



I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Father before all ages, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

Nicene Creed

Opening Question:

Some people believe Jesus was the most important person in history. Do you believe this? Why or why not?

History has an ironic streak. One of the greatest leaders of all time was not a king or a general or an oligarch or a captain of industry. In fact, he was poor, powerless, and ultimately executed as a common criminal. Yet, his teaching and moral example has inspired billions of people to live better lives. More than that, Jesus of Nazareth continues to call people to faith. To believe they have a relationship with God as their Father and to experience his Spirit in their lives.

Let's explore what we believe about Jesus Christ.

Titles for Jesus

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God...

Nicene Creed

We begin our investigation with a simple list of titles for Jesus. The name *Jesus* is the Greek version of the Hebrew "Joshua." It means "God saves." In Matthew chapter one, the angel Gabriel told Joseph in a dream:

After Mary gives birth to her son, name him "Jesus" because he will save people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21

The name not only identified Jesus, it described his mission: to save the world.



The term "*Christ*" was a Greek translation of the Hebrew "*Messiah*." Both mean "anointed." Throughout the history of Israel, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed with olive oil to indicate their place and power. Ancient Jews looked forward, not only to a leader anointed by authorities to free them from foreign oppression. They wanted someone anointed in a metaphorical sense with God's power.

In Acts chapter 10, Peter proclaimed:

You know God sent the Good News that spread throughout Judea...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.

Acts 10:36, 38a

Jesus displayed God's power in word and deed even as he died on the cross and rose from the dead.

Jesus is *Lord*. The term Lord has two meanings. It can be a polite word of deference like the way people use "Sir" or "Madame" in daily conversation. Or, it can recognize one's superior. The New Testament uses the term in both senses.

But, some passages emphasized the word "*Lord*" on a much higher level. Most of the time, it equates the term "*Lord*" with divinity. Who is the Lord? God himself. The New Testament extended the term to the person of Jesus. Jesus is Lord because he revealed both his own divinity and the

presence of the Father.

In John chapter 20, the risen Jesus appeared to his followers and addressed the doubting Thomas.

"Thomas, take your finger and inspect my hands here. Take your hand and inspect my side. Give up your doubts and believe!"

Thomas replied "My Lord and my God!"

John 20:27c-28

Jesus was the only *Son of God*. Throughout the history of Israel, people have addressed their leader as a "son of God." This meant he had a close relationship with the Creator. But, when we say Jesus is the only Son of God, we profess Jesus had a unique relationship with God. God was his Father; Jesus was the Father's divine Son.

Jesus as God

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ...born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

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In the beginning was the Word.

The Word stood in the presence of God.

And the Word was God.

He stood before God at the beginning.

John 1:1-2

We believe Jesus is the Son of God and is God. How can we hold both ideas at the same time? As the Son of God, Jesus depends upon his Father for his existence. After all, we profess he was born of the Father. And, yet, we assert he is God. At one time, this clash of ideas puzzled Christian thinkers. But they came up with a solution. God the Father always and forever begets his Son by sharing his divine substance with his Son. In other words, the act of begetting is eternal. That's what we mean when we say Jesus was:

...born of the Father before all ages...

begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.

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The Incarnation

For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

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The Word of God became flesh

and lived among us.

John 1:14

As Christians, we hold the divine Son of God came into the world as a human being. We call this belief the "Incarnation." The word literally means "into flesh." Some thinkers have struggled over this idea. How could the infinite, eternal son of God confine himself within the limitations of a single human being? An author once described the Incarnation as pouring the ocean into a soda bottle. Yet, that's what we believe.

But this raises another question. How can the Son of God be both divine and human at the same time? Won't his divine nature overcome his human side or his humanity limit his divinity? And, yet again, we believe the Son of God is one person with two natures that worked together in perfect unison. He is fully divine and fully human. Fully human meant he had the limits of human knowledge yet had the insights of his divine wisdom. Fully human meant he had a human soul, human will, and a human body that worked for the divine plan of eternal salvation. Fully human meant he had a human heart that revealed God's infinite love for us.

As it's stated in the letter to the Hebrews:

We don't have a High Priest in heaven who can't sympathize with our weaknesses. No, he was tempted in every way but he never sinned.

Hebrews 4:15

Conceived by the Holy Spirit

The angel Gabriel said:

"Mary, you are blessed by God. You will conceive and have a son named Jesus. He will be great. God will call him 'Son' and will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will rule over Israel forever because his reign will never end."

Mary objected, "How can this happen? I'm not married!"

Gabriel replied, "God's own power, his Holy Spirit, will come down on you. So, the boy to be born will be called holy and the Son of God. Nothing is impossible for God."

Luke 1:30b-35, 37

In Luke's gospel, Mary encountered the angel Gabriel who had a message from God. She would become the mother of the Christ. But her son would not have an earthly father. God himself would be his Father. How could Mary conceive without an earthly male partner? She would conceive through the power of the Spirit. And she would remain a virgin.

Birth of Jesus

Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, the city of David. At the time, Mary was pregnant. When they were there, Mary delivered her first-born son. She wrapped him strips of cloth and laid him in a manger.

Luke 2:4a, 5b-7ab

The life of Jesus was narrated in the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first two chapters of Matthew and the first two of Luke described the birth and early life of Jesus. The events noted seem paltry at best. But we must remember the gospels are not strictly biographies. They were written to inspire faith. The passages from the Infancy narratives foreshadowed the themes found in the public ministry of Jesus. John the Baptist preached repentance to the common people and, thus, prepared the way for Jesus. The Lord was born into poverty and, so, revealed his humble origins. The wise men from the East traveled to honor him as a king, thus revealing him as the Christ for all people.

Public Ministry of Jesus

Jesus arrived from Nazareth in Galilee. And John baptized him in the Jordan river. Then, the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert. For forty days, he was tempted by the devil. He lived there among wild animals. And God's angels served him.

Mark 1:9, 12-13

Two events marked the beginning of public ministry of Jesus: his baptism and his temptation in the desert. His baptism revealed him as the Messiah. His temptation foreshadowed the testing he would receive during his public life.

After these events, Jesus went among the people and proclaimed the Kingdom of God in word and deed. He invited sinners and outcasts to turn to God for reconciliation. He healed the sick and even raised the dead as a preview of the Kingdom. Eventually, he would travel to Jerusalem to bring his message to the city. There, he would face the culmination of his mission on earth.

Closing Question:

What is the most important thing you believe about Jesus?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 430-486, 512-570.

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