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The ***Catholic
Connections
Handbook***

for Middle Schoolers

FAITH
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Connections
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Catholic Connections



*Pray It! Study It! Live It!® resources
offer a holistic approach to learning,
living, and passing on the Catholic faith.*

The ***Catholic
Connections
Handbook***

for Middle Schoolers

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INTRODUCTION

Come with Me

“Come with me” (Matthew 4:19). Jesus said this to his first disciples, and it is his message to us today. Following Jesus is at the heart of being Catholic. Even though following Jesus isn’t always easy, it’s the most fulfilling and meaningful way to live life.

The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers is a guide for young teens on what it means to follow Jesus and to be Catholic today. This handbook offers a summary of what God has revealed to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, and what the Church has passed on from generation to generation through the working of the Holy Spirit. The handbook is a companion to the Bible and aims to help you learn about the Catholic Church and its beliefs about God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the sacraments, Christian morality and justice, and prayer.

Study It!

This handbook is divided into the following six sections, each a different color so you can more easily find the part you are looking for:

- Part 1: God, Revelation, and Faith
- Part 2: Jesus the Christ
- Part 3: The Holy Spirit and the Church
- Part 4: Liturgy and Sacraments
- Part 5: Christian Morality and Justice
- Part 6: Prayer

The handbook is a great tool for study, but it is more than that. It includes many prayers and lots of guidance for living the Catholic faith.

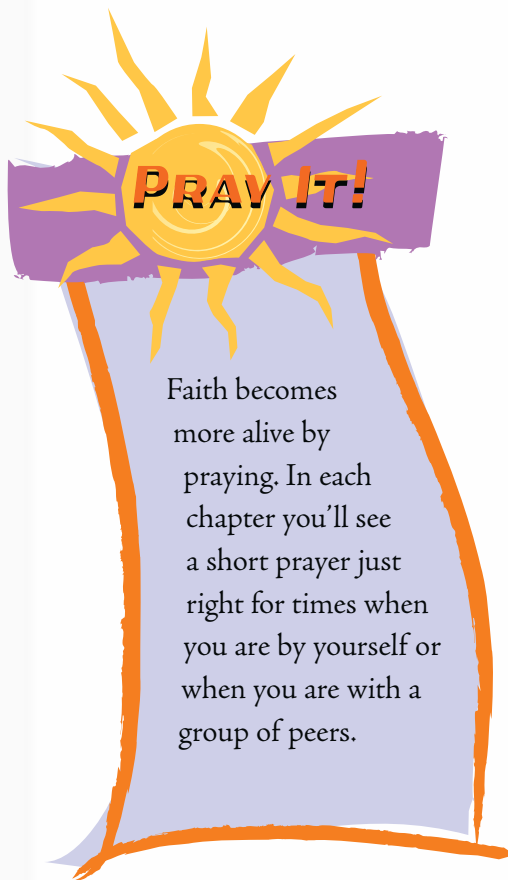
Each of the handbook's forty-three chapters has a number of special features. These are short articles set in special boxes. Along with the main text in the chapters, these articles are intended to help you further study, pray, and live the Catholic faith. Following are descriptions of the special articles you'll see throughout the handbook:



PRAY IT!

LITURGY CONNECTION

Faith is celebrated in the Church's liturgy and sacraments. The "Liturgy Connection" articles you'll see in many chapters will help you see the relationship between Catholic beliefs and worship.

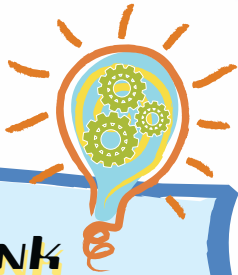


Faith becomes more alive by praying. In each chapter you'll see a short prayer just right for times when you are by yourself or when you are with a group of peers.



LIVE IT!

Being Catholic has to do with beliefs, but it also has to do with the way you live. The "Live It!" articles suggest ways you can put your faith into action.



THINK ABOUT IT!

Every chapter has a “Think About It!” article with questions for you to ponder on your own or discuss with your friends or family members.

Did You Know?

The many “Did You Know?” articles take topics from the chapter they appear in and explore it in more depth.

Looking Back

Sometimes a little history provides a better understanding of aspects of Catholic beliefs and practices. The “Looking Back” articles appear occasionally to provide you with this type of historical insight.

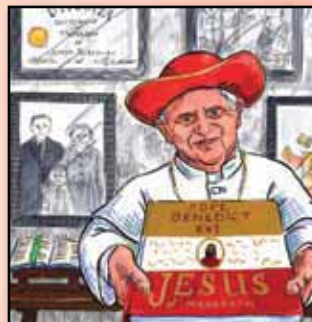
FUN FACT

The “Fun Fact” articles in every chapter are brief notes designed to inform and amuse.

PEOPLE OF FAITH



Try to imagine the Church without faithful people. It's impossible. This handbook introduces you to or reacquaints you with approximately twenty of the many people who have strengthened the Church and inspired others with their faith.



Catholic Prayers, Beliefs and Practices, Key Words, and Index

Several handy sections at the end of the handbook provide the following easy-to-access information:

- a collection of Catholic prayers
- a brief summary of core Catholic beliefs and practices
- a glossary of the handbook's key words
- an index for those times when you are searching for information about particular topics

The authors, and everyone at Saint Mary's Press who had a hand in creating this book, wish you many blessings as you use it to explore more deeply what it means to follow Jesus and to be a member of the Catholic Church.



PART I

God, REVELATION, AND FAITH

*I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,*

REVELATION, SCRIPTURES, AND TRADITION

It's Saturday morning. You wake up, turn on the TV, and start flipping through the channels. On the way to your favorite show, you find a preacher on one channel. He explains that the Creation story in the Bible happened just as it is written in the Bible. He insists that the world was created in only six days and that this should be taught in schools. Later that day, in the grocery store checkout line, a magazine cover tells why scientists support the idea that our universe began billions of years ago in a huge explosion. Inside, another article talks about how apes slowly changed over time to become human beings. At school on Monday, you find out that your newest friend at school is

an atheist—someone who doesn't believe in God. His mother has told him that people made up the idea of God so they wouldn't feel bad when people died.

In the beginning God created the world. A powerful hand shows God's role in the creation of the universe.



© Mike Agliolo/Corbis

There are so many different ideas. You begin to wonder about the things you have been taught. Is God really out there? How can you know?

Revelation

One place where you can begin to look for answers to these questions is under your own two feet. The earth itself is a sign of God's existence. In fact, you can find the evidence of God's handiwork everywhere: the trees that give you shade, the sun that warms your back, the dogs that bark in the distance, and of course, all the people around you. Though we do not fully understand God and his ways, we can use our minds to see that God truly exists because of the wonder of creation itself.

In fact, throughout all history, God has made himself known to human beings in a number of ways. He continues to do so today through the signs of creation around us, through the voice of the Church, and through the voices of our consciences speaking from within us. You may already have had an experience where God became known to you. Maybe after going to confession, you have felt the relief of having God remove the burden of your



PRAY IT!

Lord God,
I ask,
When I am lost, make
yourself known to me.
When I celebrate,
make yourself known
to me. When I am
lonely, make yourself
known to me. When
I am confused, make
yourself known to me.
When I am sick, make
yourself known to me.
When I am joyful, make
yourself known to me.
When I doubt you, make
yourself known to me.
When I am in need, make
yourself known to me.
When I pray, make yourself
known to me.

Amen

FUN FACT

Did you know that the Catholic Bible contains seven more books than many other Christian Bibles? The Old Testament books of Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch are all inspired by the Holy Spirit, and so they are included in all Catholic bibles.

guilty feelings and your sins. Maybe you have felt God's presence in the prayerful quiet of the church before Mass. If anything like this has ever happened to you, you know it comes as a gift. God makes himself known to us, because he loves us. Even more amazing, he wants to give himself to us so we know we are never alone.

What God has made known about himself and his plan for humanity is called **Revelation**. Throughout history God's Revelation has been made known through creation, events, and people but most especially through Jesus Christ. While it is certainly possible for one to have a personal experience of God, Revelation is communicated to the whole world in two main ways: the Scriptures and Tradition.

"Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Yes, here I am." God said, ". . . I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Exodus 3:4,6)

Did You Know?

The Case of the "Missing" Gospels

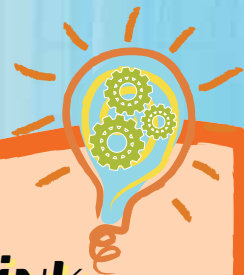
From time to time, in the newspaper or in other news media, you might hear about a newly discovered "gospel" or other ancient book that somehow mysteriously never made it into the Bible. Often, these articles or programs make it sound like leaving these books out of the Bible was an evil plot to hide a dark secret of the Church. Actually the truth is far less dramatic: early in the Church's history, these books were considered misleading or incomplete; they did not express the true faith of the Church. Eventually they were just forgotten.

The Scriptures and Tradition are distinct, yet very closely related. Both communicate or transmit the Word of God. The Scriptures and Tradition have been given to the Church to be kept safe and passed on so all generations will know God's Revelation. All believers share the responsibility for helping hand on what God has revealed through the Scriptures and Tradition.

God fully revealed himself by sending his only Son, Jesus Christ. There is nothing new that God needs to reveal until Christ comes again to establish a new heaven and new earth. But what the Father revealed through his Son needs to be explained and taught to all people. Teaching what God has revealed through Sacred Tradition and the Scriptures became the responsibility of the Apostles and their successors, the popes and bishops of the Church.

The Scriptures

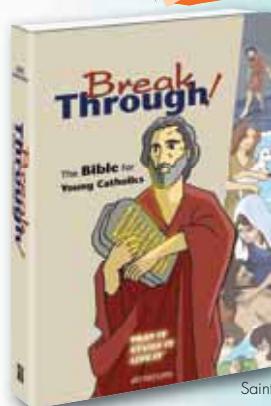
Sacred **Scriptures** are the seventy-three inspired books and letters we recognize as the Word of God. The Bible is another name for Sacred Scriptures. The Bible contains the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books that make up the New Testament. God is the ultimate author of the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the human



Think About It!

Sometimes people say God speaks to them.

If you were to ask them, though, whether they hear voices in their heads, they would probably say, "Of course not! I'm not crazy!" How does God communicate with us without using an actual voice? What are some things God might use to make his wishes known to us?



The Bible helps us discover who God is and how he relates to us. Do you ever get the chance to read the Bible?



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

We listen to God's Revelation every time we go to Mass. When we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word (the part of Mass when the Bible is proclaimed), God is revealed to us in a special way. In these readings we hear about what God has done for our salvation. We listen to how God led Moses and the Israelites out of slavery, how the prophets reminded the people of their promise to follow God, what Jesus taught and did, the stories about Jesus' death and Resurrection, and how the early Christians carried on Jesus' mission. In all these readings, God is revealed to be all powerful, loving, and forgiving. God always cares for his people, no matter what.

authors to communicate what God wants us to know for our salvation. That is, we learn how to be fulfilled in this life and how to spend eternity with God.

Four special books in the New Testament are called the **Gospels**. The word *gospel* means "good news." The Gospels are special because they tell us about the life, teachings, Passion (suffering), death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord, Jesus Christ. God's Revelation is complete in Jesus Christ.

The Bible often has accurate scientific facts and history, but we must be careful in looking for that kind of information. That is not what the original authors were trying to teach. Rather we look to the Bible for those truths that will assist our salvation. It is 100 percent correct when it tells us what we need to know for our salvation. God inspired the many different writers of the Bible to write down those truths he wanted to teach us. **Inspiration** is the fact that the Holy Spirit guided the Bible's authors to record without error what God wants us to know for our salvation.

Remember that even though the Holy Spirit guided these writers, they were still human beings. They wrote in ancient languages and lived in cultures different from ours. Just like us, they

had an incomplete understanding of the world. This sometimes makes the Scriptures hard to understand. Scholars study the Bible closely to find out exactly what its human authors intended to say. The Pope, our bishops, and our priests help us in understanding the Bible. Above all, we must ask the Spirit to guide us in understanding God's message of salvation.

Tradition

Unlike some other Christians, however, Catholics do not rely only on the Scriptures to discover God's Revelation. We also look to Tradition (with a capital T), which is sometimes called Sacred Tradition.

Tradition is based on a word meaning "to hand on." So, Tradition means both the central content of the Catholic faith and the way in which that content has been

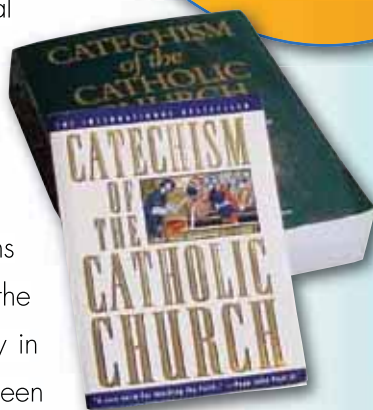


LIVE IT!

