

## HISTORICAL EVIDENCE & THE OLDEST SECULAR ACCOUNTS SUPPORTING THE EXISTANCE OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

*No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus.* Otto Betz

1. **Cornelius Tacitus:** (AD55-120) Roman historian. Most acclaimed works are the Annals and the Histories. The Annals cover the period from Augustus Caesar's death in AD14 to the death of the Emperor Nero in AD68, while the Histories begin after Nero's death and proceed to the reign of Domitian in AD96. In the Annals, Tacitus alludes to the death of Christ and to the existence of Christians at Rome. See Annals XV,44: *But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.*" (The misspelling of Christ as "Christus" was a common error made by pagan writers). It is interesting that Pilate is not mentioned in any other pagan document that has survived. It is an irony of history that the only surviving reference to him in a pagan document mentions him because he passed sentence of death on Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ (Messiah).

2. **Suetonius:** Roman historian and court official during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian. Suetonius wrote in his Life of Claudius: *"As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."* (Life of Claudius 25.4). Chrestus is a misspelling of Christus; the spelling probably assumes that the spelling of Jesus' title "Christos" was the same as the ChiRho symbol which was also a literary device which indicated a quote "worthy of note" = the 'chrestus' symbol. Claudias' expulsion of the Christians from Rome is mentioned in Acts 18:2. This event took place in 49AD

In his work Lives of the Caesars, Suetonius also wrote: *"Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."* Assuming Jesus was crucified in the early thirties, Suetonius places Christians in the Roman capital less than 20 years later and he reports that they were suffering for their faith and dying for their conviction that Jesus had really lived, died and that He had risen from the dead!

3. **Pliny the Younger:** Roman governor in Bithynia AD112 wrote to Emperor Trajan to seek advice as to how to treat the Christians. He recounts that he had been killing Christian men, women, and children. He is concerned that so many have chosen death over simply bowing down to a statue of the emperor or being made to *"curse Christ, which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do."* (Epistles X, 96)

4. **Tallus,** a secular writer writing circa AD52 wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean from the Trojan War to his own time. The document no longer exists but it was quoted by other writers like the Christian, Julius Africanus, who wrote around AD221. He quotes Tallus' comments about the darkness that enveloped the land during the late afternoon hours when Jesus died on the cross. Julius wrote: *Tallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun—unreasonably, as it seems to me (unreasonably of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died.*" Julius Africanus, Chronography, 18.1 The importance of Tallus' comments is that the reference shows that the Gospel account of the darkness that fell across the earth during Christ's crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from non-Christians.

5. **Phlegon:** Julius Africanus also quoted another secular scholar whose works are now lost. Phlegon wrote a history called Chronicles. Phlegon also comments on the darkness at the time of Christ's crucifixion: "*During the time of Tiberius Caesar an eclipse of the sun occurred during the full moon.*" Julius Africanus, Chronography, 18.1

(The 3<sup>rd</sup> century Christian apologist Origen also references Phlegon's record of this event in his work Celsus, 2.14,33,59 as does the 6<sup>th</sup> century writer Philopon (De.opif.mund. II, 21.

6. **Mara Bar-Serapion:** Syrian stoic philosopher who wrote a letter from prison to his son circa 70AD. He compares Jesus to the philosophers Socrates and Pythagoras.

7. **Josephus ben Mattathias:** 37-100AD, Jewish priest, general and historian. He wrote two great works of Jewish history: The Jewish War, written in the early 70's and Jewish Antiquities, which was finished about AD94. In his work, Jewish Antiquities, there is a passage that has created heated debate among scholars for many decades: "*Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.*" Antiquities, XVIII, 33

8. **Lucian of Samosate:** Greek satirist later half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century spoke scornfully of Christ and the Christians but never argued that Jesus never existed. "*The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account...*" The Death of Peregrine, 11-13

9. **The Babylonian Talmud:** "*It has been taught: On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out, in front of him, for 40 days (saying): 'He is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.'* But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover." Sanhedrin 43a; df.t.Sanh. 10:11; y. Sanh 7:12; Tg. Esther 7:9 (Another version of this text reads: 'Yeshu the Nazaarene.' Yeshu is Hebrew (or Aramaic) for Jesus. Hanged is another way of referring to a crucifixion; see Luke 23:39 and Galatians 3:13

