

# **The Apostles' Creed**

**I Believe in Jesus Christ**

*Selected Texts*

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# I Believe in Jesus Christ

## Introduction

As we continue our series in *The Apostles' Creed* I would like to examine today what it means to **believe in Jesus Christ**. Please listen as I recite the Apostles' Creed:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.*

***I believe in Jesus Christ**, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand  
of God the Father Almighty.  
From there he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.*

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

Charlie Stink's friends and co-workers constantly advised him that he should change his name. Finally, Charlie Stink agreed, and so he went to court to complete the process.

The next day, back at work, his associates asked, "And so? Did you change your name?"

“Yes I did,” was the reply, “But for the life of me I can’t see what difference it is going to make.”

“Well,” his friends asked, “What did you have your name changed to?”

“I changed my name to George Stink.”

Names have meaning. And no name has had more meaning throughout the history of the world than the name *Jesus Christ*.

Today we begin the second (and longest) section in the *Apostles’ Creed*. This section deals with the second Person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Here we learn about the Person and Work of Christ.

## Lesson

Today I want to examine the significance of the name *Jesus Christ*.

### I. The Significance of the Name *Jesus*

First, the significance of the name **Jesus**.

The English name *Jesus* comes to us from the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means *Jehovah is salvation* or *Jehovah will save*. This is simply shortened to *savior*, as the Heidelberg Catechism states (Q/A 29).

This is the name given to Jesus by the angel in Matthew 1:21: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will *save* his people from their sins.”

The name *Jesus* signifies to us the salvation of God.

Now what does *salvation* mean?

The central theme of the Christian gospel is the salvation of God. The gospel proclaims that as God saved Israel from Egypt and the psalmist from death (Exodus 15:2; Psalm 116:6), so he will save all who trust in Jesus from sin and its consequences.

This salvation from sin and death is wholly God’s work. We read for example that this is so in Ephesians 2:8, “For it is by grace

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you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” And we also read in Jonah 2:9, “Salvation comes from the LORD.”

The Hebrew words that express the idea of salvation in the Old Testament have the general sense of deliverance from physical danger or moral distress (cf. Psalm 85:8-9; Isaiah 62:11).

In these passages the Septuagint (i.e. the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew) uses Greek words that mean to save from death or dangers, as well as to preserve or to heal. New Testament passages that speak of salvation use all these ideas to explain the acts of God on behalf of the spiritually lost.

Salvation delivers the believer from the wrath of God, the dominion of sin, and the power of death (Romans 1:18; 3:9; 5:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

God liberates sinners from the natural condition of being mastered by the world, the flesh, and the devil (John 8:23, 24; Romans 8:7, 8; 1 John 5:19).

He frees believers from the fears that a sinful life generates (Romans 8:15; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 2:14, 15).

And he also frees believers from the vicious habits that enslave them (Ephesians 4:17-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Titus 2:11-3:6).

Although Christians have already received salvation, we will only experience the benefits of salvation in their fullness when Jesus returns at the end of the age (Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

Salvation is accomplished through what Jesus did in history and by what he continues to do in believers by the Holy Spirit. The basis of our salvation is Jesus' death on the cross and the righteousness he achieved for us in his active obedience.

It is realized in our lives as Jesus lives in us (John 15:4; 17:26; Colossians 1:27) and we live in Jesus, united with him in his death and risen life (Romans 6:3-10; Colossians 2:12, 20; 3:1).

This vital union, sustained by the Spirit through faith and formed in our new birth, presupposes our eternal election in Jesus (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Jesus was foreordained to represent us and to bear our sins as our substitute (1 Peter 1:18-20; cf. Matthew 1:21). We were chosen to be effectually called, conformed to his image, and glorified by the Spirit's power (Romans 8:11, 29, 30).

I love the way the Heidelberg Catechism addresses the person of Jesus. Question 29 asks, "Why is the Son of God called 'Jesus,' meaning 'savior'?"