Despite what magazines in the grocery store checkout lines claim, prophets are not psychics who predict the future. Prophets are people who speak God's Word. In the Bible, the prophets reveal God's will to the people. Jesus Christ is the Word who became flesh, the ultimate prophet who was sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, we are anointed to share in Christ's prophetic ministry. We are all called to be prophets in some way. We are all called to speak God's Word.

That doesn't mean we have to preach on street corners, but it does mean our words and actions should reveal the faith we claim as our own. If someone were to follow you around for a day, would they be able to see God in the way you interact with your classmates?

If it were illegal to be a Catholic, how many of us would be found guilty?



This handbook is based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a summary of the central teachings of our Tradition. Read the handbook along with your Bible to discover who God is.

handed down through the centuries under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Did You Know?

The Flat Earth Under the Dome

The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the Bible, but they still had the same mistaken ideas about the earth as everyone else during the times they lived. For example, when the Book of Genesis was written, people believed the world was flat and covered by a giant dome. They believed water surrounded the dome. When the Creation stories were written, this incorrect scientific information was described. Whether the earth is as flat as a pancake or as round as a ball is not important when it comes to our salvation. God's creation of everything in the world out of love is important to our salvation. That truth is part of God's Revelation.

KEY WORDS

Revelation

Scriptures

Gospels

Inspiration

Tradition

Tradition is not the same thing as traditions (with a lowercase t).

You probably take part in a number of traditions. They might include things like when your family eats a certain kind of pie every year for your Thanksgiving meal, or school traditions where everyone wears the school colors to all the sporting events. The Tradition of the Catholic Church has some things in common with these, but it is still different.

Sacred Tradition started with the preaching of the Apostles. Some of this preaching was later written down in the Bible, but the Bible does not contain all of Sacred Tradition. Tradition includes our belief in the Trinity, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Seven Sacraments, and many other matters revealed through the teachings of the Pope and bishops under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through the Church's Scripture and Tradition, God actively helps us move toward salvation.

God's Mystery

While God does make himself known to us, we cannot expect to fully understand all of God's ways. We can come to know a lot about God, but we cannot completely grasp him. God is just too big for us to understand.

The Book of Job tells the story of a man named Job. Job was trying to understand why bad things were happening to him. At the end of the story, God asks him questions that no one but God could answer (see Job, chapter 38). Job then realizes something important. Even if we stand face to face with God, we will still never be able to understand some things (see Job 42:1–6).

*“At God’s command
amazing things happen,
wonderful things that we
can’t understand. . . .*

*God’s power is so great
that we cannot come near
him; he is righteous and
just in his dealings with
us. No wonder, then, that
everyone is awed by him.”
(Job 37:5,23–24)*

Looking Back

The Scriptures, Tradition, and the Ecumenical Councils

In the early 1500s, a German priest named Martin Luther began to teach that the Scriptures were the only necessary source of Christian truth. Shortly afterward all the bishops in the world gathered at the Council of Trent (1543–1565), in Italy, to respond to Luther's ideas. The bishops made clear that both the Scriptures and Tradition were necessary ways of passing on, or transmitting, God's Revelation. Ecumenical Councils such as the Second Vatican Council are official meetings of all the world's Catholic bishops with the approval of the pope. These councils are how the Church addresses important issues or questions that come up from time to time. The councils do not occur often. In fact, throughout the entire history of the Church, there have only been twenty-one Ecumenical Councils.

2

God THE FATHER

When you picture God in your mind, what do you see? Many people see an old man with white hair and a beard sitting on a throne in a cloud up in the sky. Is this what God really looks like? Not really. It seems that many of us have adopted this image of the Greek god Zeus, whom the stories about the ancient Greek gods describe just like this.

Michelangelo painted God as an old man with a white beard. What image comes to your mind when you think of God? What are some other ways to think about God?



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You might be curious why you have the image of this Greek god in your head when you think about the one, true God. Centuries ago, artists needed some way to portray God in their works, but the Bible contained no physical descriptions of God the

Father. Some painters used Zeus as the model because he was the most powerful of the Greek gods. The image of Zeus helped many people connect to some of the traits of God. That image has stuck with us. It is not wrong to picture God like this, just remember that it is an incomplete image of God. If God is not an old man with a white beard in the clouds, then who is God?

Who Is God?

If you were asked to describe a friend, you might answer in a few different ways. You could say something about her relationships to others (she is a daughter, a sister, and a friend). You might talk about what she does (she is a student and a softball player). Maybe you would say what kind of person she is (she is smart and kind). We get to know people through their relationships with others and by observing what they do and listening to what they say.

Whatever we know about God, we know because he revealed it to us. God first revealed his name to Moses. It is pretty simple, but very powerful: I AM. The Hebrew word for I AM is **Yahweh**. The name I AM or Yahweh reminds us how immense



PRAY IT!

God, our Father,
I understand so little
about you, but I know
a few things. You exist
beyond the farthest star,
but I also know you are
here with me now. I do
not know everywhere I
will go in the future, but I
do know I came from you.
I do not always understand
your ways, but I do know I
can trust you. I cannot even
guess how you came to be,
but I do know you will always
be with me. Thank you, God,
for being you. Amen.

and beyond us God truly is. I AM may seem like an incomplete sentence (“I am . . . what?”), but that is what makes the name so powerful. Think about all the possibilities that could complete this sentence: the who, what, when, where, how, and why. There are an infinite number of ways for God to be. God sustains every person, place, time, and condition that exists. At the same time, God exists beyond all people, places, times, and conditions.

God said, “I am who I am. You must tell them: “The one who is called I AM has sent me to you.” (Exodus 3:14)

FUN FACT

In the Bible, God often appears in the form of a cloud. When the Israelites escaped from Egypt, they followed a cloud. (See Exodus 13:20–22.) They camped in one place as long as the cloud covered the Tent of the Lord’s presence. (See Numbers 9:15–23.) In the New Testament, a cloud came over Jesus, Peter, James, and John and said, “This is my own dear Son!” (Matthew 17:5).

Many of our Jewish brothers and sisters do not even say this name of God. The ancient Israelites believed that naming someone or something gave one power over the person or thing. Out of respect for the name of God and for how beyond us he truly is, they substituted “LORD” for the name “Yahweh.”

Though God is so great and beyond us, he is still close to and intimate with us. He knows every hair on our heads and every passing thought that flows through our minds. The Book of Psalms says it best:

LORD, you have examined me
and you know me.

You know everything I do . . .

Where could I go to escape
from you?

Where could I get away
from your presence?

If I went up to heaven, you
would be there;

if I lay down in the world
of the dead, you
would be there . . .

When my bones were
being formed,
carefully put together in
my mother's womb,
when I was growing there
in secret,

you knew that I was there—
you saw me before I was born.

(Psalm 139:1,2,7-8,15-16)



LIVE IT!

When reading the Bible, you'll notice that God did not just create us and then run off. He continues to care for us with truth and love. We are also called to follow God's footsteps here. Our relationships with our friends, classmates, teachers, and family are not just created and left on their own. These relationships must also grow. The only way that will happen is if, like God, we are truthful and loving. We cannot have a real relationship with someone if it is based on lies and selfishness. Those relationships fall apart. Relationships based on love and honesty last . . . just like our relationships with God.

The author of Psalm 139 expresses how deeply God knows and loves each one of us—from the earliest days in our mother's womb.



Did You Know?

“Abba”: Jesus’ Name for His Father

In the Gospels, Jesus sometimes calls the Father “**Abba.**” The language Jesus spoke was Aramaic, and *abba* is the Aramaic word for “father.” This gives us an idea of the special bond Jesus has with his Father. The Father loves Jesus, much as a human father loves his children by protecting, feeding, and teaching them. Yet even the Bible sometimes portrays God’s motherly characteristics. “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you,” says the Lord (Isaiah 66:13, NRSV). Jesus teaches us to begin our prayers with “Abba” and to share in his special close relationship with God, “our Father.”

The Trinity

Long after God told Moses

his name was Yahweh, he revealed much more about himself.

He revealed that he is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three equally divine Persons who is the Holy Trinity. This is the central belief of all Christians. If

this sounds confusing, don’t be alarmed. (See more on the Trinity in chapter 3.) Even when

God reveals himself to us, he remains a **mystery.**

As hard as we try, we can’t fully understand God.

The Father

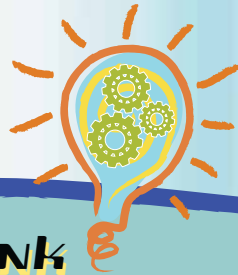
Let’s explore the first Person of the Trinity—God the Father. He is far beyond any image we can conjure up in our minds. When we pray the Creed, we call the Father “almighty.” No creature in the universe possesses more power. God the Father is all knowing

and is everywhere. Try to imagine that. Contrary to how he is often portrayed, the Father does not have a white beard. In fact, “he” is not even a man. On the other hand, God is not a woman either. The Bible portrays God as having both masculine and feminine qualities, but still God is neither male nor female. We praise God as a loving, powerful Father, at the same time recognizing that our picture of him is incomplete.

You might wonder why we call God “Father” and “he” if he is not male. Jesus calls him “Father,” and we do the same, referring to him as “he.” In calling God “Father,” Jesus expresses his unique relationship with him. “My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27).

We also call him “he” because we do not want to call God “it.” An

“My thoughts,” says the LORD, “are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours.” (Isaiah 55:8–9)



THINK ABOUT IT!

Jesus called the Father “Abba” or “Father” (see the article “Abba: Jesus’ Name for His Father”) and said we should also do this when we pray. Jesus tells us we should rely on God as children rely on their parents. How do you rely on your parents? How do they provide for you? What are some good things you have seen fathers do for their children? How is your relationship with God like a child’s relationship with his or her parents?

“it” names an object, not a person. God the Father is most certainly a distinct and special person, but unlike us, he is not a human being. Though this might seem obvious, it is important to note this difference between

God and us. We should remind ourselves that God’s ways are not human ways.

God the Father is not even old. The universe has been around for billions of years. You might think that because—as we confess in the Creed—he is the creator of the universe, he must be at least several billion years old, right? (See more on creation in chapter 4.) The only problem with this idea is that time itself is a part of God’s creation. God lives outside time, and because he created it, he is not limited or confined by it. If this boggles your mind, do not worry. It can baffle the most intelligent minds on our planet.

Logically, one could say that God created everything in the universe, but the next step backward is the difficult one. Who made God? The answer is that no one made God. God is not a created being, but rather one who is, always was, and always will be.



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

In Mass, have you ever noticed that most of our prayers are directed to God the Father? While our prayers do address Jesus Christ, his divine Son, they are mostly aimed at the Father. If you think about it, it makes sense. During Mass, we recall all the good things God the Father has done for us, including sending his Son. His Son, Jesus, is the greatest way for human beings to get to know the Father. We also thank God for doing this. But again, Jesus is a key part of our gratitude. We offer thanks to the Father in the same way we come to know the Father: “through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”



Looking Back

The One God of the Old and New Testament

In the second century AD, a man named Marcion thought the God of the New Testament could not be the same as the one in violent stories of the Old Testament. He argued that the loving and forgiving God was revealed only by Jesus in the New Testament. Marcion did not consider what the human authors of the Old Testament thought about God. The Old Testament writers pictured him this way because they thought of God as a warrior who protected his people when they were good. Without considering the intentions of the human authors, people like Marcion can misunderstand the Scriptures. The Church Fathers (the leaders of the early Church) declared that Marcion was incorrect and emphasized that there is only one true God of both the Old and New Testaments.

If this somehow doesn't make sense, again do not worry. This is why we call God a mystery. A religious mystery is not like a story the reader has just not figured out. Rather this kind of **mystery** refers to a truth so big that no human being can completely know or understand it.

God Is Truth and Love

Throughout time, God has revealed himself to us. He is Yahweh. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three divine Persons in one being. He is Truth and Love.

God is Truth simply because what he tells us is true. We can trust God's Word. God is someone we can count on, more than even the most trusted human being you know. God always keeps his promises.

God is also Love. First and foremost, God created us out of love. God is like a husband and wife

“Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

who become parents so they can share their love with their child. God's love does not end at creation, though. The Bible is filled with stories describing what God has done for us. Even though we human beings have failed to keep our part of the bargain, God forgives us and continues to be faithful to his people. Most important, God became man out of love for us. The Father gave his only Son and sent his Spirit to be with us always. There is no greater sign of love than this.

KEY WORDS

Yahweh
mystery
Abba

Imagine being held in the arms of God! God holds each one of us in his loving embrace, as a mother loves her child.



Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, "the Father loves each one of us with a passionate love, and holds us in His tender embrace," copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk

THE HOLY TRINITY



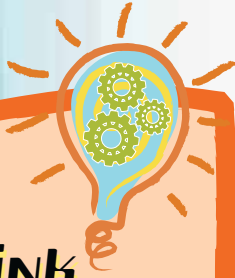
Think of the many different ways you have reached out to God in the past. There may have been times when you wanted the comfort of the all-knowing Father, who could help you see everything was going to be okay. Maybe you wanted someone who could move mountains and change lives. Other times you may have reached out to God when you were confused. Maybe you wanted God to inspire you or reveal his wishes to you. Of course there were times when you just wanted God to know you were in pain. Alone or sad, you wanted God just

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:13)



We share in the life and love of the Trinity. Pictures like this one help us to imagine our relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God.

Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, "Sharing the life of the Holy Trinity," copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk



Think About It!

When making the Sign of the Cross, we say, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We also move our hands in the shape of a cross on our head, chest, and shoulders. Why do you think the Sign of the Cross connects the Trinity and Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross? How are each of the three divine Persons of the Trinity connected to Jesus’ death, Resurrection, and Ascension?

to be there with you. It is like having a friend to listen to you—someone who has gone through the same pain and suffering as you. The good news is that God is all of these!

One God, Three Persons

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” How many times have you said or heard these words? Have you ever really thought about what the phrase means? During Mass on Sundays, Catholics stand to say the Creed. Together we state, “We believe in one God . . . ” But if someone thinks the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate individuals, he or she would be misunderstanding the central aspect of our faith.

The earliest Christians were Jewish followers of Jesus. Because they were Jewish, they knew there could be only one God.

One of the most basic prayers of the Jewish faith is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, as follows: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (6:4–5, NRSV). Yet these Jewish Christians knew that Jesus was the Son of God and was one with

the Father. They were also aware that the Hebrew Scriptures—our Old Testament—spoke of the Spirit of God. Through these experiences, they realized that the one true God revealed himself as three Persons: the Trinity.

In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things. (John 1:1–3)

The central mystery of our Christian life and faith is the Trinity. God has made himself known to us in the three divine Persons of the **Trinity**: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet these three Persons are all one God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be separated from one another. If this seems confusing, do not worry! This belief is a mystery—something beyond the ability of human beings to understand completely.

The Trinity is not divided into three parts. For example, a baseball team is made up of a pitcher, catcher, first baseman, and so on. When all nine players are assembled, you have a complete baseball team. This is not so for the Trinity.



PRAY IT!

In the name of the
Father, who created
everyone I love and all I
know; and of the Son,
who became a human be-
ing like me, and showed
me the right way to live;
and of the Holy Spirit,
who inspires me with
courage and creativity;
you are my one God.
In you I place my trust.

Amen

FUN FACT

The Bible often refers to God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but it never uses the word *Trinity* to describe them. Instead, this word comes from Sacred Tradition. All the major Christian traditions believe in the Trinity.

Each Person of the Trinity does not make up one-third of the whole God. Instead, the complete presence of God can be found in each of them. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be separated from one another.

If you have ever watched a pair of truly great dancers in action, it almost seems as if you are watching just one dancer. They move in complete harmony together. When one dancer lifts the other, it seems as if there is no effort. Each move flows naturally into the next. It seems as though the two blend into one single dancer.

In a similar, but far more real, way, the three Persons of the Trinity live in complete harmony. They are distinct Persons, yet they are completely united. Unlike the dancers, they are not united just by their actions. They are also united by what they are: one divine being.

KEY WORDS

Trinity
God the Father
Son of God
Holy Spirit

The Work of the Trinity

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Therefore all the works of God are done by all three Persons. However, some of God's works are more strongly associated with either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

God the Father is the first Person of the Blessed Trinity. When we say God created the earth, we tend to think of God the Father as the Creator. This is true, but remember, it is also true that the Son and the Holy Spirit created the world. Like a parent, the Father is the source from which life comes. It is natural to think of God the Father when we think of the Creator.

God the Son is the second person of the Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ. The

Son of God is the title often given to Jesus Christ. We also call Jesus Christ the "Savior" to recognize his saving actions on our behalf. But we cannot forget that the Father and the Holy Spirit also save us.

Did You Know?

The Sign of the Cross

Christians have been making the Sign of the Cross for almost two thousand years. In the early days of Christianity, Christians moved their thumbs across their foreheads in the shape of a cross. It was a reminder to carry the cross of Christ in their lives. In other words, we are called to sacrifice ourselves to help others. During the times and in the places Christianity was illegal, making the Sign of the Cross became a secret way for Christians to recognize one another. Today, we Catholics often make the Sign of the Cross when we enter the Church. We dip our fingers into the holy water to make the Sign of the Cross. It reminds us of our Baptisms.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. . . . The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. (1 Corinthians 12:4,7)

The Trinity is a never-ending circle of love. Family members mirror the love of the Trinity when they share love with one another. What if the whole world knew about this circle of love?



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God the **Holy Spirit** is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, who inspires, guides, and makes the lives of the believers holy. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are truly given by the Father and the Son too. Yet it is proper to recognize the gifts as being from the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity Is a Communion

Because God is three divine Persons in one, the Trinity is the communion of those three persons. Another way of saying this is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are completely in union with each other. They communicate perfectly and are in perfect harmony.

Because the Trinity is a perfect communion of the three divine Persons, we can see how the Trinity

is the perfect community. The love and unity that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share are so perfect that they flow out to us. Our families share in this love and community. The love of a mother and father extends past themselves to the children they share. When they do this, that love can extend even past the family. The love in our families should flow out in service to the rest of the community and the entire world.



LIVE IT!

The Trinity is a community that lives in complete harmony, unity, and love. Unlike the Trinity, human families are not perfect communities. But you can work toward creating a home of harmony, unity, and love by doing some simple things. For example, you might do your chores without being asked. This might seem like a typical corny response an adult would give. But what would happen if you did? Your parents would quit riding your back about taking out the trash. You wouldn't have to listen to them complain. The house would smell a lot better too! Doesn't that sound like a more harmonious community to you? This is only one way of making a home of unity, harmony, and love.

However you do it, it will take some work, but the payoff is divine!

“Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19–20)

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Patrick



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Saint Patrick was born in the fourth century AD in what later became Britain. As a youth Patrick was kidnapped and taken to Ireland, where he became the slave of a warlord for several years. At that time Ireland was a rough place to live. The Irish tribes were often at war, slavery was common, and human sacrifice was practiced. After several years, Patrick either escaped or was released. He returned home,



Saint Patrick used a shamrock to teach people about the Trinity. What does a shamrock have in common with the Trinity?

where he soon became a Christian priest. Later Patrick returned to Ireland, the land of his former captors, to preach the Gospel. This was an extremely brave step. Ireland certainly had been a difficult place for him earlier, and at that time, few people had traveled to such a foreign place to convert others to Christianity. He bravely went and later was appointed the Bishop of Ireland.

Patrick planted the seeds of Christianity in Ireland. Over the next few decades, the practices of both slavery and human sacrifice ended in Ireland. Legends say Patrick used a shamrock to explain the Trinity to the Irish people. Like the three Persons united in one God, the shamrock is made up of three leaves united to make this single, unique plant. Today Patrick is remembered for his courage, his strong faith, and of course, the shamrock—the symbol he used to teach about the one true God.

4

CREATION

A falling star in the night sky away from city lights. A beaver building a dam. People doing good things for others. Friends having fun together. A family gathering to celebrate a special occasion. Have these or any other things ever made you recognize God's goodness? Have you ever wondered where everything that exists has come from? Have you wondered why you exist or where you came from? Do you sometimes question where the world is headed or where life is taking you?

Beautiful
scenes of
nature are
like billboards
from God:
See how much
I love you! I
created a world
this awesome
for you!



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In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. (Genesis 1:1–3, NRSV)

The first line of the Bible is a good place to begin looking for some answers. Genesis 1:1 proclaims that God created the heavens and the earth. **“Heaven and earth”** is a way of referring to the entire universe. This passage from Genesis says God is the creator of all that exists. Everything depends on God. He created out of nothing and without help. The universe is not the result of fate or blind chance.

Scientists work on figuring out the physical nature of the universe. This includes trying to determine how big it is, how old it is, and what chemicals make it up. Why did God create the universe, the earth, and all living things? Why did God create us? Science can’t answer these questions. The good news is that God can answer them. He has revealed to us that he created everything because of love.

God didn’t have to create the world. It was a free choice motivated by love. He wanted to share his love with his creatures. That includes you. **Creation** is a gift, and all creation is



PRAY IT!

Lord,
God of all
creation,
thank you for
everything you
have created and
everything you have
given me. Help me
recognize my own
goodness. Continue to
bless me and everyone
else as we strive to
understand your will
for our lives and as we
care for all creation.

Amen

good. God wants everyone to share in his wisdom, beauty, and goodness and to live in union with him.

He desires a personal, loving relationship with everyone. He created the world and all of us so we might share in his glory.



THINK ABOUT IT!

Catholics are called to be “co-workers” with God in the work of creation. What does this mean? Identify some examples of things people your age can do that help make the world around us what God wants it to be.

Why Does Evil Exist?

The things that help us recognize the goodness of God’s creation are only part of the reality we know. Our world includes evil too. We see signs of this in such things as war and violence, people doing selfish and hateful things, nature spoiled by pollution, and people in many parts of the world suffering because they lack food, shelter, and other necessities. Why does evil exist when God created everything to be good? If you have ever wondered about this question, you are not alone.

Part of the mystery of creation is that God makes good things happen, even in evil situations. This doesn’t turn evil into goodness. It does, however, give us confidence that God would not allow an evil to happen if it were not possible for something good to come of it. Even though we can expect to continue to struggle to understand why evil exists, we trust that we will fully understand God’s plan after we die. We’ll see God face to face and come to understand his ways of guiding the world.

Our trust and hope are rooted in Jesus Christ. His suffering and death on a cross—his execution—were great evils, but that was not the end of the story. An amazing good followed. Jesus was raised from the dead. He invites us to share in his new life.

We know that the final end to evil has not yet happened, but we live with the faith that it will. At that time God’s plan for the world and for us will be fully realized.

KEY WORDS

Heaven and earth
creation
angels

Sin

One reason helps explain why some evil exists, and that reason is human sin. God created all people, “making them to be like himself” (Genesis 1:26). Another way to say this is we are created in God’s image. This means we were created for love. For our love to be genuine, it must be something we freely choose to do. Think about it. If loving behavior is simply programmed into us, it isn’t really love, is it?



Most of us are not major polluters. But any sin is like poisoning the delicate balance in the environment of love God created. Even a small sin has a ripple effect. Can you think of an example?

Because we have the freedom to choose to love, we also have the freedom to choose the opposite. We can choose to do things that are unloving. These choices separate us from God and from one another.

Another word for this type of action is *sin*. Sins also include things we should do but choose not to. Our sins can lead to results that harm other people and God's creation. Unfortunately, sin is a reality that affects us all.

Adam and Eve, our first parents, whom we hear about in the Book of Genesis, rejected God's love in the Garden of Eden. By doing this they disrupted God's plan for creation. The good news, however, is that God did not abandon us as a result. His plan for creation continues to unfold in history. God's creation is not finished yet. He continues to work to bring about the loving relationships he desires.

The high point of God's plan for creation is Jesus Christ. God became man to save us. Christ is sometimes called the "new creation," because he came to give us new life. He came to restore and deepen our union with God.



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

Notice the bread and wine as they are carried to the altar during the Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts next time you are at Mass. These are God's gifts to us more than our gifts to God. We are simply giving back to God the things he has already given us. The gifts are from the earth (the grain for the bread) and the vine (the grapes for the wine). They are also the work of human hands, because we work to make bread from grain and wine from grapes. These gifts are signs of the goodness of God and of our cooperation with God. They are signs of our dependence on God's creation for our physical lives—just as we depend on God for our spiritual lives.

The Journey of Creation

It is helpful to keep in mind that creation is not simply one event that happened a long time ago. God's love and presence are never-ending, and his work of creation keeps going. One way to imagine this is to think of the universe on a journey. God has a map for the journey and is guiding creation to a final end. Can you imagine all things being perfect and everyone being completely happy? This is the destiny of the human race. Everything has been created for us. This means that among all creatures, human beings are most valuable in God's eyes. This special place in creation comes with a responsibility.

