

## ***Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert***

### **Theology: Jesus, the Revelation of God**

#### **Theme**

Discuss the church's understanding of Jesus' humanity and divinity.

#### **Catechist Competencies**

1. Explain Catholic teaching on the humanity and divinity of Jesus found in the catechism and other sources.
2. Describe the implications of Jesus as the model for Christian life.
3. Explain from the Bible and from personal experience the meaning and concept of faith.

#### **Catechism References —**

#142-184, 422-478, 512-682

#### **Focusing the Study**

In Matthew's Gospel (16:15) we see Jesus presenting the question to his disciples that will effect not only their lives but also all of history. "Who do you say that I am?" As the disciples struggle with all of the ways that others have named Jesus, it is Peter who declares, "You are the Messiah, Son of the living God." Peter's response presents an instant portrait of Jesus the Redeemer, who saves us *from* sin and *for* love of one another. In response to Jesus' famous question, the church in every generation has drawn on prominent biblical titles, ancient conciliar descriptions, and modern day experiences to answer this question for itself. Any attempt to understand the mystery of Jesus involves this continuing process of interpretation.



#### **How Scripture Answers the Question**

From non-religious sources we find proof that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical person who lived in first century Palestine. He

#### ***Theology: 1 hour***



Completion of this study entitles the catechist to one hour of credit toward certification.

was a Jew who was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius and after his death he was called the Christ.

The early life of Jesus was lived in relative obscurity in Nazareth for a period of about thirty years, with the exception of a brief appearance at the age of twelve in the Temple in Jerusalem at the feast of Passover (Lk 2:41-52).

Jesus first emerges in Galilee in association with John the Baptist where he willingly receives John's baptism, which marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He appears to be a prophet (within the long line of prophets during that time) declaring "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mk 1:14).

The Gospel sketches of Jesus portray a man, who knew what it meant to be a loving person, genuinely concerned with the will of God and the goodness of his brothers and sisters whose humanity he shared. Jesus is best described as a likable friend by searching people out, going to their homes, the street, and the marketplace because he was deeply involved in their everyday lives. To those who followed him, Jesus spoke boldly about God's place in their lives and called them to be disciples by turning to God.

In Jesus, God embraced human nature in all its frailty. Generally, the New Testament presents a portrait of Jesus reaching out to those most in need. Specifically, each Gospel paints a portrait of Jesus that is relevant to the community for which the evangelist was writing. For example:

Mark focuses on Jesus as the suffering Messiah.

Matthew portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the great teacher who fulfills the Torah.

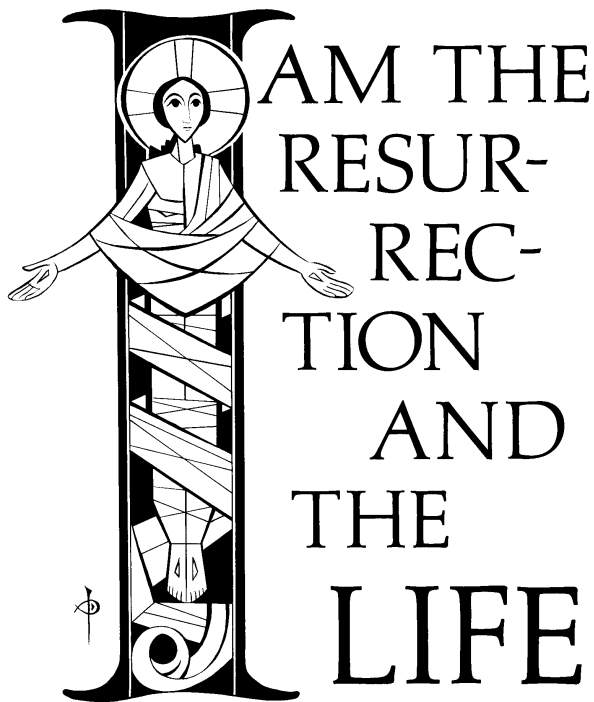
## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

Luke wishes to show that Jesus is the Savior of all people.

John emphasizes that Jesus is the eternal Word of God in the flesh that was present at the dawn of creation.

Paul focuses entirely on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus' question to Peter goes beyond the interpretation of prophet into his actual mission and ministry. The announcement of the reign of God is central to the mission and ministry of Jesus because it locates his life within the Jewish context of salva-



tion history. Thus, the reign of God represents a dynamic action within creation and history that gives life a purpose by restoring relationships between God, humanity and the world.