10. **Flavius Josephus:** Jewish historian and Roman citizen. Born c. 37AD, died c. 96AD. He wrote four books but the best know are The Jewish War, the only eyewitness account of the Jewish revolt against Rome that survives, and Antiquities of the Jews, a history of the people of Israel/Judah. In his work Antiquities of the Jews, 18.3.3 (63), Josephus gives this information about Jesus of Nazareth: "*Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ (Messiah); and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.*"

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**THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH:  
THE MASTERWORKS OF GOD**

The entire life of the Church revolves around the Most Holy Eucharist and the other Sacraments, all of which were instituted by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. They are the powers—the visible signs that come forth by the action of God the Holy Spirit at work in Christ’s Body, the Church. The graces that flow from the Holy Sacraments are ever living and life giving—they are the masterworks of God at work in the new and everlasting Covenant of Jesus Christ and are necessary to protect us from sin and necessary for our salvation [see CCC# 1127-29]

These 7 Sacraments, instituted by Christ to confer the grace they signify:

<b>SACRAMENT</b>	<b>ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT</b>
BAPTISM*	Rebirth by adoption into the family of God; liberation from original sin
CONFIRMATION*	Completing our baptism this anointing of the Holy Spirit confirms the seal of the Holy Spirit so we may share more fully in Christ’s mission to the world
EUCCHARIST	As the source and summit of the Christian life the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passion in which we receive Him, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity
PENANCE	This is the sacrament of healing, forgiveness of sins after baptism, and restoration
ANOINTING OF THE SICK	Christ uniting Himself with our suffering
HOLY ORDERS*	The presence of Christ made visible in the community through the ministerial priesthood
MATRIMONY	Through this sacrament a man and a woman establish a covenant with each other, with God, and with the whole of life becoming co-creators with God.

- in addition to grace these Sacraments confer a sacramental character or seal by which the believer shares in Christ’s priesthood. See CCC#s 1113-1666; 2177; 2180; 2185; 2187-88; 2192-3.

**THE POPES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND  
THE ROMAN EMPERORS from 14AD – 337AD**

m = murdered; † = martyred

ROMAN EMPEROR	Date of reign AD	BISHOP OF ROME	Date of reign AD
Tiberius - m.	14 – 37	(Jesus' earthly ministry is from 28AD-30AD)	St. Peter the Apostle, Vicar of Christ 30 – 67AD
Caligula - m.	37 – 41		
Claudius - m.	41 – 54	St. Peter the Apostle†	42 – June 29 <sup>th</sup> 67 (in Rome)
Nero - m	54 – 68		
Galba - m	68 – 69	St. Linus†	67 – 78
Otho - m	69		
Vitellius - m	69		
Vespasian	69 – 79	St. Cletus†	78 – 90
Titus	79 – 81		
Domitian - m	81 – 96	St. Clement I†	90 – 100
Nerva	96 – 98	St. Anacletus†	100 – 112
Trajan	98 – 117	St. Evaristus†	112 – 121
Hadrian	117 – 138	St. Alexander I†	121 – 132
Antoninus Pius	138 – 160	St. Sixtus I (Xystus) †	132 – 142
		St. Telesphorus†	142 – 154
		St. Hyginus†	154 – 158
Marcus Aurelius	160 – 180	St. Pius I†	158 – 167
		St. Anicetus† (this is a period of intense persecution)	? – 175
Commodus - m	180 – 192		
Pertinax - m	193	St. Soter†	? – 182
Julianus - m	193	St. Victor†	193 – 203
Septimius Severus	193 – 211	St. Zephyrinus†	203 – 221
Caracalla - m	211 – 217		
Macrinus - m	217 – 218		
Elagabalus - m	218 – 222	St. Callixtus†	221 – 227
Alexander Severus	222 – 230		
		St. Urban I†	227 – 233
Maximinus Thrax – m	235 – 238	St. Pontianus†	233-238
Gordiani – m	238		
Pulienus – m	238	St. Anterus†	238 - 239
Gordian III – m	238 – 244	St. Fabian†	239 - 253
Philip the Arabian - m	244 – 251		
Decius – m	249 – 251		
& sons – m	251 - 253	St. Cornelius†	253 – 255
Valerian – m	253 - 260	St. Lucius†	255 – 257
		St. Stephen†	257 – 260
		St. Sixtus II (Xystus) †	260 – 261
Gallienus – m	260 - 268	St. Dionysius	261 – 272