Did You Know? The Role of the Trinity in Creation

When Catholics talk about God as Creator, we are referring to all three Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We associate Creation most closely with God the Father, but it is important to remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together are one God. If we think of the Father creating alone, we can make the mistake of thinking Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit came into being after the Father and are not one with him, even today. Saint Irenaeus offers a helpful image. He emphasizes that creation is the work of all three Persons of the Trinity by referring to the Son and the Spirit as the hands of the Father. God the Father keeps the universe going through his Word, Jesus Christ, and through the creative power of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

An equilateral triangle is sometimes used as a symbol for the Trinity. The three sides are the same length. They indicate that all three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—are equal. The one triangle emphasizes that the Persons are unified and that they are one God.

FUN FACT

Science confirms that creation isn't finished. Every second, the universe grows larger, and the rate of growth keeps getting faster.

We trust in God's plan, but that doesn't mean we go about our lives just waiting for it to unfold. We have a part to play. We have a special role on this journey. We must keep our eyes open so we recognize God's presence in our lives and the world around us. What's more, we are called to cooperate with God and be his coworkers. This means we share in the responsibility of helping the world around us be what God wants it to be—a place where love rules. Our challenge is to think about God's desires for the world and all his creatures. We must make choices about our relationships and our care of the earth that are in line with God's will. We don't do this on our own, however, apart from God. Through the Holy Spirit, God is always at work in our actions.

“I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals.”
(Genesis 1:28)

God created the world, and it was good. How do we help one another to restore the world to a place of peace and harmony where love rules? Why is care of the earth so important to peace among all God's people?



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The Visible and the Invisible

When we say the Nicene Creed, we describe God as the maker of both what is visible and what is invisible. We recognize there is more to creation than the material things we can see and touch. Knowing of an invisible part of reality opens us up to the miraculous. It helps us understand that God is present and at work, even if we do not see any signs. Although we must be careful about making too many assumptions about the invisible aspects of creation, we know about one thing for certain: the existence of **angels.**

Did You Know?

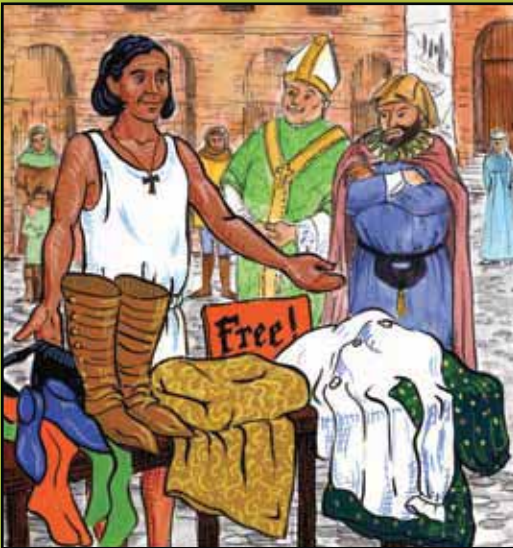
Creation and Creationism

Perhaps you have heard the word *creationism* in news stories about how the creation of the world is covered in public school classrooms. Creationists read the Bible like a science textbook and believe that the accounts of the Creation in Genesis are scientifically accurate. Creationists believe God created everything in a matter of days. This leads them to completely discount evolution, the scientific theory that life has changed over time from earlier forms of life. Catholic teaching about Creation is different from creationism. Catholics don't read Genesis like a science textbook. The biblical authors didn't write scientific reports. If we read them that way, we miss the main points and set up unintended conflicts between faith and science.

Angels are as real as you and me, but they are beings of spirit, not matter. They have intelligence, will, and individuality, and they are immortal. The word *angel* comes from a Greek word that means “messenger.” Angels are God’s servants and messengers. They glorify God without ceasing and watch over each of us every moment of our lives.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Francis of Assisi



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Can you imagine giving away your possessions and choosing to live in poverty? That’s just what Saint Francis did. He was born into a wealthy family in Italy in the twelfth century AD. Early in his life, Francis wanted to be popular and wealthy. In his twenties he spent time as a prisoner of war and then had a serious illness. While he was recovering, he had a dream that urged him to follow Jesus.



LIVE IT!

Keep a camera with you for a few days and snap photos of things that offer glimpses of the goodness of creation. Create a slide show or photo collage and share it with friends or family.

Francis felt called to live more as Jesus had lived. His values changed, and he started to live in a simpler way. He began to spend more of his time praying, preaching, and giving to the poor. Francis's father, a successful cloth merchant, wasn't happy with his son's new way of life. After Francis sold some expensive cloth from the family business to raise funds to rebuild a chapel, his father took him to court. Francis repaid the money, gave back his fine clothes, and gave up his share of his family's wealth. Many people were attracted to Francis's preaching and his simple manner of living and began to follow him. This community evolved into the religious order known today as the Franciscans.

Francis is known also for his love of creation, including animals. He is the patron saint of environmentalists. We celebrate his feast day on October 4.

S

THE HUMAN PERSON

Steven was a seven-year-old boy much like most other kids his age. There was one big difference, though. Most days after school, when his friends went home to play, Steven went to the hospital for regular medical treatments. Steven had leukemia, a type of cancer that lived in his blood.

When they first found out about his illness, Steven and his family were angry. They wondered why God would let this happen to him. The young boy did not

Have you ever considered why bad things, like the serious illness of a child, often bring out the best in families and communities?



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do anything to deserve it. But as time moved along, Steven and his family became amazed by all the help they received. They no longer thought much about why it had happened. Family members, friends, classmates, teachers, church members, doctors, nurses, and many other people helped him and his family. Even people whom Steven had never met played a big role in helping him regain his health.

After a while, Steven and his family were no longer angry with God. They no longer spent their time wondering why this had happened to Steven. They were just grateful to God for the help that came from so many good people.

Being Human

Being human is a confusing, joyful, exciting, and painful experience. There is so much to experience in a single lifetime. We are so busy doing things, we often forget to stop and look at the meaning of the events that occur.

Being human means a number of things. First of all, it means we are not God. We are limited to our own experiences and cannot see things from God's perspective. We do not always understand why things happen the way they do, especially the difficult or painful times. Being human also means we are not perfect. We all make bad decisions sometimes.

FUN FACT

In the Book of Genesis, the name that God gives the first human being is Adam. This is an appropriate name because *Adam* comes from the Hebrew word for "man." Eve's name is just as appropriate, because it comes from a Hebrew word that means "life."

PRAY IT!

God,
Everything you have
created is good.

Every human
being is your child,
including me.

Like all human
beings, I am good
because I am made to
be like you.

Even when I do
something wrong, you
love me.

Please give me the cour-
age to do what you have
created me to do.

Help me see others as
you see them.

Help me forgive others as
you forgive them.

Help me love others as
you love me.

Amen.

Having fun with
friends gives us a
sign of how God
made us—to be in
relationship with
one another.

Being human is not all dark and dreary. It means we are not alone. More than six billion of us live here on earth. We have one another to be our friends, families, and companions. Being human also means we are made in God's image. We all have the ability to love and care for one another. For the most part, that is what we do.

We Are Both, Not Just One

The **human person** is a living being made up of both a physical body and an immortal, spiritual soul. A **soul** is the spiritual element that gives humans life and survives after death. Our soul is created by God at the moment of conception. After our death our soul will be reunited with our resurrected body at the final Resurrection. It is important to remember that humans are not just physical bodies. God created us to be both body and soul, existing together in perfect unity.



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You may notice that many young people look like their parents in some way. They might have similar-sounding voices or similar facial features. Sometimes they have the same color eyes or hair. That is because physical bodies are determined to a great extent by the parents' genes. When God made Adam, he formed the soil into his body and then breathed life into him (see Genesis 2:7). Like Adam, we also have God's breath or spirit within us. Each of us has a soul that comes from God and that is united with our bodies when we are conceived in our mothers' wombs. Although our bodies will one day get old and die, our souls never will.

When God created Adam, he did not want Adam to be alone, so God created a companion for him. God does not want us to be alone, either. Just as the Trinity is a communion of Persons in loving relationship with each

Did You Know?

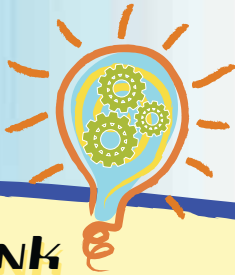
Not Just Our Souls

The Catholic Church is concerned not only with things like praying and going to church. The Church cares about all different parts of human life. For example, in 1891, Pope Leo XIII demanded that working people be paid appropriately and treated with dignity by their employers. In 1963, Pope John XXIII wrote a letter that addressed human rights, freedom, and world peace. In 1995, Pope John Paul II addressed a number of human life issues, such as abortion and the death penalty. In 2007, the Vatican (the Church's headquarters) even gave us ten commandments for driving to encourage us to be safe and responsible when we are in our cars. Because human beings are both physical and spiritual, the Church cares about all parts of human life, not just our souls.

So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. . . . God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased. (Genesis 1:27,31)

other, we are created to be in loving relationships with other people. The biggest evidence of this is that God created human beings to be male and fe-

male. Men and women are created to be equal but still different. Men are particularly good at some things. Women are especially good at others. God created us so men and women would need each other and bond together in close relationships. The Bible's story of Creation explains why human beings need communities, especially families.



Think About It!

God is not male or female.
God is not a human being.
God does not even have the same kind of physical presence humans have. But you are made in the image of God. There is something special about you that is like God. What makes you like God? What can you do that is similar to what God does?

Original Sin

The story of Adam and Eve explains how human beings were meant to live and how we fell away from God's plan. Adam and Eve represent the first human beings. At first, Adam and Eve were at peace with God and every living thing on the earth. They were happy and free. There was no pain or suffering.

Adam and Eve had only one rule to follow. God said, "You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is

bad” (Genesis 2:16–17). Tempted by the serpent, they thought that by eating from this tree, they could know what God knows. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. The first parents of the human race wrongly decided they could be happy without God and his guidance.

As a result, human beings were banished from the Garden of Eden. We separated ourselves from God. Because of Adam and Eve’s choice, they and every human being since then—except Jesus and Mary—no longer has had that same perfect relationship with God. We have lost the freedom and the holiness human beings were meant to have.

This condition is called **Original Sin**. Original Sin means two things. First of all, it is the sin that Adam and Eve committed. Second, it is the sinful condition that all human beings have from birth. The first human beings’ own wrongdoing wounded them. Now no one is able to enjoy that perfect relationship with God that Adam and Eve once had. This wound, or the sinful condition of Original Sin, has now been passed on to every human being.

A **temptation** is something that makes sinful things seem fun, exciting, or even good to do. Original Sin makes it hard for human beings to say no to temptation. For example, have you ever seen someone drop money from a pocket while walking away? If no one was nearby, you might have felt the temptation to pick up the money and keep it. Original

KEY WORDS

human person

soul

Original Sin

temptation

Sin is what makes us want to be selfish rather than do what is good. It makes us think of our own pleasure instead of doing what is right.

You might think that having Original Sin is not fair. Since the time of Adam and Eve, not one person has done anything to deserve Original Sin. It is much like the sick boy in the introduction to this chapter. He did not do anything to deserve the disease he had. He didn't learn how or decide to be sick. We sometimes do not know why some people get illnesses. Similarly, how Original Sin is transmitted is a mystery we do not fully understand. But we do know that it is passed on from one generation to the next. Except for Jesus and his mother, Mary, it is a sin that affects every person, not a sin that we have committed.

Even though we all have the wound of Original Sin, we are not born evil. We are still created in God's image and have the desire to be united with God and to be good. Even though Original Sin affects us all, it does not stop us from returning to God.

"Everybody does it."

The temptation to cheat is an example of how Original Sin affects all of us. But the truth is we were born to be good. As Jesus said, "The truth will set you free."



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Coming from God, Heading Toward God

Have you ever been away from home for a long time? Then you might know what it feels like to be homesick and want to return to the place where you are loved and things are familiar. This is also true in people's spiritual lives. Being with God is our true home. Returning to God is what will make us happy. Our worries and spiritual restlessness are kinds of spiritual homesickness.

This is why we have the Church. Human beings are all religious in the sense that we are all trying to find our spiritual homes. It is our job to help ourselves and others realize that being with God is our true home. This does not mean God has left us. Even though we cannot physically see him, God is still with us.

Christ is the model of the perfect human being. It is our destiny to live as he did. Christ may be invisible to us, but we can see Christ at work when people do his will.



PRAY IT! Liturgy Connection

During Mass comes a moment when the priest pours a little bit of water into the wine. As he does this, he whispers something that usually the people in the church cannot hear. He says, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." This mixing of the water and wine is a gesture that reminds us that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, became one of us. The priest is also saying humans are supposed to share in the divinity of Christ. We do that by receiving the Eucharist and also by living our faith so one day we will once again be in union with God.

There is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all. (Ephesians 4:6)



LIVE IT!

