



**LESSON 3**  
**PREPARATION NOTES**

**Jesus**  
**Christ—**  
**Our Lord**

## **JESUS CHRIST—OUR LORD IN BRIEF:**

Jesus of Nazareth is truly God.

### **KEY ELEMENTS:**

- The fundamental point of this lesson is that Jesus is God. This fact is absolutely central if the Christian message is to have any grounding. Unfortunately, as CCO questionnaires on campus indicate, many Catholics do not understand that Jesus is God. It is extremely important that we communicate this truth to participants. This may be the first time they hear a clear explanation of Christ's divinity.
- We will study a number of Scripture selections in which Jesus identifies himself as God. We also see in these narratives that the people listening to Jesus understood what he was saying.
- Be sure you understand well the claims to divinity listed in the table, especially:
  - *I Am—God* revealed his name to the Jewish people as “I Am” when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Jesus uses this name as his own to signify that he is indeed God.
  - *The Messiah/The Christ*—The Messiah is the one described in Daniel 7 as the Son of Man, the one sent from God who would be King and Saviour. *Christ* comes from the Greek word for *Messiah*—it means Anointed One, God's chosen one, the one who will save Israel.
  - *Son of Man* refers to a prophecy from Daniel 7:13-14 that the Son of Man is the promised Messiah. The Jews would have understood that Jesus was referring to this passage when calling himself the Son of Man.

*I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
And to him was given dominion  
and glory and kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed. (RSV-CE)*

- *Blasphemy* means to disrespect God or sacred things. The Jews thought Jesus was blaspheming when he claimed to be equal with God (e.g. by forgiving sins).
- This lesson includes a brief section defending the historical reliability of the Bible. In their excellent volume *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics*, Dr. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, S.J., outline a logical progression to establish the claims of Christ's divinity:
  - Establish that Scripture is reliable as historical record; as data.
  - Establish that Christ's claims to divinity are found in Scripture.
  - Then comes the argument for the truth of these claims.
- Lesson 3 follows Kreeft and Tacelli's logical progression in establishing the claims of Christ's divinity. Since our discussion is based on Jesus' words in the Scriptures, it is important to establish the Scriptures as a reliable source of historical information. If the participants can accept this premise, then it makes it easier to continue on to the discussion about Christ's divinity.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

- These articles of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* look at the Trinity and the three divine persons, Father, Son and Spirit: CCC 150-152; 238-267; 446-451.
- These Scripture selections show common societal opinions of Jesus: Matthew 16:13-16, John 1:29-34, Mark 2:5-7, John 20:24-28, Luke 4:33-34, Matthew 8:8-10.
- *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics* (by Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli) describes the *trilemma* argument used in this lesson. It also explains the *quadrilemma*, which argues four options for Jesus' identity: as liar, deluded, legend or Lord. It is an excellent resource worth consulting as you prepare for this lesson.



**LESSON 3**

**Jesus  
Christ—  
Our Lord**

# 1 Share how last week's challenge went.



## Introduction

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You may have heard Jesus referred to as Lord and Saviour. These terms each describe a unique aspect of Jesus' identity. It is important to understand each separately before we can grasp how they complement one another. Today we will look at Jesus as Lord.



Christianity is unique among world religions, because it emphasizes more than just moral teachings and a way of life. It hinges on the identity of Jesus Christ, who was truly God and truly man.

*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit  
was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.*

### THE NICENE CREED

Recognizing Jesus' identity is essential to the Christian faith. If the man—Jesus of Nazareth—is not also God, then the Christian faith is utterly demolished.

## Is the Bible a reliable source?



For the remainder of this lesson we will look at a number of selections from the Bible in which Jesus claims to be God or to have attributes ascribed only to God. However, before we can establish the divinity of Christ from the Bible, we need to ask if the Bible is a reliable source of historical information. Two of the most common questions asked about the Bible are:

- a) Does the Bible faithfully express the meaning of its original authors, or has its message been changed over the centuries?
- b) Do the Gospels accurately reflect what Jesus actually said and did?

One way to establish the legitimacy of ancient documents is to examine manuscripts from as close as possible to the original time they were written. You may be surprised to learn that the New Testament is the most documented work of ancient literature, with over 5000 more ancient manuscripts still in existence compared to its closest competitor. With this vast collection of manuscripts, scholars have been able to trace the accuracy of the copies of the New Testament that have been passed down, and have found that the oldest manuscripts are 97-99% identical. Therefore, we can say with strong certainty that the New Testament in your hands today accurately reflects what was written by the First Century authors.

