



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 1:1–4

John 1:1–3, 14

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## The DaVinci Code and the Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?

### EASTER

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How many of you love to read a good story? How many of you have read *The DaVinci Code*? It's rare that we take a service, especially an Easter service, and devote it to a book, but this is no ordinary book. It's been on the top of *The New York Times* bestseller list for 158 weeks. It inspired several major network news specials. Tom Hanks will star in a major motion picture next month based on this novel.

I read the book a couple of years ago. At first I thought, this is a great read, but what's the big deal? The plot isn't all that different from any other mystery. It starts off with the murder of the curator at the Louvre in Paris. This leads to a trail of clues found in the work of Leonardo DaVinci, and the discovery of a centuries-old secret society called the Priory of Sion. The clues of Leonardo's work and the mission of the secret society revolve around the Holy Grail. This Holy Grail is not put forward as what we think of as the Holy Grail—the chalice that Jesus used during the Last Supper. The book says that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus and the mother of his child. And because she bore his children, she's the Holy Grail. After the crucifixion, she fled with their child to the south of France where they established a line of European royalty. This secret society, the Priory of Sion, was to preserve that secret bloodline until it was time to make it known to the world. But that's not all. Along the way, Brown also suggests that a secretive Catholic group known as Opus Dei tried to cover up all of this information about Jesus and Mary because they wanted to suppress the role of women in the church. Brown says the church also later invented the belief that Jesus is God to bolster its male power-base and got rid of all evidence to the contrary.

Now it's a page-turner, but it's not just the story that grabs your attention. What grabs your attention is a statement on p.1 which says, *"All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."* Now that statement is false, but even if it were true it makes it difficult as you read the story to distinguish between fact and fiction. The bottom line is that this blend of fiction and historical assertion suggests the whole foundation upon which Christianity is established is a lie.

Look at some of the more radical claims made in this novel.

### Were Jesus and Mary married?

First, consider the claims about Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The Bible says that Mary was a devoted follower of Christ, who Jesus had freed from demon possession. She was deeply grateful for that and gave the rest of her life to serving him and his cause. She was there at his crucifixion and burial. She was the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection. She was, no doubt, a remarkable woman.

Dan Brown takes what the Bible says about Mary and adds to it significantly. He has a character in the novel say that the marriage of Jesus and Mary is a matter of historical record. But there is no accepted historical record at all to that effect. In fact, Karen King, a leading historian who specializes in the life of Mary and is a professor at Harvard, says that's ridiculous. There is no evidence of that kind of relationship between Mary and Jesus.

Where did Brown get this idea? He takes a quote out of one of the Gnostic gospels, which I'll talk about in a minute. One of those writings says that Jesus "kissed" Mary and describes her as Jesus' "companion." But that's a far cry from saying they were married. In the Bible, believers are often encouraged to greet one another with a holy kiss. Why would this kiss be any different? Brown also states that it would have been inconceivable for a Jewish rabbi like Jesus to be unmarried. But he forgets that Jesus himself once spoke highly of those who are **"eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"** (Mt.19:12). Not only that, he forgets that there were ancient Jewish communities like the Essenes who remained unmarried because of their commitment to God.

What's really driving this? Dan Brown says that he has a desire to promote the idea of the sacred feminine, that is, goddess worship. In fact, one of the characters in the book says that the quest for the Holy Grail is literally the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene.

## Are the four Gospels wrong?

This brings us to the second major claim that Brown makes, that the four gospels are just wrong. He claims that the early church suppressed up to 80 other gospels and arbitrarily chose the four we have today in order to suppress accounts that elevated Mary as an apostle or even a goddess. The fact is, no biblical scholar has any knowledge of 80 alternate gospels floating around from the 1st century. The four gospels we have in the Bible are there because they were credible, both then and now. These four were universally affirmed from the time they were written in the 1st century as being authentic, eyewitness accounts of Jesus. Each one of them was written by an apostle or under the influence of an apostle. John and Matthew were apostles. Mark was written under the influence of the apostle Peter and Luke under the influence of Paul.

The gospel writers went out of their way to establish the fact that these were eyewitness accounts. Luke writes this at the start of his account: **“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught”** (Luke 1:1–4).