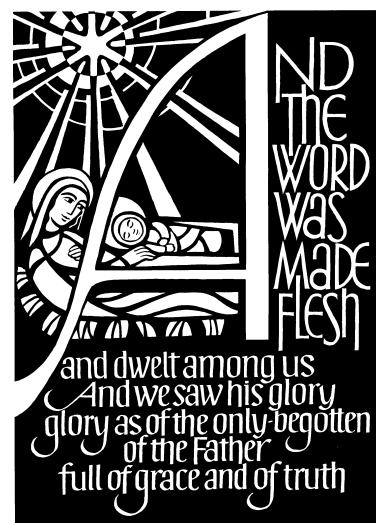
It is the disciples' experience of the risen Christ that begins to connect both the mission and ministry of Jesus to the salvific nature of his life and relationship with the Father. The early Church began to realize that it is necessary to know Jesus (encounter him in one's heart) rather than know *about* him. Since Jesus was no longer a physical person, the early church set forth on the mission of preaching the resurrected Christ. This activity included both the messages of his life (knowing about) and the invitation to accept him (knowing in one's heart) as the Son of God by being baptized in water and the spirit.

### How Our Tradition Answers The Question

Simply stated, Jesus Christ is the person called Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified on a cross, rose from the dead, and is proclaimed the Son of God. After the resurrection, Jesus began to be experienced as personally active as an embodied Spirit within the community of his followers. What enables the early Church to move from Jesus' own proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the proclamation of Jesus, himself as Christ the Lord, was their experience of the resurrection. Everything we say about the Jesus of faith depends on the resurrection as it makes the shift from the Jesus of history to the Christ of salvation.

The church of the first several centuries struggled with its articulation of Jesus' identity. In Catholic Christology, all of the activities and works of Jesus are considered divine acts since they come from the divine person. This not only focussed on miracles and prophecies but also included the daily activities of his life. This central theme created debates centered around two interpretations of the incarnation: Jesus' divinity and humanity. This development had its origins in the community's lived experience of Jesus' spirit active in the community during worship which gave rise to the basic confession of faith. The concern of the early Church Councils was to bring to expression an official and universal formulation for this confession of faith for the unity of the Church.

Today we profess our faith in Jesus as truly human and truly divine. Although theological formulations of this mystery took time to develop, it wasn't until the fourth century that the Nicene Creed formally stated what the early church had believed, and prayed and what we Catholics believe and profess today - namely that Jesus Christ is one in being with the Father. Certainly, we hold this as a central article of our faith. How one



## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

The Council of Chalcedon stands out in history as the focal point for the development of Catholic Christology. At this Council, the Church reached a clear consensus in its understanding that in Jesus there existed two natures, human and divine, in one divine person, with no confusion between the two natures. The great value of this Council is its insistence upon the fullness of Jesus' humanity and divinity within the unity of one person. Since the Council of Chalcedon had named the official Church teaching on this matter, it has undergone very little change. We see that in the church's original credal statement a richness that requires every generation to interpret its meaning to fully appreciate the total mystery of God as it is found in Jesus. All other councils have merely repeated the earlier conciliar definitions whenever they turned their attention to Christological issues: Lateran IV (1215), Lyons II (1274), Florence (1442), Trent (1547), and Vatican II (1962-1965).

*Further reading on the Christological Councils is encouraged to understand the ongoing development of their theological issues within the context of Church history.*

### A Matter Of Faith

This short essay on Jesus and his identity has only scratched the surface of the full spectrum of the Christological question "Who do you say that I am?" The answer to this question determines how we know if Jesus is still present in the world today. Both scripture and tradition would say that Jesus is present in three ways. First, as the risen Lord he is present to all of creation. Second, through baptism he is present to the whole Christian community. Third, in the Eucharist celebration he is present in a unique way under the physical appearance of bread and wine.

Faith and Christian life begin with the same question which Jesus posed to Peter and the disciples who were with him over two thousand years ago. 'Who do people say that I am?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' (Mt 16:13-15).

Peter's frank and impetuous response: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" is not merely an abstract statement, rather it is a revelation born out of a lived experience of Jesus as a gift from God. As each one of us lets him or her self be touched personally by the question:



As the sufferings  
of Christ  
abound in us +  
so also through  
Christ.  
Does our  
comfort abound

"And you, who do you, say that I am?" we begin to hear the question as "What do I really mean to you?"

Peter's realization and response came after a long period of living with Jesus, hearing his words and observing his life and ministry. In our case, to respond with the faith and assurance of Peter we need to carefully listen to how Jesus is revealing himself to us at any given time in our life.