Every human being is made in the image of God. This is one of the most important things to remember when dealing with other people, especially people you do not like. It is easy to see the good in your friends and in those who do nice things for you. But God asks us to be good even to those whom we do not like. For example, when people insult you, it hurts. You might want to strike back in the same way they hurt you. But when you do this, you have sunk to their level. You have done the same thing they did. If you were to respond with understanding and kindness, though, you would acknowledge that these people are worthy of the same respect you deserve. When you do this, you allow them to see the image of God within you.

The doctors and nurses who help people battle illnesses are examples of how we can see the work of our invisible God. By doing God's will, we can become the way others are able to see God's work. The following prayer, thought to be written by Saint Teresa of Ávila, says it best:

An act of kindness is one way of being Christ's Body here on earth. When we help others, we are being the people God created us to be.



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Christ has no body now but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which
Christ's compassion must look out on the world;
Yours are the feet with which
He is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which
He is to bless us now.



Looking Back

Created from Love, for Love

The Book of Genesis has two different Creation stories. The first story is about the seven days of Creation. It was written around the sixth century B.C. At that time the Israelites had been captured and were being held in Babylon. There they learned about the Babylonian creation story. It is a fierce tale where many gods battle one another to create the universe. The Babylonians believed that one of their gods, Marduk, made human beings from the blood vessels of a demon. Their creation story teaches that humans were made simply to be slaves to the gods. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Israelites responded by writing the beautiful Creation stories that reveal what the true God is like. The world and human beings were created out of love, not from violence and bloodshed. We are created in God's image, not as slaves but rather to be God's partners in caring for creation.

6

God's PLAN FOR SALVATION

Trust is an extremely important part of life. We trust people so often that we often do not even think about it. We trust that our parents will have food for us to eat. We trust that our teachers will tell us the correct information. We trust that other drivers will obey the traffic laws. We trust that our friends will keep our private talks a secret. To ensure this trust, we sometimes make promises to each other.

Imagine what life would be like if you could trust no one. What would be different about getting in a

Trust is one of the most important qualities in a friendship. Our relationship with God is one friendship we can always trust. He always keeps his promises.



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car? How would your friendships change if you could not trust anyone with your secrets? What would it be like if you could not count on your parents to provide for you? Sooner or later, you would probably become isolated and lonely. You would travel less. talk less. rely on others less.

Fortunately, God is not like that. God is someone we can trust. Trusting God brings us closer to him. Throughout history he has made promises that he keeps. On the other hand, we human beings have not always kept our part of the bargains. That is when things fall apart. Despite our sins and weaknesses, God is always faithful in his promise to save us from sin and death. We can trust God, because he has always been faithful to his promises.

Salvation History

Salvation history is the pattern of events in human history through which God makes his presence and saving actions known to us. If you think about it, that includes all of history—everything that's already happened and everything that will happen in the future. The Bible reveals God's plan for salvation by focusing on his Chosen People in the Old Testament and on Jesus Christ in the New Testament.



PRAY IT!

God,
People are not perfect.
My parents make
mistakes.

My friends do not always
do what they promise.

Teachers tell us to act
one way, but even they
sometimes act differently.

I am glad I have you to
trust.

Even though I do not always
understand your ways,

I know you keep your
promises.

Thank you.

Amen

FUN FACT

When God makes a covenant with someone, the person's name is often changed. The new name symbolizes the new relationship with God. For example, Abram became Abraham and his wife, Sarai, became Sarah. Jacob took on the name Israel.

Imagine a timeline where we could see the ups and downs of salvation history as told in the Bible. It would probably look like a roller coaster. Though God is always faithful to his promises, his Chosen People were not always faithful to their promises. There were the times when they followed God's will. When this happened, things tended to work out better. When they did not follow God's will, life got pretty difficult.

“When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth.” (Genesis 9:16)

We human beings today still are not always faithful to our covenant with God. We are still on this roller coaster ride. We can count on one thing. Although human beings do not always hold up their end of the bargain, God keeps his promises.

God chose a rainbow as a sign of the promise he made with all living things that he would never again destroy the earth.



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God Gives Second Chances

In the Old Testament, we can read about the first promises and covenants God made with people. When God created Adam and Eve, he made them a promise. They would live in happiness with him forever, as long as they obeyed him. Sadly, Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree. Then they were driven out of the Garden of Eden. Humans had separated themselves from God.

This does not mean God abandoned them. He still loved Adam and Eve. But as time passed, God became more and more unhappy with human conduct. He was angry at everyone except for a man named Noah. With a flood God wiped out all the human wickedness

Did You Know?

Jesus Christ Saves All

Did you know the Catholic Church does not condemn the people of non-Christian religions? Salvation is possible for anyone, whether they are Catholic or not. Christ is the savior of all people. The Church has stated that non-Christians who “sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do his will” may achieve eternal salvation (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium]*, number 16). This does not mean every religion is equal. The full truth and grace needed for salvation can be found only in the Catholic Church. It does mean no one is out of reach for God in his plan of salvation.

KEY WORDS

salvation history
covenant
Ten Commandments

from the earth. Afterward, only Noah and his family remained.

God then made a covenant with Noah. A

covenant is a sacred agreement between people, or between God and a human being, where everyone vows to keep a promise forever. God promised Noah never to destroy the human race with a flood again. The Bible identifies the rainbow as the symbol of that covenant.

Despite their sins, God still promised salvation to his people. Like a good parent, he cares for his children. He gives them a second chance. Even when we do something wrong, God still loves us. He continues to give all of us second chances when we do something wrong.



Think About It!

When God appears, it can be scary. When God makes his covenant with Abraham, the Bible says “fear and terror came over him” (Genesis 15:12). When Jonah hears God, he runs the other way (See Jonah 1:3). When Jesus’ disciples hear God on the mountaintop, they “were so terrified” (Matthew 17:6). God speaks because he wants us to know something new or act differently. That can be scary. What do you think God wants you to do differently? Why might that be scary?

God’s Covenant with Abraham

Throughout history God has called certain individuals to lead his people back to him. The first of these is Abraham, the father of our faith, from whom God established his people. When God calls Abraham, both he and his wife, Sarah, are already old. They never were able to have children.

God makes a covenant with Abraham. He promises to give him land and many descendants, who will be a blessing to all people. In return, Abraham promises to be faithful to God. Abraham's many descendants became God's people, the Israelites.

One of the most important Israelites was Moses. Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. After the Israelites escaped into the desert, Moses received the laws from God. Through Moses, God told the Israelites how he wanted them to live. These laws guided all parts of the Israelites' daily lives and were their part of the Covenant promise they made with God. The **Ten Commandments** are the summary of these laws that guide people on how God wants us to live.

And the LORD said to himself, "I will not hide from Abraham what I am going to do. His descendants will become a great and mighty nation, and through him I will bless all the nations." (Genesis 18:17–18)



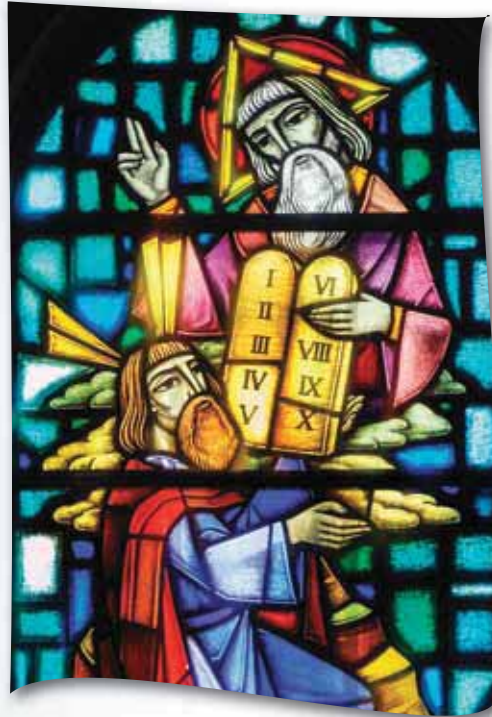
PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

Every year the Easter Vigil is celebrated on the Saturday evening before Easter Sunday. It begins the Church's remembrance of Jesus' Resurrection. It is also special for two other reasons. First, we welcome new members into the Church on this night. Second, during the Easter Vigil, we also recall God's saving actions throughout history. There are as many as seven readings from the Bible. They recall the seven days of Creation, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, the prophets pointing the way toward the Messiah, and Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection.

In this liturgy we get an overview of God's plan of salvation. The Easter Vigil is a dramatic thanksgiving for all God has done for us. Next Easter ask your parents to take you.

The Ten Commandments are as important today as they were in the time of Moses. They are like a Top Ten list for living in good relationship with God and with each other.



God Fulfills His Promise

All through history, God has been faithful to his promise of salvation. When we human beings have gone astray, he has sent his prophets to guide us. In his greatest act of salvation, God became one of us. In the New Testament, we can read how he fully revealed himself by sending his only Son. Through his Son, Jesus Christ, he established the covenant forever. This is sometimes called the New Covenant, but it is really the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Noah, Abraham, and the Chosen People. You will read much more about Jesus in later chapters.

The Good News that God's promise of salvation was now fulfilled in Jesus Christ was preached to everyone. Jesus gave his Apostles the power to carry on his mission. They passed on their work to others. They passed it down too. This continued down through the centuries all the way to us today. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church and will do so until Christ returns. When Christ returns, God's promise of salvation will be complete.



LIVE IT!

There are no excuses when it comes to doing God's work. Some of the greatest figures in the Bible seem at first like they aren't well suited to what God asks of them. Abraham and Sarah are too old to have children. Yet God chooses them to be the parents of a new nation. Moses is a poor speaker. God still makes him God's spokesman. The prophet Jeremiah says he is too young. Yet God knows he will become a great leader.

You are also a part of God's plan of salvation. You have a special task to do. Each morning think of one thing you can do to help another person. You could make sure your car is always stocked with bottled water ready to hand out to someone in need. You could help a friend prepare for a test. There are countless possibilities, even if at first you don't think you're the right person for the job.

1

FAITH: Responding TO God

Often people say you need to have faith. They tell each other, "Keep the faith" or "Have faith in God." Has anyone ever asked you the question "Do you have faith in God?" Have you ever considered what your response would be? Maybe your first thought was, "Yes. Of course I do!" If so, that is a fine answer. Maybe this is the first time you have ever thought about it, and you do not have a quick answer. That is okay too. Having faith does not mean you have all the answers. In fact, just considering the question is one of the first steps of faith. This chapter will look into what hav-

ing faith means. Afterward, you may realize you have more faith than you thought you did.

Some of life's most difficult questions are matters of faith. God does not expect us to have all the answers.



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What Is Faith?

Throughout history God has called upon people to follow his will. **Faith** is the way people respond to God's call. On a simple level, faith means a belief in God. For Christians it means more than that. Faith is believing and accepting that God made himself known to us through his words and actions, especially through Jesus Christ. It is accepting God's truth with our minds, but more than that. Faith is something that guides our entire lives. It is the way we live in harmony with what God has taught us.

In a way it would be simple to say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who is our Savior." It would be easy if that was all that was required for salvation. But having faith also requires us to live our lives based on this belief. Following is a short story that makes this point.

A two-year-old boy is playing on a wooden playground structure that has all sorts of slides, swings, and ropes to climb. He runs toward a ledge near where his father is standing. As he gets closer to the ledge, his father smiles and moves closer, because he knows exactly what is going to happen. The little boy stops at the edge of the five-foot drop and starts to laugh. Then he throws his arms up over his head and flings his body into the air toward his father. As

FUN FACT

Laughter is a sign of great faith. God promises Abraham and Sarah they are going to be the parents of many descendants. But they are so old that Sarah laughs at the thought. Abraham and Sarah keep their faith in God. So when their son is born, they name him Isaac, a Hebrew name that means "laughter."

PRAY IT!

Jesus, I am like the man who cried out to you, "I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!" (Mark 9:24). Sometimes it seems like my faith is as small as a mustard seed. But with even that much faith, you said I could do anything.

It does not seem possible, but with you nothing is impossible. I place my trust in you, knowing you will not disappoint me. Amen.

A leap of faith is like jumping into the arms of God. We trust that he will always be there for us.

he has done a hundred times before, his dad reaches out and catches the boy. The boy is not even finished with his laughing before he runs back around to make the jump again.

To leap into his father's arms, the boy has to have faith in his father. He has to believe his father can catch him. He also has to trust that his father will catch him. Leaping is just the final step in his act of faith. Because he believes and trusts his father, it is the natural thing to do. A person with faith in God is like the child who leaps into the hands of his father. Our salvation depends upon our faithfully placing ourselves into the hands of God.



