

# **I Believe in Jesus Christ: Incarnation, Life, Death, and Resurrection**

## **SESSION TWO LEADER GUIDE**

**This leader guide is designed to follow each page of the second session: “I Believe in Jesus Christ: Incarnation, Life, Death, and Resurrection” with background for the leader and helpful references for expanding the learning. This second lesson may be taught as one longer continuous session, such as at a retreat setting, or as separate sessions (approximately one hour) that cover each page of the session. You may wish to have youth view the website, or individual pages, on their own, then gather as a group to discuss and explore the learning. The website is also useful within the classroom as a teaching tool to introduce the material, then youth may revisit it later to reinforce learning at home. While the curriculum offers prompts for guiding conversation and offers direction for teaching the material, it is important to prepare your own answers for questions and notes for discussion. Sharing your personal experience and insight with the group is a valuable resource for these lessons.**

## **OBJECTIVES**

**At the end of this session, the students will be better able to:**

**Recognize the differing methods for scientific and theological inquiry**

**Differentiate between the theological and scientific claims of birth, life, and death**

## **THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

**The conversation between faith/religion and science can be difficult to navigate with youth who live in a world where they are bombarded by a great amount of information and opinions. It is important to first set a safe learning environment where differing opinions are respected and confidentiality is secured.**

**You may also want to consult with parents/guardians prior to beginning this session to alert them to the concepts taught in this session, and invite them to preview the website. Many adults are unfamiliar with ways to talk about both science and religion, or may have beliefs that are challenged by this learning.**

**Within any group of youth you will find a wide range of maturity and development levels. In general, adolescent-aged students (12-14) are able to engage in more complex thinking, reason deductively, and are better able to form concepts about the past, present, and future than their elementary counterparts. As adolescence is achieved, they can synthesize values and beliefs with their own experiences to create meaning and understanding for life. This is also a time when a sense of personal identity is being formed, and this extends to their identity as it relates to the concepts of science and faith.**

## **SUPPLIES FOR SESSION ONE:**

- **Copies of NRSV\* Bible – 1/pair of youth**
- **Computer and access to Internet**
- **Poster board, markers in various colors**

**\* Note: If an alternate version of the Bible is preferred, then the references listed below will need to be adapted to accommodate another version.**

## **TO BEGIN:**

**Gather youth and provide an overview of lesson(s) to be covered in I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST: INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION session(s). If this lesson is held separately from the previous lesson, review the need for a safe and confidential environment. Ask youth to recall ways for their group to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. If possible, review these ideas previously listed on a white board, or a computer document and read the completed list. Ask all present, youth and adults, to agree to follow these guidelines for the duration of the learning time together.**

## **PAGE ONE – I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST:**

## **INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION**

**Begin the lesson by reviewing the definition of a statement of faith or a creed: A statement or set of formal beliefs, usually Christian, or a set of guidelines that define how you live.**

**Ask: How would you summarize the story of Jesus' life beginning before birth and ending with death? *Allow all answers. Note that the Apostle's Creed states that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, which is different than human conception understood scientifically.***

**Ask: How would you summarize the story of your own life beginning before birth to when you will finally die. What are the key differences between your story and the story of Jesus? *Allow all answers.***

**Next: Review the information on the first page of lesson two: I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST: INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.**

**Read aloud the statement in the picture entitled "LIFE" and discuss how this statement might or might not challenge the Christian viewpoint of life beyond death. Note the portion of the statement that says that life is, "the sole responsibility of the recipient." Discuss how this statement might challenge a belief in a loving God who cares for us.**

**Have the group watch the video link to the skit. Discuss the following with the group:**

**While the video does, literally, poke fun at the issues of life and death, it raises some important questions. Is the body just a wrapper or medium for a soul, which is left behind as the soul exits after death? Most Christians believe in a full body resurrection, so this would dispute that claim.**

**What about the idea that you can only believe what you see, as with the body but not the soul?**

**Is resurrection like reincarnation? Page two of the lesson covers this issue in greater detail, but in general the two are not the same. To be reincarnated is to return to earth as a different being, resurrection is about transformation.**

**Discuss with the group why they feel that some Christians and some scientists disagree about the claims of Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and the scientific claims of how life begins and ends. Be attentive to the need for each group member to honor the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of each other. Allow the discussion to continue for as long as interest is maintained. You may continue on with the lesson to **PAGE TWO – THE TWO LENSES**, or bring the session to a close. If the session will end, encourage students to do research, on their own, to find news**

**related items that address both the understanding of the life of Jesus and scientific views of life and death. Encourage students to bring this information back to future sessions.**

## **PAGE TWO – THE TWO LENSES**

**Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members to share any information they may have gathered in researching news articles related to the understanding of the life of Jesus and scientific views of life and death.**

**To begin, review the information on PAGE TWO under the heading: THE SCIENTIFIC LENS, BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH. Discuss the general understanding of how cells multiply and develop into complex organisms. Complex organisms have individual parts that work together, such as a human with arms, legs, etc. that work with the body or a plant with roots, leaves, and flowers that carry on functions to support the life of the plant.**

