



Written by [Jim Drummey](#) on December 25, 2023

The Prince of Peace — Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus Christ, whose birthday is celebrated throughout the world on Christmas, has had a greater impact on human history than any person who ever lived. Though he died at the age of 33, the year in which we live is dated from his birth. Though he lived in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago, more than one billion people today call themselves followers of Christ. Though he never wrote a book, tens of thousands of books have been written about his life and teachings.



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Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a town in Roman-occupied Palestine. After a flight into Egypt to escape the murderous wrath of King Herod, Jesus returned to Palestine with Mary and Joseph and grew up in the village of Nazareth, where he worked in Joseph's carpenter shop.

At the age of 30 Jesus left Nazareth, gathered around him 12 men who became known as his apostles, and traveled throughout Palestine preaching love of God and love of neighbor and attracting followers by the thousands. He was a marvelous storyteller, illustrating his teachings with examples and parables about persons, places, and things that were familiar to his listeners. Christ's parables (e.g., The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son) are often cited even by non-Christians as literary and moral masterpieces for their simple yet profound messages.

The Way of the Cross

The core of Jesus' moral code was love, not only of God and neighbor, but even of enemies because "this will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and the good." He adhered to this difficult standard himself on the cross by asking forgiveness for those who had crucified him.

Jesus urged his followers personally to help those in need — the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the imprisoned, saying that whatever they did "for one of my least brothers, you did it for me." He asked them to forgive the faults of others and laid down the Golden Rule: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." He forbade murder and adultery, anger and hatred, and encouraged prayer and fasting and sacrifice, saying that "if a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and follow in my steps."

Thousands of people were drawn to Jesus by his tenderness and compassion for the sick and the suffering ("Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you"), by his mercy and forgiveness toward sinners (When the Pharisees criticized him for associating with sinners, Jesus said, "People who are healthy do not need a doctor; sick people do"), and by his courage and fearlessness (He chased the moneychangers out of the temple and condemned the hypocrisy of the



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Scribes and Pharisees, calling them “white-washed tombs — beautiful to look at on the outside but inside full of filth and dead men’s bones”).

The Pharisees, angry at Jesus’ criticism of them and jealous of the crowds that followed him, sent clever men out to question Jesus while he was speaking, in the hope of tripping him up. But he confounded them time and again, as when they asked him if it was lawful to pay taxes to the hated Romans, and he replied: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, but give to God what is God’s.” Or when they asked if a woman caught in adultery should be stoned to death, and Christ said: “Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her.”

More Than a Man

But Christians throughout the world believe that Jesus was more than just a good and holy man; they believe that he was the Son of God, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. As evidence of their belief, Christians cite the fulfillment in Jesus of Old Testament prophecies regarding the place and circumstances of the Messiah’s birth, the betrayal and suffering he endured, and the manner of his death.

But the most convincing evidence of Jesus’ claim to be God was the spectacular miracles he performed before hundreds and even thousands of eyewitnesses (“These very works which I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me”). He changed water into wine; cured the blind, deaf, and lame; exorcised demons from people; fed thousands with only a few loaves of bread and fishes; and raised three people from the dead, including his friend Lazarus.

The raising of Lazarus four days after he had died was the last straw as far as the chief priests and Pharisees were concerned, and they wove a plot to kill Jesus, getting unexpected help from one of Christ’s own apostles, Judas, who was willing to betray his master for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus was arrested late at night, put through the mockery of a trial, beaten and tortured, and then put to death on the orders of Pontius Pilate.

The Greatest Miracle

The followers of Jesus thought they had seen the last of him when his body was taken down from the cross and placed in a borrowed grave outside Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago. But, three days later, the tomb was found to be empty and more than a dozen people reported having seen Jesus alive that Sunday. Over the next 40 days, Jesus was seen in different places at different times by small groups of people and by large groups, including a crowd of 500. On the 40th day, according to reliable eyewitness accounts, he gave his apostles their final instructions, to carry his teachings “to the ends of the earth,” and then rose up into the heavens, not to return until the end of the world.

Whatever attitude people hold toward Jesus Christ, whether they believe him to be God or not, there is no question that if his teachings were followed faithfully by everyone, the world would be a better and more peaceful place in which to live. Merry Christmas!

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