



St. Andrew**Academy**

What Christians Believe and Why It Matters

Week 3

“Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord”
“Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the
Virgin Mary”

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“Jesus . . .”

- ❖ Birth & infancy – born in 6BC or so
- ❖ Jesus’ boyhood
 - Only one story – Jesus at the Temple when he was 12 or 13
- ❖ Jesus’ public ministry
 - Only lasted about 30 months; Jesus was in his early 30’s when he began his public ministry
 - In Galilee – where Jesus spent most of his time; even here Jesus avoided the big cities. (But Nazareth was only four miles from a big city. Jesus was probably not as “rural “ as we might think.)
 - In Judea
 - Jesus’ last week
- ❖ Jesus’ crucifixion
 - About 30BC, when Jesus was about 35-36
- ❖ His resurrection
 - The lynch-pin on which Christianity stands or falls!

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“ . . . Christ . . . ”

- ❖ In ancient Israel, kings were anointed.
 - *Messiah* is from the Hebrew word *mashia* meaning “anointed one.”
Christ is Greek for *mashia/messiah*.
- ❖ We mistakenly put *Messiah/God* together, but we ought to put *Messiah/King* together.
 - Jewish hope for the messiah is hope for the return of the king
- ❖ Two key expectations of this returning king
 - Fight off the pagans – Saul and David did this
 - Cleanse the temple
- ❖ Hezekiah and Josiah were two good kings among the sorry lot of Israel’s kings.
 - They drove out pagans and cleansed the temple!

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The Return of the King

- ❖ Zechariah 9
 - V. 1-8 God defeats Israel’s enemies and encamps at God’s house – the temple.
 - V. 9-10 The king of peace
 - V. 12-13 The restoration of Israel
- ❖ Mark 11:1-10
 - Jesus as the king of peace, riding a donkey!
 - This is an intentional royal claim. The crowd is praising God for the arrival – at long last! – of the true king.
 - It is a messianic demonstration.
 - Judas Maccabeus had entered Jerusalem to waving palm fronds. (The story is found in 1 Maccabees.)

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“ . . . *his only Son* . . . ”

What do we mean when we call Jesus God’s son? What do we not mean?



- One God in three persons
- God has always known himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
- God is inherently relational!! God is a community of three!!

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The Hypostatic Union (what??!!)

- ❖ The classic understanding, reflected in our own Confession of Faith, was hammered out in a council that met at Chalcedon in 451AD.
 - The Council didn’t invent anything – they simply brought together the core teachings and practices of the early church. Their language expressed, in precise terms, those teachings and practices.
- ❖ *Hypostasis* means entity; *union* refers to the union of two natures.
 - We believe in the perfect union of two distinct but never separate natures – one human and one divine – in one integral, eternal divine person.
 - One person – two natures
 - We can think of the trinity as one what and three whos; Jesus is two whats and one who
- ❖ The early church concluded that this must be so, even if we can’t penetrate the mystery.

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The Denial of Jesus' Truly Human Nature

- ❖ *Docetism* (from the Greek word for *appear*)
 - Jesus only appeared to be human
 - Perhaps there is a heavenly, spiritual redeemer, the “Christ,” took who over a human body, “Jesus”
 - “God in a bod” or God with a human skin are both *not* the way to think about Jesus. He was more human than you and I.
- ❖ We can be drawn to this if we see the material world as inherently evil and something to be escaped from.
 - Gnosticism
 - We end up thinking Jesus didn’t really suffer, nor was he really tempted, that he was omniscient and omnipotent throughout his life
- ❖ This heresy weakens our the message of the incarnation – that God became human so that our humanity might be healed and restored.

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The Denial of Jesus' Truly Divine Nature

- ❖ *Arianism and adoptionism*
 - Jesus was only a very special human – one “adopted” by God as his special son and prophet.
 - Jesus was a human being perfectly fulfilling the image of God and God’s ideal for humanity.
 - Jesus is unique in his relationship with God, but is NOT equal with God’s eternal being.
- ❖ Something like this underlies the Unitarian church and much 19th and 20th century liberal Protestantism. Also Jehovah’s witnesses.
- ❖ This heresy weakens the Christian understanding of redemption. Leads to redemption being redefined as pulling us up by our bootstraps or following Jesus’ good example. We *lose the God-who-suffers!!!*

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The Denial of Jesus' Unity in Two Natures

- ❖ Here, the mystery is solved by seeing Jesus as having only one nature, a hybrid of sorts – the unique “God-man.”
- ❖ Another way was to suggest that Jesus had a truly human body, but lacked a human rational mind or soul, instead being filled with the divine Logos/Word . . . “God in a bod.”
- ❖ Or perhaps Jesus was a perfect “moral union,” much like persons in a perfect marriage. One doing the “God stuff” and one doing the “human stuff.” This denies the inseparability of the two natures.
- ❖ Or another choice . . . “Jesus’ humanity was like a drop of wine in an ocean of his divinity” . . . Jesus’ humanity was swallowed up in his divinity.

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Diversity within Our Confession

- ❖ The great Christian confessions, including the UMC, uphold two inseparable natures, divine & human, in one person, Jesus – two “whats” and one “who”
 - Don’t deny the full and true divinity and humanity of Jesus
 - Don’t divide him into two persons
 - Don’t make him into some hybrid “God-man”
- ❖ Beyond that . . . There is plenty of room for diversity and exploration! For example, what was Jesus’ self-awareness?
 - Knosis – “emptying (Philippians 2:5-11) – the divine Son did not set aside his divine attributes but suppressed or restricted them during his time on earth.
 - Others strive for a way to see Jesus as having two minds during his time on earth.

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“our Lord . . .”

❖ Romans 10:12

- There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, rich in mercy to all who call upon him.

❖ Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

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The Lordship of Jesus

- ❖ Proclaiming Jesus as Lord is *not* synonymous with proclaiming his Trinitarian divinity. When Paul speaks of Jesus as Lord it is specifically his exalted status. But Paul does speak of Jesus as he speaks of God.
 - This is the Son of Man at the right hand of God in Daniel 7.
 - I Corinthians 8:6
 - “. . . yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”
 - Romans 9:5
 - “. . . and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”
- ❖ The theopolitical dimension is inescapable: If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.
- ❖ As Lord, Jesus shares in the honor that is God’s and he is to be obeyed as God is to be obeyed.

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“*Conceived by the Holy Spirit . . .*”

- ❖ Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35
- ❖ The Holy Spirit (also the Spirit of God, the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, etc.) is God’s empowering presence.
- ❖ The Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism.
- ❖ The Spirit is to anoint the bringer of Good News in Isaiah 61, which Jesus chose to read at the beginning of his ministry (see Luke 4).
- ❖ This claim is a way of further professing Jesus’ divinity, just as the next claim (Mary) stresses Jesus’ humanity.
 - This is God’s work as God had never worked before. Indeed, God would be present as God never had before.

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“*Born to the Virgin Mary . . .*”

- ❖ There is much more here than simply Mary not having had sexual relations.
 - There is no biology here, only mystery – the unimaginable, unique union of flesh and spirit.
- ❖ Mary came to be seen as the *theotokos* – the God-bearer. Just imagine the consequences of that. Protestants think that Roman Catholics have done too much imagining about this. Protestants have done too little.
- ❖ The Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary’s conception, not Jesus’. It flows from the idea of Mary being the God-bearer. How could the *theotokos* carry the sin of original sin?

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