

“I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son”

December 5, 2021

Luke 1:26-45 (read in call to confession)

Isaiah 9

Psalm 2

Hebrews 1

(John 1:14-18)

In Isaiah 9 the prophet speaks of the coming of the son—
the one who would reign on the throne of David, his father, forever.

God had told David in 2 Samuel 7, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

God was teaching David – and us –
what it means to be a child of God.

David wanted to build a house for God –
but God says, no, it’s the other way around:

I will build *your* house.

The throne of David will be established forever.

The son of David will become the Son of God.

Little did David realize how true that would be!

But Isaiah seems to have glimpsed it –

the name of the Son of David will be “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God...”

And God himself [“the zeal of the LORD of hosts”] will make it happen.

Perhaps he realized it in some way –

after all, many Psalms reflect different aspects of this.

Psalm 2 has four stanzas –

the first stanza speaks of the plot of the nations who conspire against the Messiah;

the second speaks of God’s response – as he laughs at their conspiracy,

because he has established the King on Zion;

the third stanza comes in the voice of the King –

“the LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you,’”

as he speaks of how the inheritance of David extends to the whole earth!

And the fourth stanza concludes with a warning to the rulers of the earth –

urging them to submit to the Son –

and proclaiming a blessing on all who take refuge in him.

Sing Psalm 2

Read Hebrews 1

The outline for today’s sermon is found in your bulletins –

just a little bit later – because the outline is found in the Creed itself.

“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,

begotten of the Father before all worlds;”

What does it mean to believe in one Lord, Jesus the Messiah?

The Apostles’ Creed says:

“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord;”

The Nicene Creed expands this slightly:

“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father before all worlds;”

When we say that we believe in “one Lord” –

we are not merely saying that Jesus is our *master* –
we are saying that Jesus is the Yahweh of the OT.

The whole of the Christian tradition affirms without hesitation
that Jesus is uniquely related to God the Father –

such that where Moses called, Hear, Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one;

for us, there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

That’s what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:6.

He takes the *shema* – the basic statement of faith of the OT,
and says that the God of the Shema is the Father –
and the LORD – the Yahweh of the Shema – is Jesus.

And yet there is only one God.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks:

29. Q. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Savior?

A. Because He saves us from all our sins, and because salvation is not to be sought or found in anyone else.

In Matthew 1:21 the angel tells Joseph that Mary will bear a son,

“and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

This is not simply a matter of the meaning of the name.

Certainly the name Jesus means “Yahweh saves,”
but there is more going on here.

Jesus is the Greek form of “Joshua,”

and just as Joshua caused Israel to inherit the land,

so also Jesus is the new Joshua who causes us to inherit eternal life!

In Joshua 1:6 the LORD says to Joshua,

Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land.

Joshua is the one who causes Israel to inherit the land.
by his covenant faithfulness.
And even so our Joshua, our Jesus, brings us into his inheritance
through his covenant faithfulness!

There is also a connection between Jesus and Samson in Judges 13.
The birth of Samson was predicted by an angel to a couple that was barren.
And the angel said to his mother,
*The child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb,
and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.*

And the angel tells Joseph,
You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus is the one who fulfills all that Joshua and Samson did.

Therefore we confess that we believe “in Jesus,”
because he is the only one who can save us from our sins.

Is Jesus a complete savior or not?
Either you trust in Jesus alone for salvation –
or else you trust in something or someone else.

So we confess that we believe in Jesus,
because he is the one who saves us from our sins.

But then,

31. Q. Why is He called Christ, that is, Anointed?

A. Because He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us, and who continually intercedes for us before the Father; and our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us.

The word “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew “Meshiach” –
which literally means “anointed one.”

In the OT, the idea of the “anointed” – the messiah –
was especially associated with the Son of David.

It is used in the book of Samuel sixteen times –

from the Song of Hannah where she speaks of the anointed king,
to Samuel's speech in 1 Samuel 12 where he speaks of Saul as the LORD's anointed,
and then in all of David's dealings with Saul,
and later in 2 Samuel to refer to David.

Nine of the ten references in the Psalms are to the Davidic king

In short, all but five references to the "anointed one" in the OT refer to the King.

