

We believe in Jesus

January 22, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Just before I began here at Langford I had an informal job writing for a big magazine down in the States called *Worship Leader* magazine. They didn't actually *pay* me anything but they *did* publish a couple dozen articles that I wrote and they sent music for me to listen to and review.

And I remember this one album that they sent me – it was by a Christian band and they said 'Tell us what you think. Do you think that this is good for congregational worship?'

I'll never forget - one of the songs on this album was called 'Who is Jesus' and it went:

Who is Jesus? / Who is Jesus? / Is he a man?

[Verse 1] The sky gods demand sacrifice / They need blood / They need blood

[Verse 2] The neighbor becomes betrayer / We want blood / We want blood

[Chorus] Who is Jesus? / Who is Jesus? / Is he the Christ?

[Verse 4] Trinity / Oh great mystery / God save us all / God save us all

Being a traditional, evangelical theologian I did *not* recommend this album for congregational singing and my review reflected that.

Before too long, the editor got back to me and said 'The record label is not going to like it if we publish this so can we soften it a little?' I was on my way out anyways and so I said 'fine, whatever.' And now I'm here.

But the question remains – who is Jesus? I REALLY wanted that song to answer that question. Is He God? Is He man? Is He a man? Is He part God and part man? Who is He?

Over the years, that question has sparked some heated debate within the church¹ and that's reflected in the amount of attention He gets in the Creeds. You've probably noticed that already – today's statement about Jesus is about twice as long as the next longest statement. The Apostle's Creed is the same – Jesus takes up more than half of the creed when the Father and the Spirit get only one line. Why is that?

It's because the Church has wanted to make sure that we are clear on who Jesus is. Because who Jesus is determines everything else.

So let's look at our statement of faith together – let's read the statement on Jesus – the third one:

3. We believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, His conception by the Holy Spirit, His birth by the Virgin Mary, His real but sinless humanity, His voluntary humiliation in life as the Man of Sorrows culminating in His substitutionary and atoning death as a sacrifice for our sin, His

bodily resurrection from the dead, His ascension into Heaven as the only and eternal mediator between God and man and His coming again in power and glory.

Now there's a lot there, but I want you to notice that this statement actually breaks down into three parts with three statements each.

Above all, our statement of faith wants us to know three things about Jesus:

1. Our statement wants us to know that Jesus is divine – He is God – that's the deity, conception by the HS and virgin birth parts.
2. Our statement wants us to know that Jesus is human – His sinless humanity, His life as the Man of Sorrows and His sacrificial death.
- And 3. our statement wants us to know that Jesus is still at work – He is risen, He is in Heaven eternally interceding for us and He is getting ready to come again.

That's what we believe about Jesus – He is fully God, He is fully man and He is still at work.

Let's unpack each of those in turn.

So first – Jesus is God. That's what it means when we say that we believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus. We believe that Jesus is wholly and truly God. Like I said last week, John 1:1 makes that point – 'In the beginning was the Word (Jesus) and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' Jesus is God. Philippians 2 – same thing – He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped – that means that Jesus is equally God. Colossians 2:9 which we read earlier in the reading plan - 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (Col 2:9 NIV).

Jesus is one hundred percent fully, truly God.

Now, in addition to *those* Scriptures, there are some *more* reasons that we believe that Jesus is divine and those are wrapped up in the Christmas story. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Now that much we know from the Gospel of Luke – 2:34-35 - 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Way back in Isaiah, God has promised a miraculous baby, born of a virgin, who would signal the intervention of God in the world and here in the first chapter of Luke, the baby appears. Mary is the virgin who will carry the baby and the baby will have no human father because the Holy Spirit causes Him to be conceived in her.

That means that Jesus is fully God. Now why's that important?

Two reasons – first, verses like Romans 3:10-11 tell us that no human being on their own seeks after God. That verse says: 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Rom 3:10-11 NIV). Left to our own devices, we wander off on our own and when we just 'follow our hearts' they tend to lead us away from God. So if we were going to be restored to God, then God would need to take the first step. And that's what He did in the person of the Son.

