

Primary sources, and significant figures for Christian history in the first three centuries

- ~33AD: Jesus and first apostles
- 50-70 AD: **Letters** (I Thessalonians, Philippians, I & II Corinthians, Romans...)
- 51: Roman historian **Suetonius**: “because of Chrestus”
- 64: Roman historian **Tacitus**: Nero blames the Christians
- 60-70: Gospels according to **Mark, Matthew, Luke**
- 90-100: Gospel according to **John**
- 96: Letter of **Clement** confirms early Christian theology
- 107: Letters from **Ignatius of Antioch** confirm early Christian theology
- 111: Roman governor **Pliny** reports on Christians singing hymns to Christ “as to a god.”
- 100-155: **Polycarp** (who died in 155) records a list of books considered authoritative in the church (these are the core of the New Testament books).
- 100-130: **The Didache**, a Christian teaching manual.
- 155-157: First “Apology” of **Justin Martyr**, who died in 165. Attempts to persuade the Emperor about Christianity; notably uses philosophy in his efforts.
- ~150 and later: **Gnostics, including Valentinus and Marcion**, produce other writings and “gospels,” describing Jesus as pure spirit, without a human body, and without a birth or death; they describe two gods (the god of the Old Testament is a bad god) or perhaps many divine beings. One is saved by growth in the secret knowledge (“gnosis”) from the divine spark of knowledge within, progressing through several levels of spirituality. Gnosticism is against the material world and against the physical body (including sex and childbirth). These writings include the gospel of Mary, the gospel of Judas, the Acts of Peter, etc.
- ~180: **Irenaeus** writes “Against Heretics” against the Gnostics, saying that if one wants to know the Christian faith, don’t look for these new “secret knowledge” ideas, rather talk to Christians around the empire and read what they hold authoritative. Seek the teaching that is “of the whole” (“catholic”).
- 200: Der Balzeh papyrus records an early creedal form.
- 203: Recorded Martyrdom of **Perpetua, Felicitas, and their companions**.
- 215: **Hippolytus** records early liturgies and early creedal forms.
- 155-240: **Tertullian** (Carthage in North Africa) delves into Christology. Records (~200) an early creedal form, a “rule of faith” “handed down from the Apostles.”
- 184-253: **Origen** of Alexandria, a prolific Christian scholar, known for his allegorical reading of scripture.
- 200-258: **Cyprian of Carthage**: writer, bishop and Martyr in North Africa.