Claudius Gothicus	268 – 270				
Aurelian – m	270 – 275		St. Felix I†		272 – 275
Tacitus – m?	275 – 276		St. Eutychianus†		275 – 283
Florianus – m	276				
Probus – m	276 – 282				
Carus – m	282 – 283				
<b>WESTERN EMPEROR</b>	<b>DATE of reign AD</b>	<b>EASTERN EMPEROR</b>	<b>DATE of reign AD</b>	<b>BISHOP OF ROME</b>	<b>DATE of reign AD</b>
Carinus – m	283 – 285	Numerian – m	283 – 284	St. Caius (Gaius) †	283 – 296
Diocletian	284 – 286	Diocletian (rules in east with Maximian in west)	284 - 305		
Maximian	286 – 305			St. Marcellinus†	296 – 304
Constantius	305 – 306	Galerius	305 – 311	St. Marcellus†	304 – 309
Constantine	307 – 337	Lincinius – m	308 – 324	St. Eusebius	309 – 310
Constantine eliminates his rival in the east and rules solo as first Christian Roman Emperor	324 – 337 (united Roman Empire)			St. Melchiades (Miltiades)	311 – 314
				St. Sylvester I	314 – 337
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313AD – Edict of Milan recognizes Christianity as a legitimate religion protected by the Roman Empire and ends organized persecution of Christians by the Roman State.  
Roman Emperor Constantine is baptized on his death bed in 337AD.

The list of Popes and dates is copied from the *Annuario Pontificio*, the official publication of the Holy See. The earliest part of this official list is from the 5<sup>th</sup> century catalogue of Popes on a wall at the ancient Basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls in Rome, placed there on the order of Pope St. Leo the Great (440 – 461AD). Pope Leo's list continues through his pontificate but I have limited the list to the reign of Constantine and Pope St. Sylvester I. Another earlier list is found in Bishop Eusebius' *History of the Church* written in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century in which Eusebius records a list of the first 12 Popes / Bishops of Rome from a list composed by St. Irenaeus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. St. Irenaeus' list agrees with Pope Leo's list with the exception of Pope Anacletus [100-112AD] whose name is missing from Irenaeus' 2<sup>nd</sup> century list. For St. Irenaeus' 2<sup>nd</sup> century list see *Church History*, Bishop Eusebius, Book V, chapter VI, 1-5 [*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, page 221, Hendricks Publishing Company]. For the chronological list of the Popes from the *Annuario Pontificio* see *Church History*, Father John Laux, Tan Book Publishers, Inc., Appendix I\*\*. The chronological list of Roman Emperors is for the most part adapted from *Augustus to Constantine*, Robert M. Grant, Westminster Press, 1970.

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## EARLIEST BISHOPS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

In *Church History* Book IV, chapter 5, Eusebius, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, writes concerning the succession of the Bishops of Jerusalem: *The chronology of the bishops of Jerusalem I have nowhere found preserved in writing; for tradition says that they were all short lived. But I have learned this much from the writings, that until the siege of the Jews, which took place under Adrian [135AD] there were fifteen bishops in succession there, all of whom are said to have been of Hebrew descent, and to have received the knowledge of Christ in purity, so that they were approved by those who were able to judge such matters and were deemed worthy of the episcopate.*

Note: Eusebius is referring to the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome which was brutally suppressed in 135AD. The First Jewish Revolt took place from 66-73AD and resulted in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the deaths of over a million Jews, and the enslavement of circa 55,000 Jewish men, women, and children. After the Second Revolt the city of Jerusalem was raised to the ground, rebuilt as a Roman city and renamed Aelia Capitolina. Jews were forbidden all access to the holy city but Christians were not penalized because they did not participate in either revolt. Christian persecution which began in 64AD was diminished for a time during the reign of Hadrian.

<b>THE FIRST CHRISTIAN BISHOPS OF JERUSALEM</b>			
1. James, kinsman of Jesus Christ +	11. Justus +	21. Gaius I	31. Dius
2. Symeon, kinsman of Jesus Christ +	12. Levi +	22. Symmachus	32. Germanio
3. Justus +	13. Ephres +	23. Gaius II	33. Gordius
4. Zacchaeus +	14. Joseph +	24. Julian II	34. Narcissus (repeated)
5. Tobias +	15. Judas +	25. Capito	35. Alexander
6. Benjamin +	16. Marcus	26. Maximus II *	36. Mazabanes
7. John +	17. Cassianus	27. Antonius *	37. Hymenaeus
8. Matthias +	18. Publius	28. Valens	38. Zambdas
9. Phillip +	19. Maximus I	29. Dolichianus	39. Hermon
10. Seneca +	20. Julian I	30. Narcissus	

+ Jewish descent. The Apostles, other early disciples of Jesus, and these men are the link from the Old to the New covenant. This is why we call the Catholic Church the “new Israel.” We acknowledge that our roots are completely Jewish.