So it is easy to see why the catechism refers to Jesus as the Messiah
because he is "our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit,
and who defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us."

But why does the catechism say that the title "Messiah," or Christ,
refers to his prophetic and priestly offices?

For this we need to look at the other five references.

In Psalm 105:15 the Psalmist reflects on the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
and speaks of how God spoke to Abimelech in Genesis 20:7
of how Abraham was a prophet.

The Psalmist says,

*He allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account,
Saying, 'Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!'*

Here the Psalmist connects the idea of Abraham as prophet
with the idea of Abraham as anointed one.

Truly Abraham was a Messiah – an anointed prophet –
because he brought life to Abimelech and his people,
when Abimelech was under the curse of death.

After all, God had said to Abimelech,

Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken.

The only way that Abimelech could live was if Abraham prayed for him.

And through the intercession of Abraham (Gen 20:17)
God healed Abimelech and his household.

That is why the catechism says that Jesus the Messiah – the Anointed One – is
"our chief Prophet and Teacher,
who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God
concerning our redemption;"

The last four OT references to Messiahs (or anointed one)
come from Leviticus 4 and 6.

Here Moses speaks of the anointed priest,
hacohen hamashiach
“the priest, the anointed one”

This is specifically a reference to the high priest,
because he is the one who is anointed to succeed Aaron (Lev 6:22).

The high priest is a Messiah – an anointed one –
because he makes atonement for the people.
And even so, our Lord Jesus the Messiah is
“our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us,
and who continually intercedes for us before the Father.”

So while most references in the OT (and the entire focus of the intertestamental literature)
was on the Messiah as king,
it is clear that the imagery of the Anointed One
included prophetic and priestly aspects as well.

In the New Testament, the threefold office of the Messiah is clearly revealed
in the way that the four gospels talk about the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus.

In Matthew 3, Jesus is revealed as king in his baptism.
John is baptizing and declaring “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”
and when the Pharisees and Sadducees ask to be baptized,
he responds by saying that judgment is coming against them,
and that the one who comes after him is the royal Son (echoing Psalm 2)
who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
Then when Jesus is baptized, the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended like a dove,
and a voice from heaven declared,
“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

In John’s gospel, Jesus is revealed as priest – or at least as sacrifice!
Because as John was baptizing he sees Jesus and says,
“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

And at the transfiguration of Jesus, in Luke 9, Jesus is revealed as the prophet –
as the great prophets of the old covenant, Moses and Elijah, gather with Jesus,
and the Father says from the cloud, “This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!”

Jesus is the Anointed prophet, priest and king – the Messiah – the Christ.

So we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, “*the only begotten Son of God –
begotten before all worlds.*”

What does that mean?
“Only Begotten”?

We are not talking here about the virgin birth.
We are talking here about the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father.

John speaks of this in John 1:14:

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only[-begotten] Son^[d] from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Many modern translations say “glory as of the only Son from the Father.”
But I don’t think that this fully captures what John is saying here.

John has just said that we are *born*
by the will of God through faith –

and then in the next verse (v14)
he says that the Word is the only-begotten Son from the Father.

Some argue that the word ‘monogenes’ just means “unique” or “one-and-only” –
but the *genes* root is at the heart of the word for “born” in verse 13.

John is saying that that the eternal Word is the only-begotten Son of God.
This is the doctrine of eternal generation.

Put simply: eternal generation is the doctrine
that the Son of God has always been the Son of God.

The Father has always been the Father.
You fathers, there was a point in time when you became a father.
Before that you were NOT a father.
But that is NOT the case with God.

God has always been Father.
He has always been begetting the Son.
There was no point in time when the Word--the Son--
came into existence;
the Son has ALWAYS been the Son of His Father!

Why is the doctrine of eternal generation important?
Why does it matter?
Well, in the early church,
there were people who taught that the Son was a creature.
(Mormon's and JW's still teach this).
They claimed that there was a point before creation,

when the Father had existed all by himself.

And then he created the Son and the Spirit, and they created the world.

But pastors like Athanasius saw that this was heresy!

Because if the Son is not eternal,
then the Son is not *really* God.

And if the Son is not *really* God,
then he has not reconciled us to God!

