lk 2:52). At the Third Council of Constantinople in 681, the Church formally taught against Apollinarianism and declared that Christ possesses two wills and two natural ways of

operating, a divine nature and a human nature. The Council taught that Christ's human will "does not resist or oppose, but rather, submits to his divine and almighty will."

Other references in the Gospels help to explain the mysterious union of Jesus' divine and human natures in one Divine Person. For example, consider the story of a woman suffering from a hemorrhage who pushed through a swarming crowd and touched the tassel on Jesus' cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped (see Luke 8:43–48).

Jesus asked Peter and his disciples, "Who touched me?" Peter recognized the futility of answering Jesus. There were so many people "pushing and pressing" against Jesus. But Jesus persisted: "Someone has touched me; for I know that power has gone out from me" (Lk 8:46). By asking this question, Jesus showed that he was completely aware of the woman who had faith. He was completely aware that she was healed. Jesus' question provides a remarkable glimpse into the interplay between his human nature and divine nature. The **Church Fathers** called miracles "Theandric actions" —that is, divine deeds done humanly. In this case, through the woman touching the humanity of Jesus, she was healed by his divine power or that of the Holy Spirit. This incident teaches that Jesus hears and answers prayers, whether expressed to him in words or in silence as this woman had prayed. Also, this miracle teaches that Jesus never did some deeds as a man and some deeds as God. Everything that the Son of God did as a man was done humanly because that is the manner in which he existed—as a man.

Jesus interacted with people in a most loving, caring, and compassionate human way. In union with the Word, the Son of God had immediate knowledge of the Father and of the secret thoughts of people. He was always aware of "God's big picture," the eternal plan of salvation that he came to reveal. The early Church condemned those who denied that Jesus had a human

body (Gnostics) and those who denied that Jesus had a human soul (Apollinarius). Jesus, the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity, was fully human and therefore possessed a human body, a human intellect, a human will, and a human soul just like you do.

[b]Jesus Understands Our Human Experience

[SL 20] [SL 45] [SL 48]As far as Jesus' human nature was concerned, he matured like anyone else. He gained knowledge and from learning as any other human. Jesus gained three kinds of knowledge by way of his human nature:

1. The knowledge of God by virtue of hypostatic union. This type of knowledge did not increase throughout Jesus' human life. He always possessed it at the same ultimate degree.
2. Infused knowledge; that is, the type of knowledge that could read the thoughts and hearts of other people. Jesus knew everything. Again, this type of knowledge did not grow; he always possessed it.
3. Acquired knowledge; that is, the type of knowledge Jesus gained through his human experience and reflection. This type of knowledge did increase as Jesus' life went on.

By being true man, Jesus is able to understand our human experience because he lived a human life as fully as we did. His human experience is similar to ours physically, mentally, and emotionally. For example, Jesus felt and acted on many common emotions:

[image of weeping Jesus]

Jesus wept.

Jesus showed his grief at the death of his friend Lazarus (see John 11:35). He also wept over the holy city of Jerusalem, which he knew would not accept him as the Messiah and would face destruction (see Luke 19:41–44).

[image of a happy Jesus]

Jesus was joyful.

[SL 103] Jesus participated in many joyful occasions, such as the wedding feast at Cana (see John 2:2–11) and the meal with the repentant Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1–10). Jesus also rejoiced when his seventy-two disciples came back from their mission (see Luke 10:21). Jesus so enjoyed himself on some occasions that his opponents partially mischaracterized his festive attitude by labeling him “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Lk 7:34). He was indeed a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

[image of an angry Jesus]

Jesus was angry.

Don’t forget that, as an emotion or passion, anger is neither good nor evil in itself. It’s what you do with anger that makes it good or bad. An example of a good, angry response is if you see an innocent person being harmed. Anger can spur you to action. The Gospels describe examples of Jesus’ anger. For example, he was angry when those in opposition to him questioned him about performing a healing miracle on the Sabbath (see Mark 3:5). He angrily cleared the money-

changers out of the Temple because they were disrespecting a place of worship (see John 2:13–17). He was angry with Peter when he suggested Jesus should not follow the way of the Cross (see Mark 8:33).