\*These two names are omitted in Eusebius’ *Church History*, but are listed in his *Chronicles* and are also listed by the Church historian Epiphanius. Also see *Church History*, Book V, chapter 12 in which Eusebius lists the first thirty of the bishops, ending with Narcissus, “*the thirtieth in regular succession from the Apostles.*”

## GREAT COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

COUNCIL AND DATE	SIGNIFICANT TEACHING
COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM – 49/50 AD	Decisions on conversions and circumcision. It was decided that it was not necessary for converts to submit to the Old Covenant laws like circumcision.
1. NICAEA I – 325 AD	Nicene Creed; divinity of Christ, condemned Arianism; Easter observance set.
2. CONSTANTINOPLE I – 381 AD	Expanded the Creed; defeated Arianism; condemned Macedonians who denied divinity of the Holy Spirit
3. EPHESUS – 431 AD	Defended Mary as the mother of God; condemned Nestorianism which held there were 2 distinct persons in the Incarnate Christ
4. CHALCEDON 451 AD	Condemned Monophysitism by defining 2 distinct natures of Christ: Jesus fully human & divine.
5. CONSTANTINOPLE II – 553 AD	Confirmed Chalcedon; condemned heresies like Monothelitism that held Christ had only 1 will
6. CONSTANTINOPLE III – 680-81 AD	Defeat of Monothelitism by defining two wills of Christ as 2 distinct principles of operation in unity of purpose
7. NICAEA II – 787 AD	Regulated veneration of holy images; condemned Iconoclasts and defined that sacred images may be honored without idolatry
8. CONSTANTINOPLE IV – 869-870 AD	Condemned teachings of Photius Bishop of Constantinople. Last council attended by Eastern Church; beginning of the Great Eastern Schism
9. LATERAN I – 1123 AD	First council after the Great Eastern Schism. Condemned practice of lay princes in investiture of bishops. Called for recovery of the Holy Land.
10. LATERAN II – 1139 AD	Enacted reforms suggested by St. Bernard of Clairvaux; condemned certain heresies; declared null and void decrees by the deceased antipope Anticletus II.
11. LATERAN III – 1179 AD	Established the Sacred Conclave as voting body to elect Pope by 2/3 <sup>rd</sup> s majority; condemned Albigensians and Walkenses heresies
12. LATERAN IV – 1215 AD	Defined <i>ex cathedra</i> : from the chair of Peter and “ <i>There is but one Universal church, outside of which there is no salvation.</i> ” Set in stone the term <i>Transubstantiation</i> for the mystery of the Eucharist. Ordered annual

	confession and Easter Communion.
13. LYONS I – 1245 AD	Called for a new Crusade. Excommunicated and deposed Emperor Frederick II.
14. LYONS II – 1274 AD	Filioque clause officially added to the Creed. Attempted reconciliation with Eastern Catholics. Decreed that papal elections should begin 10 days after death of the Pope.
15. VIENNE – 1311-1312 AD	Reformation of the clergy and Catholic Universities; called for a new Crusade; dealt with the charges against the Knights Templar; defined the relation of the soul to the human body; condemned false mysticism.
16. CONSTANCE – 1414-1418 AD	Put an end to the Western Schism (Avignon Popes vs. Rome); issued reform decrees in "head and members", condemned Wycliffe and Hus.
17. BASEL-FLORENCE – 1431(38)-1445 AD	Affirmed papal primacy against Conciliarists who said a general council was superior to the Pope; attempted reunion with Eastern church.
18. LATERAN V – 1512-1517 AD	Disciplinary decrees-defined the relation of Pope to a general council, condemned philosophers who taught human soul was mortal and only one for all mankind; discussed religious upheaval in Germany caused by Luther.
19. TRENT – 1545-1563 AD	Condemned Lutheranism and other errors in teaching that resulted from Protestant movement; proclaimed Bible and Tradition as rule of faith; defined doctrine on the Mass, the sacraments, justification, purgatory, indulgences, invocation of saints, veneration of sacred images, issued decrees on marriage and clerical reform.
20. VATICAN I – 1869-1870 AD	Defined the nature of revelation and faith, the relation of faith and reason, and infallibility of the Pope when speaking <i>ex cathedra</i> in matters of faith and morals. Condemned pantheism, materialism, deism, naturalism, and fideism.
21. VATICAN II – 1962-1965 AD	Convoked by Pope John XXIII "mainly to more effectively preserve and present the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine." 16 documents reaffirmed the principles of Catholic faith and morality authorized numerous changes in the Eucharistic liturgy, the ritual of the sacraments, and in the church's administrative structure. These documents and liturgical reforms defined the Church in the modern age.
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## Summary of the Events leading up to the Great Eastern Schism

The great estrangement between Eastern and Western Rite Catholics finally came about on July 16, 1054, after centuries of unresolved disputes.

