

# Topic: The Incarnation & Person of Jesus

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IHM

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

# Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and  
the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

“Bless us, O Lord, and these thy  
gifts, which we are about to  
receive. From thy bounty, through  
Christ our Lord, Amen.”

# Guest Speaker

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Mrs. Quiana Dirker, IHM PSR

# Jesus' Birth & Origins in the Gospels

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- Matthew 1:1-2:23
  - Connections to Jewish culture
  - Reign of Herod 73-4 BC
  - Magi—Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh
  - Focus on Joseph (God communicating to him through dreams)
  - Flight to Egypt/Massacre of Innocents
  - Genealogy going back to David and Abraham
- Mark
  - No infancy narrative
- Luke 1:1-2:21
  - Connections to Gentile culture
  - Reign of Caesar Augustus 63BC-14AD
  - Shepherds
  - Focus on Mary (Annunciation & Magnificat)
  - Genealogy going back to Adam
- John 1:1-18
  - No infancy narrative; Divine Origin
  - Jesus as the “Logos” or Word of God Incarnate
  - Same opening words as book of Genesis

# Jesus as Fully God Incarnate

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- Jesus as the Word of God made flesh (Jn 1:14)
- Jesus (as the Son of God and second person of the Trinity) was pre-existent from all eternity with the Father and the Spirit (Jn 1:1-2)
- By sharing in our humanity, Jesus makes it possible to share in his divinity
  - “The Son of God became man so that we might become God”—St. Athanasius
- Jesus was/is eternally God, but became fully human/assumed a human nature at the Incarnation



## Jesus as the Culmination of Salvation History



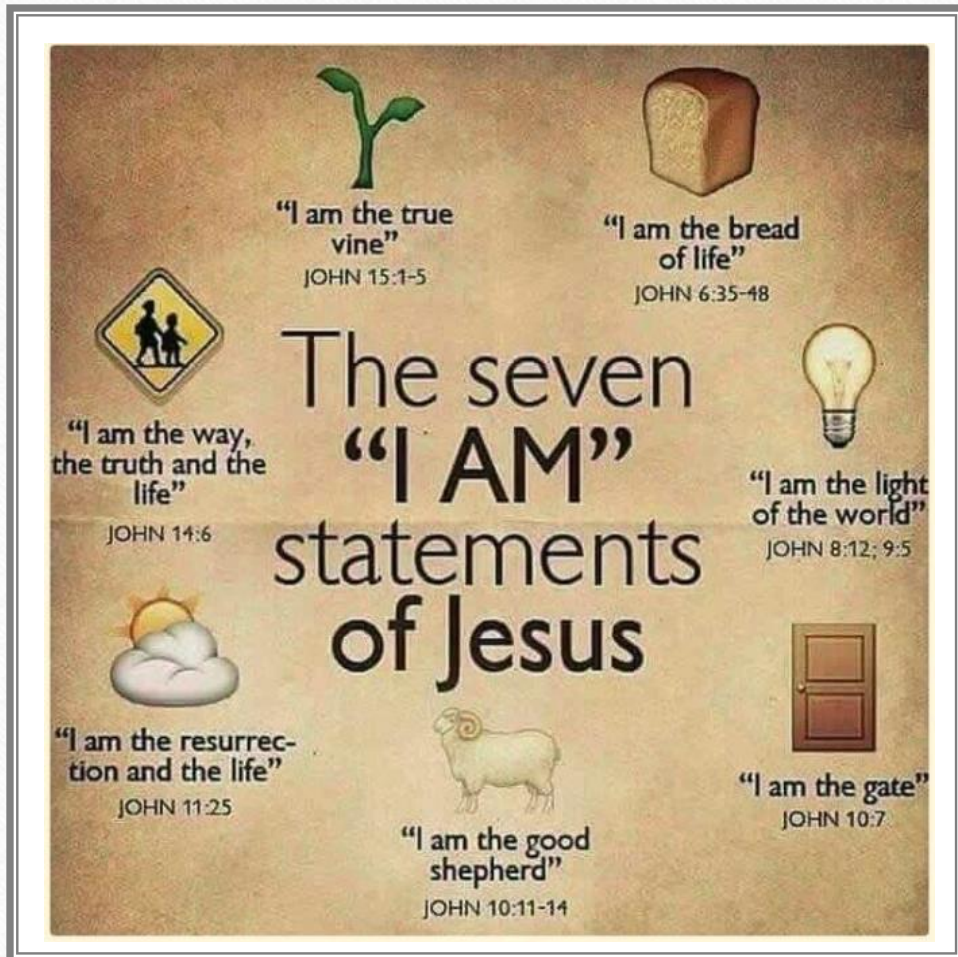
- Jesus as the fulfillment, not replacement, of the Old Testament (Mt 5:17-18)
- Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God (as God)
- Jesus as the Alpha & Omega (Beginning & End)
- Jesus as the human face of God among us (Jn 14:9)

# Jesus as Fully Divine Lord

- OT Divine name of God=Yahweh (I am who I am).
- Out of respect, the Jewish people would not speak the name of YHWH out loud, but would say “LORD” instead (Adonai in Hebrew).
- Greek word for Lord is Kyrios; thus when Jesus is called “Lord” in the NT it is hinting at his divinity.