**LEADERS:** This offers a small sample of the arguments in favour of the New Testament as having reliably recorded the words and deeds of Jesus. If your group seems to need further conversation about this point, you can refer to the Appendix (page 154) in this Leader Guide and the *Discovery* Participant Guide.

Let us now wrestle with Jesus' most controversial and remarkable claim: his divinity.

# The Divinity of Christ

Jesus caused controversy and curiosity wherever he went because of his powerful words and miracles. He left everyone wondering, “Who is this man?” or even, “Who does this man think he is?”



The Gospel writers give us an account of society’s attitudes and opinions about Jesus during his public ministry and his Passion—from the Pharisees, to the crowds, to his disciples, to the Romans, and even to the demons. Jesus was seen as a great man, a miracle worker, a superb moral teacher and perhaps Israel’s hope for freedom from Roman tyranny. More importantly, many understood that he claimed to be equal with God, and for this scandalous blasphemy, the Chief Priests sought to kill him.

Scripture does not describe an occasion when Jesus said the words “I am God.” However, a careful look at the Gospels shows that Jesus claimed equality with God, especially by taking upon himself attributes only God could possess.

We will look at a number of Scripture selections in which Jesus claims to be God or have attributes ascribed only to God. As we go through the passages, refer to the list of divine descriptions below.

**LEADERS:** Give everyone one or two verses to look up so that they will be prepared to read aloud and give an answer. Encourage those listening to answer as well, to make sure they are paying attention.

**L** Make sure that each Scripture selection has at least one description matched up with it. It is not necessary for the group to find all the references in each verse—recognizing a few in each passage is sufficient.

A. Son of Man	G. the truth
B. the way to eternal life	H. equal with God
C. the authority to forgive sins	I. the Christ/the Messiah
D. gives life	J. Son of God
E. one with the Father	K. deserving the same honour as God
F. the authority to judge	L. “I Am”

## 2 John 8:51-59. How does Jesus claim to be God?

### JOHN 8:51-59

(vv. 56-59) *“Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*

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**A ANSWER:** L. “I Am”

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## 3 How does Jesus astound the Jews in this passage?

**A ANSWER:** He claims to have lived before Abraham, which is physically impossible.

**L LEADERS:** If participants do not notice that Jesus says “I Am,” probe further by asking, “What is significant about Jesus’ response?”

**ANSWER:** “Before Abraham was, I am” is a curious way to word a response grammatically (he does not say, “I was,” he says, “I am”). By using the words “I am” in this context, Jesus is saying that he is the Great I Am (Yahweh).

### **Background on terms used in this passage:**

**A (L) “I Am.”** God revealed his name to the Jewish people as “I Am” when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Jesus uses this name as his own to signify that he is indeed God.

**(I) The Messiah/The Christ.** The Messiah is the one described in Daniel 7 as the Son of Man, the one sent from God who would be their King and Saviour. “Christ” comes from the Greek word for “Messiah.” It means Anointed One—God’s chosen one, the one who will save Israel.

## 4 Luke 5:20-26. How does Jesus claim to be God?

### LUKE 5:20-24A

*When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."*

- ANSWER:** A. Son of Man  
C. the authority to forgive sins  
H. equal with God

#### **Background on terms used in this passage:**

Blasphemy means to disrespect God or sacred things. In this passage, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy because he claims to forgive sins, which makes him equal with God. Proclaiming himself as the Son of Man is also considered blasphemous.

Son of Man refers to a prophecy from Daniel 7:13-14 that the Son of Man is the promised Messiah. The Jews would have understood that Jesus was referring to this passage when calling himself the Son of Man.

*I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
And to him was given dominion  
and glory and kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed. (RSV-CE)*

It was scandalous to the Jews that Jesus claimed to have the authority to forgive sins—only God had that kind of authority!

## **5** Mark 14:61-64. How does this passage reaffirm the claims made in the last two Scripture selections?

### **MARK 14:61-64**

*But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am; and*

*‘you will see the Son of Man  
seated at the right hand of the Power,’  
and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”*

*Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death.*

- ANSWER:** A. Son of Man  
I. the Christ/the Messiah  
J. Son of God  
L. “I Am”

Again we see how blasphemous this claim appeared—enough to incite the religious authorities to kill Jesus.

## 6 John 4:25-26. How does Jesus identify himself to the woman?

### JOHN 4:25-26

*The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."*

**ANSWER:** I. the Christ/the Messiah

**A** Jesus clearly says that he is the Messiah. (Explanation of the word "Messiah" under Question 2.)

## 7 John 5:21-23. What divine attributes does Jesus give himself in this Scripture passage?

### JOHN 5:21-23

*Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*

**ANSWER:** D. gives life  
K. deserving the same honour given to God

**A** It must be understood how scandalous this would have been for the Jews. Jesus ascribes to himself attributes that only God can possess. The Jewish understanding is strictly monotheistic: there is only one God—no other. Jesus could not say such things without consequence! His claim appeared scandalous and blasphemous.