And the answer given is: "Because he saves us from our sins. Salvation cannot be found in anyone else; it is futile to look for salvation elsewhere."

This is of course what Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Friend, there is no other savior than Jesus. There are not many roads to God. There are not many ways to heaven. There is only one way, and that is through Jesus. That is why Jesus himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

And so the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 30) asks, "Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus?"

And, of course, the answer given is: "No. Although they boast of being his, by their deeds they deny the only savior and deliverer, Jesus. Either Jesus is not a perfect savior, or those who in true faith accept this savior have in him all they need for their salvation."

Those who trust fully and completely and only in Jesus the Savior find that he is indeed all that they need for their salvation.

That is the significance of the name Jesus. It means *savior*.

## II. The Significance of the Name *Christ*

Second, the significance of the name **Christ**.

The English title *Christ* comes to us from the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means *anointed one* or simply *anointed*.

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The title *Christ* is not a surname, except in the old sense in which surnames like Smith, Taylor, Packer or Clark declared a man's trade or profession. But what does *anointed* mean?

The Hebrew word for *anoint* in the Old Testament means *to apply oil* by pouring or spreading. The practice was common in many cultures in the Middle East. We see it first in the Scripture when Jacob anointed a pillar he had set up as a memorial of his meeting with God at Bethel (Genesis 28:18).

Later, anointing with oil was extended to the three key offices in God's covenant community: to prophets (1 Kings 19:16), to priests (Exodus 28:41; 30:30; Leviticus 8:12), and to kings (Judges 9:8, 15; 1 Samuel 9:16; 15:1; 16:3, 12; 1 Kings 1:34).

Anointing, then, was used for induction into leadership offices.

The act of anointing had several functions. First, it served to ordain leaders into the office of prophet, priest, or king. In each case, the idea is that of setting aside, or authorizing for God's service.

Second, while anointing was done by a human agent (such as Samuel, who anointed both Saul and David), it was considered to be done by God himself (1 Samuel 10:1; 2 Samuel 12:7).

And third, anointing, at least in the case of David, was accompanied by a special divine enablement to carry out the mission for which he was anointed and commissioned (1 Samuel 16:13; cf. 1 Samuel 10:6-8).

Thus, anointing in Old Testament times was an act of great significance. It set persons—prophets, priests, and kings—apart for God's use. The one anointed was considered chosen by God to carry out his appointed service.

The New Testament quickly identifies Jesus of Nazareth with the Old Testament concept of one anointed for a distinctive mission. This is the word used by Andrew when speaking of Jesus in John 1:41: "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)" (see also Luke 4:18-21; Acts 4:27; 10:38).

Each of the three Old Testament offices—prophet, priest, and king—find their fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ (Luke 4: 17-20; Psalm 110:4; cf. Hebrews 5:4-6 and Daniel 9:24, 26; Psalm 2:6).

John Calvin, the great Reformer and Theologian, I believe, was the first to speak of the three offices of Christ.<sup>1</sup> He noted that man, as he was created by God, was intended to function as prophet, priest, and king.

Man was originally endued with knowledge (corresponding to the office of prophet, man was able to understand God's revelation of himself in this world), holiness (corresponding to the office of priest, man was, while without sin, wholly consecrated to God), and righteousness (corresponding to the office of king, man was, by walking in total obedience to God, able to exercise dominion over the lower creation).

The entrance of sin into the world, however, affected the whole man and made it impossible for him to function properly in his threefold capacity as prophet, priest, and king. He is subject to the power of error and deception, of unrighteousness and moral pollution, and of misery and death.

Christ came as the ideal man and for the purpose of restoring man to his original condition, and as such functioned as prophet, priest, and king. Let us look at each of these offices in greater detail now.

Let's look at each office briefly. First, with respect to the office of prophet, "Christ executes the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation."<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament predicts the coming of Christ as a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." This passage is applied to Christ in Acts 3:22-23: "For

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, nd), I:494-503 (2:15).