*Note: This video may cause some students to engage in a conversation about issues related to abortion and the controversy of when life begins. While this is an important and somewhat related topic, this is a moral and ethical discussion that does not serve the purpose of this*

*lesson. Help redirect the conversation to the topic of viewing the two ways of understanding birth, life, death, and resurrection. It would be good to preview the video and prepare your own responses to share with the group.*

**Give a brief overview of the video noting the following:**

**A sperm cell combines with an egg to begin conception,**

**DNA forms,**

**Cells begin to multiply,**

**Red blood cells oxygenate the fetus as it grows,**

**The fetus develops over many weeks into a baby,**

**The baby is suspended in amniotic fluid and receives nourishment through the umbilical cord,**

**The baby can move around, kick, has hiccups, sucks its thumb,**

**The lungs develop last to prepare the child to breath air after birth.**

**Discuss the video with the group being sensitive to how students might respond to some of the references to sexual reproduction and the brief picture of the birthing**

**process. This video is photographic proof of how a human develops. This technology also allows medical science to study human development, and even perform surgery on a fetus prior to birth. This is an example of using a scientific lens to view human conception, birth, and life.**

**It is important to help students understand that this video, along with other scientific understandings of conception, birth, and life are not meant as tools to prove or disprove the work of God. This video tells about the life cycle of humans, which is similar to that of other living things.**

**After the video, read out loud the statement from the webpage:**

**“For scientists, life and death are viewed within an understanding, or lens, of scientific inquiry to determine how living things work. Think of looking through a telescope lens or other magnifying lens to examine and learn about the world. This way of looking through a lens represents the scientific method to understand all living things.”**

**Ask: How do you look at things scientifically? *Discuss answers as time allows.***

**Next, review the information on PAGE TWO under the heading: THE CHRISTIAN LENS, INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.**

**Have the group recite the second article of the Apostle's Creed together, or use the second faith statement if desired.**

*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself. ([www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org))*

**Ask:** What does this statement tell us about Jesus' life cycle? *Allow all answers. Encourage the group to notice the phrase from the Apostle's Creed, "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. This statement reflects the belief in incarnation and the virgin birth of Jesus.*

**Recall the details of the video and story and ask the group to think about the differences between the scientific view of the life cycle and the story of Jesus' life cycle.**

**Ask:** How do you define incarnation? *Allow all answers*

**How do you define resurrection? *Allow all answers***

**Review the definitions as listed on the web page.**

**Discuss the understanding that Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit, and born as a human. Consider whether the same processes of fetal development that were viewed in the National Geographic video would have happened with Jesus. 3D and 4D technology was not available to view the fetus, so we have no photographic proof. The gospels, which serve as a Christian lens, do tell us that Mary was with child and delivered a baby named Jesus. These same gospels also tell us that Jesus was resurrected to a new life and appeared after he died.**

**It is important to help students understand that the gospels, along with other Christian understandings of conception, birth, life, and resurrection are not meant as tools to prove or disprove the work of science.**

**Read aloud the following statement from PAGE TWO of the webpage:**

**“For Christians, life and death are viewed within an understanding, or lens, of how God is in relationship to our world. Think of looking through a telescope lens that represents God’s act of meeting us in the person of Jesus Christ to understand all living things.”**

**Ask: Does this learning about the two lenses change**

**how you think about conception, incarnation, life, death, and resurrection? Why or why not? How has your thinking about these issues changed since you were younger?**

**Discuss the reasons for why others might disagree about these two ways of viewing these issues.**

**To close this portion of the lesson, ask the group if they can tell one way that they might talk to others about the two ways of looking at the beginning and end of life and how they might work together. Encourage members to make a list of “I Believe” statements that include both understandings.**

**If the session will end, encourage students to ask family and friends about their understanding of scientific and Christian views of life and death, and to bring those ideas back to future sessions.**

### **PAGE THREE – WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?**

**Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding and conversations they might have had with family or friends regarding their understanding of how science and religion look at issues of birth, life, and death.**

**Prior to gathering the group to review this third page,**

**preview the slide show at the top of the page and become familiar with the following information:**

*The slideshow displayed at the top of this page contains a number of images that represent the different ways that people view the issues of life and death. These are images that are among the many available in the media and on the Internet and are only a small representation of what youth might encounter. The group will view these images during this portion of the lesson. From the start of the slide show they appear as follows:*

*A picture of a typical manger scene,*

*A baby,*

*A tattoo of the crucifixion,*

*A graveyard with headstones,*

*A picture with the words, “He is Risen, the Lord is Risen Indeed,”*

*A landscape as seen through two binocular lenses,*

*A picture with the statement, “The Gospel is an announcement, not an argument. You share it, not shove it.”*

**To begin this portion of the lesson, have page three visible to the group and together watch the video links**

on the page.

