

Who Is Jesus, According To Other Religions?

People trying to discover the truth about God would be wise to take a hard look at Jesus before looking anywhere else. While that may sound like a bold assertion in and of itself, it really isn't when you consider Jesus is the one religious leader who is most frequently mentioned by religious groups, whether or not they happen to be Christian. Every major religious movement considers Jesus to be an important religious figure. Every movement makes some effort to account for His existence and teaching. This ought to give seekers a reason to pause and consider the life of Jesus seriously.



Judaism

While we recognize Judaism pre-existed (and gave birth to) Christianity, Judaism has also had over two-thousand years to consider and respond to the claims of Christ. Much has been written about Jesus from a Jewish perspective, most interestingly by those early Jews who described Jesus in the centuries immediately following His life. Ancient Jewish believers (as recorded by the Talmud and the Toledot Yeshu) described Jesus in the following way:

Jesus Was Mary's Son

Ancient Jews acknowledged Jesus existed and had a mother named Mary. They denied Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus, but they did recognize Mary was promised to a man named "Yohanan":

"Near his house dwelt a widow and her lovely and chaste daughter named Miriam. Miriam was betrothed to Yohanan, of the royal house of David, a man learned in the Torah and God-fearing...On the eighth day he was circumcised. When he was old enough the lad was taken by Miriam to the house of study to be instructed in the Jewish tradition." (The Toledot Yeshu)

Jesus Was a Teacher

Both ancient and modern Jews typically accept Jesus was a rabbi and popular teacher (although they would deny He is the Messiah).

Jesus Had Many Disciples

In addition to being a popular teacher, Jesus gathered disciples, according to the ancient Jewish record. The Talmud records this, and describes the death of some of Jesus' disciples:

“Our rabbis have taught that Jesus had five disciples: Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni and Todah. They brought Matthai to (to trial). He said, ‘Must Matthai be killed? For it is written, ‘When (mathai) shall I come and appear before God?’” (Psalm 92:2) They said to him, “Yes Matthai must be killed, for it is written, ‘When (mathai) he dies his name will perish’” (Psalm 41:5). They brought Nakai. He said to them, “Must Nakai be killed? For it is written, “The innocent (naqi) and the righteous will not slay”” (Exodus 23:7). They said to him, “Yes, Nakai must be killed, for it is written, ‘In secret places he slays the innocent (naqi)’” (Psalm 10:8). (b. Sanhedrin 43a; the passage continues in a similar way for Nezer, Buni and Todah)

Jesus Was Respected

While Jesus is often derided by modern Jews, this was not the case in the earliest of times. In fact, little negative material related to Jesus can be found in 1st and 2nd century Jewish literature. Jesus was largely recognized as a popular teacher who was revered by His followers and respected by his opponents. But as Christianity spread and the Divinity of Jesus was proclaimed throughout the known world, Jewish opposition rose. By 1000AD, many Jews were facing stiff persecution and blamed their situation on the rise of Christianity and the person of Jesus.

Jesus Was a Miracle Worker

Ancient Jews also acknowledged Jesus had supernatural powers and performed miracles. They typically denied, however, Jesus' power came from God. Instead, they often claimed Jesus wielded the power of the Devil (similar to the record of opposition found in the New Testament):

“Jesus practiced magic and led Israel astray” (b. Sanhedrin 43a; cf. t. Shabbat 11.15; b. Shabbat 104b)

“The insurgents with him replied that if Yeshu was the Messiah he should give them a convincing sign. They therefore, brought to him a lame man, who had never walked. Yeshu spoke over the man the letters of the Ineffable Name, and the leper was healed. Thereupon, they worshipped him as the Messiah, Son of the Highest... Yeshu spoke up: “Madam, I am the Messiah and I revive the dead.” A dead body was brought in; he pronounced the letters of the Ineffable Name and the corpse came to life. The Queen was greatly moved and said:

‘This is a true sign.’ ...the Sages came before the Queen, complaining that Yeshu practiced sorcery and was leading everyone astray... He spoke the Ineffable Name over the birds of clay and they flew into the air. He spoke the same letters over a millstone that had been placed upon the waters. He sat in it and it floated like a boat. When they saw this the people marveled.” (The Toledot Yeshu)

Jesus Claimed to Be the Messiah

While ancient Jews denied Jesus was the Messiah, they did acknowledge Jesus made this claim publicly:

“Yeshu proclaimed, ‘I am the Messiah; and concerning me Isaiah prophesied and said, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ He quoted other messianic texts, insisting, ‘David my ancestor prophesied concerning me: ‘The Lord said to me, thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.’ ...He started out toward Jerusalem and, arriving at Knob, acquired an ass on which he rode into Jerusalem, as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah... On the eve of the Passover, Yeshu, accompanied by his disciples, came to Jerusalem riding upon an ass. Many bowed down before him.” (The Toledot Yeshu)

Jesus was Crucified on the Cross

Another important historical claim of the New Testament (the Crucifixion of Jesus) is acknowledged by ancient Jewish records. While the Talmud and Toledot Yeshu affirm the execution of Jesus, they both deny Jesus was resurrected:

“It was taught: On the day before the Passover they hanged Jesus. A herald went before him for forty days (proclaiming), ‘He will be stoned, because he practiced magic and enticed Israel to go astray. Let anyone who knows anything in his favor come forward and plead for him.’ But nothing was found in his favor, and they hanged him on the day before the Passover.” (b. Sanhedrin 43a)

“Yeshu was taken prisoner to the synagogue of Tiberias, and they bound him to a pillar. To allay his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink. On his head they set a crown of thorns... Yeshu was put to death on the sixth hour on the eve of the Passover and of the Sabbath. When they tried to hang him on a tree it broke, for when he had possessed the power he had pronounced by the Ineffable Name that no tree should hold him. He had failed to pronounce the prohibition over the carob-stalk, for it was a plant more than a tree, and on it

he was hanged until the hour for afternoon prayer, for it is written in Scripture, 'His body shall not remain all night upon the tree.'” (The Toledot Yeshu)

Jesus' Followers Reported He Rose from the Dead

But while ancient Jews denied the Resurrection, they did acknowledge two important facts. The ancient Jews affirmed that the earliest disciples of Jesus claimed Jesus rose from the grave, and these writers also acknowledged the tomb of Jesus was initially found empty. The Toledot Yeshu then attempts to explain the empty grave by saying that the gardener removed Jesus' body:

“They buried him outside the city. On the first day of the week his bold followers came to Queen Helene with the report that he who was slain was truly the Messiah and that he was not in his grave; he had ascended to heaven as he prophesied. Diligent search was made and he was not found in the grave where he had been buried... A gardener had taken him from the grave and had brought him into his garden and buried him in the sand over which the waters flowed into the garden... Queen Helene demanded, on threat of a severe penalty, that the body of Yeshu be shown to her within a period of three days. There was a great distress. When the keeper of the garden saw Rabbi Tanhuma walking in the field and lamenting over the ultimatum of the Queen, the gardener related what he had done, in order that Yeshu's followers should not steal the body and then claim that he had ascended into heaven. The Sages removed the body, tied it to the tail of a horse and transported it to the Queen, with the words, 'This is Yeshu who is said to have ascended to heaven.'” (The Toledot Yeshu)



Islam

The Islamic faith was founded by Muhammad on the Arabian Peninsula in the early 7th Century. He claimed to be restoring the monotheistic religion corrupted by the Jews and Christians. As a result, Muslims acknowledge the impact of Jesus and recognize Him as a significant person within their own religious system. The Quran describes Jesus in the following way:

Jesus Was Born of a Virgin

The Quran describes Mary as a virgin prior to her miraculous conception. The conversation between Mary and Allah is recorded in the Quran, and Mary is told that she will conceive without the benefit of human involvement.

“She said: “Verily. I seek refuge with the Most Beneficent (Allâh) from you, if you do fear Allâh.” (The angel) said: “I am only a Messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son.” She said: “How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste?” He said: “So (it will be), your Lord said: ‘That is easy for Me (Allâh): And (We wish) to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allâh), and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allâh).’ ” So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place (i.e. Bethlehem valley about 4-6 miles from Jerusalem).” (Quran 19:18-22)

Jesus Was to Be Revered

Jesus is held in high regard within the Muslim worldview. According to a legend, when Muhammad eliminated all the images of others gods in the Ka’bah, he refused to destroy the statue of Mary and the infant Christ. Jesus remains in a position of respect and reverence within Islam. When muslims speak the name of Jesus today, they typically either say “Hazrat Eesa” (“revered Jesus”) or “Eesa alai-hiss-salaam” (“Jesus peace be upon him”). While Muslims believe Jesus was to be revered as a prophet and Apostle of God, they do not believe He was more than this:

“O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians). Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allâh aught but the truth. The Messiah ‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allâh and His Word, (“Be.” – and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit (Rûh) created by Him; so believe in Allâh and His Messengers. Say not: “Three (trinity).” Cease. (it is) better for you. For Allâh is (the only) One Ilâh (God), Glory be to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son.” (Quran 4:171).