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Faith Is a Gift Freely Chosen

Faith is first of all a gift from God. Someone cannot have faith without the Holy Spirit, who helps us see our need for God. Before a person can have this gift of faith, he or she must first have the freedom to choose it. Being faithful can be done only by someone who understands and freely chooses to believe in God and his Church.

You might think, "My parents force me to go to church, so how can I ever freely choose it?" Think of it this way. What would you do if someone offered you a box and said that if you accepted it, you would carry it around for the rest of your life? You would want to know what was in the box before you made a decision, right? Without looking inside it, you cannot really make a choice. The box is like the faith God wants to give you. It often comes to you through the words and examples of your parents. If you are ever going to choose to accept the faith God offers, you must look into it. You have to learn about it before you

Did You Know?

The "Heart" of Our Beliefs

The word *belief* can be traced back to Old English and Old High German words that mean "to hold dear and to love." The word *creed* can be traced back to two Latin words, *cor* and *do*. *Cor* means "heart" and *do* means "I give." So when we say our creed, or our beliefs, we are doing more than just saying the things that we think. We are stating what is in our hearts. A creed is the set of beliefs to which our hearts are devoted.

KEY WORDS

faith
belief
creed
monotheistic

accept it. Only then can you really make a free and informed decision.

Faith Is Believing

Having faith means you believe. A **belief** is something people consider to be true. For Christians, this belief is found in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. At Mass, we declare our core beliefs when we pray the Nicene Creed. A **creed** is an official statement of one's faith, or what one believes.

Believing is also an act of the entire Church. Don't confuse Church—with a capital C—with a building. The Church is the community of faithful people who put their faith in Jesus Christ. In a way your first Church is your family. It is the Church that teaches you. It is the Church that is a role model for you. It is the Church that supports and nourishes your own faith. Without your family and the Church, there is no one to pass on the faith.

The words from the beginning of the Nicene Creed are probably familiar to you. Check out the rest of the Creed in appendix A, Catholic Prayers.

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,

maker of heaven and earth,

of all things visible and invisible,

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,

Belief is not the end of the road when it comes to having faith. In fact, believing is only the beginning. Belief is the foundation on which the rest of our faith is built.

Faith Is Trusting

Having faith also means you trust. Trust is when you confidently turn control of your life (or part of your life) over to someone or something else with hope. If you have ever worked on a school project with others, you know what it is like to trust. Working hard on your part of the project, you trust that your partners will complete their parts. You have given some of the control over your grade to your partners with hope that they will do their jobs.

When we trust God, we acknowledge that we cannot ever be truly happy without him. We can do our part, but without God, our “project,” which is our lives,



THINK ABOUT IT!

Being a faith-filled person does not mean all your questions will be answered. It also does not mean you will never have another doubt. God is mysterious, and it is part of your human nature to try to understand him. Your questions can even bring you closer to God. How could bringing your doubts and questions to God in prayer be helpful in your spiritual life? What questions do you have for God?

“I assure you that if you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, ‘Go from here to there!’ and it will go. You could do anything!” (Matthew 17:20)

will never be complete. So having faith means we trust God—we put God in control of our lives.

Trusting God is a required ingredient of faith. Trusting him does not mean things will always go the way we want them to go. Human beings are not perfect. We often bring much misery and pain upon ourselves. By trusting God and allowing him to lead our lives, we will give and receive more joy and happiness in this world and in the next.

Faith Is Doing

Finally, having faith means you do something about it. Doing means you act upon what you believe.

In fact without the doing, someone could argue that you don't have faith at all. You may have heard the phrase "The proof is in the pudding." This means we see the true significance of ideas or beliefs when they are put into action. This applies to faith too. Your

Mother Teresa used the words "Jesus in disguise" to describe those who are in most need of our help.

Like Mother Teresa, when we reach out to others, we are putting our faith into action.



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actions make real your belief and trust in God. The Letter of James says it best, as follows:

My friends, what good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it? Can that faith save you? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!"—if you don't give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead. (2:14–17)

Faith in God Alone

Christianity is **monotheistic**, a word that describes the belief that there is only one God. Yet even we who call ourselves Christians do not always completely place

**"Israel, remember this! The LORD—
and the LORD alone—is our God."**

(Deuteronomy 6:4)



PRAY IT! Liturgy Connection

Every time we celebrate Mass, we offer our petitions, or requests, in what is called the Prayers of the Faithful. Here we ask God to fulfill our needs. This does not mean God will grant every wish we ask. It just means we trustfully place our needs into God's hands. Imagine if you were babysitting a two-year-old, would you give him everything he asked for? Sometimes the most loving thing a person can do is say no.

In a similar way, God does not grant our every wish. We do not always understand why. Nonetheless, we trust that he will provide what is best for us. Next time during the Prayers of the Faithful, offer your own needs to God and trust that he will provide what is best for you.

our trust in God alone. Instead we sometimes look to money or worldly power for our protection. We can also spend too much time and attention trying to get lots of stuff. We begin to think we can be happy only when we have the best sports equipment, the newest video games, or whatever new catches our eyes. Those things become like false gods when we forget that our true happiness can be found only in God. None of us is perfect, but as our faith in God grows, we will not allow anyone or anything to be substituted for him. God is our true home, and we will be truly satisfied only by doing his will and being with him.

Some Christians have chosen to give up all they have to place their faith in God alone. For example, those who join the Maryknoll Missionaries leave their homes to work in the poorest areas of the world. They choose to abandon the comfort and security of their homes. Led by their belief in the Good News of Jesus Christ, they trust God's call and act upon it.

Even Jesus was tempted to rely on something other than God. When he was in the desert, the devil tried to convince Jesus to look for material things and worldly power to save himself. Jesus replied, "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'" (Matthew 4:10).



LIVE IT!

Mother Teresa is a wonderful inspiration for those who want to be faithful to God. But the stories about saintly people like her overwhelm many people. Many might think, “I could never be as great as she was,” and then decide to do nothing. Mother Teresa did not see herself as someone great. She saw her work as simple—not easy, just simple. She read the Gospels. She believed in Jesus’ call to serve those who are the neediest in our world. She trusted that God would help her. Then she went out and did it. When asked about her work, she emphasized that faithful people did not have to help the entire world. They just needed to help one person. She said, “We do no great things, only small things with great love” (Rai and Chawla, *Faith and Compassion*, page 158). What is a small thing you can do with great love?

You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Blessed Mother Teresa



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Mother Teresa was a woman of great faith. She was born Gonxha Agnes Bojaxhiu in 1910 in Skopje, Macedonia. At age eighteen, she joined the Sisters of Loreto and took the name Teresa after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. She became a missionary in Calcutta, India, where she was a schoolteacher and principal. After living there for almost twenty years, Teresa had an encounter with God in which she heard Christ tell her, “Come be my light.”

Teresa was inspired to help those who suffered from the most extreme poverty. In 1948, after a few years of prayer and

determination, Mother Teresa received permission to leave her convent to work with the poorest of the poor in the streets of Calcutta. She soon formed the Missionaries of Charity, who set up hospitals and homes for the dying. In 1979, after years of dedication to her mission, this “saint of the gutters” was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. By the 1990s the Missionaries of Charity could be found all over the world, helping homeless people, abused women, and orphans, as well as those suffering from AIDS, drug addiction, and other illnesses.

Mother Teresa died in 1997. She left behind a thriving order of priests, nuns, and laypersons devoted to the service of the neediest people in our world. Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa in 2002. After she died, her private letters revealed that she had overcome many years of spiritual doubt and anguish. Considering the extreme poverty she faced in Calcutta, it is no surprise she questioned why God would remain silent and allow such things to happen. In spite of these feelings, she trusted God and kept hard at work at her mission. Because of God’s silence, her work demanded an even greater faith from her. Her belief and trust in God showed in all her wonderful work.



PART 2

JESUS THE CHRIST

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died
and was buried; he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.*

8

The GOSPELS

Almost everyone likes books about heroes. These books can encourage and inspire us. They can help us have bigger dreams for our lives and become better people.

The Gospels are books about the greatest, most inspiring hero of all time. Jesus Christ is a man who is also our Lord and Savior—the Son of God. He reveals the truth about God and about our lives. He tells stories that force us to stop and think about what we are doing and why. He shows us that our lives have a meaning and purpose. He assures us we are loved and are able to love God and others in return.

KEY WORDS

Gospels
inspiration
synoptic

**This is the Good News about Jesus Christ,
the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)**

Jesus has inspired millions down through the ages to follow him. Now he invites us to get to know him. We sometimes hold back. We think we know him already.

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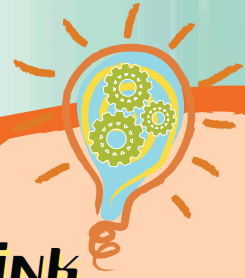


Where would you be in this picture? Sitting close to Jesus, wanting to know and follow him? Standing outside the circle, afraid to change your life?

We think we are too busy or too young. Down deep we may fear—and it might be true—that we will need to change some things in our lives if we get to know Jesus well. But we cannot be afraid to let into our lives the person who best knows and loves us. Jesus will show us how we can become truly great.

Jesus and the Scriptures

How can we get to know Jesus Christ and the fullness of truth he brings? To answer this, think about how we get to know people in our families who lived before us. Sometimes our still-living older relatives tell all kinds of stories about family



Think About It!

“Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all people” (Mark 16:15). Imagine that Christ has just given this mission to you and your friends. You don’t have a lot of money. Probably you don’t have many friends in important places. You don’t have much experience in speaking to other people. But you know you need to, want to, and can do it. How would you go about spreading his teachings? We have means of communication that were not available to the Apostles. What means would you use most? Why?



FUN FACT

Have you ever had to copy some writing by hand? Now we have machines that can copy anything written or printed. But before the 1500s, even printing presses didn't exist. Trained people had to copy by hand writings like the Gospels. They must have been patient and careful to be as accurate as they were.

members who have already died. Maybe the people who have died—or the people who lived with them—left written records like diaries or memoirs.

This is the way it happened with Jesus. The men he was closest to, the Apostles, were the chief witnesses of his public life. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, they told others about Jesus' life and teachings. They did this through their preaching and by their examples. The Holy Spirit guided them to remember everything we need to know for our salvation.

The Holy Spirit also led some of the Apostles or their helpers to write down their teachings about Jesus' life and message. These writings became the four **Gospels** of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word *gospel* means "good news."

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.
(2 Peter 1:16)

We learn about Jesus' life and teachings chiefly from the four Gospels. They are at the heart of the whole Bible. The Old Testament prepares the way for Christ, the promised Savior. The New Testament centers on him and on following him with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Other written reports of Christ's life appeared in early Christianity. But the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are special. They are the only Gospels included among the inspired books of the Bible.

Inspiration means God is the ultimate author of these books. He wanted them written, and he wanted certain points to be made. The Holy Spirit led the human writers to say without error the truths God wants told for our salvation.

The human writers were not just puppets. They had to do their own research and may have written with certain questions or problems in mind. Each had his own style of writing. Each may have omitted details or combined different sermons of Jesus into one. But the Holy Spirit made sure they gave

Did You Know?

Reading the Scriptures

Many people living during Jesus' earthly lifetime could not read. So the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) were read out loud in the Jewish places of worship, called synagogues. Luke's Gospel, for example, shows Jesus returning to Nazareth, his hometown. In the synagogue he reads out loud a passage from the Book of Isaiah. In the passage is a promise of a savior coming to bring Good News to the poor. Jesus says that promise has come true in him (see Luke 4:14–21).

Christians have kept the practice of reading and explaining the Scriptures during worship services. Especially in Catholic worship, we read from both the Old and New Testaments. This helps us see how they relate to each other.



PRAY IT!

Dear God,
Thank you for telling me
about yourself in the
Scriptures. Thank you
for showing me yourself
most fully in the Gospels.
May the Holy Spirit help
me understand Jesus' life and
teachings. Let them inspire
me to grow in friendship with
you. Help me serve you and
others as the Gospels teach us
to do. May I become more and
more like Christ, so that others
can see him in me.

Amen

honest reports of all the important points of Jesus' life and teachings. They passed on the truths God wants us to know to follow Jesus and be saved.

Writing the Gospels

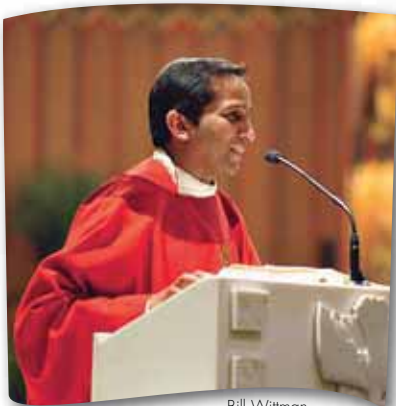
Have you ever done one of those oral history reports that are popular assignments at some schools? They can be fun. You talk to people who lived through some big historical event. You may look at written records they have. Then you write a summary.

