

# Who Is Jesus Christ?

## The *Study Catechism*: Questions 28–41

**Question 28.** *What is the second article of the Apostles' Creed?*

"And I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and 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 the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead."

**Question 29.** *What do you believe when you confess your faith in Jesus Christ as "God's only Son"?*

That Jesus Christ is a unique person who was sent to do a unique work.

*Luke 3:21–22* "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

*Luke 12:49–50* "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!"

*John 1:14* "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

**Question 30. How do you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?**

No one else will ever be God incarnate. No one else will ever die for the sins of the world. Only Jesus Christ is such a person, only he could do such a work, and he in fact has done it.

*Isa. 53:5* “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

*John 1:29* “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

*Col. 1:15–20* “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

**Question 31. What do you affirm when you confess your faith in Jesus Christ as “our Lord”?**

That having been raised from the dead he reigns with compassion and justice over all things in heaven and on earth, especially over those who confess him by faith; and that by loving and serving him above all else, I give glory and honor to God.

*1 Cor. 15:3–4* “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.”

*Rev. 11:15* “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”

*Eph. 1:20–23* “God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his

feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

*Phil. 2:9–11* "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

***Question 32. What do you affirm when you say he was "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary"?***

First, that being born of a woman, Jesus was truly a human being. Second, that our Lord's incarnation was a holy and mysterious event, brought about solely by free divine grace surpassing any human possibilities. Third, that from the very beginning of his life on earth, he was set apart by his unique origin for the sake of accomplishing our salvation.

*Luke 1:31* "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus."

*Luke 1:35* "The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'"

*Heb. 2:14* "Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."

*Phil. 2:5–7* "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

***Question 33. What is the significance of affirming that Jesus is truly God?***

Only God can properly deserve worship. Only God can reveal to us who God is. And only God can save us from our sins. Being truly God, Jesus meets these conditions. He is the proper object of our worship, the self-revelation of God, and the Savior of the world.

*John 20:28* "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

*Matt. 11:27* "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

1 John 4:14 “And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.”

**Question 34. What is the significance of affirming that Jesus is also truly a human being?**

Being truly human, Jesus entered fully into our fallen situation and overcame it from within. By his pure obedience, he lived a life of unbroken unity with God, even to the point of accepting a violent death. As sinners at war with grace, this is precisely the kind of life we fail to live. When we accept him by faith, he removes our disobedience and clothes us with his perfect righteousness.

*Heb. 2:17–18* “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”

*Heb. 4:15* “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.”

*Heb. 5:8–9* “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

*Rom. 5:19* “For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

**Question 35. How can Jesus be truly God and yet also truly human at the same time?**

The mystery of Jesus Christ’s divine-human unity passes our understanding; only faith given by the Holy Spirit enables us to affirm it. When Holy Scripture depicts Jesus as someone with divine power, status, and authority, it presupposes his humanity. And when it depicts him as someone with human weakness, neediness, and mortality, it presupposes his deity. We cannot understand how this should be, but we can trust that the God who made heaven and earth is free to become God incarnate and thus to be God with us in this wonderful and awe-inspiring way.

*Mark 1:27* “They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’”

*Mark 4:41* "And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"

*Matt. 28:18* "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"

*Luke 22:44* "In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."

*Job 5:9* "He does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number."

**Question 36. How did God use the people of Israel to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus?**

God made a covenant with Israel, promising that God would be their light and their salvation, that they would be God's people, and that through them all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. Therefore, no matter how often Israel turned away from God, God still cared for them and acted on their behalf. In particular, God sent them prophets, priests, and kings. Each of these was "anointed" by God's Spirit—prophets, to declare God's word; priests, to make sacrifice for the people's sins; and kings, to rule justly in the fear of God, upholding the poor and needy, and defending the people from their enemies.

*Gen. 17:3–4* "Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.'"

*Gen. 12:1–4* "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

*Ex. 6:4–5* "I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant."

*Gal. 3:14* "In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

*Jer. 30:22* "And you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

*1 Peter 2:9–10* “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

*Zech. 1:6* “But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your ancestors?”

*Lev. 5:6* “And the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.”

*Ps. 72:1, 4* “Give the king your justice, O God, . . . May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.”

***Question 37. Was the covenant with Israel an everlasting covenant?***

Yes. With the coming of Jesus the covenant with Israel was expanded and confirmed. By faith in him Gentiles were welcomed into the covenant. This throwing open of the gates confirmed the promise that through Israel God’s blessing would come to all peoples. Although for the most part Israel has not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, God has not rejected Israel. God still loves Israel, and God is their hope, “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). The God who has reached out to unbelieving Gentiles will not fail to show mercy to Israel as the people of the everlasting covenant.

*Isa. 61:8* “I will make an everlasting covenant with them.”

*Jer. 31:3* “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”

*2 Sam. 23:5* “For he has made with me [David] an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.”

*Rom. 11:29* “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

***Question 38. Why was the title “Christ,” which means “anointed one,” applied to Jesus?***

Jesus Christ was the definitive prophet, priest, and king. All of the Lord’s anointed in Israel anticipated and led finally to him. In assuming these offices Jesus not only transformed them, but also realized the purpose of Israel’s election for the sake of the world.

*2 Cor. 1:20* “For in him every one of God’s promises is a ‘Yes.’ For this reason it is through him that we say the ‘Amen,’ to the glory of God.”