Jesus Was A Prophet

Islam affirms Jesus (known as “Isa” or “Eesa”) was one of God’s most important prophets:

“And Zakariyâ (Zachariya), and Yahya (John) and ‘Iesa (Jesus) and Iliyâs (Elias), each one of them was of the righteous.” (Quran 6:85)

Muslims also acknowledge Jesus was sent specifically to the Children of Israel:

“And will make him [‘Iesa (Jesus)] a Messenger to the Children of Israel (saying): “I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I design for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allâh’s Leave; and I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I bring the dead to life by Allâh’s Leave. And I inform you of what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely, therein is a sign for you, if you believe. And I have come confirming that which was before me of the Taurât

(Torah), and to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you, and I have come to you with a proof from your Lord. So fear Allâh and obey me. Truly. Allâh is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him (Alone). This is the Straight Path.” (Quran 3:49-51)

While Muhammad is described as the final prophet from God, he listed the previous prophets and included Jesus in that list. Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet, but they deny He is God:

“The Messiah [‘Iesa (Jesus)], son of Maryam (Mary), was no more than a Messenger; many were the Messengers that passed away before him. His mother [Maryam (Mary)] was a Siddiqah [i.e. she believed in the words of Allâh and His Books (see Verse 66:12)]. They both used to eat food (as any other human being, while Allâh does not eat). Look how We make the Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) clear to them, yet look how they are deluded away (from the truth).” (Quran 5:75)

Muslims also deny Jesus was the “Son of God”:

“And the Jews say: ‘Uzair (Ezra) is the son of Allâh, and the Christians say: Messiah is the son of Allâh. That is a saying from their mouths. They imitate the saying of the disbelievers of old. Allâh’s Curse be on them, how they are deluded away from the truth.” (Quran 9:30).

Jesus Was a Wise Teacher

Muslims acknowledge Jesus was a divinely wise teacher. The Quran reports Jesus’ disciples, as a result of His teaching, were filled with compassion and mercy:

“Then, We sent after them, Our Messengers, and We sent ‘Iesa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary), and gave him the Injeel (Gospel). And We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him, compassion and mercy.” (Quran 57:27)

The Quran also reports the disciples were helpers of God (although they believe this God was Allah):

“O you who believe. Be you helpers (in the Cause) of Allâh as said ‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), to AlHawârîûn (the disciples): “Who are my helpers (in the Cause) of Allâh?” AlHawârîeen (the disciples) said: “We are Allâh’s helpers” (i.e. we will strive in His Cause.). Then a group of the Children of Israel believed and a group disbelieved. So We gave power to those who believed against their enemies, and they became the uppermost.” (Quran 61:14)

While Muslims acknowledge Jesus was a wise teacher who had many disciples, they believe the teaching of Jesus was limited by the will of Allah:

“And indeed We sent Messengers before you (O Muhammad), and made for them wives and offspring. And it was not for a Messenger to bring a sign except by Allâh’s Leave. (For) each and every matter there is a Decree (from Allâh).”
(Quran 13:38)

Muslims also believe Jesus’ disciples identified themselves as Muslims:

“’Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), said: ‘O Allâh, our Lord. Send us from heaven a table spread (with food) that there may be for us – for the first and the last of us – a festival and a sign from You; and provide us sustenance, for You are the Best of sustainers.’” (Quran 5:114)

Jesus Was A Miracle Worker

Muslims believe Jesus performed many miracles:

“And indeed, We gave Mûsa (Moses) the Book and followed him up with a succession of Messengers. And We gave ‘Iesa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), clear signs and supported him with Rûh-ul-Qudus [Jibrael (Gabriel)]. Is it that whenever there came to you a Messenger with what you yourselves desired not, you grew arrogant? Some, you disbelieved and some, you killed.”
(Quran 2:87)

These miracles included the healing of a blind man and a leper:

“And will make him [‘Iesa (Jesus)] a Messenger to the Children of Israel (saying): “I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I design for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allâh’s Leave; and I heal him who was born blind, and the leper...”
(Quran 3:49)

Jesus also spoke miraculously as an infant:

“He will speak to the people in the cradle and in manhood, and he will be one of the righteous.” (Quran 3:46)

The Quran also reports that Jesus brought life to the dead:

“...I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I bring the dead to life by Allâh’s Leave. And I inform you of what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely, therein is a sign for you, if you believe.” (Quran 3:49)

Jesus Ascended to Heaven

Islam also acknowledges Jesus ascended into heaven in bodily form:

“And (remember) when Allâh said: ‘O ‘Iesa (Jesus). I will take you and raise you to Myself and clear you [of the forged statement that ‘Iesa (Jesus) is Allâh’s son] of those who disbelieve, and I will make those who follow you (Monotheists, who worship none but Allâh) superior to those who disbelieve [in the Oneness of Allâh, or disbelieve in some of His Messengers, e.g. Muhammad , ‘Iesa (Jesus), Mûsa (Moses), etc., or in His Holy Books, e.g. the Taurât (Torah), the Injeel (Gospel), the Qur’ân] till the Day of Resurrection. Then you will return to Me and I will judge between you in the matters in which you used to dispute.’” (Quran 3:55)

The Quran reports Jesus will sit beside Allah during the judgment

“And there is none of the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), but must believe in him [‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), as only a Messenger of Allâh and a human being], before his [‘Iesa (Jesus) or a Jew’s or a Christian’s] death (at the time of the appearance of the angel of death). And on the Day of Resurrection, he [‘Iesa (Jesus)] will be a witness against them.” (Quran 4:159).

While Muslims acknowledge the ascension, they either deny that Jesus was crucified or that He died on the cross. Most simply believe Jesus’ death was an illusion (and some even believe that Judas Iscariot was mistaken for Jesus on the cross):

“And because of their saying (in boast), “We killed Messiah ‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allâh,” – but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of ‘Iesa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not [i.e. ‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)]” (Quran 4:157)

Jesus Will Come Again

Islam acknowledges Jesus will return in the future (during the latter days). The Hadith (a collection of sayings from Muhammad) describes this Second Coming of Jesus. While Muslims acknowledge the Second Coming, they maintain Jesus will return as a Muslim (“Ummati”) and as a follower of Muhammad, returning to earth to revive Islam.

Ahmadiyya

The Islamic Ahmadiyya Movement was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

in the late 19th Century following the authorship of his book (“Jesus in India”) in April of 1896. Ahmad believed Jesus survived the crucifixion and later travelled to India to preach as a prophet. The Movement eventually divided into two branches, the “Qadani” (who recognize Ahmad as a prophet), and the “Lahore” (who see Ahmad simply as a reformer of Islam). The Ahmadiyya Movement describes Jesus in the following way:

Jesus May Have Been Born of a Virgin

Ahmadiyya Muslims affirm the Christian claim Jesus (called “Yus Asaf”) was born of a virgin. (While members of the Ahmadiyya Movement believe Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, this belief is not considered an essential requirement of faith. Many within the Ahmadiyya community do not believe in the Virgin Conception; the issue is left to the individual believer.)

Jesus was a Prophet

The Ahmadiyya Movement recognizes Jesus was a real person who lived in history. Ahmadiyya Muslims hold views of Jesus (very similar to traditional Muslims), affirming Jesus was a real man. In addition, Ahmadiyya Muslims also mirror Islamic beliefs about the role of Jesus as a prophet. (While members of the Ahmadiyya Movement believe Jesus was a prophet, they do not believe that He was God or the “Son of God”.)

Jesus Was a Wise Teacher

Ahmadiyya Muslims also acknowledge Jesus was a divinely wise teacher, and they believe He taught disciples from Palestine to India.

Jesus Was A Miracle Worker

According to ancient manuscripts and Kashmiri tradition, “Yuz Asaf” (Jesus) was a prophet who had the power to heal miraculously. (While members of the Ahmadiyya Movement believe Jesus was able to work miracles, they do not believe He resurrected or will return in the “Second Coming”. Instead, the “Second Coming” is considered to be allegorical by Ahmadiyya Muslims and is thought to be fulfilled in the arrival of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.)

Jesus Was Crucified on the Cross

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote and acknowledged Jesus was nailed to a cross and crucified. (While members of the Ahmadiyya Movement believe Jesus

was crucified, they do not believe that He died on the cross). Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote Jesus lost consciousness on the cross and only appeared dead; he described this condition in a manner similar to Jonah's condition in the belly of the fish. According to Ahmad, Jesus was removed from the cross and his injuries were treated with "Marham-e-Issa" ("Ointment of Jesus"). He appeared to His disciples, then travelled to Afghanistan and Kashmir where He continued to teach, preach and heal the sick. He eventually died at the age of 120 in India and was supposedly buried in Srinaga.)