Think about it for a minute.

If the Son is not God,

then that means that he is only an angel--he is only a creature.

And that would mean that his death would only reconcile us to the angels-
to creatures!

But...

1) If we are only reconciled to creatures,
then we are not reconciled to God

And the Bible says that we ARE reconciled to God.

II Peter 1:4 tells us that through God's great and precious promises,
we have been made partakers of the divine nature.

How?

Because Jesus Christ has united us to himself!

But if Jesus Christ isn't God

then he could not have made us partakers of the divine nature!

And also,

2) If Jesus is only an angel, then he is no more powerful than Satan.

In fact, some of these heretics even taught
that Jesus and Satan were brothers.

But if Jesus is going to defeat the powers of sin, death and the devil,
then he must have sufficient life, righteousness and authority to do so.

After all, to defeat sin, he must be the righteous One.

To defeat death, he must have life in himself ("in him was life").

and to defeat the devil, he must have an authority higher than the devil.

Yet even the angels in Scripture do not have authority over the devil.

Jude tells us that the archangel, Michael,

could only rebuke the devil by saying, "the LORD rebuke you"

But Jesus speaks as one having authority in himself.

He is no mere angel.

He is God himself.

And John explains this in verses 15-18:

¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes

after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.^[g] ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only[-begotten] God,^[l] who is at the Father's side,^[g] he has made him known.

This is very much where the book of Hebrews begins.
It picks up where the gospel of John left off.

Indeed, the book of Hebrews is all about who Jesus is.
The Christian life is structured around Jesus.

Hebrews tells us that while God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.

But what does it mean to call Jesus ‘the Son of God’?

When we speak of Jesus as the Son of God,
we must distinguish between at least two senses in which this is true.
And here in Hebrews 1:1-4 we see this distinction.
Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity.
But there is a different sense in which he also becomes the Son of God
when he is exalted to the right hand of God.

We see the eternal sonship of Christ in verses 2-3.
Who is this Son by whom God has spoken to us?

He is the Son –
*whom he appointed the heir of all things,
through whom also he created the world.*

Now we begin to see why Jesus is the eschatological Word.
He is the last Word, because he was the first Word.
The heir of all things is the one through whom God created the ages.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
John tells us that God made all things *through* his Word –
and without him was not anything made that was made.

Hebrews now says the same thing.
Back then his name was not yet Jesus.
He had not yet come in our flesh – but he was with the Father –
and the Father created the world *through him*.

Long before the incarnation, he was the Son of God.

A son looks like his father.

Adam, created in the image of God, is called “the Son of God” by Luke,
and Hebrews uses the same language of the “Son.”

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Isaiah had said that God would not share his glory with another (Is 42:8).
But the Son is said to be the very “shining” of the glory of God.

What does it mean for the Son to be the “radiance” of the glory of God?

What do you see when you see the radiance of God’s glory?

You see the Son.

How can you tell what God’s nature is?

Look at the Son.

The shining of God’s glory *is* the Son of God –

whatever it is that is visible in God is seen in the Son.

And he is the exact imprint of his nature.

He is the precise image of his Father.

When you see the Son you see the Father –

as Jesus said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

Colossians 1:15-20 says the same sort of thing:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

that in everything he might be preeminent.”

The word choice is different,

but the basic idea is identical.

The Son was the one through whom God created the world.

The Son is the member of the Trinity who makes God visible to us.

And when we see the Son, we see God.

And as Hebrews will say shortly in chapter 2 –

we do not yet see everything under his feet –

but we see Jesus!

By faith, we see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father!

At the heart of the Christian faith is that the Creator of the world

is also its Redeemer (what we saw last week!).

And the Son is the one through whom God has redeemed the world.

Paul had said in Colossians, “in him all things hold together.”

Hebrews says, “he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

The Son of God is involved in creation and in providence.

As John tells us, “in the beginning was the Word.
And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” (John 1:1)
Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

So when Hebrews says that he has spoken to us by his Son,
it means that God has spoken to us by his eternal Son.
Through all those ages
God spoke by the prophets.
He spoke through mediators who only reflected his glory.
Remember Moses—the greatest of the OT prophets?
He came down the mountain with the glory of God shining in his face.
But that was a fading glory—a reflected glory.
But the Son does not have a “reflected” glory,
he is the very “shiningness” of the glory of God.
He is the radiance itself!