Second, God alone could make the kind of sacrifice that would pay for all the sins of the world, of all people in all times and in all places and so He came in the person of the Son to be that sacrifice. If I were to die to pay for sin, I could only pay for my own; God though, in His infinite value, could pay the price for all.

One of the most important defenders of Jesus' divinity very early on – like the early 300's – was St. Athanasius.ⁱⁱ In one of his key works, he wrote:

"He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was ... worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father."ⁱⁱⁱ

It was Jesus' divinity that gave Him the power to act on our behalf and so we believe in the divinity of Jesus.

Now what about the humanity? "(i) We believe in His real but sinless humanity, (ii) His voluntary humiliation in life as the Man of Sorrows culminating in (iii) His substitutionary and atoning death as a sacrifice for our sin."

Let's take those one at a time. We believe in His real but sinless humanity. There was a school of thought going way, way back (to the time of Jesus even) that wondered if Jesus only appeared to be human. They didn't believe that God would demean Himself to the point of taking on human flesh and so they insisted that Jesus must have been God in some sort of ghostly apparition. They would point to a verse like Luke 24:37, where Jesus appears post-resurrection in His disciples midst, where it says: 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost (Luke 24:37 NIV). He just appeared, like He walked through a wall.

The problem with that though is that if you slide down two more verses, to Luke 24:39-41, Jesus invites His disciples to touch His scars and then eats some fish as they stand there watching. Jesus was really, truly human.

So Jesus was truly human, just like you and me, but there was one big difference. He always honoured God. There was no sin in Him whatsoever. Hebrews 4:15 puts it like this: 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

And because Jesus had no sin, He could be the pure, spotless sacrifice that restores us to God; Hebrews 2:17 says this: “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

Now that brings us to the significance of Jesus’ death but before we talk about that, we need to talk about His life. And in His life, Jesus voluntarily chose humility, leaving behind the glories of Heaven to become the ‘Man of Sorrows.’ Now that’s not just the title for a hymn; the ‘man of sorrows’ is a person that God promised in Isaiah. Isaiah 53, what we call the Suffering Servant passage, says that there would be this man, come from God, who would be despised and rejected by men and yet carry the sins of all. He would be pierced for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities and the punishment that brought us peace would fall upon Him.^{iv}

Our statement of faith affirms that that’s Jesus. Our God became fully human, lived as the man of sorrows, familiar with suffering and then on the Cross, He faced the wrath of man so that He could deliver us from the wrath of God.

And that’s what the substitutionary, atoning death as a sacrifice from sin is all about.

See, in the Old Testament, when you made a sacrifice, you would go up and place your hand on the goat or whatever and say ‘this goat stands in my place. It’s going to die so that I can live.’ That’s what a substitutionary sacrifice is. The problem though is that you’d have to do it again and again, month after month, year after year; all that blood meant to pay the price for sin.

But here’s the thing – Hebrews 10:4 tells us ‘the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin.’ The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin because they’re not human. They’re not like us and you need someone like us to pay for rejection of God.

And so Jesus came, fully God, fully man, in a real human body, as the man of sorrows, to take our place and be pierced for our sin. When we put our faith in Jesus, it’s like we lay our hand on Him and say ‘Jesus thank You for taking my place and dying for me so that I can live.’ Jesus is our substitutionary sacrifice.

And it’s that sacrifice that makes us right with God. He is our ‘atoning’ sacrifice – He brings us back into relationship with God. 1 John 2:2 puts it like this: “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Jesus had no sin of His own and so He died in our place (substitutionary) as the sacrifice that would restore us to God (atonement).

2 Corinthians 5:21 puts it well – “21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Once the ancient Church settled that Jesus was in fact God, the next thing to affirm was that He was fully man. And like Athanasius defended Jesus' divinity, Gregory of Nazianzus defended his humanity. In another famous early Christian work, he said 'what He has not assumed He has not healed but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.'^v Which is to say: 'If Jesus is not man, He can't save men; but if He is, then He can save humanity.'