## 8 John 10:24, 30-33. What is the conflict described in this Scripture narrative?

### JOHN 10:24, 30-33

*So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." (...) Jesus answered them, "The Father and I are one." The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God."*

- ANSWER:** D. gives life  
E. one with the Father  
H. equal with God  
I. the Christ/the Messiah  
J. Son of God

A

In the previous passage (John 5:21-23), one might argue that Jesus was not blatantly claiming to be God. In John 10, he is more direct. The Pharisees understand his statements and are offended.

## 9 John 14:6-7. What are the claims to divinity in these verses?

### JOHN 14:6-7

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*

- ANSWER:** B. the way to Eternal Life  
D. gives life  
E. one with the Father  
G. the truth

A

## 10 What truths are embedded in the words *the way, the truth, the life*?

### ANSWER:

**The:** Jesus specifically uses the article “the.” He does not say, “I am a way, a truth, a life.” Nor does he use “one”: “I am one way, one truth, one life.” He said, “I am THE way, THE truth, THE life.”

**Way:** Jesus not only says he is THE way but also adds, “no one comes to the Father except through me.” This is a weighty and crucial proclamation! Jesus claims to be the only way to the Father. If we want to come to the Father, we must go through Jesus.

A

**Truth:** Jesus claims to be Truth itself, thus claiming for himself an attribute of the highest divinity. It would follow that we should take very seriously what Jesus says and does.

**Life:** If Jesus is the source of life, then we need to turn to him to find our meaning and purpose. He is the source of our life now and after death.

When we understand the significance of each of these words, we see that Jesus’ claims are of fundamental importance to our faith.

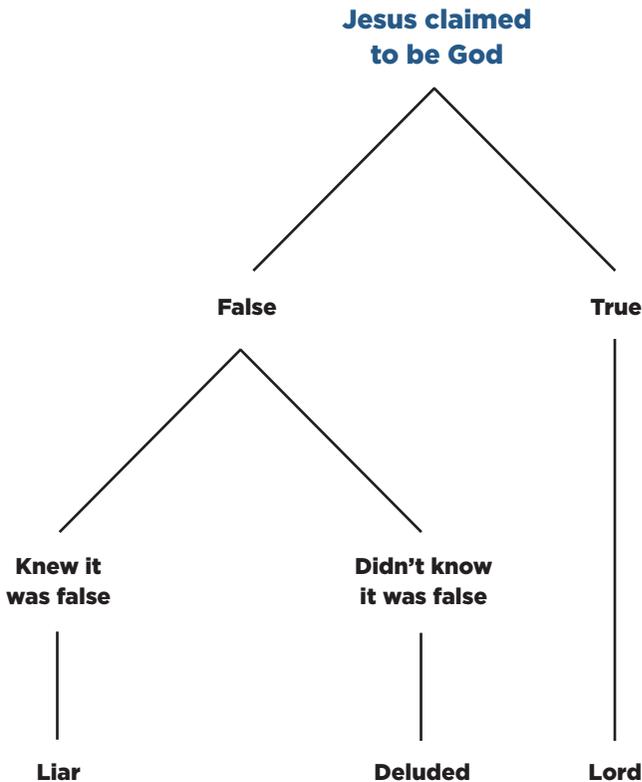
# The Trilemma



Many people would consider Jesus to be a great moral teacher but find it difficult to believe that Jesus was divine.

However, as we have seen, Jesus repeatedly equated himself with God. This leads us into an argument called the *Trilemma*, which puts forward three possibilities regarding his claim to be God. His claim can only be true or false; someone cannot claim to be God and be both right and wrong at the same time. If his claim is false, then either Jesus lied about his identity, or he was sincerely deluded. Or, his claim to be God was true.

There is much reasonable and practical evidence to suggest that Jesus is not a liar nor deluded, but Lord.



# Option #1: Jesus lied

The first objection to this argument is that Jesus claimed to be God, but he knew he was not—in other words, he lied.

## 11 What are some characteristics you would associate with a liar?

**ANSWER:** They lie for selfish gain, especially for money, power, fame or pleasure; they're not trustworthy; their lies catch up to them; they are usually emotionally or socially unstable, and feel that they need to lie to impress others; they would expect their lies to be successful.

