



McMaster Divinity
College

NT CHRISTOLOGY: THE SURPRISING LIFE OF JESUS AND THE ENDURING CHRIST OF FAITH NT 3P1280 (BS/CW/PS)

McMaster Divinity College
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Monday, 11:00am–12:50pm

The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Nowadays, most people take it for granted that Jesus of Nazareth was a Galilean Jew who lived in the first century and was executed by Pontius Pilate. Yet Jesus was also much more than this, as can be seen from the fact that an estimated two billion people claim to follow him still today, two thousand years after his crucifixion. In this course we will take both a historical and a literary approach to Jesus's astonishing impact. We will examine what Jesus did and said, seeking to understand how and why his earliest followers came to regard him as much more than a mere teacher. We will also examine the different voices within the New Testament to see what they have to say about Jesus. In some cases, the course will explain seemingly strange aspects of his character as perfectly normal (for a first-century Galilean Jew); in other cases, it will render still more awe-inspiring those qualities of Jesus that have persuaded millions of people to follow him and even to worship him.

SPECIALIZATIONS

NT 3P1280 is available as a Biblical Studies (BS), Christian Worldview (CW), or Pastoral Studies (PS) specialization.

✧ Students taking this as a *Biblical Studies (BS)* course will be encouraged to explore what the New Testament says about the life of Christ and to consider the early emergence of christological ideas from various perspectives (e.g. historical, sociological, literary, theological).

✧ Students taking this as a *Christian Worldview (CW)* course will be encouraged to consider the tremendous impact that Jesus of Nazareth has made on human history and to explore the many ways that people explain his influence.

¬ Students taking this as a *Pastoral Studies (PS)* course will be encouraged to explore how the life of Christ is relevant for Christian faith and practice in the 21st century as both an exemplary human life and a revelation of God.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Having completed this course successfully, students will:

KNOWING

- Know the general tenor of historical Jesus research and the major debates that characterize it;
- Know Jesus's words and deeds and how they relate to important aspects of his social, historical, and cultural contexts (e.g. socio-economic realities in Galilee, circumstances preceding the Jewish War, Torah observance, etc.);
- Become familiar with the various ways in which the New Testament authors interpret the significance of Jesus as well as the key New Testament passages where christological ideas are expressed;
- Critically evaluate different contemporary positions regarding the development of early Christologies;

BEING

- Appreciate Jesus as a real, historically situated human being;
- Appreciate that Jesus's beliefs and social interactions are meaningful first-and-foremost within the first-century matrix of Early Judaism;
- Be amazed by the character and behaviour of Jesus;
- Be sensitive to the experiential nature of the early church's interactions with Jesus (both pre- and post-Easter) and the effect these experiences had on the formation of early Christologies;
- Recognize the great honour and respect that is due to Jesus, both as a remarkable human being and as a revelation of God;
- Become open to fresh (and potentially surprising) encounters with the person of Jesus;

DOING

- Have basic historical research skills, including the ability to locate useful resources, the ability to assess competing historiographical methodologies, and the ability to weigh historical evidence;
- Have the ability to knowledgeably discuss the various perspectives on Jesus of Nazareth that have been articulated by biblical authors, historians, theologians, film makers, and others;
- Have the ability to situate Jesus within his first-century environment and to discuss intelligibly the ways in which this environment sheds light on his words and actions;
- Have the ability to "bring Jesus to life" by some form of effective communication (e.g. written, spoken, artistic, etc.).

TEXTBOOKS AND RESOURCES

All students are required to possess an English translation of the New Testament, as well as:

Hurtado, Larry. *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions About Earliest Devotion to Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Biblical Studies (PS) students are *also* required to possess:

Beilby, James L., and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds. *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

Pastoral Studies (PS) and Christian Worldview (CW) students are *also* required to possess:

Borg, Marcus J., and N. T. Wright. *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

JESUS FILMS

In addition to the course readings, students are required to view a Jesus film. The following is a list of pre-approved films. If you wish to watch some other film of a suitable length (i.e. not a lengthy TV series), please email me well in advance of the assignment due date to request permission. *Some of these films contain violence, nudity, and/or profanity. Students who wish to avoid potentially disturbing content should research the films before watching them (e.g. using the parental advisories at www.imdb.com).* It is your responsibility to obtain access to your chosen film.

