

# Ichthys, The Christian Fish Symbol: Origin and History Facts

You can spot it anywhere: on someone's shirt, in a newspaper advertisement, even on the back side of the car in front of you in traffic. It is the recognizable Christian Fish symbol or the Jesus Fish, which resembles a hand-drawn fish that sometimes includes a cross for the eye or the name Jesus in its middle. Although the Christian fish symbol re-emerged in popularity [during the 1960s](#), the symbol, also known as Ichthys, has historical characteristics that attributed to the spread and unity of Christianity long before it was popular in society today.

These five origin facts will encourage you to look differently when you see the Christian fish while out and about in your day. It may cause you to beam with appreciation for the longevity of the fish in our lives for generations or be in amazement that such a simple figure could have impacted the Christian faith as much as it has.

## 1. The symbolism of the fish emerged from the Greeks - Ichthys.

The fish, which many may have seen in this form <><, originates from the Greek word for fish, "ichthys/ichthus." This word is further defined in the acrostic IXNYy (with the N flipped) that [translates to:](#)

- I – Iota or Iesous (which means Jesus)
- X – Chi or Christos (which means Christ)
- N – Theta or Theou (which means God)
- Y – Upsilon or Yidos/Huios (which means Son)
- Y – Sigma or Soter (which means Savior).

Basically, the fish represents the phrase of "Jesus Christ God's Son is Savior." Some [research](#) has suggested that the fish symbol emerged in the first century or even before Jesus died on the cross, but nothing has been confirmed as to when the symbol and its meaning first began.

## 2. The fish (ichthys) was used as code for persecuted Christians to meet.

During the times of persecution by the Romans in the first centuries, the fish symbol was used among Christians in hiding to display meeting places for everyone to meet and worship. They could be spotted on trees or doorways or even tombs and at the same time, the fish symbol was also [used by several pagan religions](#) so they wouldn't bring about suspicion from anyone about what it could be.

## 3. The fish (Ichthys) could be used in determining who was a Christian and who was an enemy.

One story passed down about the fish symbol states that the fish was used as a way of communicating whether someone was a Christian or whether he/she was someone looking to persecute Christians. When two people encountered each other, the Christian would draw the first half of the fish in the sand. If the other person drew the remaining half of the fish, correctly, then the Christian knew he/she was with a fellow Christian. If it was drawn and the other person didn't finish the fish, it would look as though an innocent person was just [drawing in the sand](#). It also depicted a way for Christians to stand up against sinning through idol worship that was very [prevalent among the Roman empire](#) and other cultures at the time.

#### 4. The Christian fish relates to several Scripture references of fish in the Bible.

Several may be able to recall references in the Bible to fish, such as Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish ([Matt. 14:15-21](#); [Mark 6:34-44](#); [Luke 9:11-17](#); [John 6:5-13](#)). There is also Jesus calling His disciples to be “fishers of men,” where Jesus called these men to present the Great Commission to others so they know Jesus is their Savior ([Matt. 4:19](#)). The kingdom of heaven is described as a “dragnet” to gather those of all kind to the kingdom, conveying the example of fishing as well ([Matt. 13:47](#)). Who could also forget that Jesus, after His resurrection from the grave, cooked fish for His disciples and proved He was their Lord and freed from the grave ([John 21:9-14](#)).

What all of these scripture verses relay is the notion that fish represents a meaningful element of the Bible, where it was not only used to bring fellowship and the love of Jesus to all but also present God’s kingdom in a visual, powerful way to believers. The verses encompass the belief that when we display the love and grace of Jesus to others (like a net), we will draw lost people to us who need to know the Savior loves them.

#### 5. There are several other forms of the fish used today.

So maybe you have seen the fish on car bumpers but they seem to be ones that say evolve inside it or have feet underneath it. Just as the Christian fish symbol became popular again in the 1960s and onward, those who believe differently from the Christian faith have made their own beliefs clear through alternative displays of the Christian fish.

Evolutionists (those who believe we evolved from the earth, not God), fans of Star Trek (Trekkies), and even those who worship pasta (pastafarians) have [altered the Christian fish](#) to represent their beliefs instead of what the Christian fish symbol truly stands for. When you come across someone who is sporting these “unique” symbols on their cars, bodies, or another way, make the choice to pray for those people that they will recognize what God is trying to tell them and will find the peace they need in the Savior.

It’s an iconic representation of the faith that we hold dear to our lives; the belief that God sent Jesus to earth to show God’s love and died for our sins so that we could be reunited with God through acceptance of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Just having the Christian fish on a shirt, on your business card, or at the end of your email is not enough to take the place of a relationship with Jesus that you can have through faith.

What is hoped is that by seeing this Christian fish symbol somewhere, you will be reminded of Jesus and His desire for all of us to be “fishers of men.” Take this knowledge of the Christian fish to heart and let it influence your life and daily choices. Read the scripture references; remind yourself of those who used this symbol to still worship their Lord when it was punishable with death; be amazing in knowing that the simple design of a fish kept Christianity alive and well during dark times in history. As you learn more of the truth behind this memorable symbol, <><, the hope is that you will find yourself drawn to be fisherman leading others to Christ and to the love of God that never waivers or disappoints.

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