

# WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS

A group of English writers were discussing what they would do if certain heroes of history were suddenly to enter the room. What would they do if Shakespeare or Dante were to appear before them? Finally someone asked, "What would we do if Jesus were to appear before us?" One member of the group, Charles Lamb, replied, "If Shakespeare were to enter this room, I should rise up to do him honor; but if Jesus Christ were to enter, I should fall down and give him worship."

Charles Lamb expressed the difference between Jesus and the great men of history. The greatness of men would make us rise in respect; the greatness of Jesus would compel us to kneel in worship.

The Nicene Creed states correctly what Orthodox Christians believe about Jesus when it says we believe: "...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through Whom all things were made."

It has been said that the Nicene Creed contains 101 Greek words of which 84 are concerned with the Son. The most dominant emphasis of the Creed is Christ.

St. John repeatedly refers to Christ as the Word. The term is most appropriate. Unless a man speaks a word, we cannot know him. Words communicate meaning. They enable others to know what is on our mind. As words express our inner thoughts, so Christ—the Word of God—communicates to us the thoughts of God. He came to earth to be God's "language" in speaking to man. In Christ dialogue with God is re-established.

## LORD

The Creed proceeds to tell who Jesus is. It describes Him as Lord—a word which was used throughout the Old Testament for God. It is a title the early Church deliberately gave to the glorified Jesus to express that He is the absolute and undisputed creator and possessor of the entire universe, that He is the Master, we the servants. One of the earliest Creeds of the Church was "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9; I Cor. 12:3).

## JESUS

After the word “Lord” in the Nicene Creed, we come to the word “Jesus”. This was the name indicated from heaven for the Child born in the manger in Bethlehem. “And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus’” (Luke 1:30-31). Jesus is the Greek for the Jewish name “Joshua” which means “God is salvation”. A further explanation of the name Jesus is found in Matthew 1:21, “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The nature of Christ’s mission was announced from heaven before He was born. He was to be named JESUS (God is salvation) because His primary purpose was to save His people from their sins. There is no mention at all of His teaching, for His teaching would be ineffective unless there was first salvation.

Is there any name more precious than Jesus? “Jesus”—the name at whose mention all things bow, those in heaven, those on earth and those under the earth. “Jesus”—the name that brings comfort to the afflicted, strength to the weak, hope to the hopeless, forgiveness to the sinner, courage to the faltering, life to the dying. “Jesus”—the name that is above all other names; the name that becomes a prayer expressing and fulfilling the needs of our souls; the name at whose prayerful mention impossible things begin to become possible.

Jesus is the human name of God’s Son. It denotes His human nature since He was fully man and fully God in one and the same person.

## CHRIST

The next name the Creed applies to Jesus is “Christ”. Christ is a Greek word which means “the anointed one”. It recalls the ancient Hebrew custom of anointing a person who was set apart for a high office, as David was anointed by Samuel in the name of the Lord before he became King. The Greek word “Christ” is the equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Messiah”. Thus the title “Christ” means the Messiah or the Anointed One. It is important to remember this, because it means that when we speak the words “Jesus Christ” we are confessing the essence of what we believe as Orthodox Christians. Since “Jesus” is a name, and

“Christ” is a title, when we put the two words together and say “Jesus Christ” we are confessing our faith that Jesus is the Messiah, or the One anointed by God to save His people. As Peter proclaimed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16).

A Jewish soldier who had attended Christian services during World War II went to a rabbi and asked him the difference between the Messiah of the Jews and the Jesus of the Christians. The rabbi explained, “The difference is that we Jews believe the Messiah is still to come, whereas Christians believe he has already come in Jesus.” To this, the soldier asked what was an unanswerable question, “But, rabbi, when our Messiah does come, what will he have that Jesus does not have? Will he have more love? More positive goodness? More miraculous power? More purity of life? More divine forgiveness? More perfect righteousness?”

The ancient Jews had such great fear of God that they would not even pronounce His name. God Himself dispelled this fear by giving us His name in two of the most beautiful words mankind has ever known: “Jesus Christ”-words that make real the presence of God and bring Him into our hearts.

