

January 18, Epiphany 2A (John 1:29–42)

Who is Jesus? The first chapter of John's Gospel offers many answers.

by [Christine Chakoian](#) in the [January 2026](#) issue

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Who is Jesus, really? There have always been disagreements on this question, both within and beyond Christianity. But it feels like the argument is particularly fraught these days—especially in the United States, and especially in relation to political affiliation.

A few years ago, the *Century* reviewed Tony Keddie's *Republican Jesus: How the Right Has Rewritten the Gospels* (see June 3, 2021, issue). Keddie calls Republicans out for mistranslations, omissions, and sewing cut-up texts together into “the framework of a carefully designed quilt that’s backed by ignorance, stuffed with hatred, and sewn with self-interest.” The reviewer, Aaron Klink, adds that Keddie “calls this garble-omit-patch approach to hermeneutics ‘the GOP method.’” Although he is politically progressive, Keddie says he has no interest in creating a Democratic Jesus. He simply wants people to stop misreading the Bible for political purposes.”

Writing at TruthScript, pastor Seth Brickley makes this very different claim: “No political party in American history is more at odds with biblical Christianity than modern-day Democrats.” He says, “The party has enshrined the ritualistic child sacrifice of abortion.” He attributes “the breakdown of American society” to Democrats’ disbelief in “the exclusivity of God’s design for marriage as being between one man and one woman” and warns that “the rising prevalence of ‘alternatives’” will bring “more disarray.” He decries “gender-affirming-care” as “a whitewashed term used to mask the shockingly grotesque and brutal reality of self-mutilation.” In contrast, while “the Republican Party is anything but perfect . . . a simple glance at the party platform shows how much more in line with biblical Christianity it is.”

Others profoundly disagree, of course. On the Quora site Divine Atheist, this question was posed: “If Jesus came back to Earth, would he be a Republican or a Democrat?” One person answered

A brown-skinned Palestinian Jew who gives free healthcare, feeds the hungry, forgives the prostitutes, tells those who live by the sword they shall die by the sword, kicks the bankers out of the church, tells the religious to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, who exhorts those who would be perfect to give what they have to the poor, and who says blessed are the peacemakers, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness? The Republicans would call him Antifa and nail him up again!

Someone else said, “He’d be neither. He supposedly believed in left-wing ideologies such as helping the poor. He would have been a socialist.”

Who is Jesus? In the opening verses of John’s Gospel, we receive many answers. Already we have been told that Jesus “is the Word,” “in the beginning with God,” through whom life “has come into being,” and much more. But we have also been told that John the Baptist’s role was “as a witness to testify to the light” (1:8)—and what he says about Jesus matters. Shortly after this John testifies that he is not the Messiah but “the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness” (1:23).

John's testimony matters—because through his voice, Jesus is recognized by others. In just the first five verses of this passage, John declares that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” He testifies that Jesus “ranks ahead of [him], because “he was before [him].” John frames the reason for baptizing is that Jesus “might be revealed to Israel.” John proclaims that he “saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove”—making Jesus “the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And he testifies “that [Jesus] is the Son of God.”

The impact of John's witness is immediately evident. In the verses that follow, two of his own disciples are standing with him when Jesus walks by, and John exclaims, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” That one phrase is enough to move the two men to follow Jesus. The repercussions continue to expand, as one of them—Andrew—reaches out to his brother, Simon. Now it is Andrew's turn to testify: “We have found the Messiah,” and he brings Simon to Jesus.

The ripple effects continue into the verses that follow this passage. Those who meet Jesus testify to who he is: the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote, the Son of God, the king of Israel (John 1:45, 49).

But the testimony is not only for the sake of reaching others. As these first followers see who Jesus really is, they are also changed. Jesus renames Simon “Peter,” meaning “rock.” He will not be the last one who is transformed.

Who is Jesus? Our answer matters long before eternal salvation comes up. Are we Christians who give Christ a bad name? Or are we representing him well?

While I have some issues with the people who funded the “He Gets Us” ad campaign, I appreciate the hope it expresses. In their own defense, they've said this:

How did the story of a man who taught and practiced unconditional love, peace, and kindness; who spent his life defending the poor and the marginalized; a man who even forgave his killers while they executed him unjustly . . . how did this man's story become associated with hatred and oppression for so many people? And how might we all rediscover the promise of the love his story represents? Those are the questions at the heart of He Gets Us.

The question is, do we get *him*?