

ment, and the promised Messiah. Even though Latter-day Saints believe that the birth of Jesus actually occurred in the spring of the year (D&C 20:1; *see* APRIL 6), they observe the December celebration when, more than at any other time of year, the Christian world unites in remembering Christ's birth and practicing his teachings of love, charity, self-sacrifice, and tolerance.

Most Latter-day Saints include some of the traditions, games, decorations, music, and food associated with the Christmas customs of their homelands in their family celebrations. Such items as Christmas trees, stockings, gifts, and greeting cards add to the beauty of the holiday and are not discouraged. But the recommended focus is religious. The Church encourages family closeness, concern for neighbors, thoughtfulness for fellow workers, renewal of friendships, and acts of Christ-like love, giving, and celebration. Appropriate sermons, lessons, songs, and programs are presented in Sabbath services during the Christmas season. Latter-day Saints are cautioned that holiday shopping, decorating, and festivities should not obscure the remembrance of Christ nor hinder the quest for peace on earth.

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## CHRISTOLOGY

Christology is the theological study of the human and divine natures and roles of Jesus Christ.

It developed soon after the death of the apostles in the first century, as conflicting teachings arose over the proper understanding of Christ. Christology served both as a response to heresies and as a development of a systematic theology that orthodox Christians could accept. Eventually these teachings were discussed in councils and formulated into CREEDS, for instance, at Nicaea (A.D. 325), Constantinople (A.D. 381), and Chalcedon (A.D. 451). These creeds insisted upon a full communion of Christ's divine and human natures, as opposed to the teaching that he was either divine or human, or part one and part the other. In every sense, the councils concluded, Christ is God and of the same substance (*homoousios*).

Various Christologies competed in the early Christian church. Docetists taught that Jesus Christ only seemed to suffer on the cross, since he only appeared to have a body. Modalists taught that there is only one God in three modes; Arianism, that there are three persons united in purpose. Nestorianism insisted upon two separate wills in a dyadic unity, while Apollonarianism taught that Jesus' human body was inhabited by a divine soul.

Over the years, others have insisted that Jesus Christ is merely the ideal man for humanity, since Jesus often called himself "the Son of man." They have felt that he seldom drew attention to his divinity, as Albert Schweitzer argues in his famous *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1911).

Some modern Lutheran theologians believe that Jesus was not simultaneously on the earth as a human and in heaven as God. Under this view, Jesus was divine in the PREEXISTENCE but gave up his godly status and divine properties, except moral attributes, and took upon himself flesh and became a man. This is called the "kenotic" theory.

John Hick, a British philosopher-theologian, feels that Christianity should return to the earliest Christology, the "grace" theory, which teaches that Christ was transformed into a being sharing the divine properties by being infused with his Father's grace.

Although the term "Christology" is not frequently used by Latter-day Saints, the doctrine of the Church can be described in the following manner: Jesus Christ descended from his high pre-existent station as a God when he came to earth to die for mankind's sins (*see* JESUS CHRIST: FIRST BORN IN THE SPIRIT; CONDESCENSION OF GOD). He was JEHOVAH come to earth in a physical body as the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh (*see* JESUS CHRIST: ONLY BEGOTTEN IN THE FLESH). While on earth he was still God, but he received from his Father "grace for grace," as do God's other children (D&C 93:12; *see* JESUS CHRIST: MINISTRY OF). The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants speak forcefully of the divine sonship of Christ and also of his humanity (Mosiah 15:2–3; Alma 6:8; 11:38; 13:16; 34:2; 3 Ne. 11:7, 28:10; D&C 93; *see* JESUS CHRIST, FATHERHOOD AND SONSHIP).