- ◆ Removal of the Roman capital from Rome to Constantinople.
- ◆ Opposition to the council of Nicaea; autonomy of Byzantine bishops organized.
- ◆ Roman Emperor's interference in doctrinal matters.
- ◆ The Council of Trullo: Greek council held in 692 attempted to dictate to the Bishop of Rome by declaring any ritual and disciplinary practice not in harmony with those in the East contrary to apostolic tradition.
- ◆ Iconoclast heresy 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- ◆ Coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III as Holy Roman Emperor, 800AD.
- ◆ Photian Schism mid 9<sup>th</sup> century: Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople made first deliberate attempt to serve the Greek Church from the West. Disagreements ranged from a celibate priesthood to the filioque clause in the Creed, to the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, omitting the alleluia during Lent, etc.
- ◆ Patriarch Michal Cerularius declared the use of unleavened bread in the Holy Eucharist invalid and closed all Latin Rite Churches in Constantinople. Pope Leo IX excommunicated Cerularius and the Great Schism began.

# rites of the Universal Church

## \*Western Rites

### Latin Rites:

- Roman
- Ambrosian
- Gallican

### Non-Latin Rites

- Mozarabic
- Italo-Greek

\*These Rites recognize the authority of the Pope as the Vicar of Christ and the supreme head of the Holy Universal Church and therefore bear the name "Catholic." All other rites are Eastern Orthodox.  
List compiled and accurate as of 2005 AD.

## Eastern Rites

### Alexandrian Rites

- Coptic
- Ethiopian

### Armenian Rite

### \*Byzantine Rites

- Albanian
- Belarussian
- Bulgarian

### Georgian Rites

- Greek
- Hungarian
- Italo-Greek/Italo-

### Albanian Rites

- Melkite
- Romanian
- Russian
- Ruthenian
- Slovak
- Ukrainian
- Yugoslavian

### \*Anatichene Rites

- Maronite
- Syrian
- Syro-Malankara

### \*Chaldean Rites

- Chaldean
- Syro-Malabar

## THE FIVE PRECEPTS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In order to nourish the moral and liturgical life of the Body of Christ, Mother Church has established 5 positive laws, decreed by the pastoral authorities, which are meant to identify the **minimum** spiritual commitment required of the faithful. These 5 laws are known as **The Precepts of the Church** and are found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #s 1388-9; 1457; 2041-43; 2177, 80-81. In addition to the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church through time, talent and treasure [CCC# 1351], these are the **minimum** Covenant obligations of the People of God:

1. The faithful are required to attend the celebration of the Eucharist every Lord's Day =Sunday or Saturday vigil, unless excused for a serious reason [i.e. illness or the care of infants]. CCC# 1388-9; 2042; 2180
2. The faithful are required to confess sins at least once a year. CCC# 1457; 2042
3. The faithful are required to receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season [but are encouraged to receive Christ in the Eucharist daily if possible]. CCC# 1389; 2042
4. In addition to the Lord's Day the faithful are required to keep all Holy Days of Obligation. CCC# 2043; 2177; 2180; 2185; 2187-8; 2192-3
5. The faithful are required to observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence. CCC# 1387; 1438; 2043

CCC# 2177: *The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is the heart of the Church's life. "Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church"* [quotation from Canon Law: *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can.1246, art. 1].

In addition to the Sunday obligation to worship on the Lord's Day (it is a mortal sin to purposely choose to miss worshipping on the Lord's Day; see CCC#2181), there are currently 6 annual Holy Days of Obligation celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. IT IS A SERIOUS SIN TO PURPOSELY MISS THE CELEBRATION OF ANY ONE OF THESE FEASTS (see precept #4 listed above).