Other students may do a report on the same historical event. They may talk to different eyewitnesses. They may include other facts or order them differently. Their reports will end up slightly different from yours.

The Gospel writers did something similar. Each one chose facts about Christ's life and teachings that had been passed on by word of mouth. They may have used earlier writings about Jesus' life and teachings. For example, Luke's Gospel explains his approach and purpose clearly.

Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message. And so, Your Excellency, because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you. I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught. (1:1–4)

The four Gospels all portray Jesus Christ, and so they do share many of the same stories about his life and teachings. In particular, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke often record the same events in about the same order. They are called the **synoptic** Gospels, because these similarities are clear when their contents are “seen together” or listed side by side. The Greek word from which synoptic comes means “seen together.”



Bill Wittman

At Mass we stand for the Gospel and listen carefully, because what is proclaimed is truly Good News! Just as we stand to hear the Gospels, it is important to take a stand for what the Gospels teach us about Jesus.



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

The Liturgy of the Word is the first major part of the Eucharist. A reading from the Gospels is always included. The order of readings for Sunday Masses follows a three-year rotation. Each year in the cycle is referred to by letter: A, B, or C.

Many of the Sunday Gospels during the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter come from John's Gospel. A reading from the other three Gospels is usually read on the remaining Sundays. (We call these weeks outside special liturgical seasons "ordinary time.") Readings from Matthew are proclaimed in Year A, readings from Mark in Year B, and readings from Luke in Year C. So, the Church helps us think about the whole Gospel message over time.

But each is slightly different, because the sources and readers of each were different. Matthew, for example, writes mostly for Jewish people. He often shows how Jesus' life fulfills the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. Mark writes more for Gentiles, that is, people who are not Jewish. So he explains Jewish customs and words. Early Christian writers say Mark gives us Peter's teachings.

The Gospel of Luke often reminds us that Jesus came to save all people. It records some unique stories and teachings that stress this point. For example, the story of the prodigal son shows that God's mercy can forgive the worst sinners (see Luke 15:11–32). The story of Lazarus and the rich man teaches that we should love people who are poor as God does (see Luke 16:19–31). Luke also tells more about Jesus' childhood. Even when he is a child, some people see that Jesus comes to fulfill God's promise to send a savior (see Luke 2:22–50).

John wrote his Gospel some years after the others were finished. His organization and focus are different from those of the synoptic Gospels. He also reflects more deeply on Jesus' teachings.

His readers were mostly Greek-speaking and not Jewish. He wants to make clear right from the beginning of the Gospel that Christ is truly divine, the Son of God. John's Gospel doesn't start with the earthly life of Jesus as the others do. Instead, he shows that the second Person of the Trinity exists always with God and is God. He is the Word by which God expresses himself in Creation and the Old Testament. Finally, God shows himself fully by having the Word become someone like us.



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Mark writes his Gospel. Mark's Gospel is the earliest of the four Gospels. It is also the shortest. Find out more about this Gospel and the other Gospels written by Matthew, Luke, and John.

Getting to Know Christ

A few key ideas can help us get the most out of reading or hearing the Scriptures, as follows:

First, the writers' different audiences and purposes help explain what each author includes and stresses. Matthew, for example, is not trying to bore us with his lists of Jesus' ancestors. He's showing his

Jewish readers that Jesus really is from the line of the Messiah (see Matthew 1:1-17).

I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3)

Second, we do not have to understand every word to get the basic idea. But knowing the literal meanings of words can deepen our appreciation. At the same time, the Gospels often use physical things to stand for spiritual things. For example, Jesus says his disciples will fish for men. Jesus means by this that his disciples will work to bring others to his Kingdom.

Third, events in the Gospels often complete or make perfect events that happened earlier in the

Have you ever participated in a Bible study group? Reading and discussing the Bible with others can be a great way to grow in faith and knowledge of God's Word and how it applies to your life.



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Old Testament. In chapter 6 of John's Gospel, for instance, Jesus recalls how God provided a kind of bread for his people in the desert so they wouldn't die (see Exodus, chapter 16). Then Jesus reveals that he is the perfect bread from heaven that gives eternal life to everyone who believes in him.

Fourth, we do not have to figure out everything ourselves. Many Bibles have helpful notes and comments. Thoughtful Christians have written many commentaries on the Gospels.



LIVE IT!

God speaks to us personally in the Scriptures. We read them to understand. We also want to apply God's word to our daily lives. So, we need more of a plan for reading the Gospels than for reading other books.

First, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand and live the Gospel message.

Second, we can read carefully. We can imagine the people and events and even "make a movie" of them in our minds.

Third, we can pause to think about what we have read and apply it to our own lives. How does the Spirit encourage, teach, correct, challenge, comfort, or inspire us in this passage?

Sometimes this practice will give us big insights. Other times, we seem to see nothing. But if we keep trying with faith, the fruits will be great.

Finally, we are not alone. The Spirit especially guides the bishops who have succeeded, or followed, the Apostles. They have the full power and responsibility to explain the Scriptures and Tradition rightly. But the Church also urges us to study and think about Jesus. If we ask in prayer, the Holy Spirit will guide us in our reading.

Reading the Gospels has changed lives. Missionaries have risked their own safety to bring the Good News to those who have not heard. Others have



Looking Back

Copies of the Gospels

Did you know that the original copies of the four Gospels from the early centuries have fallen apart or been destroyed? So how do we know our Gospels are the same as what the authors wrote?

This is a question experts ask about all old books. They study and compare the oldest whole and partial copies of those books to determine their accuracy.

Bible experts have found hundreds of early copies of the Gospels. We have more and older copies of them than of any other ancient book. Experts say that the copies from different places and times are basically the same. So our versions of the four Gospels are extremely reliable, more so than any other ancient book. We can thank the early Christians who treasured these books and accurately copied and preserved them.

made the lives of those around their homes much better by their Gospel-inspired words and deeds.

If you want to make a difference in the world, try reading the Gospels. You will meet unforgettable, real people like Mary, Joseph, Peter, James, and John. Above all, you will get to know Jesus, the most unforgettable and real person of all. He will enlighten, challenge, encourage, comfort, and amaze you. He will become your hero and ideal. He will make you truly happy in this life and the next. He will enable you to inspire others.



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In 1947 herders discovered old manuscripts in a cave near where Jesus lived. They are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. They include some of the oldest biblical manuscripts ever found.

9

JESUS CHRIST, TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

Imagine getting some really unbelievable good news. Pretend you've tried out for the basketball team or school play but figured you had no chance of starting or getting a big part. Or imagine you'd love to have another child in the family, but your parents have said it wasn't possible. Then suddenly you learn your dream has come true. You're named a starter. You're chosen to play the part. You're going to have a little brother or sister.

Can you think of some great news you have received? Think about all the people you wanted to tell. For the past 2,000 years, the Church has been telling the best news ever.



Jose Luis Pelaez, Inc./Blend Images/Corbis

As good as news like this is, the Church has even better news for the whole human race. The Gospel of John tells it as follows: "The Word became a human being, and full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son" (John 1:14). This incredible Good News of the Gospels is called the mystery of the **Incarnation**, the truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second Person of the Trinity, is both fully God and fully man. He took on our human nature, which means that the Son of God became one with us. By doing this Jesus makes it possible for us to get to know him, trust him, love him, follow him, and show him to others. He wants us to join freely with him in the great adventure of spreading his Kingdom. He wants to teach us what human and divine life are all about. He wants to give us the power to imitate him, to become like him, so he lives through us. He wants us and those around us to be happy now and forever.

He always had the nature of God, but . . . of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. (Philippians 2:6–7)



PRAY IT!

Jesus,
Thank you for your great gift of love in becoming human for us. Help me to honor and love you as my Savior, Lord, and God in all my thoughts, words, and actions. Teach me through your holy life to live a holy life too. Through the Holy Spirit, give me the grace to know and follow your teachings with humility, generosity, and persistence. May others see your goodness in me. Amen.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

How do we get to know who Jesus Christ is? We might start by thinking about how we get to know and understand people in general. We spend time working, playing, and relaxing with them. We think about what they say and do. We get to know them as persons. Someone is kind and caring. Someone else is determined and stubborn. We get to know their talents and abilities. One is great in math. Another is a terrific storyteller.

We get to know Jesus Christ in a similar way. Only, because his earthly life is long in the past, we have to rely on the reports of others who were with him at the time. Those reports are part of God's Revelation, which is passed on to us through the Scriptures and Tradition. What do the Scriptures and Tradition tell us about Jesus?

They show us that Jesus is a divine person with two natures. He keeps the divine nature that he has had for eternity. He also takes on our human nature. He is not just God or just man or some sort of half-and-

Jesus wept when his friend died. He must have laughed sometimes too, because he was one of us. He was like us in all things except sin and experienced the same emotions we do.



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LIVE IT!

How can we get to know Jesus better?

We can pay attention to the Good News of his life and lessons. We can read the Scriptures on our own or listen to them at Mass. We can read writings or listen to talks by people who have thought about Jesus Christ.

We can speak with Jesus. We can pray to him in a group or on our own. The Spirit will use our openness to Jesus to help us grasp his life and message.

We can be touched by Christ in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Jesus works through them to help us know and follow him better.

We can see Christ shine through the witness of faithful people.

We can study the lives of saints and learn to see goodness in people we know. Jesus gives us many ways to build our relationships with him.

half mix of the two. He is truly and fully divine and truly and fully human, but without sin of any kind.

Jesus Christ is truly human, like us. He grows, walks, talks, works, has friends, and jokes around. He enjoys meeting and talking with people of all kinds. When Jesus' friend Lazarus dies and when he thinks about how his own people will reject him, he cries. He enjoys a good meal, good talk, the beauty of flowers, and the innocence of children. He gets hungry, tired, and angry. When people ignore him or are ungrateful, his feelings are hurt.

"The Son of God . . . worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a hu-

Did You Know?

Jesus Talks About His Divinity

Jesus is slow to reveal he is God. In the Gospels he sometimes refuses to answer questions about his godhood (see, for example, Matthew 16:20, Mark 8:11–12, and Luke 20:1–8). Why? If you look closely, you will see it depends on when and to whom he is talking.

God had taught the Jewish people that he was the only God. If Jesus had claimed to be God right from the beginning, the other Jews would have killed him for blasphemy—which eventually happened, anyway (see John 8:59, 10:31). Blasphemy is an action regarded as an insult to God. Jesus needed time to show by words and deeds that divine power worked through him. Then his followers could accept his word that he was one with God. Jesus often would not answer questions about his divine nature from those who ignored the proof of his words and deeds. They wished only to trap him, not know him.

Miracles, like Jesus' walking on water, are signs of Jesus' divinity. He truly is God.



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man will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin¹ CCC, number 470).

Jesus Christ is truly God. He does things only God can do. He performs miracles of healing and raising the dead. He forgives sins and foretells the future. He dares to explain and add to God's teachings from the Old Testament. Simon Peter calls him "the Son of the living God," and Jesus agrees. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:16–17).

Although Jesus is only thirty years old in human age, he claims to have existed before the founder of the Jewish people. "Before Abraham was born, 'I Am'" (John 8:58). "I AM" is the name God gives himself when Moses asks on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 3:14). Jesus says he is the real and natural Son of God, not an adopted son or just someone close to God. "Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me" (John 12:45). "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). Jesus is God himself. In fact, his accusers charge that he breaks Jewish law "because he claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:7). He does not deny it.

Jesus also allows others to call him "Lord." We might think this is just an older way of showing respect for people. It might be like saying "sir" or "ma'am." But in the Greek Bible, LORD is the word used in place of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, which is a special name for God. So to call Jesus Lord is like calling him God. It expresses our belief in Jesus' divinity. That is especially clear in the reaction of Thomas to the risen Jesus: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).



PRAY IT! **Liturgy Connection**

Jesus is at the center of every liturgy and especially the Eucharist. We address our praise, needs, thanks, and sorrow for sin to him as our Lord. We end our prayers with "through Christ, our Lord." It is only through him, with him, and in him that we can approach the Father.

We know Jesus will understand us in our weaknesses. He can and will present our needs to the Father and respond to them. "On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace" (Hebrews 4:15–16).

“This is my own dear Son—
listen to him!” (Mark 9:7)

FUN FACT

Ordinary people in Jesus’ time did not have last, or family, names. They were identified by their first names and by their hometowns or their fathers. Our Lord is called Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus, son of Joseph. Christ or Messiah is not Jesus’ last name but rather his title and role. It is like saying George Washington, President.