[image of a worried or distressed Jesus]

Jesus was distressed.

Certainly, approaching his arrest, trial, and Crucifixion, Jesus was worried, sorrowful, and distressed. At the Last Supper, he was deeply troubled that one of his disciples would betray him (see John 13:21). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told his Apostles, “My soul is sorrowful even to death” (Mt 26:38). Jesus genuinely feared his Death, yet he put his trust in the Father: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39).

Jesus also gained wisdom through lived experience, which is related to acquired knowledge. From the first instance of his human existence, Jesus, like his Mother, was full of grace, because he was true God by the hypostatic union.

[fh]Section Assessment

Comprehension

1. In what way did the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity assume human nature?
2. What were exceptions to Jesus’ sharing in human nature?
3. What did the Third Council on Constantinople teach to counteract the heresy of Apollinarianism?

4. How does Jesus' healing of the woman with the hemorrhage provide a glimpse of the interplay between Jesus' human nature and divine nature?
5. Explain the difference between Jesus' knowledge by virtue of the hypostatic union, infused knowledge, and acquired knowledge.

Reflection

6. Which example of Jesus' expression of human emotion surprises you the most? Why?

[sec[Section 3

[a]Historical Evidence and Beliefs about Jesus from Outside of Christianity

Recall another famous conversation that Jesus had with Thomas after Jesus allowed the Apostle to probe his wounds as proof that it was actually him, raised from the dead. Thomas exchanged his earlier unbelief for faith. “My Lord and my God!” he exclaimed. Jesus responded with words intended for generations that would follow, including your own: “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (Jn 20:28–29).

Was Jesus a true man? There is no reason for even nonbelievers to doubt that Jesus of Nazareth existed. This fact can be easily shown through the historical record, the subject of this section. Within the Gospels and other writings of the New Testament, there are several historical references to people, dates, and events that can be verified by sources outside of Sacred Scripture. Likewise, there are numerous non-Christian references to Jesus and early Christianity that date from the second century and beyond.

Although these non-Christian sources do not provide detailed biographical information about Jesus, they strongly support the fact that a man named Jesus, and particularly followers of Jesus, did exist during the time suggested by New Testament writings and reports of early Christian writers. These non-Christian sources also do not affirm Jesus’ divinity, and at certain times attempt to contradict it. Nevertheless, these ancient Roman, Jewish, and Greek writers made fascinating and interesting statements about Jesus and his followers that can benefit people today who first question if a man, Jesus, lived on earth. It is ironic that Christians today can use the statements made by non-Christians to prove to non-believers that there was a

historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in the first-century in Palestine. It is also fortunate that we have these sources available to us. Because of disasters like fire and plundering and the natural passing of time, we have only a fraction of what was written down in the ancient world available to us today. Yet, while we don't have all the early documentation, we do possess enough to prove the existence of Jesus and his followers.

[images of the historians described or other photos of the events or places described in each section; keep the sections in the following (chronological) order]

[b]Roman Historians

[c]Tacitus (ca. AD 56–117)

Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman senator and the greatest Roman historian of his time. His two most important works were *Histories*, which covered the years AD 69 to 96, and *Annals*, an unfinished work that chronicled the reigns of four Roman emperors: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.

It is in *Annals* (ca. AD 115) that Tacitus mentions Jesus Christ. Writing of the Great Fire that broke out in Rome in AD 64 during the reign of Emperor Nero, Tacitus recounts that Nero blamed the fire on Christians as an excuse to persecute them:

To suppress this rumor [that he had started the fire], Nero fabricated scapegoats—and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius's reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only

in Judea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital. (*Annals*, 15.44)

This account verified that the public ministry of Jesus took place during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Luke's Gospel also mentioned this important detail (see Luke 3:12). Tacitus likely used Roman records to chronicle history. He is the only Roman historian to mention Pontius Pilate, although two Jewish writers—Josephus and Philo—tell of Pilate's harsh rule in Judea.