Like Jesus Christ, all mortals live in a state of humiliation, but through the mediation of the Christ they may progress to a state of EXALTATION (*see* DEIFICATION; GODHOOD). There is no ultimate

disparity between the divine and human natures; Joseph SMITH asserted that mankind is of the same species as God, having been made in God's image (theomorphism) and being eternal, with unlimited capacity (*TPJS*, pp. 345–46). One early LDS leader proclaimed, “As man now is, God once was. As God now is, man may be” (Lorenzo SNOW). Latter-day Saints speak of man as a god in embryo and of Jesus Christ as mankind's elder brother. A favorite LDS children's hymn is titled “I Am a Child of God.”

Latter-day Saint doctrine can be understood to have appreciation for Christ and applications for man that go beyond traditional Christology. It is LDS teaching that all the Father's children possess the potential to strive toward the same godhood that the GODHEAD already has; because in their humanity there is a divinity that is progressing and growing according to the faith, intelligence, and love that abound in their souls. Like the attribute of perfection, divinity is not a static absolute but a dynamic progression (*see* ETERNAL PROGRESSION).

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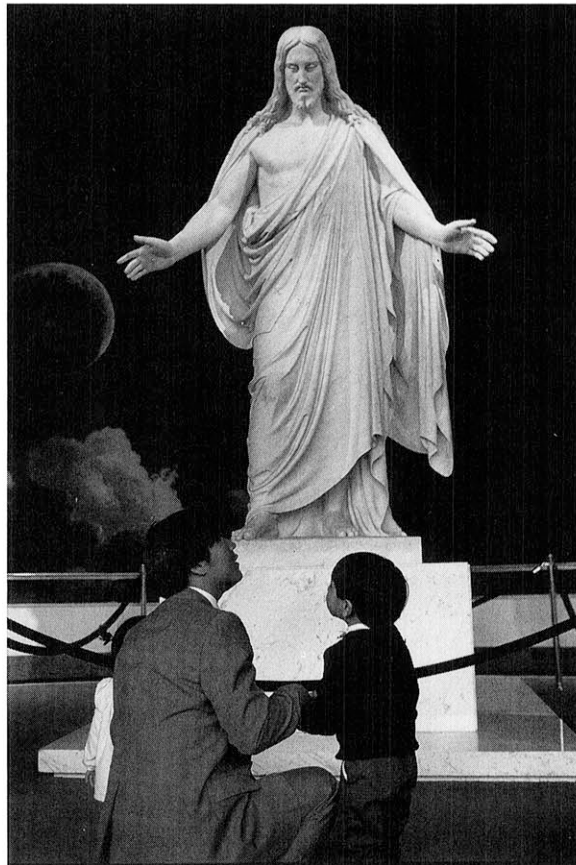
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## CHRISTUS STATUE

Replicas of the Christus statue by Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1768–1844) are located in several LDS VISITORS CENTERS. These white carrara marble statues of Christ, with his hands outstretched, inviting all to come to him, help present the central doctrine of the Church: that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

The first such statue acquired by the Church was a gift of Stephen L Richards, First Counselor to President David O. McKay (1951–1959). In 1966 this heroic-size (11 feet, 1 inch) Christus was placed in the North Visitors Center on TEMPLE SQUARE in Salt Lake City.

The second Christus was commissioned for



*Christus*, by Bertel Thorvaldsen (c. 1965, Carrara marble replica of 1821 original, 3.36 m), in the North Visitors Center, Temple Square, Salt Lake City. Thorvaldsen's statue of the resurrected Christ helps present LDS belief in Jesus Christ, the son of God and redeemer of the world. It stands in a rotunda before a mural of the universe to show that “by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created” (D&C 76:24).

display in the Church's pavilion at the New York World's Fair (1964–1965) and was sculpted by Aldo Rebaudi of Florence, Italy. It was intended to help visitors understand that Latter-day Saints (or Mormons) are Christians. This statue was later placed in the Visitors Center on the grounds of the Los Angeles Temple.

Additional Christus statues are currently located at visitors centers adjacent to temples in New Zealand; Hawaii; Mexico City; Washington, D.C.; and Mesa, Arizona.

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