

## Who Is Jesus?

**John 1:1-14**

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Welcome to the second Sunday in Lent—that great season of prayer and fasting in preparation for hearing the greatest story ever told: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We began last week our exploration of Basic Christianity as expressed in the Apostles' Creed. This week we come to the second statement of the creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." Who is Jesus? That is the most important question anyone can ask, because our faith stands or falls on our answer to that question.

Jesus is the name given to him by the angel Gabriel in the Christmas story. It is a Hebrew name which means "God saves." Christ is a royal title that means "anointed King" and refers to the one long prophesied and hoped for in the Old Testament.

Christians believe that Jesus is fully and completely God and fully and completely human. He is one person but with two natures: divine and human. This is easily seen in this soaring passage from the beginning of the Gospel of John.

John 1:1 - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We learn three things about Jesus Christ here. First he is pre-existent and eternal. He was there before the foundations of the earth were laid. All created things were made through him. He is the second person of the Holy Trinity and he existed from eternity as the Word of God. The Hebrew people understood the word of God to be the creative power behind the universe—the intelligent designer if you will. Psalm 33:6 - "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."

Secondly, we learn that the Word was "with" God—this is to say that the Word is distinct from the Father. The Son and the Father are two equal and distinct persons, if you will. And thirdly we learn that the Word was God. It does not say Jesus was a God, as if we believed in more than one god, but he is essentially one with God. This is to say that Jesus Christ clearly had a divine nature. He was not separate from God, indeed later on he could say of himself, "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30) This makes Christianity utterly unique. No other world religion has a founder who claimed to be God. He does not point us to God or teach us about God, he is

God. Martin Luther famously said, “You should point to the whole man Jesus and say, ‘That is God.’” That is exactly what Thomas says to Jesus at the end of the Gospel, “Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:28)

We worship Jesus. We pray to him. We obey his commands. He is our highest loyalty. We deny ourselves for him. We pick up our crosses for him. We give away our lives to him. He is our Lord and God.

But Jesus is also fully and completely human. John 1:14 states, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling with us...” God did not wear a human body like a party costume. God did not take control of a human body like some kind of voodoo zombie. But God made the most incredible journey from Spirit into flesh. Jesus was a real man born of a woman. He had to learn to read and write. He was obedient to his parents. He was tempted by sin and evil. He felt hunger and cold. He laughed at weddings and cried in graveyards. Most importantly the Bible says, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death...” (Hebrews 5:7) Jesus suffered and died on the cross like a human being. Even after his resurrection he did not cease to be human. They could see his wounds, feel his body and watch him as he cooked and ate fish with them on the beaches of Lake Galilee.

Jesus was human in every way expect one: he was without sin. John the Baptist points him out, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) This identifies Jesus as spotless, innocent and unblemished by human sinfulness.

Jesus is not a hybrid or mongrel who is ½ God and ½ man. He is one person with two complete natures. The object of our faith is an absolute mystery: God has entered into time to confront us and call us to decision. “Repent and believe the good news” he challenges us, “For in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has come near.” Jesus Christ is the decisive event in all of human history. He is God’s only Son. It has never happened before, and it will not happen again. Jesus Christ is unparalleled, cannot be duplicated and is utterly without equal. John testifies in his gospel, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

How can we understand the two natures of Christ? John Calvin suggested the analogy of eyesight. Each of us has two eyes. Each eye has a different vantage point. Yet together the eyes combine to form one vision by which we live. We can understand the two natures of Christ in the

same way. Each nature was complete and fully functioning yet in unity they issued in a unified vision of one life, one person, the man Jesus Christ.

The Virgin Birth safeguards and communicates the great mystery of the incarnation. Along with the Resurrection, it serves to mark the life of Jesus as exceptional. He came into this world through a door marked “no entry” and he left this world through a door marked “no exit”. Like the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, the Virgin Birth really does not mean anything by itself, but it points to the mystery of God himself stepping onto the stage of human history to conquer sin and death.

Many people say that they are ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher but not his claim to be God. But this is the one thing that cannot be said about Jesus. He just does not fit into a class of great moral teachers. A man who was merely human and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be mentally unstable or worse—a sociopathic manipulator. C. S. Lewis put it this way:

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing non-sense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Christianity is the only religion that teaches that God suffers with us. Jesus Christ alone has demonstrated that God is not some remote figure sitting on Mt. Olympus in a deck chair sipping ice tea and watching us groan and sweat on the earth far below. Jesus knew our grief and sorrows and even died our death, not just as a man, but as God. So we take great comfort and hope from the great truth that God is truly with us.

By becoming human, God has provided the basis for peace and reconciliation in the world. The Bible says, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14) He came to share everyone’s humanity—in Christ there is no male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free (Galatians 3:28)—and so he is potentially everyone’s savior. This is the basis for respect of all people, even those who are very different from us, indeed even our enemies: God came for the world and all who receive him can become his children. Look into the eyes of any human being on the planet and you should see one for whom God came looking for.