A mature faith that proclaims that Jesus is human and divine does not attempt to protect his divinity at the expense of his humanity. We must live with the tension of not latching onto only one image or perception when talking about Jesus. In fact we need realize that the many perceptions of Jesus within our own life change over time

As the death of Jesus marks a transition from the historical to the theological, these many images stimulate us to search for the full truth about Jesus. We can take advantage of the many insights from those who believed to the point of martyrdom, the insights of many scholars seeking to comprehend the mystery of Jesus, and the insights of the Magisterium of the Church.

It is in the person of Jesus Christ that one finds the roots of the Christian vision of life, which is God's, personal self-involvement in the creative process of salvation through human liberation. Ultimately, questions concerning Christian identity, the meaning of and mission of the church and the roots of Christian ministry must be brought into contact



## ***Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert***

with the person, teaching and ministry of Jesus. Our life as Christians finds its source in the unique accounts of the events of Jesus' life – the gospels. The purpose of Christian doctrine, morality, spirituality, and Scripture is to provide us with the knowledge and experience of the living person of Jesus Christ. Part of being a follower of Jesus is to learn as much as we can about who he is and what he stands for by reading the Bible, books written about him, his teaching, and finally through prayer experiences that make him real in our heart.

### **Summary**

When we come full circle with what we really know and what we still embrace as mystery or articles of faith, we are left with the initial question presented to us by the Gospel writer "Who do you say that I am?" Our response affirms that in Jesus we encounter the human face of God. The examination of Jesus as the human face of God involves questions of anthropology, psychology, and history which go beyond the scope of this article, but what we can surmise is that through Jesus we are given a vision of God as loving parent. He spoke of the intimacy between himself and the Father. He referred to himself as being with the Father and the Father being with him

In essence, the gospels present both the ordinary and the extraordinary in Jesus and leave us with the choice to accept or reject him in our present day conception of human reality in the light of grace. Ultimately, the answer to this fundamental question comes down to this: Catholic believers of today must base their decision about Jesus on the same foundation that has supported the faith of all the popes, bishops, teachers, parents and others throughout history. That foundation is first of all the biblical record of Jesus and his teachings, particularly the four gospels, and the integrity of all those who have preserved and interpreted that biblical record through the years.

In conclusion, we will find what we seek precisely in a personal relationship with Jesus and not simply waiting for him to come. This intimate relationship moves us to proclaim, like Peter "You are the Messiah, The Son of God."

### **Review/Discussion Questions**

In order to complete this study and earn one hour of credit toward Catechist Certification, you must respond to the review/discussion questions in either of the following ways:

1. Write/type your response (20-40 words each) and submit them to your catechetical leader;
2. Engage in a formal discussion of the questions (at least 30 minutes) in some forum approved by your catechetical leader (e.g. a catechist meeting, level meetings, team meetings, catechist pairings, etc).

### **Review Questions**

1. Why is studying Jesus the best way to know about God? How else has God been revealed to us?
2. What are your thoughts on the entrance of Jesus into history?
3. Why did the Son become human?
4. What is your image of God? Is it the same as Jesus?
5. What did Jesus come to do?

### **Practical Applications/Critical Thinking**

1. How do we make real the Kingdom of God on earth?
2. How do we present in our faith community the lifestyle of Jesus' love, compassion, forgiveness, healing, and teaching?
3. How do we achieve a balanced view of Jesus as both human and divine?

### **The Author**

Mike Dowling provides consulting and training services to parishes organizing and implementing religious education programs for all ages. The primary focus of his work is to provide formational opportunities for catechists, DREs, and Youth Ministers within the Dioceses of Rockford, Chicago, and Milwaukee.

### **Fostering Faith catechist formation inserts**

These titles are available in a convenient 4-page copy machine-friendly 8 1/2 x 11 format for those who missed them first time around. Order the titles you need to make copies for your catechists. \$5 each. Send your check with a request for the desired titles to the Office for Catechesis.

#### **Titles now available:**

**Scripture:** Formation of the Oral Tradition in the Old Testament  
**Liturgy:** Understanding the Liturgical Year  
**Catechesis:** Jesus, the Early Church & the Effective Catechist  
**Theology:** The Trinity Revealed in Creation  
**Sacraments:** Catechesis on the Sacraments  
**Prayer:** Ways of Prayer  
**Church:** Theology of Church  
**Catechesis:** Faith and Human Development  
**Moral Life:** The Role of Conscience  
**Liturgy:** The Liturgy of the Word  
**Scripture:** The Kingdom of God in the Meals of St. Luke's Gospel

Fostering Faith inserts are the property of the Office for Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Permission is granted for reproduction and distribution to catechists for their formation. Any other use is prohibited. Direct questions to the Publications Manager: 312-243-3700.