- The Greatest Story Ever Told (George Stevens, 1965)
- Jesus Christ Superstar (Norman Jewison, 1973)
- Godspell (David Greene, 1973)
- Jesus of Nazareth (Franco Zeffirelli, 1977)
- The Last Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese, 1988)
- Jesus of Montreal (Denys Arcand, 1990)
- The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson, 2004)
- Color of the Cross (Jean-Claude La Marre, 2006)
- Son of God (Christopher Spencer, 2014)
- The Young Messiah (Cyrus Nowrasteh, 2016)
- Mary Magdalene (Garth Davis, 2018)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

PARTICIPATION (2 x 5% = 10%)

As a graduate seminar, the course will involve not just weekly lectures but also regular discussions both in small groups and as an entire class. Links to suggested follow-up materials will also be posted on A2L. You are expected to attend class meetings, to listen to the lectures, to learn through discussions, and to skim (and potentially set aside for the future) follow-up materials recommended for further learning. Your level of engagement will be assessed by means of two self-evaluations. **Twice during the semester, you will complete a brief self-assessment on A2L that invites you to reflect on how well you are engaging in the class as an overall learning experience.** This will encompass how well you are listening to and learning from others, how well you are contributing your own questions and comments, and how well you are making use of recommended follow-up materials to develop a plan for ongoing learning.

INITIAL AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS (5% + 10% = 15%)

At the start and end of the semester, you will briefly answer the question: *Who is Jesus, and how do you know him?* While your reflections must be thoughtful, they cannot be long. **Your initial reflection must be no longer than 750 words. Your concluding reflection must be no longer than 1,500 words.** Please make the most of your limited space.

Avoid the temptation to focus exclusively on the first part of the assignment (who Jesus is). Things to consider as you undertake your reflections on the second part (how you know Jesus) include the role that the canonical witnesses play in Christian theology relative to other sources of information about Jesus (i.e. Should Christians attempt to go “behind” the Gospels by doing historical research, and if so why?), the extent to which Jesus’s humanity is decisive for explanations of his thoughts and actions (i.e. Do we interpret Jesus’s words and deeds with reference to his enculturation as a first-century Jew, or do theological beliefs about him require that we understand him differently than we do other people in history?), and the role and significance of contemporary experiences regarded as “a personal relationship with Jesus” (i.e. Is it important for individual Christians to confirm that their understanding of Jesus is historically reliable, or is knowing Jesus a matter of faith and experience?).

Your concluding reflection need not offer a totally changed perspective on Jesus, but it must convey the influence that specific course components have had on your understanding. To prepare for this concluding reflection, I suggest that you re-read or re-watch your original reflection. Then, take a moment to reflect on your own learning, to observe how you have matured in your understanding, and to ponder how you might continue your learning after the conclusion of the course. Please point to specific areas of (past, present, or future) growth in your understanding of Jesus.

BOOK & FILM RESPONSES (15% EACH = 45%)

Every month or so, you will read a book or watch a film. You will then **submit a thoughtful response to the book or film that is no longer than 750 words.** You will then **come to class with three bullet points that identify ideas/quotations/issues/questions of specific interest to you.** These bullet points will be used to foster in-class discussions.

For the first stage of this assignment, Biblical Studies (BS) students will read *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, whereas Christian Worldview (CW) and Pastoral Studies (PS) students will read *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. For the second stage, all students will read *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* For the third stage, students will watch a Jesus film (either one of the pre-approved films listed above, or some other film approved in writing by the professor).

Your **submitted responses must invoke specific elements of your source** (citing specific chapters, pages, scenes, or quotations). You must also offer insightful responses (such as counterarguments, connections to something else in the New Testament or in Christian thought/practice, reflections on the implications of the information, etc.). **Above all, do not naively compare the depiction of Jesus in your book/film with those in the canonical Gospels. Your task is not merely to assess the book/film but rather to consider what it means to present a portrait of Jesus.** If you choose to take issue with something in your book/film, be careful to show awareness of its methods and/or goals when doing so.

Each of **the bullet points that you bring for class discussion should articulate a specific observation and then offer a specific follow-up question.** The goal is to initiate dialogue about specific issues to encourage further learning.

MAJOR PROJECT (30%)

For your major project, you will apply your new knowledge about the historical Jesus and New Testament Christology to some facet of contemporary thought and/or practice. The details will vary for each student, with students selecting some area of focus that suits their specialization. Whatever the final shape of your project, there must be: (1) academic publications that support the claims you are making about the historical Jesus and/or New Testament Christology; and (2) popular materials that exemplify the contemporary relevance of your claims. *You are encouraged to be creative in designing your final projects!* To give only a few examples:

- ≈ A student in the Biblical Studies (BS) specialization might assess recent debates regarding the mythic nature of NT stories about Jesus, with online blogs exemplifying the relevance of the issue.
- ≈ A student in the Christian Worldview (CW) specialization might reflect on contemporary views of Jesus among non-Christians, with accounts of personal acquaintances serving to exemplify the views in question.
- ≈ A student in the Pastoral Studies (PS) specialization might compare the views of Jesus exemplified in contemporary worship songs with the views of Jesus articulated in the New Testament.

