

How to Talk  
to Children  
about

JESUS

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# Introduction

“How do I talk to my child about...?” This is not an uncommon question among parents as well as teachers and catechists. Abstract concepts, hard-to-broach subjects, and sensitive issues all require a particular kind of language that gives a child enough information without being overly complex or confusing. The same is true for aspects of our faith. How do we talk to children about the great big concept of God or about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus? How do we explain the gestures, symbols, and ritual of the Mass or approach issues of morality and making sound choices?

This series of books provides parents as well as teachers and catechists with a range of questions about these topics. Each one offers terminology relatable to a young child’s experience as well as family activities to stimulate further conversation and comprehension. In sharing these responses, you are likely to find yourself more than capable of talking to your child about these and other topics of faith and practice.

# Where and when did Jesus live?

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## **For your information**

At first glance, this seems like an easily answered question. When we talk about the place and time of Jesus' birth and life, we're talking about the historical Jesus—the time that Jesus lived here on earth. Jesus lived on earth about 2,000 years ago, but he has always been living as God the Son! Before the world began, Jesus was always with God and was God (John 1:1–2; John 10:30). We know that God has always existed. God has no beginning or end. Since Jesus is God, that means Jesus has always existed too. God was never created; God is the one who created (John 1:3).

As we read about Jesus in the Bible, the story of his time on earth ends as he returns to heaven. The disciples—and we—were not left alone. Jesus kept his promise to be with us always. He sent the Holy Spirit to guide us, continuing to empower us to live the example and teachings that Jesus gave us.

## **Talking to your child about where and when Jesus lived**

- Talk with your child about how long ago their grandparents were born. Jesus was born more than 2000 years ago.
- Remind your child where he or she was born (and if you've lived in more than one place since then). What about Jesus? The Bible tells us that Jesus lived in the Middle East, mostly Israel. (You might want to do an internet search for a map of Israel to see these places.)

- Jesus was born into a Jewish family from Galilee. He was born in Bethlehem and lived in Egypt for a short time with his parents; then he grew up in Nazareth, a small village in Galilee. After Jesus started to teach, he was a homeless wanderer throughout Israel, living a very simple life. He held no job; he owned no home or property.
- Jesus grew up learning the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) and probably spoke Aramaic (a language related to Hebrew) as his first language. The regions in which Jesus lived and traveled appear to have had many spoken languages; it would not be surprising if he also knew Hebrew and some Greek and maybe a few other local languages.
- What did Jesus look like? The Bible never gives any physical description of Jesus. Many of the images we have of Jesus today—the ones where he has blue eyes and light skin and hair—are not accurate. Because Jesus was a Mediterranean Jew, he would have had dark skin, dark eyes, and dark hair. Since he walked everywhere, he was probably muscular and trim. His hands—from his early carpentry work with Joseph—might have been rough and calloused.

Even though we can't see Jesus as the people who lived with him did, we can "see" him and know his presence whenever and wherever people care for each other. Suggest that, as a family, you all watch carefully during the following week for where you "see" Jesus.

### **Pray together**

*Jesus, thank you for coming to our world. Thank you for promising always to be with us by sending us the Holy Spirit, who continues to show us how to live with generosity and open hearts.*

# Who was part of Jesus' family?

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## **For your information**

We can focus on the family of Jesus from many different perspectives: the people Jesus lived with when he was on earth, his long line of Jewish ancestors, his (and God the Father's) view that all people are one family, the reality that each of us is part of Jesus' family.

Thinking about the family that surrounded Jesus while he was on earth reminds us that Jesus, the Son of God, became human and shared many of our experiences.

## **Talking to your child about Jesus' family**

- Talk with your child about your family tree, stressing how fortunate you are to have your family. God's plan is that we're not alone, that we're part of a larger family who cares, helps, and loves one another.
- Because Jesus was human, just like us, Jesus belonged to a family. We know from our Scripture stories that Jesus' mother was Mary; his earthly foster father was Joseph. (Because Jesus was also God, the Son of God, God the Father is his father.)
- On July 26, we celebrate the feasts of Sts. Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary and the grandparents of Jesus. Scripture does not mention Anne and Joachim, but other early Christian writings give us some stories about them.
- Scripture also tells us that John the Baptist was a cousin of Jesus. When Jesus, as an adult, began his life of teaching and caring,

John the Baptist prepared the people to listen and recognize Jesus. John the Baptist's parents were Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Read these Scripture passages about Jesus' family:  
Matthew 1:1–25; Luke 1:5–25; Luke 1:39–45;  
Luke 2:8–20; Matthew 3:1–17.

Make a family tree and talk about your large family. Ask: Are there people who are different from us, who think differently, who act differently? How can we be loving and accepting of everyone? How do we stay connected to and in contact with our large family?

- Remind your child that in addition to grandparents, everyone has great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and on and on. The same was true of Jesus. In fact, Matthew's and Luke's gospels give us a long list of Jesus' ancestors. When we read these lists, there are many names we've probably never heard before. When we learn about these people, we find some who were very loving and others who probably, at times, seemed very different from the person Jesus would be. All kinds of people were part of Jesus' family! There's an Advent custom—the Jesse Tree—which tells us about many of the ancestors of Jesus. You might want to create a Jesse Tree this coming Advent.
- When we think about Jesus' family and read the Scripture stories, we also realize that Jesus saw everyone as part of his family. Jesus especially reached out and included people who were poor, left out, lonely, and fearful.
- Jesus sees *us* as part of his family! How does that make you feel?

### **Pray together**

*Jesus, as you continue to bless our family, help us to be like you—including and recognizing everyone as part of God's one family.*