

1 Strong historical evidence shows that Jesus really existed, and his followers thought he was Divine.



The best historical evidence is quite clear: Jesus of Nazareth absolutely existed, and he was worshipped by his followers. We have numerous sources from c. 45-150 AD, both non-Christian and Christian, and a very strong manuscript tradition (much stronger than, say, sources about Julius Caesar’s assassination). Pagan and Jewish sources (e.g., Tacitus,

Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Josephus Flavius, the Babylonian Talmud) confirm that Jesus was a real historical person who lived and taught in Galilee and Judea, was viewed by some as a miracle worker, was worshipped as divine by his followers, and was crucified under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate (26-36 AD). Here are two illustrative quotations:

“Christus...suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.”
-Tacitus, *Annals* (c. 109 AD)
“[The captured Christians] were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn [Sunday] and sing a hymn to Christ **as to a god.**”
-Letter of Pliny the Elder to Trajan (c. 110 AD)

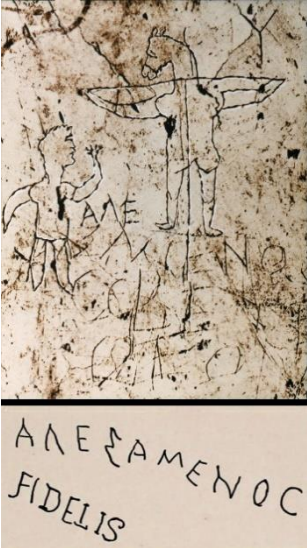
The earliest Christian sources, both Biblical (e.g., Paul and Mark, c.48-70 AD) and extra-Biblical (e.g., Ignatius and Polycarp, c.105 AD) show a strong consensus that **Jesus claimed divinity, and his followers believed him.** E.g., Paul’s letters (c.54-60 AD) quote early Christian hymns that “Jesus is Lord” (Phil 2:11) and “image of the invisible God” (Col

1:15). The Gospel of Mark (50-70 AD) portrays Jesus as divine (forgiving sins, silencing the sea, proclaiming ‘I am.’). Later Gnostic writings generally agreed that Jesus was divine as well (instead, they tend to downplay his humanity).

2 Good logic supports the idea of Christ as Divine

Many people today acknowledge that Jesus existed, but believe he was simply a “nice man” or “good teacher,” but that Church hierarchy later divinized him. But history and logic do not support this notion.

Why would his earliest followers (all Jews) fabricate a very un-Jewish, blasphemous lie: namely, that a man claimed to be God Himself? They stood nothing to gain: indeed, many were persecuted and executed for their exclusive belief in Christ’s divinity. E.g., no serious historian doubts the basic facts of **Paul of Tarsus**: a devout Jew who initially persecuted Christians, but after claiming to have seen the risen Christ, he preached the Gospel widely. His reward for this preaching was persecution, imprisonment, and execution (See 1 Cor 15:1-11, 2 Cor 11:22-30, Acts 8-9, 13-14). Like most early Christians, he stood nothing to gain from lying.



← This is ancient Roman graffiti (c. 200 AD), portraying a man (on the left) looking up towards a naked, crucified man with the head of a donkey. It reads: **“Alexamenos worships [his] God.”** The pagan graffiti mocks the Christian man Alexamenos and his “God” Jesus, who is portrayed in humiliating fashion (naked, crucified, with a donkey head). In the adjoining chamber (bottom image), a different person’s hand has written “Alexamenos is faithful.”

Despite persecution, this early Christian man held faith to his belief in Christ as divine.

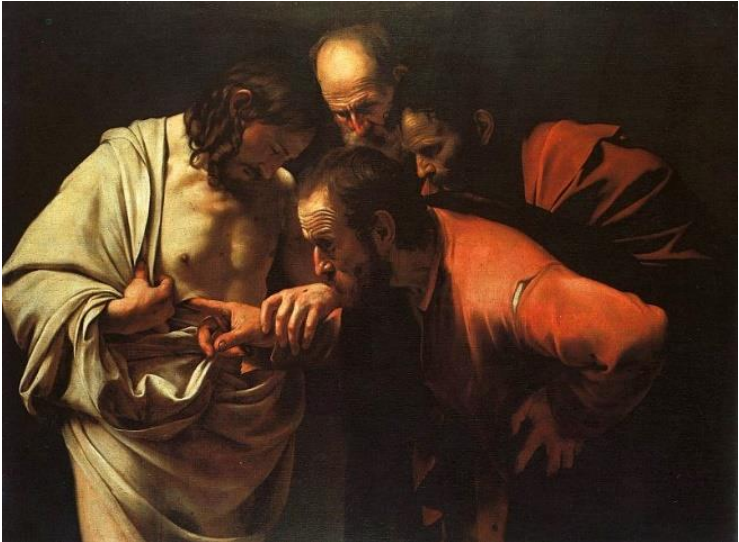
C.S. Lewis (atheist author turned Christian) summarized our choice as **“The Trilemma”**:

- 1) Jesus claimed to be God (see above)
- 2) Someone claiming to be God is one of three things:
 - (a) liar (a mischievous con-artist)
 - (b) lunatic (with delusions of grandeur)
 - (c) Lord (truly God)
- 3) All the evidence we have about Jesus—that he was a good and sane man—makes #1 and #2 very unlikely.
- 4) Thus, He was most likely Divine.