# Gospel of John: 7 'I am' statements



- Statements Jesus makes about himself
  - Challenges the reader to recognize Jesus as the Messiah & Son of God (Yahweh="I AM")
  - Bread of life (6:35)
  - Light of the world (8:12)
  - Sheepfold (10:7)
  - Good shepherd (10:11)
  - Resurrection and the life (11:25)
  - Way, truth, and life (14:6)
  - Vine (15:5)

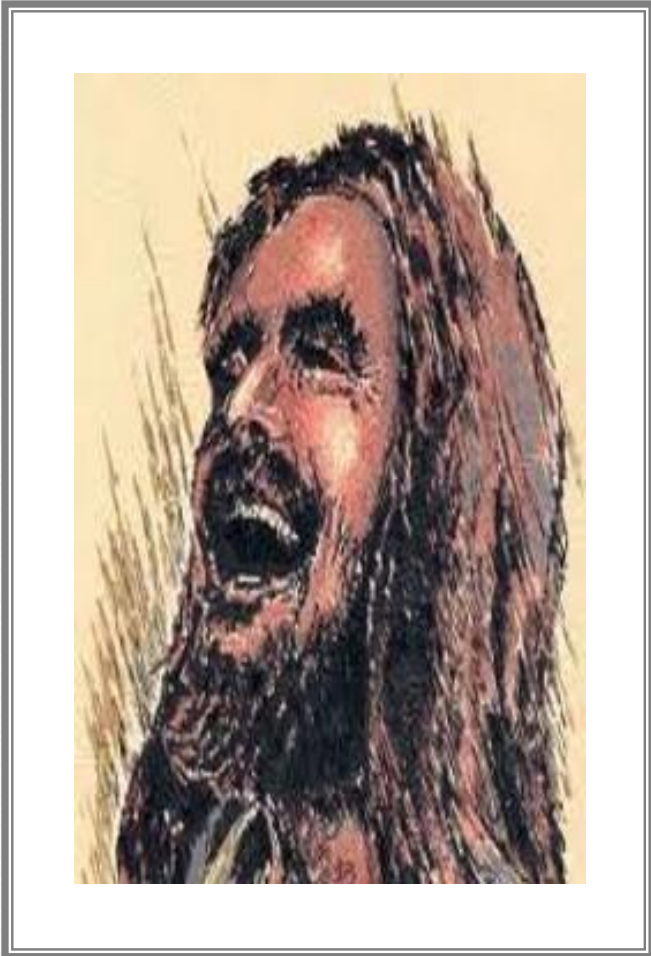


# Jesus Was Fully Human

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- Jesus is our perfect model, not only of divinity, but especially of humanity and what it means to be human.
- Jesus teaches us what it means to be human through his life, teachings, passion, death, resurrection and ascension.
- Jesus shows us to be human is to love and be loved:
  - We love, because God first loved us. (I Jn 4:19)
  - We are to love others, as Jesus loves us. (Jn 15)
  - Jesus loved all, and particularly sought out those whom society rejected (like the Samaritans, the sick, the poor, and “sinners”).
  - Jesus loved with his life, and even unto his death.





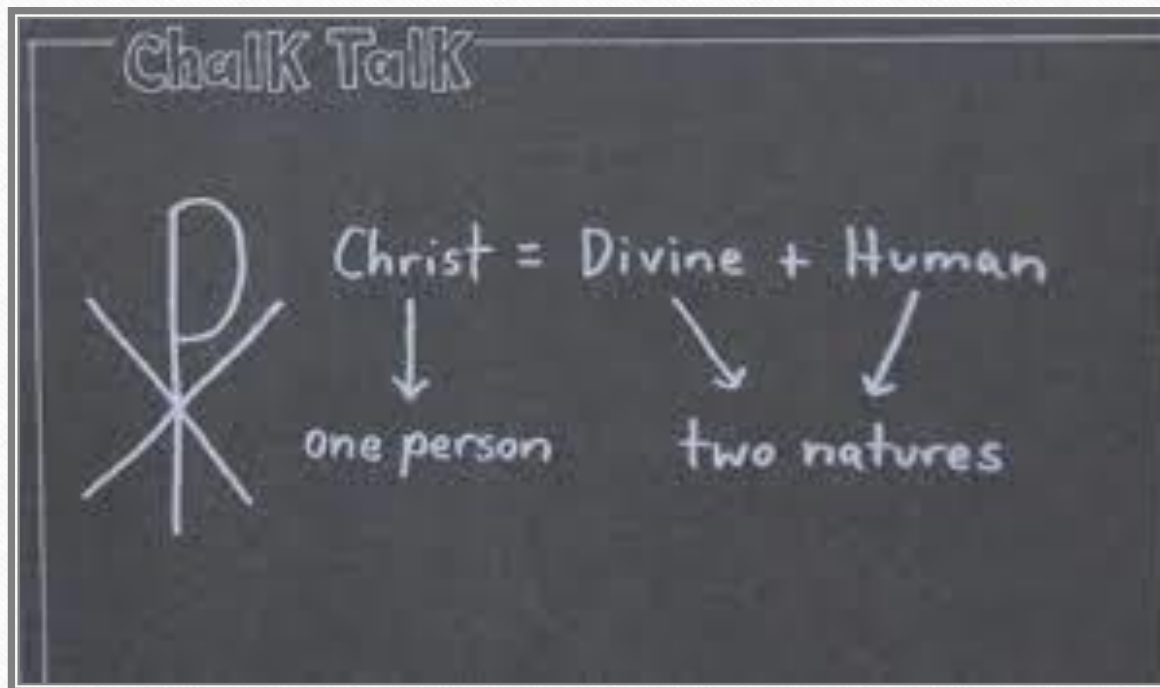
## Jesus Had a Human Body, Mind, Heart & Soul