We believe that Jesus is fully divine and that Jesus is fully man.

Now I know that you know that and this statement does too but it wants to remind us that Jesus' ministry did not end with His death. And these last three statements are meant to remind us of what Jesus is up to now. They're meant to remind us that Jesus is still at work.

Here's the statement – we believe in “(i)...His bodily resurrection from the dead, (ii) His ascension into Heaven as the only and eternal mediator between God and man and (iii) His coming again in power and glory.”

Now the first one you know well. It's what we stake our faith on. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17 “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins... 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”

We believe in Jesus' *bodily* resurrection from the dead – He didn't just 'appear' to rise again – He had a body that could be touched and eat fish – and because He rose again we have faith that we will too. That's 2 Corinthians 4:14: “14 ... we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence” (2Co 4:14 NIV).

So we believe in Jesus' bodily resurrection but we also believe in His ascension into Heaven. At the beginning of Acts for example, Jesus took His disciples out into the countryside and told them that they would be His witnesses to the ends of the earth and then Acts 1:9: “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

That in and of itself is kinda neat. Jesus is up in Heaven but He's still human. Did you ever think about that? He's in His glorified body, the kind of body that we will all eventually have, but He didn't lose His humanity; He's still like you and me.

Which sets Him up perfectly to be our only and eternal mediator between God and man. When Jesus went back into Heaven, He didn't peace out to some sort of eternal vacation. No, Jesus went into Heaven to advocate for us at the right hand of the Father.

Paul, thinking about whether or not there is anyone who will separate us from the love of God puts it like this: “34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” There is no way that God will stop loving us because the One who died for us is there to plead our case.

And Hebrews 7:24-25: 24 "...Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Two things about that^{vi} – 1. Because Jesus lives forever, He has always been and will always be at the right hand of God, interceding for us. He is our ETERNAL mediator. And 2. Jesus is our ONLY mediator – Mary didn't die to restore us to God; the saints didn't die to restore us to God. Jesus alone did and so He alone is always interceding for us, speaking on our behalf to the Father.

I always think of the song 'Before the throne of God' on this –

1 Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea;
a great High Priest whose name is Love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on his hands,
my name is written on his heart.
I know that while in heav'n he stands
no tongue can bid me thence depart,
no tongue can bid me thence depart.

That's this. We believe that Jesus went into Heaven to be the only eternal Mediator who intercedes for us with God.

So we believe in Jesus' bodily resurrection, we believe in His ascension into Heaven as the only and eternal mediator between God and man and we believe in His coming again in power and glory.

Our faith doesn't stop in Heaven; we believe that Jesus will come again and rule over His restored Kingdom in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Jesus Himself put it like this – Matthew 16:27 – "...27 the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."^{vii}

When that happens Jesus will finally triumph over every evil and every injustice that the world has ever seen. Every sin, if not borne by Jesus Himself, will be paid for in blood and there will finally be justice. When He comes again there will be no more sickness or sorrow or pain – that's Revelation 21:4 – and death itself will be no more.

Isaiah 25:7-8 says "7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe

away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.”

So we believe that Jesus will return in power and glory to usher all those who have trusted in Him into His eternal Kingdom.

We believe in Jesus’ divinity, we believe in Jesus’ humanity and we believe in Jesus’ ongoing work.

Now, what does that mean for us as we seek to live in light of it in the world?

Let me give you three thoughts.

1. Because Jesus is fully God, Jesus is able to fully save. There is no such thing as halfway saved in the Kingdom of God; you are or you’re not. And notice, your salvation is not at all dependent on what you’ve done. God Himself in the person of His Son Jesus has paid the price for sin; God Himself in the person of His Son Jesus has borne the punishment for sin; it is finished. If you believe that Jesus is God become man to reconcile us to God and live in light of that fact, then you are eternally secure. Because Jesus is fully God, Jesus is able to fully save.