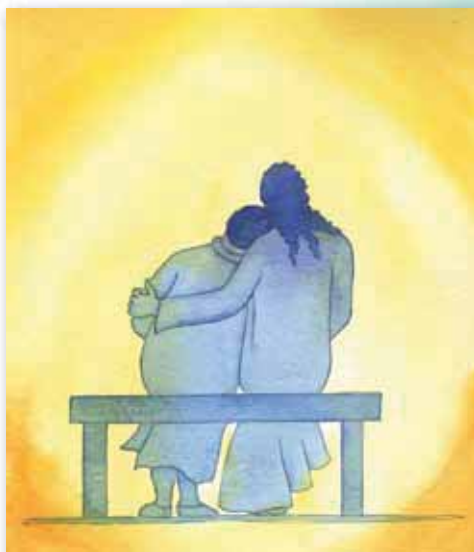
What the Incarnation Means for Us

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) gives the following summary of who Jesus is. “At the time appointed by God, the only Son of the Father, the eternal Word, that is, the Word and substantial Image of the Father, became incarnate; without losing his divine nature he has assumed human nature” (CCC, number 479).

It is important that Jesus is really both God and man for several reasons. First, Jesus is called the *Christ*, the Greek word for the Hebrew word **Messiah**, or “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, priests, kings, and sometimes prophets were anointed. That is, they had precious olive oil poured over them to show that God had chosen

them for a special purpose. The Messiah promised by God was expected to be a priest, prophet, and king who would save the people of Israel. In fact, the name **Jesus** means “God saves.” That is the prime goal of his mission to us. He comes to save us from the Original Sin that we all inherit and that infects human nature. He also can save us from our personal sins that hurt us and our relationships with God and

others. Christ comes to give us the grace—that is, a share in God’s own divine life and love—to save us from sin and death.



“Lean on me.”
Imagine Jesus saying that to you, especially in tough times when you need a friend the most.

Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, “Jesus’ love is personal, tender, and unchanging; he is present with us always, especially in the Blessed Sacrament”, copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk

Looking Back

Mistakes About Christ

The Church has always affirmed Jesus Christ’s divinity and humanity in response to people who have said he was either only God or only human. While the New Testament was still being written, some people claimed Christ was only divine. So John, for example, insists on the physical presence of “the Word of life.” “We have heard it, and we have seen it . . . and our hands have touched it” (1 John 1:1).

Others in the early Church argued that Christ was not divine or not equal to the Father. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) responded by affirming Jesus’ full divinity. You may come across people today who believe that Jesus was only human. We can try to help people who believe this to see Christ’s full picture in the Scriptures. We can pray that God will help them understand and believe the truth.

KEY WORDS

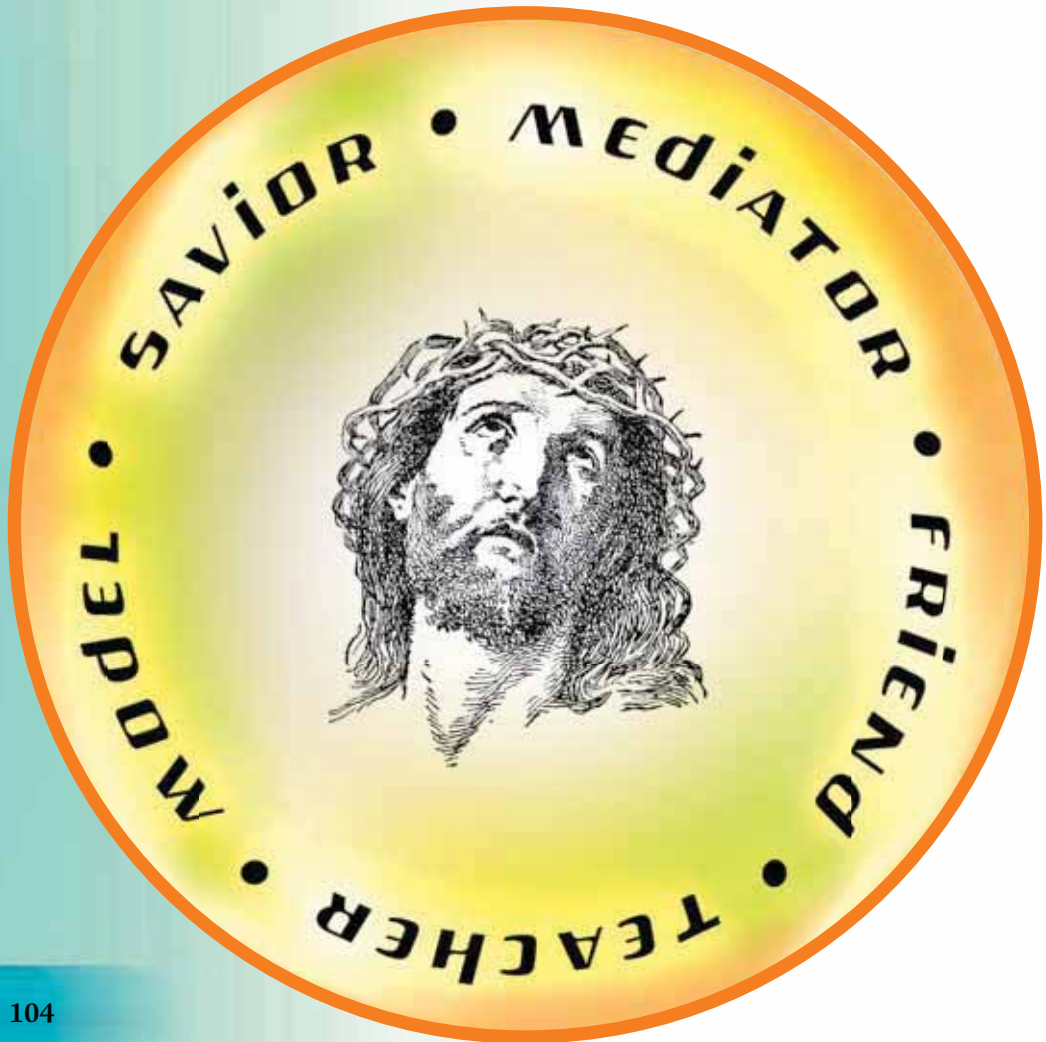
Incarnation

Messiah

Jesus

mediator

Second, because Jesus is both God and man, he is the one and perfect **mediator** between us and God. You know how sometimes when two friends fight, a third friend will talk with each of them and get them to be friends again? That is part of what a mediator does; a mediator helps restore broken relationships.



For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

As our mediator, Christ offers himself in sacrifice on the cross and in Mass to restore our relationships with his loving Father. He goes to the Father on our behalf and comes to us on behalf of the Father to reveal the love of the Father for us.

Third, by becoming truly man, Jesus shows he wants to and can be our friend. Good friends understand us well and stick by us. They are there for us, stubbornly loyal, sometimes brutally honest.

As God, Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves and has the highest hopes for the saints we can become. He loves us and is patient with us beyond all human measure. As man, Jesus understands us, our strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows, emotional highs and lows. He sympathizes, encourages, advises, and corrects, all with great affection.

Fourth, Jesus offers himself as a teacher and a model for us to imitate. You probably have heroes already whom you imitate. You may admire and try to become like a certain athlete or performer. Christ is our model for a holy life. "I am the way, the truth,



Think About It!

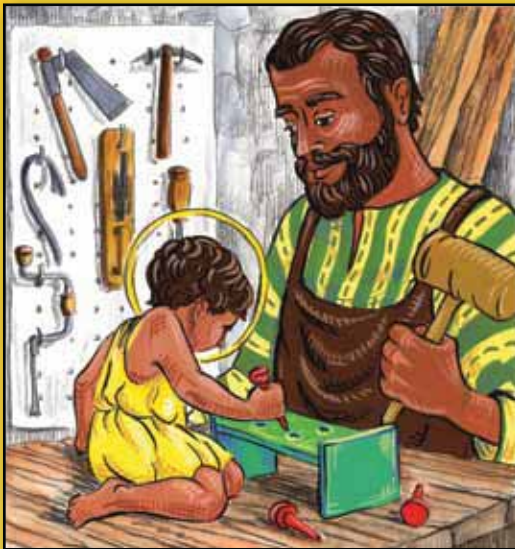
As a fully human person, Jesus is an example for us. But we need to think about his life and teachings to follow him. For example, Christ tells us we will be happy and God's children if we work for peace (see Matthew 5:9). How can you work for more peace in your family? for more peace among your friends? What other teachings of Jesus do you remember and how can they guide your life?

and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6). Jesus presents the Beatitudes as ideals that we should strive for, but he also lives them. If we want to follow him, he tells us that we must love one another as he loves us (see John 15:12).

But how can we possibly become like Christ? Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote, "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might

PEOPLE OF FAITH

Saint Joseph



© 2009 Saint Mary's Press/Illustration by Vicki Shuck

God called Saint Joseph to be the husband of Mary and legal father of Jesus. Joseph heroically did what God wanted even when it caused him to suffer. He married his beloved, Mary, although she was mysteriously pregnant. He left his relatives, friends, job, and home to lead his family into Egypt so Jesus would be safe from King Herod's massacre of the innocent children.

make men gods."² (CCC, number 460). Through the grace Christ gains for us, we become children of God. Especially in Baptism and the other sacraments, the Holy Spirit helps us think, feel, and act as Jesus would. "God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a truly religious life through the knowledge of one who called us to share in his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Most of Joseph's life was not that exciting. But he showed the same steady faith and obedience to God's will during his quiet years in Nazareth. He fulfilled the ordinary duties of a husband, parent, worker, and citizen well and with love. Like any good father, Joseph taught Jesus many things, including his own trade of carpentry. In her *Autobiography*, Saint Teresa of Ávila encourages praying to Joseph. Jesus, she says, who obeyed him on earth, honors Joseph in heaven by always doing what he asks.

It's easy to imagine Joseph as a reliable, upright person who does what needs to be done without a lot of talk. His commitment to doing the right thing in the Gospels inspires us to do what God wants without whining or complaining. He teaches us to look at and listen to Jesus in silent prayer. March 19 is his feast day.

10

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Can you see signs of God's love in the faces of babies?



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Every baby is a miracle. A baby is the result of the love between a man and a woman. A baby is the result of God's love. God has created the physical laws that form the baby's body. God has directly given the baby a spiritual soul.

We would expect Jesus' birth to be even more miraculous. As the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, he has always existed. But he wants to be like us, which means having a human birth.

An angel appeared to Mary to announce that she would be Jesus' mother. Her yes has made all the difference in the world.



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In the Bible, God sends the angel Gabriel to ask Mary to become Jesus' mother. Gabriel explains the wonderful way it will happen. "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you . . . For there is nothing that God cannot do" (Luke 1:35,37). According to the Apostles' Creed, Jesus is "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary" (see appendix A, "Catholic Prayers"). We call Gabriel's message to Mary the **Annunciation**.

Every Christmas we remember the story of Jesus' birth. It is good to look at the Gospels closely and think about them prayerfully. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke have stories about Jesus' birth. (John starts with a hymn about the Son of God.) Only the Son of God has ever been able to choose how he will be born as a human. He seems to make his birth as humble and hard as possible.

Mothers about to give birth usually try to prepare everything perfectly for the babies. But in Luke's Gospel, Mary and Joseph have to be away from home among strangers. They cannot even get housing or a proper bed. So the Son of God is born in some kind of stable. His cradle is a manger,



PRAY IT! Liturgy Connection

The Church's liturgy has a yearly rotation of seasons. Each stresses a different stage in the history of salvation. The liturgical year starts with Advent.

For four weeks, we prepare for the Lord's coming into the world and into our hearts.

The Christmas season begins with celebrating the Lord's birth on Christmas Day. It ends with the feast of his Baptism on the second Sunday in January. It includes the feasts of the Holy Family, Mary's motherhood, and the Epiphany. In this season we relive the early history of the Holy Family. We rejoice in Christ's coming.

FUN FACT

People have developed many ways to celebrate the coming of Christ during the Christmas season. Saint Francis of Assisi built the first Nativity scene in AD 1223. He wanted people to see how poor the baby Jesus was. The first Christmas carols come from the fourteenth century. They were songs for dances. Carols show our joy and unity at Christ's birth.

one of those open boxes that hold food for animals. "She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn" (Luke 2:7). The Gospel of Luke shows us that God is one with even those who seem to be the poorest of people. It warns us from the start not to judge the true worth of others by what they have or how they appear.

"This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2:11)

God does reveal Jesus' true nature to some people. Angels suddenly cover the sky where shepherds are tending their flocks. "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people" (Luke 2:10). In the Gospel of Matthew, a strange star guides **Magi**, wise men who studied the skies, over a long trip to greet the King of the Jews. "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews?

We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2).

Both the simple Jewish

Kings and shepherds come to worship Jesus. How do you worship Jesus?



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