Bahá'í

Bahá'u'lláh (a 19th century Persian) claimed to be a messenger from God as he founded the Bahá'í Faith in 1863. Bahá'u'lláh taught all of religious history had been revealed through a series of messengers sent by God, and he considered himself to be the last of these messengers. Bahá'u'lláh recognized several leaders from prior religious movements and claimed these men revealed the progressive truth of God to each generation. Based on this perspective, Bahá'u'lláh accepted many of the claims of Christianity and affirmed many characteristics of Jesus.

Jesus Came From God

The Bahá'í Faith describes Jesus as a "manifestation" of God and acknowledges Jesus was sent by God (the Bahá'í faith does, however, place Jesus alongside other messengers from major religious movements, including Abraham, Muhammad, the Buddha, Krishna, and Zoroaster).

Jesus Was Born of a Virgin

The Bahá'í faith also acknowledges Jesus was born of a virgin through the Holy Spirit, just as the Bible maintains:

"As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed..." (From "The Promised Day Is Come" by Shoghi Effendi, page 109)

Jesus Spoke for God

The Bahá'í faith also acknowledges Jesus spoke for God while He was here on earth. In fact, the words of Jesus are considered to be the words of God.

Jesus Was A Wise Teacher

Bahá'u'lláh described Jesus as a divinely wise teacher whose words contained the deep wisdom from God Himself:

“The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive, and resplendent Spirit.” (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 85)

Jesus Had a Divine and Human Nature

Bahá'u'lláh also described the nature of Jesus in a manner consistent with Biblical teaching. In one of Bahá'u'lláh's writings (the “Book of Certitude”), Bahá'u'lláh claims Jesus had two natures: a divine nature and a human nature. (To be fair, Bahá'u'lláh also said this was true for all of God's “manifestations”, including himself.) Bahá'u'lláh saw Jesus as a bridge between a perfect, inexpressible and transcendent God and physical humanity.

Jesus Was A Miracle Worker

The Bahá'í faith acknowledges Jesus performed miracles while here on earth. Bahá'u'lláh described Jesus as someone who could heal the sick and give sight to the blind:

“We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him, the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened, and the soul of the sinner sanctified.” (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 85)

Jesus Was Crucified and Resurrected As an Atonement for Humanity

The Bahá'í faith also acknowledges Jesus died on a cross and this death and (spiritual) resurrection were offered to redeem fallen humanity:

“Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all

the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive, and resplendent Spirit.”
(Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 85)



Hinduism

Hinduism is a very diverse religious faith that began in India. It is rooted in religious views dating back to the Iron Age of India (12th to 6th centuries BC) and it has no single founder. There are many varieties of Hinduism embracing a complex and divergent set of views, and for this reason, it is difficult to isolate a unified set of beliefs related to Jesus. Hindu believers often hold a variety of views.

Jesus Was a Holy Man

Most Hindus evaluate “spirituality” on the basis of behavior and practice. Virtues such as tolerance, love, non-violence, self-sacrifice and humility are held in high esteem and considered to be characteristics of “holy men” known as Sadhu. By this criteria, Jesus qualifies as a “Hindu Saint” on the basis of his life and teaching.

Jesus Was A Wise Teacher

Most Hindus respect the teaching of Jesus and some have even committed themselves to this teaching. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, admired the teaching of Jesus greatly (particularly the Sermon on the Mount), even though he was not interested in Jesus as a true historical character. Gandhi saw Jesus as a symbol of superior ethics and revered His teaching.

Jesus is a ‘God’

Some Hindus are more than willing to acknowledge Jesus as divine, if He is not seen as ‘uniquely’ Divine. Hindus often worship many gods and goddesses and some are eager to include Jesus in their list of deities. They don’t, however, see Jesus as the only way to God. Instead, some understand Jesus as the perfect example of “self-realization” (the goal of Hindu “dharma”). Many Hindus see Jesus as a symbol of what humans can attain, rather than a true historical person. He is divine in his modeling, if not in His nature, and He is not the only such model. While some Hindus

may see Jesus as a God-man of sorts, they would also site other examples such as Rama, Krishna and Buddha. Jesus is simply one of many “ishtas” (forms of the divine) in the history of mankind.



Buddhism

While Buddhism is based primarily on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (a spiritual teacher from India who lived from approximately 563BC to 483BC and is known as the Buddha), Buddhism incorporates a variety of religious traditions, beliefs and practices. Like Hinduism, Buddhism provides no singular unified view about Jesus, although a number of Jesus’ characteristics are described by many Buddhists.