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q/A 24.

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Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.”

Jesus speaks of himself as a prophet in Luke 13:33, claims to bring a message from his Father (John 8:26-28; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24), foretells future things (Matthew 24:3-35; Luke 19:41-44), and speaks with singular authority (Matthew 7:29). It is no wonder, then, that the people recognized him as a prophet (Matthew 21:11, 46; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 6:14; 7:40; 9:17).

Furthermore, Christ discharged his office of prophet prior to his appearance on earth, and in fact continues it even to this day. In the Old Testament, it was Christ functioning as the Angel of the Lord, and also in and through the prophets (see 1 Peter 1:11; 3:18-20; Genesis 18). Christ continued his prophetic work by the operation of the Holy Spirit in and through the teaching of the apostles (John 14:26; 16:12-14; Acts 1:1). And he continues it today through the ministry of the Word and in the spiritual illumination of believers. So, even while he is seated at the right hand of the Father, he is ever active as our great prophet.

Second, with respect to the office of priest, “Christ executes the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.”<sup>3</sup>

The Old Testament also predicted the priesthood of Christ (Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:13; Isaiah 53). In the New Testament Christ is mentioned as a priest in only one book—Hebrews—but there the office is frequently mentioned (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1). However, other books refer to his priestly work (Mark 10:45; John 1:29; Romans 3:24).

While a prophet represented God among the people, a priest represented the people before God. Hebrews 5:1, 3 teaches us that a priest is taken from among men to be their representative, is appointed by God, is active before God in the interests of men, offers

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<sup>3</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q/A 25.



gifts and sacrifices for sins, and also makes intercession for the people: “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. . . . [H]e has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.”

Christ fulfilled the office of priest. He was appointed by God to be the representative of his people (Romans 5:18, 19). Christ also offered a sacrifice for sin—himself (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). He also makes intercession for his people (Romans 8:34).

Third, with respect to the office of king, “Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”<sup>4</sup>

As the Son of God, Christ naturally shares in the universal dominion of God. In distinction from this we speak of a kingship that was conferred on Christ as Mediator. This kingship is twofold, namely, his *spiritual* kingship over the Church, and his *universal* kingship over the universe.

Christ is king of the Church in that he rules over his people. It is called *spiritual* because it relates to the spiritual realm, is established in the hearts and lives of believers, has a spiritual end in view (namely, the salvation of sinners), and is administered by spiritual means, the Word and the Spirit. It is exercised largely in the gathering, the government, the protection, and the perfection of the Church (see Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:33; 19:38; John 18:36-37; Acts 2:30-36).

Christ is also king over the universe. He said in Matthew 28:18: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” This kingship is not the same as Christ’s original kingship as the Son of God, although it pertains to the same realm. This kingship is entrusted to Christ as Mediator on behalf of the Church. As Mediator, he guides and protects his Church against all the dangers that it is exposed to in this world (Matthew 16:18).

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<sup>4</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q/A 26.

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Now, how do the offices of Christ pertain to us? Well, as a prophet he cures our ignorance and blindness, he shows us the way of salvation, and he furnishes our understanding with a knowledge of spiritual things.

As a priest, he removes the guilt of our sins, he purchases salvation for us, and he cleanses us from all pollution of flesh and of the spirit.

And as a king, he perfects his strength in our weakness, he bestows salvation itself upon us, and he bends our will into obedience unto himself.

### Conclusion

When you recite the *Apostles' Creed* and say the words, “**I believe in Jesus Christ,**” you are affirming your participation in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

You are recognizing Jesus as *your* Savior.

You are affirming that work of salvation that Christ accomplished for you.

You are also recognizing Christ as *your* prophet, priest, and king.

And you are affirming that he reveals God's will to you, represents you to God, and rules over you.

That is what you and I mean when you say, “**I believe in Jesus Christ.**” Amen.

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