## TRUTH UNVEILED

The whole truth of who God is and who man is has been disclosed to the world in and by Jesus. That is why Jesus could say, “I am the Truth.” It is as if truth were wearing a veil before and now in Jesus the veil is removed. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, with the veil removed. As we read in Hebrews 1:1-2,

*In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.*

The Apostle John writes about Jesus,

*No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known (John 1:18).*

St. Paul summarizes our faith as to who Jesus is:

*He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything He might be pre-eminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross (Col. 1:15-20).*

Augustine's response to Jesus should be our response:

*listen, He is the one who speaks.  
I am enlightened; He is true Light.  
I am the ear; He is the Word.*

## **NOT THE WINDOW BUT THE LIGHT**

An American lady of the Bahai religion was once lecturing in India. According to the Bahai faith all religions are equally true. They believe, for example, that Jesus was just another great teacher like Buddha. He was not *the* way but one of the many ways to God. Since the Bahai lady spoke only English, an Indian was translating for her. In her lecture she said, "The sun rises in the morning, and as it ascends in the heavens it shines through the various windows in the house, one after another. Each religion represents a window through which the light shines. Jesus is one such window." The Indian translator interpreted faithfully what she said, but at the end of the sentence he added in his own language, "I beg to differ with the lady, Jesus Christ is not the window. He is the Light itself."

Pascal summarized what Jesus means to us with these beautiful words:

*Not only do we understand God only through Jesus Christ, but we understand ourselves only through Jesus Christ. We understand life and death only through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, what we know is neither our life nor our death, neither God nor ourselves.*

## TRANSFORMED HUMANITY

Jesus took on our humanity, cleansed it and transformed it into a holy and glorious humanity. He made man the tabernacle of God's presence, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Through His ascension Jesus even took our human nature into Heaven with Him. How can anyone now say, "I'm only human" in a derogatory and cheap way?

Sometimes we are tempted to think that the closer we come to God, the more we must give up our human nature; the more like God we would be the less human we can be. But that is not true. The only time we deny our humanity is when we fall into sin. The farther away we travel from God, the less human we are. Then it is that we lose our humanity and need to come back to God to recover it.

## TO DEHUMANIZE JESUS

To dehumanize Jesus is to make Him an ideal impossible of fulfillment. Jesus was fully God but also fully man. Sometimes we find it difficult to keep the two natures together. Most often we feel that His divine nature was so overpowering that it swallowed up His human nature so that He came out in the end more divine than human. But this is not so. He was *complete* God and *complete* man in one and the same Person.

To be truly human is to be like Christ Who was truly God but also truly human, like us in everything except sin. If we are going to say, "I'm only human," let's say it not as an excuse for sinning; let's say it as we look at the perfect example of what a human can truly be: Jesus! Jesus came to show us what it means to be truly human and to give us the power to become like Him.

## JESUS PRESENT THROUGH THE AGES IN THE LITURGY

This same Jesus is made present to us today through the Divine Liturgy. This is expressed so beautifully and so simply in the epiclesis prayer that is addressed to the Holy Spirit for the consecration of the bread and wine:

*And make this Bread the Precious Body of Thy Christ. Amen.  
And that which is in this cup, the Precious Blood of Thy Christ. Amen.  
Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.*

The continuing presence of Jesus in our midst is the main theme of the liturgy as expressed in the words the celebrant priest addresses to the priest co-celebrating with him during the liturgy: "Christ is in our midst," to which the response is given: "He is and ever will be." The liturgy is thus the sacrament of Christ's permanent saving presence among us today.

## SUMMARY

1. As words express our inner thoughts, so Christ—the Word of God—communicates to us the thoughts of God. He is God's self-communication.
2. Jesus is Lord—absolute and undisputed creator and possessor of the entire universe. He is the Master, we are the servants.
3. The human name JESUS (meaning God is salvation) expresses Christ's mission. He came to save His people from their sins.
4. When the title "Christ" (meaning the Anointed One or the Messiah) is applied to Jesus it becomes a confession of faith indicating our faith that Jesus, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the Messiah.
5. Jesus is God with the veil removed.
6. To be truly human is to be like Jesus.
7. Jesus is fully human and fully God.
8. The liturgy is the sacrament of Christ's permanent saving presence among us today.