## THE SOLEMNITIES AND ANNUAL HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

A solemnity is the highest liturgical rank of a feast in the ecclesiastical calendar. In addition to the movable feasts like Easter and the Feast of Pentecost, fourteen solemnities are celebrated in the universal Roman Catholic Church. These fourteen solemnities include: Feast of the Mother of God (January 1<sup>st</sup>), Epiphany (January 6<sup>th</sup>), Feast of St. Joseph ( March 19<sup>th</sup> ), Feast of the Annunciation (March 25<sup>th</sup>), Trinity Sunday (first Sunday after Pentecost), Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord/ Corpus Christi (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday now moved in the USA to the next Sunday), Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the Friday after the second Sunday after Pentecost), Feast of St. John the Baptist (June 24<sup>th</sup>), Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29<sup>th</sup>), Assumption of the

Blessed Virgin (August 15<sup>th</sup>), Feast of All Saints (November 1<sup>st</sup>), Feast of Christ the King (last Sunday of the ecclesiastical year), Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (December 8<sup>th</sup>), and the Feast of the Nativity of the Savior/ the Christ Mass (December 25<sup>th</sup>). In addition to these solemnities of the universal Church, many Catholic parishes across the world now include the optional observance of the Feast of Divine Mercy on the first Sunday after Easter as part of the local liturgical calendar.

The Holy Days of Obligation are those feasts among the solemn feasts which are to be observed by the faithful by attendance at Mass and rest, as far as possible, from unnecessary work. The number and dates of these holy days of obligation vary among the different Catholic nations of the world. In the United States, six holy days of obligation are observed. On these special solemnities every parish pastor is required to offer a special Mass for the parishioners in honor of the feast day. In year 2008 in the United States these feasts are to be observed by the faithful by attendance at Mass as required by Precept #4 of the Five Precepts of the universal Roman Catholic Church (see CCC# 2043; 2177; 2180; 2185; 2187-8; 2192-3):

1. FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION	December 8 <sup>th</sup> : The conception without original sin of Mary the Mother of God.
2. FEAST OF THE CHRIST MASS	December 25 <sup>th</sup> : Celebration of the birth of the Savior.
3. FEAST OF MARY MOTHER OF GOD	January 1 <sup>st</sup> : This feast celebrates Jesus' naming, circumcision, and entrance into the Old Covenant Church on the 8 <sup>th</sup> day after His birth (Leviticus 12:1-4; Luke 2:21) and honors His Virgin Mother.
4. FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD	40 days from Easter Sunday as the ancients counted (Acts 1:3). In the US this feast may be celebrated on the next closest Sunday, according to the discretion of the local bishop.
5. FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD	August 15 <sup>th</sup> : The Virgin Mary assumed body and soul into heaven.
6. FEAST OF ALL SAINTS	November 1 <sup>st</sup> : Celebration our brothers and sisters who have already entered the beatific presence of the Most Holy Trinity.
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The conference of Bishops can abolish certain holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday with prior approval of the Apostolic See. Under these rules certain Holy Days observed in the United States have been moved to the next Sunday while others have been eliminated as required holy days.

## **BIBLICAL EVENTS WHICH PREFIGURE BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*“Christ himself died once and for all for sins, the upright for the sake of the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. They refused to believe long ago, while God patiently waited to receive them, in Noah’s time when the ark was being built. In it only a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water. It is the baptism corresponding to this water which saves you now...” 1 Peter 3:18-21*

Biblical events that prefigured Christian baptism in Christ:

<b>SCRIPTURE PASSAGE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>
Genesis 1:1-2	1. Creation: when the Holy Spirit brought life and order to the waters of chaos.
Genesis 6:9-18 1 Peter 3:20-21	2. Noah and his family were saved from the waters of the flood that cleansed the earth of sin, which St. Peter tells us prefigures our baptism in 1 Peter 3: 20-21.
Exodus 14:1 1 Corinthians 10:1-2	3. The children of Israel, fleeing from the Egyptians, passed through the waters of the Red Sea—passing from the old life of slavery into their new life as God’s Covenant people; which St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 is a form of baptism.
Exodus 30:17-21 Numbers 19:11-13	4. The water purification rites of the Old Covenant: -When the priests cleansed their hands and feet with the water from the laver so that they were ritually cleansed and able to enter the Holy Place of the desert Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem. -The ritual purification by immersion after coming in contact with the dead or with blood (after childbirth).
2 Kings 5:1-19	5. When the prophet Elisha told the Syrian general Naaman to dip himself 7 times in the waters of the Jordan River to be healed.
Ezekiel 36:24-27	6. Ezekiel’s prophecy that Yahweh will pour clean water over His people and they will be cleansed and filled with a new heart and a new spirit when God places His very spirit within them.
Joshua 3:14-17	7. The crossing of the Jordan River when God parted the waters and the priests stood midway across the River with the Ark of the Covenant as the children of Israel passed through the waters of the Jordan, leaving their old lives behind to become citizens of the Promised Land.
Mathew 3:4-5; Mark	8. The baptism of John the Baptist which called the faithful of