Reading the passage from *Annals*, it is not hard to see the contempt that Tacitus had for Christianity. He described it as a “degrading and shameful” superstition that had made its way to Rome. He certainly was no Christian, but neither did he deny the existence of Jesus Christ. Also in *Annals*, he reported how some Christians were arrested, mocked, covered in the skins of animals, and then put before bloodthirsty dogs. Others were crucified by being nailed to crosses. He also wrote that Nero soaked the corpses of Christians **with oil** and burned them as torches.

[c]Suetonius (ca. AD 70–140)

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was a Roman biographer and writer. Though his writings did not reveal much information about Jesus, he did verify that “Christians” were upsetting Roman authorities just two decades after the Death and Resurrection of Christ. In fact, one of the details he wrote about was an incident in which the Jews and Christians were removed from Rome during the reign of Emperor Claudius (41–54). In his *Lives of the Caesars* (ca. 112), he wrote: “He

expelled the Jews from Rome on account of the riots in which they were constantly indulging, at the instigation of Chrestus" (*Lives of the Caesars*, 24).

There are some errors in this account. Suetonius assumed that Jesus (whom he misnamed "Chrestus") was there and responsible for the incident. What was more likely the case is that when the first Christians went to Rome to preach in the Jewish synagogues about Jesus as the Messiah, they were met with violent resistance by some of the Jews. Claudius apparently believed that Christians and Jews were members of the same religious sect. Therefore, he banished them all after their public infighting. Interestingly, this incident is also referred to in the Acts of the Apostles (see Acts 18:2).

[c]Pliny the Younger (ca. AD 61–113)

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus was the nephew and adopted son of the Roman writer Pliny the Elder. Known as Pliny the Younger, Secundus was a Roman senator. He is most noted for his books of letters, many of which are literary masterpieces. His references to Christ and Christians occur in his last volume of letters, including his own correspondence with Emperor Trajan when Trajan was the governor of Bithynia (modern Turkey) in AD 111–113. These letters are the largest collection of administrative correspondence from Roman times.

In Letter 96, Pliny wrote to Emperor Trajan asking how to deal with Christians who would not submit to Roman law and beliefs. In the same letter, he gave the impression that Christians were foolish zealots, though he admitted they were people who lived morally. Pliny was concerned about what he called a "superstition" because it challenged the Roman practice of worshiping the emperor. Note a following key part of Pliny's letter to Trajan:

They asserted that this was the sum and substance of their error; namely that they were in the habit of meeting before dawn on a stated day and singing alternately a hymn to Christ as to a god, and then they bound themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wicked deed, but that they would abstain from theft and robbery and adultery, that they would not break their word, and that they would not withhold a deposit to meet together again for a meal, which however was of the ordinary kind and quite harmless. (Epp. X. 96/97: Lightfoot's translation)

This passage is filled with all sorts of important historical data. For example, it tells that Christians met together to worship, to sing hymns to Christ, to recite a creed, to promise to live morally, and to worship Christ as God.

Nonetheless, the Romans thought them to be worthy of death. Trajan wrote back, reassuring Pliny that he had done well in dealing with Bithynian Christians. The emperor confirmed that any Christians who came to Pliny's attention should be punished, but also said that Pliny should not go looking for them.

[b]Jewish Historian

[c]Josephus (ca. AD 37–101)

Born Joseph ben Matthias in AD 37, Josephus was commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee during the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70). Josephus was captured by the Romans, but he became a confidant and friend of a Roman commander, Vespasian, who became Roman

emperor in AD 68. Josephus's life was spared because of this friendship, and he became a Roman citizen.

Josephus wrote *The Jewish Wars* and a twenty-volume history of the Jews, the *Jewish Antiquities*. These two works are major sources of historical information on the Jews and life in Palestine under Roman rule. In *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus wrote of John the Baptist, calling him “a good man” (18). In book twenty of the series, he noted that Annas the Younger — the son of the Jewish high priest mentioned in John 18:12–24— put to death James the Just in AD 62. He refers to James as the “brother of Jesus who is called Christ.”

Most noteworthy of Josephus's writings for your current study is his account of the rule of Pontius Pilate. Though it is credited to Josephus, note that some passages sound as if they were written by a Christian believer:

Now about this time lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he should be called a man.

