

## **Series Apostles' Creed Message 3**

### **This Message: "I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord"**

#### **Scripture reading John 5:17-24**

The statements in the Apostles' Creed are very distilled truths of Scripture. What we recite each week are summary statements of rather extensive deep truths. We are making an attempt, in this series of messages, to unfold these truths so that our faith will be based on a greater knowledge and appreciation of who God is and what He has done for us, and so that we can recite the Creed in our worship services in a more thoughtful and meaningful way.

We need to keep in mind that the Church of Jesus Christ is comprised of believers from every language group, tribe, and nation, and that it has been in existence for nearly 2000 years. The Church has been able to maintain its identity as the Church because believers from many locations and through many centuries have agreed on the essential truths of their faith. The essential truths of the Scriptures must be affirmed and faithfully upheld today by us just as believers of past generations did. The Creeds of the Church have helped believers of all ages to maintain uniform beliefs.

Today we will focus our attention to the beginning of the second paragraph, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

#### **Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

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, dead, and buried; He descended into hades; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen

You will notice that there is a greater emphasis given to this paragraph about Jesus Christ than paragraphs one and three. This is because the history of Jesus' birth, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, present exalted status, and future victory over evil — these topics form the core of the gospel message. The first and last parts of the Creed are not less important, but the Creed is deliberately structured so the greatest emphasis is on Jesus and the subject of salvation.

There are seven powerful and significant statements about Jesus Christ in the Creed. First is the statement about His relationship with the Father and with us: "His only Son, our Lord." Second there is a statement about His incarnation: "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit," and "born of the Virgin Mary." Third, we read about His sufferings and death: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." These words bring the cross to mind. Next there is a statement referring to the realm in which Christ's spirit spent three days and three nights: "He descended into Hades." Then His resurrection is proclaimed, "The third day He rose from the dead." The sixth statement concerns His ascension, "He ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father." Finally the Creed announces that He will return as Judge of the world, "He shall come to judge the living and the dead."

It might seem strange that in these statements there is no mention of Jesus' years of ministry on earth; no mention of His miracles or teaching. The most important facts for the early Church were His incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection. These were the events which most advanced the purposes of the Father.

The incarnation alerted people to the uniqueness of Jesus. Through His birth He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised redeemer for mankind. He was God in the flesh, and therefore He revealed the truth about the grace, mercy, and righteousness of God. Through His crucifixion, Jesus Christ died the death that every person deserved to die and through His sacrificial atonement He justified sinners before our holy God. The early Church wanted the world to know that Jesus Christ was born to die.

As we learned last week, there is a lot of information and theology packed into each of the statements in the Apostles' Creed. We will work our way through the Creed slowly and carefully. In this lesson we will think about the meanings of the four terms, "Jesus," "Christ," "only Son," and "our Lord."

“Jesus” was the human name given to the baby born to Mary. The angel told Mary that she was to give Him that name “because He will save His people from their sins.” (See *Matthew 1:20-21*) “Jesus” means “the Lord saves,” so His name was a description of who He was (Lord) and what He came to accomplish (salvation).

“Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Messiah.” This was a title meaning “the Anointed One.” In Old Testament times, the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel were ceremonially anointed with oil at the beginning of their ministry activities. The person who was thus anointed was recognized as the special representative of God for specific responsibilities.

Prophets were designated to announce the word of God to the people. God would speak to them and they would repeat the words to their target audience. This is why they would always preface their announcements with the words, “Thus says the Lord.” Priests represented the people before God. They assisted with the temple sacrifices, and led the worship activities and spiritual education of the people. Their responsibility was to lead people into the presence of God.

The kings were supposed to be more than the political heads of the nation. They were supposed to model, guide, protect, and lead the people in the ways of justice and righteousness.

The Old Testament indicated that the Messiah would take upon Himself the identities and responsibilities of the prophets, priests, and kings. The Jews understood that He would receive a special anointing. The Messiah would reveal the truth of God to the people, bring people back into relationship with God, and lead people in the ways of righteousness. The Messiah would establish the authority of God on earth. This was the Messianic hope and expectation. In the person and ministry of Jesus, the offices of prophet, priest, and king were combined so that He completely and perfectly met the needs of sinners as “the Christ.”

Next it is affirmed that Jesus is the Father’s only Son. It was very important for the believers of the first centuries to assert that Jesus had an intimate, vital relationship with God the Father because non-believing people did not accept who Jesus was.

The Jews refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the One who fulfilled all the promises of the Old Testament as well as the eternal purposes of the Father. The Jews did not accept the fact that Jesus had a close, intimate, dynamic relationship with God the Father. In fact, Jesus was accused of blasphemy, and the Jews even attempted to stone Him because, according to them, He was just a mere man, claiming to be God (*John 10:33*).

The Gentiles were reluctant to acknowledge Jesus as God because He did not fit into the elaborate philosophical system of the Greek/Roman culture. The Gentiles assumed that there were many deities, and they did not have the concept of a sovereign God who was over all. They did not have any Scriptures or covenants of promise to give them guidance and hope; and they did not believe in miracles or resurrection. Jesus was like a stranger to the Gentiles, and they had no reason to think that He was the only Son of the only Father in heaven.