What Brown wants to put forward as trustworthy are those Gnostic writings that began to be circulated much later than the Gospels of the Bible after the mid-2nd century. There weren't 80 of them. There were about 45 separate titles, and only five of them could be called gospels. What they taught was NOT an alternative brand of Christianity, but something radically different—that salvation came not through the cross and resurrection, but through secret knowledge revealed only to an elite few. They taught that the created world, including flesh and blood, was evil, and that God could have never become a part of that world in the person of Jesus. Jesus wasn't a real man; he just appeared to be a man.

## Is Mary part of *The Last Supper*?

Brown doesn't just contend that there are secret

scriptures but also hidden messages in art, particularly the work of DaVinci. This is the third claim that we should consider. Brown says that DaVinci filled his work with hidden symbols all pointing to Mary being the wife of Jesus, carrying his child, and being the Holy Grail. He claims that in *The Last Supper* the apostle on the right of Jesus is not the Apostle John but Mary Magdalene. When you look at *The Last Supper* there is very little doubt that the person purported to be the John in this picture does look a bit feminine. But this is where Brown didn't do his homework.

First, it was very common for artists of that day to portray the Apostle John as young and fair and clean-shaven. DaVinci, more than most of those artists, had a tendency to portray all young men in his paintings in a feminine way. One of the reasons we know it's John is the preliminary sketches DaVinci made for this painting. When you go to Venice and study them, you see that he labeled each one of the figures he was painting; and he labeled this person *John*.

Brown also makes much of this painting in that there's no chalice because Leonardo wanted Mary to be seen as the Holy Grail. But art historians have pointed out that Brown didn't do his research because DaVinci was not painting the moment where the bread and the wine were passed, which would have obviously featured the cup. He was painting the earlier moment when Jesus says, "One of you will betray me." That's why you see such emotions on all the apostles' faces.

What about the secret society, the Priory of Sion, that DaVinci was supposedly a part of? In 1996 a BBC documentary showed that documents Brown says were discovered in Paris in the 1970s attesting to the group are now believed by almost all experts to have been forged and planted there. The whole thing is a hoax.

## Did the church invent the idea that Jesus is God?

Then there's Brown's claim about Jesus himself. Brown has one of his characters saying that almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false. He says that the idea that Jesus was God himself in human form was created out of thin air in A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicea. He argues that in this Council, church leaders wanted to consolidate their male power base, and create a divine Christ even though no one believed it up to that point in time.

Brown is right that Nicea was very important in church history. The emperor Constantine recently had converted to Christianity, and he called bishops together from all around the world, not to *figure out* what to believe, but rather to *affirm* it. The

Council was called to make an official statement of what everyone always believed to be true for the Christian faith. What Christians believed, taught, and understood to be true was without debate. The Gospels were written within 25 years of Jesus' life, and they clearly taught that Jesus was God in the flesh.

For example, in John's gospel he wrote: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"** (Jn.1:1-3,14).

So why have the council of Nicea in the first place? A teacher named Arius appeared on the scene, who suddenly started teaching that while Jesus was a good guy, he wasn't God. Of course, the Christian leaders said, "What are you talking about? That's crazy." But Arius kept spreading his ideas, so Constantine said: "Let's get all the bishops together and set forward what we've always believed and affirm what the Gospel records say." They came up with the Nicene Creed, a statement clearly affirming the belief that Jesus is God. By the way, the book says that the creed was accepted by a narrow vote. That's not accurate either. It passed 298 to 2, and Arius was branded a fringe heretic. But in *The DaVinci Code* Brown says Arius was the main representative of what Christians taught, that everybody believed like Arius up to that time, and the Council of Nicea was a great big conspiracy. That is so inaccurate. From the start, Christians worshiped Jesus as Savior and Lord, and every major Christian writer and thinker leading up to Nicea testifies to this.

### **Evidence for the resurrection**

The deity of Jesus wasn't some new teaching; it was present from day one. It was the heart of the Christian message, and it was what Jesus proved by his own resurrection. Paul said that through the resurrection Jesus was **"shown to be the Son of God"** (Rom.1:4 NLT). Of this resurrection, Luke, a physician and an accurate historian, said there are **"many convincing proofs"** (Acts 1:3). Sir Edward Clark, a well known British lawyer of his day wrote, "As a lawyer I've made a prolonged study of the evidence for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling." Consider how much more solid is the evidence for the resurrection than anything Brown puts forth in *The DaVinci Code*.