1:4-5; Luke 3:3-4; John 1:31	Israel into the baptismal waters of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah's ministry proclaiming the Kingdom of God.
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The first catechism of the Church, known as the *Didache*, or “The Teaching”, written not later than 120AD and perhaps written as early as 50 AD, immediately after the Council of Jerusalem, records: *Regarding baptism. Baptize as follows: after first explaining all these points, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if you have no running water, baptize in other water; and if you cannot in cold, then in warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Before the baptism, let the baptizer and the candidate for baptism fast, as well as any others that are able. Require the candidate to fast one or two days previously (Didache, 7. 1-4).*

**Please notice that no where in these instructions is it permitted to baptize without water!** Jesus taught that no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through “water and the Spirit.” In Titus 3:4-8 St. Paul instructs St. Titus: *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior for humanity were revealed, it was not because of any upright actions we had done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own faithful love that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that, justified by his grace, we should become heirs in hope of eternal life. This is doctrine that you can rely on.* Paul’s statement reaffirms Jesus’ instruction to Nicodemus in John 3:3-3-6: *In all truth [amen, amen] I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. [...]. In all truth [amen, amen] I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human, what is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

A profession of faith does not replace water baptism as the spiritual rebirth into the family of God [see John 3:5 and for more information see the study on the Gospel of St. John chapter 3]. Faith is the first step in the process of salvation and baptism is the second step in what is a life long journey toward eternal salvation.

The necessity of water in the Sacrament of Baptism: CCC # 694; 1213-17; 1228; 1238-39; Infant baptism = CCC# 1252

## HERESIES CONCERNING CHRIST

*“Only in Him is there salvation; for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.” Acts 4:12*

*“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’” John 14:6*

The Catholic Church has always taught:

that Jesus is both God and man,  
that He has both a divine and human nature but that He is one person,  
that He always exists as God the Son, that He is equal to God the Father,  
that He was begotten of the Father; He is not a created being,  
that He was born as a human,  
that He died and rose again,  
that He ascended into heaven,  
and that He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The problems for the Church came in trying to decide how to express this basic "Rule of Faith". Soon very sincere men slipped into heresies when they tried to explain from their own understanding the nature of Jesus of Nazareth. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines heresy as: *"..the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same.." [CCC# 2089].* Some of the errors in doctrine denounced in the early centuries of the Church continue today.

For example, there are still those who deny that Jesus was truly God. Those who fall into this heresy believe that Jesus was a great man and a godly man but that he was not God. In this heresy they deny Christianity since the doctrine of the Incarnation—that the Second Person of the Trinity came to earth as a human without ceasing to be divine – is the very basis of Christianity. Generally this is the belief of **Deists and Adoptionists**.

Other heresies stressed the oneness of God by denying the other two persons of the Trinity as ‘persons’ in the Godhead. **Monarchians, Patripassinists, & Modalists** believed that God the Father and Christ is ‘one person.’ This heresy maintains that God the Father became Christ.

There were also those who believed that although Jesus was the Son of God that He not equal to God the Father. This is the heresy of the **Arianists** (the heresy that the First Nicene Council addressed). Arianism believed that God the Father *created* God the Son. That is to say that God the Father existed before God the Son and made God the Son as he made the earth and everything else. Arianists assigned the role of creator solely to God the Father while others who fell into this heresy believed in God the Creator (Father), God the Redeemer (Jesus), and God the Sanctifier (Holy Spirit), as if there were 3 gods. This is the heresy of **Polytheism**.

There are also misguided Christians who believe Mary was the mother only of Jesus the man and should not be called ‘Mother of God.’ This is the heresy of **Nestorianism** which was spread by Nestorius, a monk of Antioch, who became the influential patriarch of Constantinople in 428AD. Nestorius preached that the Man Christ was not God; God only dwelt in Him as in a temple, and that He became God by degrees. In other words, he taught that there were two persons in Christ, the one human, and the other divine. Logically in this interpretation he had to deny that Mary is the Mother of God. He said she should be called *Christotokos* (Christ bearer), but not *Theotokos* (God bearer). The doctrine of this heresy was addressed at the Council of Ephesus in 431AD. The Church pronounced that Christ is only one person, not two. Therefore, Mary is the mother of that person and if that person is God then Mary is indeed the *Theotokos* and deserves to be called the “Mother of God”. It was from the ruling of this council that “Holy Mary, Mother of God” was added to the “Hail Mary” prayer.

