

# WHO IS JESUS?

This section presents a brief overview of different views held by certain Christians concerning Jesus. Each point is detailed in subsequent sections. Because groups describing themselves as Christian hold differing views about Jesus, the predominant, traditional view is presented first, followed by variants.

## Predominant view

Christians predominantly profess that [Jesus](#) is the [Christ](#) ([Matthew 16:16–17](#); [1 Corinthians 2:8](#)), the only [Son of the Living God](#), the [Lord](#),[\[6\]](#) and the eternal [Word](#).[\[7\]](#) They profess Jesus to be the second of three divine persons, or [hypostases](#), of the [Holy Trinity](#): Jesus the Son constitutes, together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, the single [substance](#) of the One God.[\[8\]](#) Furthermore, Jesus is defined to be one person with a fully human and fully God, a doctrine known as the [Hypostatic union](#).[\[9\]](#)

Christians predominantly profess that Jesus became man in the [incarnation](#),[\[10\]](#) so that those who believe in him might have eternal life.[\[11\]](#) They further hold that he was born of the [Virgin Mary](#) by the power of the [Holy Spirit](#) in an event described as the [miraculous virgin birth](#).[\[12\]](#)



Christians predominantly profess that Jesus is the [Messiah](#) (Greek: *Χριστός*; English: Christ) prophesied in the Old Testament.[\[13\]](#) In his life Jesus proclaimed the "good news" (Middle English: *gospel*; Greek: *euangelion*, *εὐαγγέλιον*) that the coming [Kingdom of Heaven](#) was at hand,[\[14\]](#) and established the Christian Church, which is the seed of the kingdom, into which Christ calls the poor in spirit.[\[15\]](#) Jesus' actions at the [Last Supper](#), where he instituted the [Eucharist](#), are

understood as central to worship and communion with God.[\[16\]](#) They profess that Jesus suffered death by crucifixion,[\[17\]](#) [descended into hell \(hades, place of the dead\)](#),[\[18\]](#) and rose bodily from the dead in the definitive [miracle](#) that foreshadows the [resurrection of humanity](#) at the end of time,[\[19\]](#) when [Christ will come again](#) to [judge the living and the dead](#), resulting in election to [Heaven](#) or damnation to [Hell](#).[\[20\]](#)

Christians predominantly profess that through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus restored man's communion with God in the blood of the [New Covenant](#). His death on a cross is understood as a redemptive sacrifice: the source of humanity's [salvation](#) and the [atonement](#) for sin,[\[21\]](#) which had entered human history through [the sin of Adam](#).[\[22\]](#)

## Other views

Other groups hold different views concerning Jesus' divinity and humanity. [Nestorianism](#) teaches that Jesus was two persons,[\[23\]](#) rather than one, rejecting the unity of Jesus' natures, whereas [Monophysitism](#) teaches that Jesus had one nature, rather than two.[\[24\]](#) Neither of these views

differ concerning the other points. [Docetism](#),<sup>[25]</sup> conversely, teaches that Jesus' humanity was merely an illusion, and instead he is understood as purely divine. This view does not teach the incarnation or the mortal death of Jesus by crucifixion, and understands the resurrection in significantly different terms.

[Non-trinitarianism](#) does not define God in terms of three divine persons. Some of these groups teach that Jesus is not, or at least was not always, God. Others see Jesus as God, but not distinct from the Father or Spirit, often describing those as merely changes in appearance, or modes of existence. [Mormons](#) consider Jesus to be the son of God, a separate being, united with the Father and Spirit in purpose.

Some [Liberal Christians](#) generally consider Jesus to have been an ordinary man only. They generally believe that miraculous and prophetic events in Jesus' life were not historical. They sometimes find a metaphorical meaning in what they consider fictitious accounts of his life. Jesus' relationship with God is described in widely diverse views within this group.<sup>[26]</sup>

Christians in the emerging church believe Jesus was an example only; not divine, not ordinary. The view is looked down upon by most other branches of Christianity.

## Sources used

Christian views of Jesus are derived from various sources, but especially from the canonical Gospels. Christians predominantly hold that these works are historically true.<sup>[27]</sup> Christians do not limit themselves to merely historical methods, but because they believe the Bible is inspired by God, they employ religious methods as well, such as [typology](#) and other forms of [exegesis](#). Similarly, they follow the theological insights, concerning Jesus, of the New Testament epistles.

The Roman Catholic view is expressed in the Second Vatican council document, *Dei Verbum*:

Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels just named, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught.... The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches and preserving the form of proclamation but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus.<sup>[28]</sup>



Furthermore, Catholic and Orthodox Christians develop their views of Jesus from [Sacred Tradition](#), which includes the decrees of [Ecumenical Councils](#), and material from the writings of the [Church Fathers](#). Additionally, a prominent place is given for the teachings of certain theologians, called "[Doctors of the Church](#)," known for their orthodoxy, eminent learning, and sanctity. Anglican Christians affirm that the Church has

"authority in Controversies of Faith" and is "a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ",[\[29\]](#) and they accept the doctrinal decrees of the Ecumenical Councils insofar as they are agreeable to Holy Scripture [\[30\]](#) Most Protestant Christians also consider these sources valuable in developing their views of Jesus.

Some ancient texts, known as [apocrypha](#) or "secret writing," filled in the silence of the New Testament writings and the Apostolic Fathers on certain matters with often fantastic and picturesque accounts. Other texts had more doctrinal aims, some of which presented teachings condemned by the early Church. Concerning Christian use of these texts for developing views of Jesus, in antiquity [Origen](#) expressed the position still predominantly held by Christians today:

We are not unaware that many of these secret writings were produced by wicked men, famous for their iniquity.... We must therefore use caution in accepting all these secret writings that circulate under the name of saints..... because some of them were written to destroy the truth of our Scripture and to impose a false teaching. On the other hand, we should not totally reject writings that might be useful in shedding light on the Scripture. It is a sign of a great man to hear and carry out the advice of Scripture: "Test everything; retain what is good."[\[31\]](#)

Some of these texts were didactic works expressing the theology of unorthodox groups, and obviously these groups held a converse view of their writings than that of Origen and orthodoxy. Thus, in antiquity, variant groups at times employed these apocryphal works in developing their view of Jesus, and though they vanished at a given historical point, modern reconstructionist movements often reemploy these texts in developing their views of Jesus. Notable groups include [Gnosticism](#), and that of the [Ebionites](#).

**First Image:** *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, by Caravaggio (1601–02) — "Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." [John 20:27](#)

**Second Image:** Illuminated manuscript of the Gospels c. 1220