**Discuss the following with the group, encouraging each member to offer a response:**

**When you read or hear the stories from the Gospel about Jesus' life, do you think that they could be true? Why or why not?**

**What do you think about the Shroud of Turin? Could it be a religious relic that was once used to wrap the body of Jesus? Why or why not?**

*Remind the group that the video noted offers new evidence that the Shroud is dated to have been from the time period when Jesus was alive, but doesn't tell how it was created or to whom it belonged. While the evidence of its date may show that it could have belonged to Jesus, those testing the Shroud are not trying to prove Jesus' divinity.*

**How do you and/or your friends view life after death? Do you think that it is important to believe in the resurrection? Why or why not?**

**How does a belief in Jesus Christ as God's Son affect or change your views about life and death?**

*A belief in Jesus includes a belief in God being present in human form and bringing us salvation and eternal life. For some youth, there may be doubts about*

*life after death, or about a belief in Jesus. Help the group understand that doubt and questioning is a healthy part of developing a faithful response to God.*

**Next, have the group look at the slideshow at the top of the page, and ask that everyone wait until all pictures are viewed before making comments.**

**Invite the group to respond to the images and allow time for each member to add to the conversation.**

**Using the information provided at the beginning of this session, talk about each of the images. (Remind the group to be respectful of each other's response.) The white dots that appear at the lower right of the slideshow can be used to select and navigate through the images.**

**Ask the group to share what each image might mean to them, or how the image might cause them to respond to the issues of life and death. Use the following as prompts for discussion:**

**The manger scene appears in many places at Christmas, but most people don't think about the incarnation when they view the scene.**

**The graveyard might be a symbol of the ultimate end of life, or a symbol of a loved one being with God.**

**The tattoo of the crucifixion is a permanent marker of a**

**belief in Jesus. What kind of response do you have when you see religious tattoos or statements on clothing?**

**The two focused areas of the landscape viewed through binoculars show only a part of the whole picture through two separate lenses. How might use of true binocular vision, or using both lenses at the same time, allow for a more complete view of the landscape? How does this compare to viewing life and death through both the scientific and religious lenses?**

**How does this statement about the Gospel being an “announcement not an argument” change the way the story should be shared? Have you experienced situations where someone tried to force a belief in God onto another person? What was your reaction to this situation?**

**Discuss with the group their experiences in talking to others about Jesus and a scientific understanding of how life begins and ends. What is most difficult, or easiest to talk about?**

**To close the session, talk about what these images might promote that is challenging or helpful to the conversation about scientific and religious views of life and death. Ask that they spend time at home looking at the website and researching other information about a scientific view of the life cycle, the Shroud of Turin, or other ideas covered in the lesson. Ask each member to bring a copy of any images that represent their belief in**

**incarnation and resurrection to the next session.**

## **PAGE FOUR – FOCUSING YOUR VISION**

**Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any research they might have completed that shows a scientific view of the life cycle, the Shroud of Turin, or other ideas covered in the previous lesson. Ask the group to share any images that represent their belief in incarnation and resurrection that they might have brought to this session.**

**This final page of I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST: INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION is designed to help youth focus on both the scientific and religious view of the issues of life and death. The group will create a poster that lists statements about life and death. Prior to the beginning of the session, mark the poster board by drawing a line down the middle dividing the poster board into two columns. On one column label the top with the phrase: "Life is..." and on the other side label the top with the phrase: "Death is..."**

**To begin the session, open the website and review the first three pages of I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST: INCARNATION, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION. Ask the group members to share**

**one significant thing they may have learned or discovered about the issues of life and death. Discuss how they might have engaged other youth or family members in this learning and any conversations that might have occurred, either in person or in a social media setting.**

**Next, look at page four, FOCUSING YOUR VISION, and review the information and links listed on the page. Reinforce the concept that science is tasked with discovering *how* things work and tries to provide *proof*, and religion looks at *why* things happen and looks for a *purpose*. Help the group understand that this is a basic way of looking at this issue, and that just like science and religion, their ideas will change and become more complex.**

**Discuss the article written by Dr. Francis Collins, and how he has changed his views from that of an atheist to that of a theist, or believer. Encourage the group to consider how looking at the issues of life and death through both lenses of science and religion have helped him to answer questions that each understanding alone could not answer.**

***For an additional leader resource, listen to a podcast with Dr. Francis Collins on the ELCA “Grace Matters” website from October 28, 2007:  
<http://www.gracematters.org/2007listen.html#October>***

**Next, ask the group to consider how they view life and**

**death as a result of the learning in this lesson. Ask the group to finish the phrases listed on both columns of the poster board. Encourage the group to consider ways to respond from both a scientific and religious viewpoint. Write the responses in the appropriate columns.**

**Display this poster for the congregation, or have youth take pictures of their work to share with friends and family.**

**For additional learning, ask a member of the congregation or other source who has a career in medical science to come and share how they integrate their faith and scientific beliefs.**