Jesus Was An Enlightened Man

Most Buddhists acknowledge and respect the fact Jesus lived a self-sacrificial life and had compassion on those who were in spiritual need. This kind of compassion is seen by Buddhists to be the key to happiness and enlightenment. For this reason, many Buddhists, including the 14th century Zen master, Gasan Jōseki, refer to Jesus as an “enlightened man”.

Jesus Was A Wise Teacher

Most Buddhists also respect the teaching of Jesus to a high degree, especially Jesus’ teaching related to loving one’s neighbor and the need to demonstrate kindness and forgiveness. His teaching related to compassion, for example, impressed the Dalai Lama greatly. Jesus is seen as someone who possessed the correct perspective on life and his teaching helped others to embrace the truth. Some Buddhists including the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, have even recognized Jesus as a ” bodhisattva” (one who dedicates his life sacrificially to the service and betterment of others). While Jesus is seen as a wise teacher, He is not seen as divine.

Jesus Was a Holy Man

The current Dalai Lama often describes Jesus as a “holy man” and includes Jesus in his list of such people. In fact, the Dalai Lama does not typically elevate Buddha to a greater status than Jesus when discussing the two figures. The Dalai Lama met frequently with the Pope in the early part of

the 21st century and showed great respect for the teaching and person of Jesus Christ.



The New Age Movement

Nothing could be more diverse than the New Age Movement when related to the identity of Jesus. Perhaps most striking however, is the pluralism and relativism existing within the movement. Any attempt to identify Jesus as the singular God of the universe will surely be rejected. Many New Age believers are willing to consider the teaching of Jesus, however, and the “Christhood” of Jesus is often described as something all of us could attain. In this sense, Jesus is seen as a man who completed a process of “spiritual evolution” over successive generations of reincarnation, becoming an enlightened master.

Jesus Was A Wise Moral Teacher

This may be the only area of agreement between most New Age believers. Since the 1800’s, many New Age spiritual movements have described Jesus as some sort of sage, teacher or philosopher. They typically highlight those areas of His teaching aligning with the principles of Eastern mysticism, and they often distort the words of Jesus to accomplish this. They also typically ignore Jesus’ teaching about his own identity. Many revere Jesus’ moral teaching and some argue the ethics of Jesus are not those of the Christians who follow Him. These New Age believers particularly respect what they believe Jesus taught about peace and love of one’s enemies, the hypocrisy of the rich and religious leaders, and the rights of women and children.

So, Why Do They Think They Must Account for Him?

We’ve taken some time to highlight the major Non-Christian religions here to understand how they view Jesus. We’ve deliberately excluded those faith systems that are direct derivatives and distortions of Christianity (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science); after all, we would expect these derivative religions to speak about Jesus in one way or another. But it’s interesting to note even those religions pre-existing Jesus have come to include Jesus in their description of reality. All the world’s major religions feel compelled to account for Jesus in one way or another:

***Jews** believe Jesus was Mary's son, was a teacher (Rabbi), had many disciples, was respected, performed miracles, claimed to be the Messiah and was crucified on the cross. They also acknowledge His followers reported Jesus was raised from the dead.*

***Muslims** believe Jesus was born of a virgin, is to be revered and respected, was a prophet, a wise teacher who worked miracles, ascended to heaven, and will come again.*

***Ahmadiyya Muslims** believe Jesus may have been born of a virgin, was a prophet and wise teacher, worked miracles, and was crucified on a cross.*

***Bahá'í** believe Jesus came from God, was a wise teacher who had a divine and human nature, worked miracles, and was crucified and resurrected as an atonement for humanity.*

***Hindus** believe Jesus was a holy man, a wise teacher, and is a 'god'.*

***Buddhists** believe Jesus was an enlightened man and a wise teacher.*

***New Age** believers maintain Jesus was a wise moral teacher.*

Is He Worthy of An Investigation?

Given Jesus is a common feature of the major religions of the world, it might be important for us to learn more about the man whom everyone feels the need to describe. While the world's religions account for Jesus tangentially, only one faith system is established on the authentic, attested eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, teaching and ministry. If one was inclined to begin a spiritual quest for truth, it would be wise to start with the faith system best describing the man all other faith systems find themselves compelled to explain. Christianity is founded on there liable record of the man-God we know as Jesus and ought to be the first stop in any seeker's journey of faith.