

God the Son: His Identity and Birthⁱ
Philippians 2:5-11
Week 5

Opening

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

God of ages, you have called us to this place at this time with these people to look more closely at ancient words of faith. As we encounter this creed, send your Holy Spirit to guide our discussions. Give us a humble eagerness and imaginative thoughtfulness that our eyes might be opened anew to the power of the faith we profess. We pray in the name of the One whose passion and resurrection we anticipate this Lenten season, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

It may be a good practice to recite the Creed together each week as we are taking a closer look at each line. This week, we'll discuss the line **"I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary..."**

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 Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Check-in questions

This week we'll be discussing the identity and lordship of Jesus. What other lords (idols) have you been tempted to honor besides Jesus? How has Jesus proven himself better than any of them?

God the Son: His Identity and Birth

It is generally thought that the Apostles' Creed represents an expansion of a very simple and basic confession of faith: "Jesus is Lord!" Christians have always insisted that there is something qualitatively different about Jesus that sets him apart from all other religious teachers or thinkers. There is a vitally close connection between the person and the message of Jesus. What Jesus did and the impact he made on those who encountered him make his message important. In Jesus, the message and the messenger are one and the same.

If Jesus is just a man, a human being like the rest of us, he shares our need for redemption – in other words, he can't redeem us. He is part of the problem, not the solution to it. On the other hand, if Jesus is God, and God alone, he has no point of contact with us. He cannot relate to those who need redemption. Jesus' humanity provides that point of contact. And so we arrive at the conclusion that Jesus must be divine and human if he is to redeem us.

The Apostles' Creed identifies a number of key beliefs that allow us to understand why Jesus matters so much to Christians. First, it identifies that Jesus is the "Son of God." Although all believers are children of God in some sense of the word, Jesus is singled out as the Son of God. In the creed, saying that Jesus is the "Son of God" amounts to saying that Jesus is God. It is obvious that the first Christians worshiped and adored Jesus Christ – a practice that continues today. If Jesus were just another human being, a creature like the rest of us, then the New Testament writers would be guilty of worshiping a creature! But Jesus ought to be worshipped and adored precisely because he is God.

The name *Jesus* literally means "God saves." *Christ* is a title, not a surname; strictly speaking, the name should be written as "Jesus the Christ." *Christ* is the Greek version of the Hebrew word *Messiah* (see John 1:41). *Messiah* literally means "the anointed one" – in other words, one who has been anointed with oil and therefore singled out by God as having special importance. The basic sense of the word *Messiah* is "the divinely appointed King of Israel." The Messiah was the long-awaited deliverer of the people of God, promised in the pages of the Old Testament.

The creed also makes explicit reference to the virgin birth. This belief is important for three reasons.

1. It makes important connections with Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23). Here, as elsewhere in his career, Jesus brings to fulfillment great Old Testament hopes.
2. It stresses that Jesus was divine by nature, not by adoption some time later.
3. It provided an important defense against early Jewish opponents of Christianity who suggested that Jesus was the illegitimate child of Mary (possibly hinted at in John 8:41). Such hostile critics suggested that Jesus was the son of a Roman soldier, thus

insinuating collaboration with the foreign army occupation. The New Testament has a rather different – and much more exciting – understanding of who the real father of Jesus was!

The creed does not refer to Jesus as *the* Lord but as *our* Lord. Jesus Christ has the right to lordship over our lives. This amounts to a demand for personal obedience and loyalty to him as our Lord and Savior. It is possible to pay lip service to Jesus as Lord yet deny him as Lord by the way we act (Matthew 7:21-22). To recognize that Jesus is Lord of our personal lives; he is also the Lord of the church. The church owes its faithful obedience to Jesus Christ and to no one else. The church cannot and must not substitute anything or anyone for Jesus.

Read Philippians 2:5-11

*Make it a point over the course of this series to read from a few different translations. Encourage those who may be reading from a different translation to share any differences they see.

Initial Reactions

1. What from these passages confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

Going Deeper

4. Taking the Scripture passage as a whole, what is the relationship between Jesus and God?
5. In what sense(s) could Jesus be said to have "made himself nothing" (v.7)?
6. How could Jesus be called a "servant" (v.7)?
7. What does it mean for you that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (v. 11)? What does it mean for you that Jesus Christ is *your* Lord?

So What Questions

8. The name of Jesus is now "the name that is above every name" (v. 9). Think of great human leaders of the past and present. How is Jesus greater than each of them?
9. Verses 9-11 are full of adoration of Christ. When have you felt yourself caught up in that kind of adoration?
10. Try to envision the worldwide worship of vv.10-11. What do you imagine it will look like? Sound like?

Heidelberg Catechism Questions

Each week, a question from the Heidelberg Catechism will be included with this study guide. The hope is that COB folks would take time to reflect on this question during the week as it gives more framework for the Creed as we study together.

Question 35

What does it mean that he “was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary”?

Answer:

That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature so that he might also become David’s true descendant, like his brothers and sisters in every way except for sin.

Question 36

How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?

Answer:

He is our mediator and, in God’s sight, he covers with his innocence and perfect holiness my sinfulness in which I was conceived.

For Now or Later

- Read Revelation 5, John’s vision of the majesty of Christ.
- To set today’s Scripture in its full context, study Philippians 2:1-4 and 12-18 concerning the practical implications of Jesus’ humanity for believers.

Closing

Check in if you haven’t already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.

¹ McGrath, Allister. *Life Guide Bible Studies: Apostles’ Creed*. Intersity Press, 2016.