The **Manichaeans** taught that their founder Manes (c. 215-276AD) received a higher form of truth than taught by Christ. This is also basically the teaching of Mohammed (d. 639AD) the founder of **Islam**. Both heresies deny the Trinity and the divinity of Christ.

To question Jesus’ humanity is also heresy. It is the old heresy of **Monophysitism**. Monophysites distort St. Paul’s statement that Jesus was “a man like us in all things but sin,” but they have difficulty understanding, for example, that He was subject to fatigue, or all the humbling bodily functions, or the desires or temptations that all men have. They believe that instead to two natures, both human and divine, that He was physically human but His nature was divine. They denied that Christ had a true human nature. The human nature, they maintained, was absorbed in the Divinity as a drop of wine in an ocean. Therefore, they believed there was really only one nature in Christ, and that was His divine nature, hence, ‘mono’ = one and physite = nature.

Monophysites are very close to the heresy of **Docetism** and the **Gnostic-Docets**. These heresies basically taught that Jesus was somehow not subject to all the things that make one a human. They taught that Christ merely assumed the appearance of a human body. Docetism denies the reality of the humanity of Christ. St. Ignatius refuted this heresy when he wrote: “*For I know and believe that He was in the flesh after the Resurrection: and when He came to Peter and his company, He said, ‘Lay hold and handle Me, and see that I am not a bloodless spirit’, and straightaway they touched Him and believed, being joined to His flesh and blood. Therefore also they despised death, nay, were found superior to it; and after His Resurrection He ate and drank with them, as one in the flesh, though spiritually He was united with the Father. [...] The Docetists abstain from the Eucharist, because they allow not that It is the flesh of our Savior, which flesh suffered for our sins, and which the Father of His goodness raised up.*” St. Ignatius was martyred ca. AD 107.

At the end of the 2nd century St. Irenaeus completed his great work *Against Heresies*, which was written to refute the various forms of **Gnosticism** [an old heresy resurrected in the book *The DiVinci Code*]. The Gnostics denied the historicity of the Gospels. For the Gnostics, neither the historical Jesus whose humanity they denied, nor the events of His

life meant anything for salvation. They viewed these as only signs of an eternal, invisible and secret reality, and believed that physical matter and the world were inherently evil, the creation of an inferior god. For the Gnostics the goal of humanity was in escaping from the physical body and earthly constraints and in returning to the higher spiritual world from which humans fell. The means of achieving this "spiritual reality" were contained in a secret truth revealed only to the Gnostics, not found in Sacred Scripture of the Tradition of the Church. These teachings were refuted by Irenaeus who established the principles for the interpretation of the Scriptures guided by the "Rule of Faith, handed down by the Apostles, and insisting the whole Bible portrays one continuous history from Creation to redemption and consummation. He affirmed the teaching of the Universal Church that Salvation takes place in time and history and the Old and New Testaments form a single vision within this historical sweep.

In 451 the Council of Chalcedon, with nearly 600 Bishops assembled, settled the issue by declaring the Catholic doctrine of the two natures in one Divine Person of Christ. All present arose and exclaimed "*That is the faith of the Fathers; that is the faith of the Apostles! So we all believe! Peter has spoken through Leo!*" The definition of the Council of Chalcedon was not accepted by the whole Church. The Monophysite controversy went on for nearly a hundred years. Finally all those parts of the Eastern Empire in which Greek was not the language of the people severed themselves from the Church and have remained in schism: the Copts in Egypt, the Jacobites in Syria, the Armenians, and the Abyssinians.

The Monophysite heresy led to the **Monothelism** heresy (monon = one and thelema = will). In an effort to conciliate the Monophysites, Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople since 610AD, thought that by declaring that there was only one will in Christ, the Syrian and Egyptian Monophysites would be satisfied and give up their schism. The Church opposed this teaching in the VI Council of Constantinople. The Church maintained that Christ was one person, with two natures both human and divine and that both natures were in perfect accord.

These are the heresies that relate directly to Christ. There are many others. Another heresy popular today is the heresy of **Pelagianism**, the belief that humans can obtain salvation solely through their own efforts, and the heresy of **Universalism**, belief that everyone will achieve salvation.

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