



THE APOSTLES' CREED: JESUS THE SON

Matthew 1:18-25

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Dr. Thomas E. Evans

As we continue in the Apostles' Creed, into the second section, we truly begin to enter into theological concepts that makes Christianity unique.

...And in Jesus...

In the Aramaic, "Jesus" means "God saves." By definition, to believe in Jesus not only means assenting to the Lordship of Jesus but to your own need for a savior. It is not simply the world that has gone so wrong, but each of us has as well. As Matthew indicates, he is called Jesus because he will "save people from their sins". It is important to understand this need as part of the Creedal affirmation. So much of our world spends time pointing fingers at other people that we often delude ourselves that the world is the problem and not us. Believing in Jesus is a commitment to believing in your own need for a savior.

Today's fundamentalist atheists, like Christopher Hitchens, enjoy exposing the naiveté of Christians which, I admit, has reared its head throughout the ages. They accuse us of intellectual escapism, but Jesus has never been that kind of savior.

Jesus may save us from eternal consequences but not temporal ones. Though he did heal, feed, and calm storms there are still many earthly battles he will not rescue us from and so, in this life, we still deal with heartache, hunger, sickness, and even death.

While God's seemingly laissez-faire attitude, at times, causes doubt within each of us and even disbelief. The faith found in scripture and the historic faith of the Apostles' Creed never pretended this life would be a treasure trove of

endless bliss should we simply put our trust in him. In fact, it makes the opposite point. Being a follower of God, and especially Jesus, more than likely means a hard life.

Jesus tells us we must give to all that ask, turn the other cheek, and take up your cross daily! Not to mention most all of the apostle's lives were cut short because of their commitment. Even so, there is a transformation that takes place in this life. We become new creations and we find boundless joy in him. But the path to bliss takes us through the refiner's fire, like that caterpillar – in order to become the beautiful butterfly, we must go through the sometimes agonizing rebirth process.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in a savior, but not one who raptures us away from the hard parts of life.

...and in Jesus Christ...

"Christ" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *messiah*, meaning anointed one. The anointed ones are given special charges with wide impact. In 1992, the original Dream Team unleashed basketball's greatest players, like Larry Bird and Michael Jordan, as the anointed ones to bring back the gold to the United States.

In scripture, there are many anointed ones with profound tasks, most especially King David. He was anointed to establish Israel as God's holy nation. Jesus, as we have already discussed, was God's anointed appointed one to save the world.

There is another crucial aspect to our profession of Jesus as "the Christ". It underscores his connection to the God of the Old Testament. It claims that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old

Testament's hope for a messiah. This was not always clear in the early church. Marcion, a second century figure, asserted that the God of the Old Testament was not the same as the God of the New Testament. He established churches that taught this doctrine which is now considered heresy. The Apostles' Creed refutes this claim when it calls Jesus the Christ.

This means we profess not only that God did a new thing in Jesus Christ but that Jesus is part of God's continuously unfolding plan of salvation that began with Abraham. When we say we believe in *Christ* we are saying we believe in the Old Testament as well as the New.

...I believe in Jesus Christ, *his only son*...

Despite this continuity with the faith of the Jews we have also taken the concept of the Messiah in a new direction. It is not simply that they don't believe Jesus is the messiah, but also the claims we make about him would not be the kind of things they believe the Hebrew scriptures teach about the messiah. Most significantly, the Jews do not believe that the messiah is one and the same with God. So we have a different interpretation of certain texts and we also believe the New Testament offers further insight into those texts. Like the Jews, we believe in one God, but our understanding is one God with dynamic facets.

For example, when we recite those words "His only son" we are drawing from Psalm 2:7, "The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." The Jews understand this verse to refer to King David. But the author of Acts believed it most appropriately referred to Jesus.

When we add the word "Lord" we are professing something profound and shocking.

It is a radical claim that a 1st century carpenter, preacher, and healer is the one and the same as this Almighty Creator God!!

For over a century it was unclear what precisely this meant. It was not until the Nicene Creed was written, that it became mostly settled that Jesus was not the adopted son, but rather a co-eternal, co-divine part of this three-in-one God.

The implications for our faith are never ending. Again Christianity is unique in our Trinitarian view of God. We believe fully and completely in the God of the Old Testament. This God is so utterly vast and beyond our infinitesimal human understanding that a mere glimpse would melt our mind. We believe this God to be vaster than the span of the heavens, more powerful than a galaxy-wide black hole, and more timeless than the universe itself. Scripture tells us no one could look upon the Lord and live.

And yet, at the very same time, we believe everything that is God can be found in this practically infinitely small baby named Jesus. A preposterous notion and another favorite target of modern atheist attacks.

However, what seems ridiculous, has its analogue in fractal geometry (everyone's favorite subject!)

There is actually a mathematical shape known as Koch's Snowflake invented in 1902 that has similar characteristics. The snowflake encloses a finite area but has an infinitely long perimeter. Put another way, you could paint the entire interior of the snowflake with a pint of paint, but you could never finish tracing its outline. Jesus contains the infinite God in finite human form.

This means that God is both utterly knowable and close, but infinitely removed at the same time.

And there is yet another key implication that Jesus is *the son*. It means that community, friendship, love, and relationships were not invented at creation but part of the very essence of God.

In fact, what we often presume to be God's central characteristics: omnipotence, omniscience, and immortality are incidental traits of God. Like the fact that a box has to be made of something – like cardboard. But the cardboard is not the essence of the box, rather its capacity to contain something. The essence of God is not omniscience. It is love. 1 John tells us God *is* love.

Love is not simply something God does, it is the constitutive part of God's very being and this is most clearly seen in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. As humans, we most fully reflect God not as individuals but when we exhibit servant love to each other.

When Jesus taught us to pray to God by saying, "Our Father..." he invited us into the Trinity of God! He invited us to be a part of that special and unique relationship!

...our Lord

To call Jesus, the person who walked this earth, "God in the flesh" completely transforms the nature of faith. It takes it away from a simplistic faith, filled with checked boxes. It means the core of our faith is not a set of beliefs that we hold, but a person to whom we pledge everything. Thus, Christianity is not a philosophy like Buddhism or Marxism that can be reduced down to maxims or even doctrines.

Jesus himself underscored the core nature of belief in his life. And he only asked for a mustard seed's worth. All types came to him asking for healing and deliverance. He did not ask them to recite a litany of doctrine to ensure their beliefs conformed to his nature. What he wanted, more than right belief, was heart-felt trust and a willingness to follow his path.

James tells us even the demons believe and tremble. Meaning they know who Jesus is. They believe in his divine status and it does them no

good whatsoever. It is those willing to put their lives in his hands, to trust him with everything that matters the most to our Lord.

Here is a story you've probably heard before. George Buttrick, renowned 20th century preacher, tells us of a young girl during the blitz in London. Mortar shells were flying everywhere, cutting the landscape like a child cuts a piece of paper into a snowflake. But there was safety nearby, a dugout protected from the incessant shelling. The ladder into the dugout had been broken, so the father stood in darkness below, as at the foot of a well. And his child stood uncertain on the upper edge. He could see her dimly against the night sky. She could not see him at all in the depth. But she could hear his voice saying "Jump, daddy can see you." And for that girl, it was enough.

To believe in Jesus is to have the courage to leap into his loving arms, putting all our trust and hope in him. Amen.