Hebrews is not going to talk about the eternal Sonship of Christ again.
But it undergirds the whole book.
It is only because Jesus is the eternal Son
that he can successfully become the eschatological Son.

And that is the point of verses 3-5.

3. His Inherited Sonship (3c-5)

a. The Purification of Sin and the Exaltation on High (v3)

Because there is another sense in which Jesus only becomes the Son of God in his exaltation.

Yes, everything you see was made by the Son of God.
Everything you see is sustained and upheld by the word of his power.
The problem is that humanity is in rebellion against God –
and so we have made a mess of God’s creation.

That’s where verse 3 goes on to speak of his making “purification for sins.”

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

only the eternal Son of God could make purification for sin once for all! –
and so,

⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

What does that mean?

“Having *become* as much superior to angels”?
Hebrews has just told us that the Son is the one through whom God created the world.

He made all things, and yet he still has to *become* superior to the angels?
Angels are among the “all things” that he upholds by the word of his power!

What does it mean that he *becomes* superior to angels?

The explanation is found at the end of verse 4:

he has become as much superior to angels,
“as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

Something happens when Jesus makes purification for sins.

Something happens when Jesus sits down at the right hand of the Majesty.
Something happens that transforms him from “lower than the angels”
to “superior to the angels.”

That something is called an inheritance –
a *name* that he inherits.

When Jesus brings his own blood into the heavenly holy of holies
and makes purification for sins,
sitting down at the right hand of God,
Jesus inherits a name that is far more excellent than the names of the angels.

What name is that?

What name did Jesus inherit?
Was it “King of kings and Lord of lords”?
Was it “Mighty Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”?

No.

Hebrews is not interested in those names.

The name is given in verse 5:

“For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’?”

The eternal Son of God inherited the name of “Son.”

Does that sound odd?!

After all, he was the Son of God from all eternity.

And even in the incarnation he was called “son” from the first mention of his coming!

He was called the “Son of God” by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:35

“The power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God”

God himself declared at the baptism of Jesus,

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22)
So he was the eternal Son of God before the incarnation,
and he was the incarnate Son of God from his birth.

But only in his ascension to the right hand of the Father
do all of his names and titles come together.

This was the meaning of *Jesus* – (Yahweh saves).
This was the meaning of *Christ* – (Messiah – the anointed one)
This was the meaning of *Lord* – (because truly he is Yahweh come in the flesh!)

It’s not as though at one point Jesus was *not* the Son of God.
Rather, the eternal Son of God,
who had become the incarnate Son when the Word became flesh,
now becomes the eschatological Son.

Why is this important?
Well, if the eternal Son of God had remained simply the eternal Son of God,
we would never even know that he existed.
We only learn about the eternal Son of God when he became the incarnate Son.
It was only then that God began to speak *to us* by his Son.
It was a great and marvelous thing that the Word became flesh—
that the eternal Son became the incarnate Son.
The radiance of God’s glory veiled that glory as he became one with us.
The exact imprint of God’s nature took to himself our nature.

But according to Hebrews 1:4,
even that did not give Jesus a greater name than the angels.

So as long as the eternal Son remains only the incarnate Son,
he remained under the law—he is under Moses –
and the Law of Moses was mediated by angels.

What gives Jesus that final inheritance—that great name of “eschatological Son”—
the LAST Adam—
is his priestly work of offering a better sacrifice than Moses.
The eternal Son becomes the incarnate Son so that through his own death
he might offer to God a sacrifice that will result in his inheriting that glorious name
of SON.

In other words,
if Jesus does not inherit this eschatological sonship,
then you can’t be saved!
Your salvation depends upon Jesus inheriting the name of “Son.”

And because Jesus has joined himself to our humanity –
he now joins us to himself –
so that his Father might become *our Father*.

Your Father loves you –
that's why he sent his only-begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in him might not perish,
but have everlasting life!

So don't turn away from Jesus!

God has spoken his final word in Jesus.
In these *last days* he has spoken to us by his Son.
Are you listening to Jesus?