For all specializations, **the final assignment must demonstrate solid New Testament research, including a bibliography of at least ten (10) suitable academic resources. Its main written component must be 3,000–4,000 words.**

GRADING SUMMARY

Participation	10%
Reflections (x2)	15%
Book/Film Responses (x3)	45%
Major Project	30%
Total	100%

MEETING SCHEDULE

Date	Topic
Sept 14	Historiography and/or Theology
Sept 21	Money, Sex, and Violence (Part 1)
Sept 28	Money, Sex, and Violence (Part 2)
Oct 5	<i>The Historical Jesus: Five Views // The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions</i>
Oct 12	Reading Week (No Class Meeting)
Oct 19	Healing, Forgiveness, and Hope (Part 1)
Oct 26	Healing, Forgiveness, and Hope (Part 2)
Nov 2	<i>How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?</i>
Nov 9	Death, Resurrection, and Ascension
Nov 16	Cosmic Authority and Cosmic Revealing
Nov 23	SBL (Optional In-Class Tutorial)
Nov 30	Major Projects
Dec 7	<i>Jesus Films (complete with popcorn!)</i>
Dec 14	Making Sense of Jesus in the Twenty-First Century

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Due Dates	Assignments
Sept 21 @ 11:00am	Initial Reflection
Oct 5 @ 11:00am	Response to <i>The Historical Jesus</i> OR <i>The Meaning of Jesus</i>
Nov 2 @ 11:00am	Response to <i>How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?</i>
Nov 30 @ 11:00am	Major Project
Dec 7 @ 11:00am	Film Response
Dec 14 @ 11:00am	Concluding Reflection

COMMUNICATION

AVENUE 2 LEARN (A2L)

We will make extensive use of Avenue to Learn (A2L) in this course; it will be the primary hub for all course content and for all course announcements. **It is your responsibility to log into the system regularly to check for announcements, course content, and course activities.**

EMAIL

I can be contacted using the email address listed at the top of this syllabus. To protect confidentiality and confirm your identity, all communication must originate from your McMaster email account. Similarly, if I need to contact you for any reason, I will send mail to your McMaster email address. **It is your responsibility to ensure that that you are actively using and monitoring your McMaster email account.** If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address (that is, an address other than the student's McMaster email address), the instructor may not reply at their discretion. **Students must not use the "Instant Message" feature within A2L, nor should they send emails using A2L.**

OFFICE HOURS

I maintain office hours on at least two days per week, with the specific hours for each semester available both on A2L and outside my office door. **Office hours can be used for drop-in visits**, ideally kept to a half-hour maximum. If you need more time to visit or cannot come during office hours, please schedule a meeting by contacting me via email. **I am willing to meet in person or via Zoom as needed.**

SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

PARTICIPATION

Presence and participation in this course are expected. Mediocre participation translates into mediocre learning outcomes. Moreover, logging into A2L or showing up to class are not, by themselves, sufficient as a demonstration of participation. Students are expected to engage with the professor and with one another, both in structured course activities and before/after class. **Relational engagement is an important part of belonging to and maintaining a community of learning.** Late arrivals disrupt the class and may affect your participation grade.

Conversely, excessive participation can amount to dominating class discussions. Please limit your interactions so that they do not overwhelm other students or hinder others from participating. If I discern that you are dominating our discussions, I may ask you to take a step back to allow others to participate more fully.

ETIQUETTE

It is critical that students show respect for classmates and instructors. Most, if not all, courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these **disagreements**

must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and others enrolled in the course.

As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to model respectful disagreement and to help you to feel comfortable expressing your views in a respectful manner. I expect that you will give thought to your questions and comments. Please avoid sweeping statements that caricature or dismiss ideas or people with whom you disagree. Instead, identify concrete facts and speak clearly about their implications. When evaluating ideas or people, identify the underlying presuppositions or commitments that undergird your evaluation and make these explicit as part of your observation. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.

ABSENCE DUE TO ILLNESS

If you must miss class due to an illness, please email me as soon as possible. If you are an in-person student and you are ill, please email me even if you plan to attend class online. Although I may be able to share a video recording of the class, I cannot guarantee that this will be possible, so you may wish to have a fellow student take notes for you.

CLASS CANCELLATIONS

If I should become ill and unable to attend class, I will communicate via A2L as soon as possible. **Please check A2L before coming to class, so that you do not miss any last-minute scheduling changes.** Similarly, please be sure to check whether MDC has closed due to inclement weather. If we must cancel class, I reserve the right to move the week's material to A2L (asynchronous format). This will help to ensure that we stay on schedule.

RECORDING

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course, whether by an instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution or by a student for the purpose of personal study. **Your voice and/or image may be recorded during the class** and your participation in the course serves as tacit acceptance of this fact. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you. Also, please respect the privacy of peers: **do not share images, recordings, or written contributions outside the class environment.**

COPYRIGHT

Please be advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor represent copyright-protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, *including lectures* by university instructors. **You are not permitted to share or otherwise distribute course materials or class recordings without written permission** from the relevant copyright holder(s).