Then there were the heretics and false teachers of the early Church. They had several unBiblical opinions about the nature of Jesus: they proclaimed that God's pure spirit could not coexist with physical flesh; and that Jesus was not God but only a God-filled man; and that God's Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism, not at His conception, and departed from Jesus before His death on the cross. All these numerous heresies denied the essential mystery of the incarnation, that Jesus was indeed God in flesh. The heresies made Christ either a mere man or some kind of supernatural phantom. They disallowed any union of the divine and human natures in the Person of Jesus Christ.

In contrast to the common assumptions of the majority of the people, the early believers proclaimed to everyone that the human Jesus was of the same essence with the Father. Their way of stating this was to emphasize the Father/Son relationship. Unfortunately, when Scripture announces that God "sent his one and only Son into the world", many people jump to the conclusion that Jesus was the result of some kind of earthly physical relationship between God and a woman. This is what Muslims think. According to their understanding of Christianity, God had sex with the virgin Mary producing the infant Jesus, and together these three make up the trinity. Muslims consider this to be the worst form of blasphemy and is the main reason they reject Jesus as the Son of God. They accept Jesus as virgin born, as a prophet, as a miracle worker, as the Anointed One of Allah, but they do not accept Him as God.

Most of the translations of the New Testament mention “the only begotten Son” of the Father. Groups like the Jehovah Witnesses pick up on this word “begotten” and claim that this proves that Jesus cannot be God because He came after the Father; that is, because he was begotten and created as the result of the Father’s action, Jesus could therefore not be from eternity, hence cannot be equal with God. Liberal theologians concede that Jesus was a good teacher and example for humanity, but they do not accept His deity. The incarnation is thus a major stumbling block dividing believers from non-believers.

The Greek word translated as “only begotten” is “monogenas.” The first part of this Greek word, “mono,” means “one.” We use “mono” in words such as “monologue” — one person does all the talking; and “monosyllable” — a word with one sound. The second part of “monogenas” is “genas,” from which we derive words like “genes,” “genetic,” and “gender.” “Genas” has to do with the “form” or “nature” or “characteristic” of something.

When Scripture states that Jesus is the “only begotten Son,” it is not a reference to His beginning as an infant. Rather, it means that He is of the same kind and form and essence as the Father, just like a child has the physical characteristics of his/her parents. The baby Jesus was uniquely one of a kind. Spiritually He was exactly like the Father, with all the spiritual qualities that make God God.

So when we read, “God so loved the world that he gave his monogenas Son,” it means that the Father gave us Jesus Christ, the one-of-a-kind holy, sovereign God who was like Himself, to be the Savior of the world. It was God Himself who bore our sins in His own body on the cross.

Jesus Christ is like the Father in all ways. In describing the Son, the Apostle John wrote: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (*John 1:1-3*). The Apostle Paul wrote: “Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (*Philippians 2:6*).

In yet another passage, we read: “He (the Son) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (*Colossians 1:15-17*). Scripture makes it clear that the Son was with the Father before creation, and that He was the partner of the Father in creation. God the Father Almighty was the Maker of heaven and earth. The Son shared in that work.

The unity of the Son with the Father becomes even more clear when we read what Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (*John 10:30*). On another occasion Jesus said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working, and “ He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (*John 5:17, 23*). Because of these statements, the Jews tried to kill Jesus, because he was “calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (*John 5:18*). To the Jews, the statements of Jesus were the worst kind of blasphemy.

Humanly speaking, we cannot fully grasp the significance of the incarnation, nor can we comprehend how God could be both divine and human. Fortunately, we do not need to know how God became a man in order to know Christ, and to appreciate what the dual nature of Jesus qualified Him to do for us. Scripture declares, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth,” and “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another, for .... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God, the Only Begotten One, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (*John 1:14, 16, 18*).

Finally, we come to the fourth and last point concerning Jesus — His Lordship. It is easy to explain why Jesus is Lord: First, He is Lord by right of creation: for “all things were created by him and for him.” For believers there is a second, more important reason: When we “were alienated from God and were enemies .... as shown by our evil behavior, the Father reconciled us by Christ’s physical body through death to present us holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (*Colossians 1:21-22 paraphrased*). Not only did the death of Jesus Christ make us acceptable in the sight of the Father, but “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (*1 Peter 1:3-4*).

Because Jesus was willing to lay down His life as a sacrifice for sinners, “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (*Philippians 2:9-11*).

As believers we acknowledge Jesus not only as Lord but, specifically as “our Lord.” That is what the statement in the Apostles’ Creed says: “Jesus Christ ... is our Lord.” In the Creed our confession is both a personal belief, and a communal belief. The pronoun “our” is important because it makes a distinction between the people who acknowledge Jesus as Lord and those who refuse to do so.

There is the need for both a personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ and a corporate identity with other believers. The Apostle Paul explained the need for personal belief and confession when he wrote, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (*Romans 10:9-10*).

And if a person can say with sincerity, “I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,” then he/she is a member of God’s family. Scripture states that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (*I Corinthians 12:3*). The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life is the proof that a person is a child of God and a member with others in God’s spiritual family.

I hope these thoughts will lead you to a deeper appreciation of who God is and what He has done, and that you, along with believers throughout history, will declare to the world: “I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, my Lord and our Lord.”