He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of men who receive truth with

pleasure, and won over many Jews and Greeks. He was the Christ. And when

Pilate, at the information of the leading men among us sentenced him to the

cross, those who loved him at the start did not cease to do so, for he appeared to

them alive again on the third day as had been foretold — both this and ten

thousand other wonderful things concerning him — by the divine prophets. Nor

is the tribe of Christians, so named after him, extinct to this day. (*Jewish*

Antiquities, 18)

Did you notice the parts that sound like faith statements (e.g., “he was a doer of wonderful works” and “he was the Christ”)? Church Father Origen was adamant that Josephus never

accepted Christianity. One theory is that a Christian copyist added certain passages to Josephus's writings to support Christian beliefs.

Regardless, it is clear that this Jewish historian, a nonbeliever in Christ, did not question the historical existence of Jesus or that Jesus was put to death at Pilate's order sometime between AD 26 and 36. Further, Josephus stated that the followers of Jesus were very much present at the end of the first century.

[b]Greek Historians and Writers

[c]Thallus (wrote ca. AD 55)

Thallus was a Greek historian. Many of his writings detailing the history of the eastern Mediterranean from the period of the fall of Troy in the twelfth century BC to around AD 50 have not survived. However, a portion of his writings were quoted in historical documents of a third-century writer whose work was, in turn, preserved by a Byzantine historian (ca. 800). The quotation from Thallus in the Byzantine source concerns the earthquake and darkness that descended on the land when Jesus died (see Matthew 27:45 and Luke 23:44–45). Thallus wrote that the darkness was caused by a natural eclipse of the sun. It appears he was attempting to refute the miraculous aspect of what occurred, but his testimony instead strengthens the fact that Jesus often accompanied his words with "mighty deeds, wonders, and signs" (Acts 2:22). What is interesting is that Thallus wrote about this incident at least fifteen years before the first Gospels were recorded. This would make Thallus the first known ancient writer to record elements surrounding Christ and Christianity.

[c]Mara bar Serapion (wrote ca. AD 73)

Mara bar ("bar" is Aramaic for "son of") Serapion was a Greek philosopher. In a letter recovered in the seventh century written in Syriac and addressed to his son, bar Serapion wrote about tyrants who made the mistake of killing their wise thinkers or rulers. Scholars believe that the "wise King" referred to in this passage is Jesus:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their Kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, lived in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching that he had given.

This text can be cited as secular historical evidence for Christ's Death. Mara bar Serapion thought that there was a link between the "wise King's" Death and the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Romans. Jesus, the wise and just king, did predict such destruction (see Matthew 24:1–2). This passage was likely what bar Serapion was commenting on.

There are inaccuracies in his text, however. Bar Serapion unfairly implicates Jews collectively in the execution of Jesus. The events surrounding Jesus' trial were much more

complex. Only God knows the personal sin of the participants (e.g., Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate). “Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles’ calls to conversion after Pentecost” (CCC, 597). Bar Serapion further mentioned that the teaching of the wise king lived on through the teachings he left his followers.

[c]Lucian of Samosata (wrote ca. AD 115–200)

Lucian was a Greek satirist. In one of his works, he mocked the Christian faith, including the belief in the Resurrection. He said Christians follow the teaching of “that one” — further describing “that one” as their founder and lawgiver who was crucified.

[c]Celsus (wrote ca. AD 175)

Celsus was a late-second-century Greek philosopher who wrote a vicious attack on Christianity around AD 175. The writings of Celsus were preserved by Origen, whose work, *Against Celsus*, preserves some of the false charges Celsus made against Jesus. For example, Celsus claimed that Jesus was illegitimate and that his father was a Roman soldier by the name of Panthera. Further, he claimed that Jesus went to Egypt to learn sorcery. Origen thoroughly and systematically refuted these false claims. It is clear that Celsus hated Christianity and hated Jesus Christ. However, he never denied the existence of Jesus Christ.

Besides the references of these Roman, Jewish, and Greek historians, philosophers, and writers, there is also a reference to Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud, a commentary on Jewish