“I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ ...You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”

-C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

It makes the most sense to accept the Christian view from the beginning: this real historical person was God incarnate.



3 Solid evidence supports Jesus’ resurrection

The best historical evidence supports the Christian belief that Jesus truly rose from the dead.



“Jesus’ resurrection is supported by a **preponderance of the evidence**, as that term is used in courts of law.”
– Christian Clark, JD, Harvard Law School

Historians agree that Jesus was crucified, and no historian has been able to disprove that Jesus’ tomb was empty shortly after he died. What happened to the corpse? It strains credulity to imagine that his followers – scared fishermen who fled at his capture – would have taken his body away (an act that also would have violated Jewish purity laws). There is no evidence for early Christian veneration of his buried body, e.g., as Jews did with King David’s tomb.

Instead, there are numerous eyewitnesses to a resurrected Jesus, including Paul (1 Cor 15:8). No serious historian doubts that Paul truly existed, or that he believed he had seen a risen Jesus. Why would he, or the other early eyewitnesses, lie?

If the resurrection story was a later legend, why claim that women were the first witnesses (as all four Gospels do)? Female testimony was not accepted in court in those days; their witness is embarrassing and weakens the case.



For further reading, we recommend:
The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus (Habermas)
The Case for Jesus (Pitre)
Evidence That Demands a Verdict (McDowell)
The Case for Christ (Strobel) – also a movie!

4 Evidence of Miracles and Prophecies

Numerous miraculous events are connected to Jesus. E.g., the Shroud of Turin (right), purported to be the burial cloth of Jesus. No scientist can replicate how the image was made. The leading scientific theories suggest the image came from a sudden, instantaneous, and powerful flash of light/radiation, e.g., coming from the man's body.

Other miracles include modern **Eucharistic miracles** (e.g., in Buenos Aires, Tixtla, and Sokółka), where Communion Hosts were noted to bleed. Scientific testing confirmed heart tissue (myocardium), with the same AB blood type as the Shroud of Turin and the bleeding Host of Lanciano).

Finally, we have the evidence of the many Old Testament prophecies (300+ on some accounts, all centuries before Jesus lived) that he fulfilled. For example, Jesus 'God with Us' was born of a virgin, he proclaimed Good News to the poor, he rode on a humble donkey, he was betrayed, he suffered unjustly and atoned for the sins of others, and he inherited the Davidic throne to start an everlasting kingdom.

5 Jesus Changed History for the Better

The teachings of Christ and start of his Church helped to end many inhumane practices of the ancient world: e.g., infanticide, gladiator fights, and death by crucifixion. Instead, a new focus was placed on the poor, with early Christians establishing the first public hospitals and orphanages. Christians found inspiration in Christ's teaching that "whatsoever you



do to these least of my brethren, you do unto me" (Mt 25:40). Early Christians showed a compassion for the poor and vulnerable that was nearly unheard of in the ancient world. Even Julian the Apostate (pagan Roman emperor c.363 AD) acknowledged Christian charity: "[T]he impious Galileans [the Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, [and] all men see that our people lack aid from us [pagans]."

Christian charity continues today, with practicing Christians donating to charity more often and in larger amounts than nonreligious people.

But hasn't the Church caused great evil? Doesn't it discriminate against women and LGBT people? Isn't it violently intolerant (e.g., the Crusades and the Inquisition)? Doesn't it try to control people and forbid sex? For answers to these common misconceptions, see our pamphlet 'Answers to Top Objections to Catholic Christianity.'

6 Personal Encounters with Jesus: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

#1 to #5 above have focused on historical and scientific arguments, but many Christians came to believe in Jesus as God because of a personal encounter that they had with Him, an encounter which changed their lives for better and forever. Often, people encountered Christ and his merciful love when they hit rock bottom (indeed, the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are inspired by this turn to a Higher Power). They experienced his forgiveness and love, his giving of himself on the cross for their sins. For some people, their encounter with Christ transformed their previously mediocre life into one that changed the world. St. Paul, St Augustine of Hippo, and St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta are notable examples of people whose encounter with Christ changed the course of history. Even famous scientists have had such encounters. Dr. Francis Collins (recent head of both the Human Genome Project and the National

Institutes of Health) relates his own spiritual encounter while hiking—he saw a frozen waterfall with three parts, which seemed to echo the Three-in-One of the Trinity—he writes: "I felt my resistance leave me... I fell on my knees and accepted that God is God, that Christ is his son and that I am giving my life to that belief."

St. Augustine's conversion moment came on reading from an apparently random passage from the Bible.

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

-St. Augustine, c.400, after his conversion

Many people have encountered Christ by reading the Bible (particularly one of the 4 Gospels); others have found Him in modern media, e.g., in watching *The Chosen* TV series, which brings the love of the historical Jesus to life.



For more information, visit:

www.Catholic.com

Or your local Catholic parish!

Created by Tommy Heyne, MD, MSt (physician-scientist faculty at Harvard Medical School).
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Top 6 Reasons to Believe in Jesus Christ



Examining the Evidence