*Acts 10:37–38* “That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

*Luke 4:16–19* “[Jesus] stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’”

**Question 39. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of prophet?**

He was God’s Word to a dying and sinful world; he embodied the love he proclaimed. His life, death, and resurrection became the great Yes that continues to be spoken despite how often we have said No. When we receive this Word by faith, Christ himself enters our hearts, that he may dwell in us forever, and we in him.

*Acts 3:22* “Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.’”

*John 1:18* “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

*Eph. 3:17* “[I pray] that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”

**Question 40. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of priest?**

He was the Lamb of God that took away the sin of the world; he became our priest and sacrifice in one. Confronted by our hopelessness in sin and death, Christ interceded by offering himself—his entire person and work—in order to reconcile us to God.

*Heb. 4:14* “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.”

*John 1:29* “[John] declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”

*Heb. 2:17* “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.”

*Eph. 1:7* “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”

#### **Question 41. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of king?**

He was the Lord who took the form of a servant; he perfected royal power in weakness. With no sword but the sword of righteousness, and no power but the power of love, Christ defeated sin, evil, and death by reigning from the cross.

*John 19:19* “Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’”

*Phil. 2:5–8* Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

*1 Cor. 1:25* “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”

*John 12:32* “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

## Reflections

Who is Jesus Christ? This is a foundational question for every Christian. We will spend two weeks looking at the answer to this question. We must know the story of who Jesus was and what that means for us. The story of Jesus is found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four books at the beginning of the New Testament were written to tell the good news of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. They were written with the end of the story in mind. They were not recorded until after the crucifixion and resurrection and do not intend to be biographies. Instead, they explain the incredible events of the life of Jesus and proclaim him as the Messiah and the Son of God.

## TRULY GOD, TRULY HUMAN

The Gospel stories tell us of angels that came to Mary and Joseph to explain the miraculous birth of Jesus and to guide them in their care of Jesus. From the beginning we know this is no ordinary child; it is the coming of God in human flesh—the incarnation. Jesus was not God in disguise, the deity dressed in human skin. Neither was Jesus simply a very good man—the best ever—who had a special relationship to God. Jesus was both truly God and truly human. Truly God, Jesus “is the proper object of our worship, the self-revelation of God, and the Savior of the world” (question 33). Truly human, “Jesus entered fully into our fallen situation and overcame it from within” (question 34). Jesus reigns in power for us, truly God and truly human, even today. When we call Jesus *Lord* we are recognizing his power in the world today and his power in our lives.

## GOD’S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

In the Old Testament God made a covenant with Israel. A covenant is a promise to do what one says. God promised the Israelites that they would be God’s people and that through them all the world would be blessed. From the stories of Abraham and Sarah through the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land and the kingdom of David, God’s covenant was renewed. Even the prophets in the days of the exile in Babylon promised that God’s covenant was still good. No matter how often Israel turned away to other gods, God kept God’s promises.

Through the years God provided three special groups of people to help the people of Israel keep their covenant. The three special groups were prophets, priests, and kings. The members of these groups were anointed by God’s Spirit. The catechism provides good definitions of each of these roles.

Jesus Christ took on the roles of these three special groups and transformed them. It is important to note that in the transformation of these roles Jesus embodied God’s loving power and powerful love by taking away the sins of the world and taking on the form of a servant. Jesus was not the political savior the people were looking for, but he was so much more. God’s covenant with Israel was extended with the coming of Jesus. The original covenant was expanded and confirmed. It now included Gentiles as well as Jews. God’s blessing was meant for all peoples. God’s covenant promise is still true for Israel today as it is for all people.

God’s covenant with Israel continued with Jesus Christ and continues today. God’s commitment to God’s people never ends. God’s promises are always present for us. In today’s world where commit-

ments are often not kept for very long, it is sometimes difficult for us to understand a lifelong commitment. Have you made a lifelong commitment? Have you found it hard at times to keep that commitment? God always keeps God's promises. We can count on it!

## Keeping a Journal

1. Reread the catechism questions and answers for this session. Choose one sentence or phrase to reflect on for the week. Here are some ideas:

- Only God can save us from our sins.
- Jesus entered fully into our fallen situation and overcame it from within.
- When we accept him by faith, he removes our disobedience and clothes us with his perfect righteousness.
- No matter how often the Israelites turned away from God, God still cared for them and acted on their behalf.
- Christ himself enters our hearts, that he may dwell in us forever, and we in him.
- Christ interceded by offering himself—his entire person and work—in order to reconcile us to God.

See if you can memorize the sentence or phrase you choose, or at least remember the gist of it. Let this phrase stick with you through the week. Include it in your prayers, think about it while you are in the car, and remember it in the midst of a stressful situation. Look for connections between the phrase you selected and the world around you. Perhaps a conversation, a TV show, a current event, or a situation at home or at work will remind you of it. Record your thoughts and observations about this phrase and others in the journal space provided.

2. Reflect a few minutes on commitments you have made in your life. Are there some you need to reevaluate? Are there people to whom you need to make new commitments? Offer your commitments and your relationships to God in prayer. Ask for help in strengthening them. Reflect upon your relationship with Jesus Christ. Is it all it can be? Are there areas you need to explore deeper or seek help with? Offer them to God for guidance and help.