## 12 Are these characteristics exhibited by Jesus?

**ANSWER:** No! If people usually lie for selfish gain, what gain did Jesus obtain from his lie? He had no money, no worldly goods, many rejected him and he was ultimately executed as a criminal under the charge of blasphemy. If he was lying, he was so committed to the lie that he was willing to die for it. He did not change his message when the crowds rejected him (see John 6:60b, 66 as an example). He predicted that his ministry would lead him to be killed in Jerusalem, which was what happened. He was unselfish, loving and compassionate towards others.

**LEADERS:** You can ask, “So, can we agree that Jesus was not lying about his claim to be God?”

## Option #2: Jesus was deluded

What if Jesus genuinely thought he was God, but he was wrong? Could it be that Jesus was simply deluded about his claim of divinity?

### 13 What are some characteristics you would associate with someone who suffered from a delusion that they were God?

**ANSWER:** For example, narcissistic, egotistical, unable to understand and have compassion for others, confused or obstinate when presented with facts that contradict their story. They are predictable in these characteristics; they wouldn't show a sudden or surprising moment of wisdom.

### 14 Are these characteristics exhibited by Jesus?

**ANSWER:** Jesus is in control of himself and his message. He is able to debate with the greatest religious scholars of his day and leave them confounded with his wisdom and knowledge. He deflects when people praise him, always giving the glory to his Father. He preached humility, service to others, selflessness, compassion and mercy. For over 2000 years his life and teachings have been considered wise and good by believers and non-believers alike, and billions of people have chosen to follow him and his teachings.

**LEADERS:** You can ask, "So, can we agree that Jesus was not deluded when he claimed to be God?"

## Option #3: Jesus is who he says he is—God

As we have seen in this lesson, the Gospels clearly depict that Jesus claimed to be God on numerous occasions. His enemies acknowledged that he claimed to be God when they charged him with blasphemy. When his claim was challenged under the threat of execution, he did not equivocate or retract his claim. Even when it was clear that he was to be found guilty of blasphemy and executed, Jesus stood firm in his divine identity.

### 15 What divine characteristics are exhibited by Jesus?

**ANSWER:** Jesus performed many miracles and healings. He spoke with an astonishing authority (see Mark 1:22). He predicted his own resurrection (see John 2:19-22), and then he rose from the dead. He appeared to the Apostles after his resurrection and gave them the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (see Acts 2). And there are still many more!

In a quiet moment with his disciples, Jesus asked them a question: “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples respond with a few options: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asks them for their opinion: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:27-29). Today, this same question is posed to you. You have seen how the Gospels recount Jesus’ claim to be divine. You have seen the possible answers to the question of whether or not Jesus is God. Now, the question is yours to answer: who do you say that Jesus is? Is he a liar, is he deluded, or is he Lord and God?

## Summary

No serious scholars dispute the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. He is widely considered to be a great moral teacher. In reading the Gospels, however, we discover that Jesus never intended to be perceived as simply a moral teacher. He repeatedly equated himself with God. No other respected figure in history, no other founder of the world's great religions, has made such claims. The entire Christian faith hinges on this fundamental claim.

## Living It Out

### CHALLENGE

This week, seriously consider whether or not you believe Jesus is telling the truth when he says that he is God.

**LEADERS:** You might want to add here, “If Jesus isn’t God, then he is of no importance. But if he is God, then he and everything he says is of infinite importance.”

**L**

It is important that the participants evaluate what they really believe about the divinity of Christ, or the rest of the *kerygma* and *Discovery* content won’t matter.

### MEMORIZE JOHN 14:6

*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*



# Leader's Journal



Take 15 minutes as soon as possible after finishing the lesson to reflect on how God moved during your study and how your small group participants responded.

## 1 Thanksgiving

**Reflect and say a prayer of thanksgiving for specific ways the Holy Spirit was present in that small group.**

- a. How did you experience the Holy Spirit helping you to lead the lesson?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. How did you experience the Holy Spirit moving in the small group today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What were the positives from today's group?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d. What were areas for improvement?

## 2 Prophetic Listening

**Ask the Holy Spirit to help you review the lesson. Think about each person in your small group as you prayerfully reflect on these questions.**

- a. What are some indications that each participant caught the main points of this lesson?

- b. If you noticed gaps in any participant’s understanding of the main points, is the Holy Spirit inviting you to do anything over the course of this week to help this person better understand?
  
- c. Are there any other ways the Holy Spirit is inviting you to intentionally care for or nurture your individual small group participants?
  
- d. Is there anything you want to remind yourself from what played out in this lesson for when you sit down to prepare the next lesson?

### **3 Intentional Accompaniment**

**Write down a plan to intercede for your small group participants based on the specific insights above, including how you will reach out to them and/or tailor the next lesson’s introduction based on your reflections.**