There are at least four compelling proofs for the resurrection. *First, Jesus' tomb was empty.* Though skeptics have given various theories for what might have happened to the body of Jesus, none of them can hold water historically. What happened to the body? If it was removed by his enemies, why not come forth with it and debunk the resurrection once and for all? If it was removed by his friends, why would they go on to die for what they knew was a lie? The body of Jesus was not removed by men; it was raised by God.

*Second, the Lord Jesus was seen.* The NT tells of ten separate appearances of the risen Christ, including one appearance to over 500 people. Were these just made up? How do you get that many people to agree on a lie and to keep it a secret at the risk of their own lives? Were these appearances hallucinations of people deceived by wishful thinking that their Lord was alive? But the NT describes these men and women as absolutely crushed precisely because they believed their Lord was dead. Their disposition was the exact opposite of those who have such hallucinations. The best explanation for their own testimony is that they had indeed seen the risen Lord!

*Third, not only was Jesus seen, but all four gospels tell us that Jesus first appeared to women.* Mary Magdalene was sent by Jesus to tell his disciples that he had risen. That means that Jesus made a woman the first witness and preacher of the resurrection! Now that may not seem strange to us, but in that culture, women were not viewed as reliable enough to even be witnesses. This detail of Jesus appearing first to women, running against that ancient culture as it does, is one of the key evidences that the resurrection stories were not invented by the church. Had believers invented these resurrection stories with the hope that they could convince the culture about Jesus, they wouldn't have chosen women to play this role in the story! It's interesting that Dan Brown makes such a big thing about how the early church suppressed women. If that were true, why wouldn't they get rid of these stories which highlight the ministry of women and affirm their value before God?

*Finally, the disciples were changed.* The disciples who figure in the pages of the Gospels are new and different people in the book of Acts, which describes the subsequent history of the church. The death of their Master left them despondent, disillusioned, and near to despair. But in Acts they emerge as people who hazard their lives for Jesus and

who turn the world upside down. There is only one viable explanation for such a change in the disciples—they truly had seen the risen Lord.

The great thing about the resurrection is that it continues to be proven to this day. Many of us are witnesses to the truth of the resurrection because *our lives have been changed!* On Easter, we gather as witnesses to the power of the resurrection in our lives. Through faith, we know the reality of dying with Christ and being raised with him **"to walk in newness of life"** (Rom.6:4). Through faith, we know the joy of living in hope that this life is not all there is.

## CONCLUSION

Let me tell you something, if the resurrection of Jesus is true, then an even more difficult and puzzling code had been broken than the DaVinci Code. That's the Jesus Code.

- *The resurrection tells us who Jesus is—that he really is God the Son.* You know, throughout his life, several times, Jesus predicted both his death and his resurrection. If he wasn't raised from the dead, he was deluded. If he was raised from the dead, everything he said about himself was true. The night before the cross he said to his disciples, **"I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me."** And then Philip said, **"Lord, show us the Father."** And Jesus said, **"He who has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14:6,8,9). Breaking the Jesus Code begins by understanding that he was who he said he was.

- *The resurrection also tells us that the final offering of himself on the cross was accepted.* It was God the Father saying "Amen" to God the Son's sacrifice. That means that his death counted as payment for our sin. Because of our sin, we owed an unpayable debt to God, but Jesus paid it all. When Jesus said **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30) on the cross, he was saying much more than his life was over. He was saying that the work he had been sent to do was completed, and that work was nothing less than purchasing our redemption. And in the resurrection God was stamping the bill, "Paid in full!" So the Jesus Code tells us that we can be free from guilt and experience the freedom of forgiveness and new life in Christ.

- *Finally, the resurrection tells us that death does not have to be the final word for us.* On one occasion, Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me shall live, even though he dies"** (John 11:25). It's very simple: Christ entered into the ultimate fight against death, and he came out victorious. And by trusting in him, his victory becomes our victory.

That happens when you make a simple decision to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

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