

We Believe: Foundations of the Christian Faith

Session 2: The Trinity - Jesus Christ the Son (Incarnation)

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The Nicene Creed (325 AD)

Affirmations about Jesus

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For and us for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified by Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

The Apostles' Creed (2nd Century)

Affirmations about Jesus

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The Definition of Chalcedon (451 AD)

A Declaration of Christ's Nature

Following the holy fathers, we teach with one voice that the Son of God and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same Person; that He is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, or a reasonable soul and body consisting of one substance with the Father as regards to his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards His manhood, like us in all respects, apart from sin.

Begotten of His Father before the ages as regards to his Godhead, but in these last days born for us and for our salvation of the Virgin Mary, the God-bearer.

The Definition of Chalcedon (451 AD)

A Declaration of Christ's Nature

This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, must be confessed to be in two natures, without confusion, without changes, without division, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of Him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

The Articles of Religion

Article II - Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin' so that the two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.

Confession of Faith

Article II - Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. As ministering Servant, he lived, suffered, and died on the cross. He was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return. He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by him all men will be judged.

General Observations

Jesus as the Center of the Christian Faith

- Jesus is the central figure in the Christian faith
- The creeds are primarily doctrines about Jesus
- You cannot be a proper Christian without a clear understanding of who Jesus is
- The unique supremacy of Christ is the key question in determining truth from heresy
- Jesus reveals the truth about God and humanity

Witness from the Scriptures

Was Jesus God?

- John 1:1 - “the Word was with God and the Word was God.”
- Colossians 1:15-16 - “He is the image of the invisible God...For by him all things were created...all things were created through him and for him.”
- Colossians 2:9 - “For in Christ the fullness of deity lives in bodily form.”
- Jesus referred to as God: Hebrews 1:8; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; John 20:28
- Jesus’ “I AM” statements in John
- Forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:7)

The Nature of Christ

Of one Being and Substance with the Father

- Key question relates to Jesus' divinity and humanity
- Nicene controversy:
 - Athanasius - "of one substance" with the Father (homoousios)
 - Arius - "of a similar substance" as the Father ("There was a time when the Son was not.") (homoiousios)
- The Christian affirmation is that Jesus is both fully God and fully human

Begotten, not made

- Jesus was not created by the Father
- Jesus was never not the Son
- “Through him all things were made”
- There is a difference between begetting and making

“When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers, and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind than yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set...Now that is the first thing to get clear. What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God.”

-C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Heresies About Jesus Christ

They still make the rounds

- **Adoptionism** - Jesus was a man tested by God and, after passing the test, was given supernatural powers and adopted as his Son.
- **Docetism** - Jesus only appeared to have a body and was not truly incarnate. Since Jesus did not truly have a body, he could not suffer on the cross or rise from the dead.
- **Apollinarianism** - Jesus did not have a human mind but one that was completely divine
- **Arianism** - Jesus was a creature who was “begotten” by the Father. Only the Father is “unbegotten.” Only the Father is truly God

Heresies About Jesus Christ

They still make the rounds

- **Nestorianism** - Mary only gave birth to Jesus' human nature.
- **Monophysitism** - Jesus humanity was absorbed by his divinity, thus he was a blend of the human and divine
- **Moral example** - Jesus was a great teacher and moral example, but the divine miracles, including his virginal conception, miracles, and resurrection, are all simply metaphors and not historical.
- **God-consciousness** - Jesus had a unique God-consciousness and spiritual connection to God that is commendable, but so do many others

Jesus as God's Son

A redemptive title

- Not Son in the human sense - God did not get married and have a son, nor did God mate with Mary and together produce a son. Jesus was the Son of God before he was incarnate.
- Son of God - a biblical title and a redemptive role
 - Adam as God's Son and Jesus as the Last Adam
 - Israel - God's "firstborn Son" (Exodus 4:22-23)
 - David - King as "son of God" - Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:12-14
 - Daniel - a vision of power and authority (7:13-14)

Jesus Christ, Son of God

The Messiah who Redeems

- Jesus, Son of God, redeems Adam through his perfect obedience
- Jesus, Son of God, redeems Israel by making a new family centered on him
- Jesus, Son of God, redeems Kingship but bringing the perfect kingdom of God
- Jesus, Son of God, has the power and authority of God and sits at the right hand of the Father

Jesus Christ as Lord

A affirmation of Christ's deity

- Exercises divine authority
- Exercises divine judgment
- God's anointed King (Messiah)
- Kingdom rules over heaven and earth
- "Christ is either Lord of all or he is not Lord at all." - Hudson Taylor

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

The Incarnation

- The One who created the world is born into the world of His creation
- Why? “For us and for our salvation”
- John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and dwelt among us
- Philippians 2:6-8 - Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.
- God takes the initiative to save the world by coming in person in Christ

Why a virgin? Why the Spirit?

The necessity of a sinless Christ

- Original sin - Adam as the representative man
- Through Adam, sinfulness is our natural state
- We are now all “dead in our transgressions” (Ephesians 2:1-5)
- For Jesus to be the Lamb of God, spotless, without sin, he must be born without the stain of Adam’s sin
- Conceived by the Spirit - Jesus conceived without sin
- Born of the Virgin - fully human, born as we are



Incarnation: “In the flesh”

God becomes one of us

- “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)
- In Jesus, God fully identifies with humanity life and death, except without sin.
- His sinless nature allows him to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins, which he takes on himself at the cross.
- “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Implications of the Incarnation

Why it matters

- It reveals the character of God in a perfect expression of divine love
- It is God's self-emptying sacrifice
- It is the means by which God identifies with us to save us from sin and death
- It shows us that the physical life we live matters. Our goal is not to escape the flesh but to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.
- Our embodied existence matters so much that God took it on himself
- It points to our embodied resurrection and life with the resurrected Christ

**Man's maker was made man that He, Ruler of the stars,
might nurse at his mother's breast; that the Bread might
hunger, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be
tired on its journey; that Truth might be accused of false
witnesses, the Teacher beaten with whips, the Foundation
be suspended on wood; that Strength might grow weak;
that the Healer might be wounded; that Life might die.**

Augustine of Hippo

Holy or Heresy?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.”

“We believe Jesus is the Son of God the Father and as such inherited powers of godhood and divinity from his Father, including immortality, the capacity to live forever.”

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher...Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.”

“Is the relationship between God and Jesus Christ not unique? Of course it is. But so is yours. The relationship between God and every human being is unique and irreplaceable—in ever-new variations of the Christ theme.”

“God is the one who satisfies the passion for justice, the longing for spirituality, the yearning for beauty. And God, the true God, is the God we see in Jesus of Nazareth, Israel’s Messiah, the world’s true Lord.”