

## Doctrinal Themes: Jesus Christ

### Introduction

This segment is meant to help you reflect on the Jesus theme. It also provides insights into teaching the theme at different ages. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the first question. Watch the video *Theological Foundations: Jesus Christ*, and note how the explanation sheds light on the topic for your own understanding. Then read the article “Jesus Christ: God Incarnate” and write down your responses to the reflection questions.

### First Question

How would you answer Jesus’ question, “Who do people say that I am?”

### Video

Watch *Theological Foundations: Jesus Christ*, and respond to these questions:

- Why is Jesus’ humble birth significant in understanding who he is?
- If you had to write a bumper sticker about Jesus, what would it say?
- Which piece(s) of information in the video do you feel would be important to share with your group?
- Why are Jesus’ parables important?

## Article: Jesus Christ, God Incarnate

Read the following article and respond to the questions:

Who is this man who has had such a far-reaching influence on so many people for two thousand years? For those of us who have set our hearts on his teachings and promises, the question of Jesus' identity is fundamental. Christianity is an incarnational faith. We center our beliefs on the fact that the Word of God "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). It is important to learn as much as we can about the human Jesus. When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" he got several different answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. When Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus emphasized the importance of his suffering, Death and Resurrection as a necessary part of that role. Jesus was a real, historical person who lived, loved, felt, and suffered.

Jesus was Jewish. He attended the local synagogue, observed the Sabbath and Jewish feast days. As a practicing Jew, he would have prayed three times a day: in the morning, at three in the afternoon, and at sunset. Because Jesus was Middle Eastern, he most likely had dark hair, brown eyes, and olive-colored skin. His mother Mary was married to Joseph, Jesus' foster father who was a carpenter or craftsman. As a young man, Jesus became a teacher (Rabbi) and gathered disciples (students) around him. With his followers, he traveled throughout Israel and Palestine and taught people about God and God's Kingdom through his words and actions. His teachings angered the religious and political leaders of his day, and the Gospels report that after a period of a few years Jesus was crucified by the Romans. Some Jewish leaders believed Jesus blasphemed

by saying he was the Son of God. A sign posted on his cross to declare his crime read “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.” Three days later, his followers saw him alive and present to them in a new and transformed way. Gradually his followers came to know him as the Son of God.

### K-3

Young children will see Jesus as their friend and brother. Of course they cannot comprehend the doctrine of the Incarnation or Jesus as both God and man in an intellectual way, but they very easily accept it. Stress should be on the fact that Jesus lives today in our hearts and speaks to us in the Scriptures, in other people, and when we listen in prayer. Also, explain that Jesus wants us to love and forgive others.

### Grades 4-6

One of the most interesting ways to present the human Jesus at this age level is to give some background on what life for young people was like when Jesus was a young person. Middle grade children are curious and interested in doing research. Present Jesus’ miracles as acts of healing. Emphasize the importance of faith as it is exhibited in the recipients of Jesus’ miracles. This is the time to highlight Jesus’ moral teachings: the Great Commandment and the Sermon on the Mount. Older children can begin to understand that following Jesus is not always easy, and that it was not always easy for Jesus, and Jesus was like us in all things except sin. Point out that the Gospels show that Jesus experienced growth and temptations. He had friends and enjoyed parties. He included and made friends with people whom others looked down on or shunned.

## Grades 7-8

As mentioned before, this is the age when young people begin to ask the “how” questions. In this case “How could Jesus be divine and human at the same time?” “If Jesus was God, why didn’t he escape the Jews and Romans who killed him?” This is the time when the early Church arguments about divinity and humanity of Jesus are relevant. Presenting them helps young people understand that questions have always been a part of the growth and development of doctrine. Also, since middle school students have developed a more historical sense, they are interested in the early Church and the Councils that dealt with these questions.

Young people at this stage are experiencing a lot of internal change. They are emotional, and best friends are important. When doing Scripture reflection with them, help them see that as a human being, Jesus had emotions. He showed compassion for the widow whose only son had died and the centurion whose son was sick. He cried at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. He got impatient with Peter and really angry at the money changers. This helps young people identify with the human Jesus, and approach him in authentic prayer.

## Reflection Questions

- What is your favorite story about Jesus? What does that tell you about your own beliefs in him?
- In what ways did this section affirm or challenge your own approach to teaching about Jesus?