ONLINE PARTICIPATION

Online participation is like face-to-face participation in that it requires planning, engagement, and respect. In addition, **online participation has the following specific requirements.**

Technology Requirements

- Ensure you have a reliable internet connection, a device with audio and video capability, and the course platform installed (i.e. Zoom).
- Test your link and connection before class.
- **Keep your microphone muted** unless speaking.
- Use headphones, if possible, for better audio quality.

Webcam & Environment

- Unless otherwise instructed, **enable your webcam for the duration of the class session**.
- Dress in casual but appropriate attire.
- **Minimize distractions** in your background. Virtual backgrounds are acceptable if professional.

Netiquette

- **Use the “Raise Hand” feature** before speaking; avoid interrupting others.
- Keep chat messages on topic; avoid ALL CAPS, sarcasm, or humor that could be misinterpreted.
- Stay focused—do not multitask during class.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

ONLINE SUBMISSION

Written assignments must be submitted via Avenue to Learn (A2L) prior to the relevant due date (see schedule below and/or A2L). **Emailed assignments will not normally be accepted.** Under extenuating circumstances, I may be willing to accept an emailed assignment as submitted, but this is at my own discretion. At the end of the semester, any missing assignments will receive a grade of “0,” unless the student has already been granted an incomplete or deferral from the Office of the Registrar.

FILE FORMATS

Written assignments must be uploaded to A2L either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). If your file is not being accepted by the system, please ensure that you are using an accepted file format.

MDC STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the latest edition of the MDC Press Style Guide, which is available on A2L from MDC Student Services. **Failure to observe appropriate style will result in grade reductions.**

LATENESS

Everyone benefits when the entire class proceeds uniformly on schedule. Conversely, both students and professors suffer when work begins to pile up or become scattered. In this class, **a non-negotiable penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments.** Furthermore, **late submissions will not receive**

detailed comments from the professor and may not be returned at the same time as work submitted on time.

Please do not email me to request an extension, because no extensions will be given. **If you are unable to submit work on time, you can email me using the exact subject heading *didaskale eleēson***, which means “Teacher, have mercy!” I will not necessarily reply to your email. However, when I am calculating final grades after the last week of class, I will search for this specific subject heading and consider each request. Please keep in mind that busyness and poor planning do not generally provoke compassion. Also, assignments cannot be submitted after the final week of class without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (mdcreg@mcmaster.ca).

PLAGIARISM

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own (regardless of the means of its production, including Generative AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student’s dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work for you. **Using AI to produce content for you and then submitting that content as if you produced it is considered plagiarism** (i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own as if it is one’s own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy. Additionally, although there may be value in using an AI tool to correct mistakes in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, **Generative AI is not to be used for translating from your native language to English**. All degree programs at MDC are taught in English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

TURNITIN

In this course, we will be using a web-based service (turnitin.com) for plagiarism detection. A student’s continuation in the course represents his or her consent to the use of this service. If a student has objections to the use of this service, alternate arrangements for assignment submission must be made with the professor in advance of the assignment deadlines.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

GRADING SCALE

Percent Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Point (12)	Grade Point (4)	Grade Guidelines
90–100 85–89 80–84	A+ A A–	12 11 10	4.0 4.0 3.7	For work displaying mastery of the subject matter, creativity, and individualized integration of insights and their relationship
77–79 73–76 70–72	B+ B B–	9 8 7	3.3 3.0 2.7	For work displaying a good level of competence and comprehension
<i>For M.A, D.P.T, and Ph.D programs, any course grade below B– does not count for credit and must be repeated.</i>				
67–69 63–66 60–62	C+ C C–	6 5 4	2.3 2.0 1.7	For work which meets the basic course requirements but demonstrates a low level of comprehension
<i>For M.Div, Dip.Min, Cer.C.S, and occasional programs, any course grade below C– does not count for credit and must be repeated if it is a required course</i>				

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. **Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)** (<https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term they are enrolled in. This will generate a notification to course instructors outlining the activated accommodations for the student in their course. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations will be implemented once the faculty member has been notified. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to coursework or activities that have already concluded.

Contact Information:

Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries: sas@mcmaster.ca

Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC): sobotar@mcmaster.ca

MDC Registrar: mdcreg@mcmaster.ca

GUARDME

Students at McMaster Divinity College have access to the GuardMe Student Support Program (GMSSP), which offers free, confidential mental health and wellness support 24/7. Through the program, students can connect with counsellors, access helpful tools and resources, and receive support anytime, from anywhere. Support is available by phone (1-844-451-9700) or visit gmssp.org to download the Student Support App.

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