

# JESUS' TRUE IDENTITY

***As a result of this study, we hope the participants will***

*[Learning Objectives]*

- recognize Jesus' claims to deity as they appear in the gospel of Luke
- see the logic of asserting that Jesus Christ was and is God from the data collected in the gospel
- add their affirmation of faith to the chorus of believers in Luke's gospel, and believe in and trust Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Lord of all
- be equipped to explain Christ's true identity to others
- digest the implications of Christ's deity and lordship for church life

*[Process Objectives]*

- learn how to sift through testimony and evidence to come to a conclusion about Jesus' identity
- as a group, complete a task together by writing a statement describing Jesus' true identity, based on Luke's gospel
- continue to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

*[Relational Objectives]*

- support an honest assessment of congregational life, in light of the question "If Jesus is God and Lord of all, how should our church family be responding?"
- link individual personal faith to its corporate expression in the church

## **NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 32-35)**

We discover in Luke's gospel that many titles were attributed to Jesus, all of which point to a reality that defies human categories. In current theological literature, a debate rages around the identity of this person. In these conversations, "Jesus" refers to the human being born approximately 4 B.C. into a particular historical era and cultural setting. "Jesus Christ" or "the Christ" refers to the faith-affirmation that this One is God-come-in-the-flesh. No credible scholar claims that Jesus of Nazareth never existed, but the critical question of Jesus' identity (mere human? God? perfect human? great teacher? mythical hero?) generates much discussion, the most accessible occurring between Jesus Seminar scholar Marcus Borg and Episcopal bishop and New Testament scholar N. T. (Tom) Wright.

This present study comes from the perspective that the New Testament gospel writers were believers in Jesus Christ's deity, having come to that conclusion based on their interaction with him

and his followers. Your Bible study group will be asked to come to the same conclusion these first century witnesses did, that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!” and therefore worthy of our trust, our worship, and our obedience.

### PAGE 3 2 NOTES:

“Son of the Most High,” “Son of God,” “Christ the Lord,” and “the Lord’s Christ” all refer to one who has been sent by God to save the people from their sins and establish a permanent reign over the nation, Israel. The Son of God identifies Christ as of the same substance as the Father, to be equated with him.

We can discern the meaning of these terms by the reaction they got from Pharisees. For instance, in Luke 22, the local religious leaders wanted to execute Jesus for blasphemy, which meant that he had made claim to be God by saying “I am [he].”

Son of Man, the Chosen One, king of the Jews, the king who comes in the name of the Lord . . . are understood by the Jews of the time to refer to the specific role of Messiah, with all its accompanying political undertones: sent by God to take charge politically. Jesus eschewed this role while embracing the identity by demonstrating that first the Lord’s chosen must die and be resurrected before the reign could begin (Luke 17:24-25). Luke has the disciples questioning this timetable even up to the point of Jesus’ ascension into heaven in Acts 1.

### PAGE 3 3 NOTES:

Jesus modeled here some great ways to get into the conversation about his identity. The first occasion (Luke 7) has John the Baptist, from prison, asking if Jesus is the one. And Jesus’ reply was, “Look at what I am doing! What does that tell you?” Refer to Lesson Four for the details.

In Luke 9, Jesus asks his closest followers, “Okay, so tell me, what’s the buzz out there about me?” This is a great non-threatening question to ask someone: “Hey, what are your friends saying these days about Jesus Christ—anything?”

Finally, in Luke 22 at his trial before Jewish authorities, the chief priests and teachers of the law demand that Jesus identify himself. He declines, saying, “You won’t believe me if I tell you.” But they insist, by asking, “Are you the Son of God?” And Jesus replies, “Yes, you’re right to say that I AM.” When Jesus said, ‘I AM’ (in the Greek, it is *ego eimi*, the emphatic form of “I am”) he was giving himself the name equivalent to the Hebrew “YHWH” (Yahweh), the name by which God made himself known to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3)! Jesus was claiming to be *one and the same* as the God who spoke to Moses! This is why the Jewish authorities threw up their hands and said, “See? There it is. We need hear nothing more. He is guilty of blasphemy.”

Jesus accepted both titles “Son of God” and “Son of Man” because together they describe his identity as fully human and fully divine. Jesus Christ was God-in-the-flesh, come to make God

known through his salvation and permanent reign. Jesus Christ was the Son of Man, lifted up and anointed as the unique and perfect representation of humanity to reign over all creation.

### **PAGES 3 4 AND 3 5 NOTES:**

We now pause to extricate ourselves from the philosophical and theological jungle we have created in our discussion of the *concept* of Jesus' identity. On these pages, the learners are given the opportunity to engage in a *lectio divina*, or "divine reading" of the gospel story. The point of this exercise is to foster a faith response to the "Who do you say I am?" question. The reading and re-reading of the text allows you to become very familiar with its contents, and then to enter into the scene and let Christ point you toward something of particular relevance to your life. I cannot predict what God will do by this means, so just follow the directions and see where the Lord takes you.

In the group discussion, you might ask how it went, whether any burning questions arose among your participants, or if anything changed internally as a result of their encounter with Christ and his claims in this passage of Scripture.

### **NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 3 6-3 7)**

**Open your meeting with prayer** that the Lord would help you collect your thoughts and enliven your faith to recognize Jesus' true identity.

### **PAGE 3 6 NOTES:**

A group writing assignment is always a little risky (though it can be very fun!). It would help if you had some butcher paper on the wall, or a white board in a classroom, or some other way for the whole group to see the written statement develop. Follow these steps, and you should be able to craft your fifty-word statement in a somewhat orderly fashion:

1. Ask for the words and phrases Luke used (like "son of God," "the Christ") and write them as a list.
2. Ask for definitions or paraphrases of these titles, so the group can put them into their own words. Think how you would word it if you were sharing your findings with a non-Christian friend at the coffee shop.
3. On a fresh piece of paper, start framing the actual statement until you arrive at your focused but complete affirmation of Jesus Christ.

The last question on this page is another excellent case study question. Your strongest evidence comes from Luke 22:66-71, but all the Q & A input on the top of page 33 is helpful here.

**PAGE 37 NOTES:**

If in fact Jesus is God, then we should (e.g. worship, obey, love, appreciate, imitate, pray to, listen to) him!

So then the question becomes whether or not the group's *church family* worships, obeys, loves, appreciates, imitates, prays to and listens to Jesus Christ. If in any way there is a sense that the church has fallen short, please (not in a critical, cynical or judgmental way) take that to prayer in a spirit of true repentance and commitment to help turn things around. If the church *is* faithful in its response to Christ, then discuss how each person can participate convincingly in the witness to Jesus Christ's true identity.

**CLOSING PRAYER TIME**

Close in conversational prayer for the church(es) of which the members are a part, thanking God for their existence, their location, and their ministry. Ask God to be made known through these congregations and the faithful witness of all their members. Pray for boldness to proclaim Christ's true identity and the confidence to enter into conversation in a spirit of grace and truth.

Pray for individuals around the circle, that their faith in Christ would grow.