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- Jesus was fully human in all things *except* sin.
- Jesus loved, had close friends, family, etc.
- Jesus experienced the *full* range of human emotions and experiences (from joy to sorrow).
- Through the ***Incarnation*** (God taking on flesh in the person of Jesus), Jesus ***sanctifies*** (or makes holy) the entirety of the human experience.
- “He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved.” (Gaudium Spes/Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World # 22)

## The Hypostatic Union:

- The Dogma of the Church that states that Jesus is one Divine Person with two natures (fully human and fully divine).
- Both the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith are *one* true person.
- Defined at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, and later refined at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 AD.
- All other beliefs were then declared *heretical*, or incorrect/false teachings and understandings (even though many good people had innocently believed these previously; it is only a heresy once a correct teaching has been authoritatively defined).



# Two Equally Orthodox Ways to Approach Christology

(More of a spectrum of both/and, not either/or.)

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## Low Christology

- “Christology from Below”
- “Ascending Christology”
- Focus: Jesus’ humanity (Very similar to us)
  - A divine, human-example that helps us to become better
  - Terms used to refer to Jesus: ‘Master,’ ‘Teacher,’ ‘Rabbi’
- Does NOT deny Jesus’ divinity
- Apparent in Synoptic Gospels
- Very popular after Vatican II

## High Christology

- “Christology from Above”
- “Descending Christology”
- Focus: Jesus’ divinity (Very different from us)
  - A human, divine-messenger that saves us
  - Terms used to refer to Jesus: ‘Lord,’ ‘Son of God’
- Does NOT deny Jesus’ humanity
- Apparent in John, letters of John, and letters of Paul
- Very popular before Vatican II

# Low & High Christology Characteristics & Implications (Thomas Zanzig)

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## **Christology From Below (Low) – Ascending**

### ***Theological foundations:***

- (a) The Gospels as inspired, post-Resurrection testimonies of faith
- (b) The lived experience of alienation from self, others, and God
- (c) God as personal, immanent (“Our Father”)
- (d) Jesus initially perceived as a Jewish prophet and teacher in first-century Palestine
- (e) Jesus as gradually growing in consciousness of his identity and role
- (f) Jesus’s death on the cross as a direct result of conflicts with Jewish and Roman authorities and as a consequence of his total love
- (g) Salvation through personal decision and commitment, as well as through the church community

### ***Characteristics of Jesus that are emphasized:***

- (a) His humanity as the Nazarene, who experienced life as we do
- (b) His Resurrection by God (leads to an emphasis on Easter as the central Christian feast)
- (c) His ongoing presence and call to life in the Spirit (leads to an emphasis on the Eucharist as a communal banquet)

## **Christology From Above (High) - Descending**

### ***Theological foundations:***

- (a) The Gospels as historical documents dictated by God
- (b) Humanity’s fall from grace and the need for redemption
- (c) God as transcendent, “out there”
- (d) Jesus as the pre-existent Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, sent by God
- (e) Jesus, from birth, as fully conscious of his identity and role
- (f) Jesus’s saving us by “dying for our sins” in an act of perfect sacrifice, thereby satisfying God and reopening heaven
- (g) Salvation through baptism and adherence to the will of God as it is discerned by Church authorities

### ***Characteristics of Jesus that are emphasized:***

- (a) His divinity as the second person of the Trinity
- (b) His incarnation as a man (leads to an emphasis on Christmas as the central Christian feast)
- (c) His sacrificial and salvific death on the cross (leads to an emphasis on Eucharist as a re-enactment of Calvary)

# Discussion Questions

- Please share:
  - What struck you from today's Mass readings?
  - How would you respond to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?"
  - What does the Incarnation say about God? What does it say about us?
  - What values do you see in a Low Christology approach? A High Christology approach?
  - What questions did this topic and readings raise in your heart or mind?

# Closing Prayer

## St. Patrick's Breastplate (abbreviated)

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Christ with me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me,  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left,

Christ when I lie down,  
Christ when I sit down,  
Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.  
Amen.