2. Because Jesus is fully human, Jesus fully understands the human condition. He has lived in a body like ours. He knows our joys and our sorrows. He knows the pain of sickness, the sting of betrayal. He knows what it’s like to be tired and hungry, frustrated and alone.

There’s a passage of Scripture that I think illustrates that perfectly – Hebrews 4:14-16:

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Because Jesus is fully human, He understands what you are going through. Go to Him and let Him minister to you, knowing that He’s been there too.

So Jesus is fully God, Jesus is fully human, finally – 3. Because Jesus is still at work, we can have hope.

Hope in the promise of the resurrection. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says – We don’t want you to grieve over people who have died as men who have no hope – we know that because Jesus rose again, so too shall we. That means that we go into Christian funerals with the certainty that this is not the end of the story. We have the hope of eternal life, not floating around on clouds like angels, but in resurrected, glorified bodies which are better than these ones like a

mansion's better than a tent. Paul ends this passage with the statement - 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. Because Jesus has risen, we have confidence that we will too.

Hope in the intercession of Christ. I know that sometimes people have a hard time forgiving themselves, for things they've done in the past or just done – I know because I had a Q from the Pew on that a couple years ago. Think about what this means for that situation. Jesus is at the right hand of God right now, interceding for you. Satan may bring things up in your mind to say that God won't love you for doing that, but Jesus, who died to pay it back, is standing right there with the Father to forgive you. Again, the hymn -

2 When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within,
upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free;
for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me,
to look on him and pardon me.

Because **the sinless Saviour died**, your sinful soul is counted free! Not because of what you did, but because of Jesus. God looks on His sinless sacrifice and counts us righteous because of it.

You can forgive yourself because Jesus lives and intercedes for you day by day.

Finally, hope in Jesus' return. This world is not the way it's meant to be. This is a pale shadow of what God intended for Creation. When Jesus returns every wrong will be paid back, every tear will be wiped away and even death will be no more. Let that give you hope as you look forward to and pray for its coming. Hope in Jesus' return.

We believe in Jesus' divinity, humanity and His ongoing work.

Over the Christmas season, an old C. S. Lewis quote popped up in my Twitter feed and I think it nicely sums up what we've talk about today. 'The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.' I suppose today we would say 'The Son of God became man so that we could become children of God.' Either way it works.

The Son of God, fully divine, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, became fully man, the Man of Sorrows who would lay down His life as a sacrifice to enable us to believe to become children of God, leaning on His intercession and looking forward to His return.

Jesus is fully God, fully man, and fully at work.

BENEDICTION

Hebrews 13:20-21 - Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with

everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

ⁱ The whole city is full of it, the squares, the market places, the cross-roads, the alleyways; old-clothes men, money changers, food sellers: they are all busy arguing. If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you inquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask "Is my bath ready?" the attendant answers that the Son was made out of nothing (On the Deity of the Son [P.G. xlvi, 557b])."
(http://www.synaxis.org/catechist/Orthodox_Church)

ⁱⁱ <https://jude3project.org/blog/athanasius>

ⁱⁱⁱ Athanasius, *On the incarnation of the Word*, chp 2:7, OliveTree digital.

^{iv} 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

(Isa 53:4-5 NIV).

^v https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/gregoryofnaz_critique_of_apollinarianism.htm

^{vi} Two more things: 1. Because we have Jesus as our great high priest and mediator, we can go right into the presence of God. On our own, we are not holy enough to approach God; it would be like covering yourself in gasoline and then trying to walk up to a bonfire. It wouldn't work. And yet, because Jesus has gone ahead as our Mediator, we can approach the most holy God and meet with Him in a personal way.

Hebrews 10:19-22 puts it like this: 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Because Jesus is our one and only Mediator, we can approach God personally.

And 2. Even when we've sinned and fallen short of God's glorious ideal, when we feel like we could never go back to God, Jesus is there to intercede for us, so that we can have confidence that God will never abandon us. If the One who died for us is there pleading 'don't let them go,' then we are eternally secure in our salvation.

^{vii} Revelation 19:11-16 gives us a sense of what that looks like - 11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.

12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.