

Who is He?

As we approach the Advent Season, Christians all over the world turn their focus towards the birth of Jesus Christ. As exciting as it may be, however, we cannot truly appreciate the importance of His birth unless we understand who He is. I say this because it's a very tricky road as well we come upon this time of the year. In particular, it's tough because we have to accept that in knowing *who* Christ is, we have to recognize that which makes Him different than all other Gods and, as such, those things which make us different from other religions.

Why does this matter? For many reasons, however the ones I want to focus on are:

- As a church we should love and care anyone & everyone, however there are boundaries we observe as Christians, and we cannot accept everything - the church that stands for everything, stands for nothing.
- As a church we should love and care anyone & everyone, however this does not mean that we have to embrace their religious and faith choice - as Christians we see Christ as the only way.
- As a church we should love and care anyone & everyone, however we cannot forget the purpose of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection - to give us eternal life through our father in heaven. This concept is unique only to Christians - life & heaven through the death of Jesus Christ.

It's through these precepts that we then celebrate the love, joy, peace, and hope we find in Advent.¹ It's also important for us to understand that it is only through Him that we receive God's version of love, joy, peace, and hope.

So for the next 6 weeks as we walk towards the birth of Jesus I pray we begin to see who He is?

- 11/15 - Who is He? vs. Who do you say He is?
- 11/22 - What did He do?
- 11/29 - When did He do it? (When did He come?)
- 12/6 - Where did He do it? (Where did He begin?)
- 12/13 - Why did He do it? (Why did He save us?)
- 12/20 - How did He do it? (How did He save us?)

11/29 - Who is He? vs. Who do say He is?

Matthew 16:13-18 Son of Man, Son of God

13 When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

15 He pressed them, "And how about you? Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17-18 Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out."

- A lot of people say that Jesus is a lot of things ... even folks in church

1. http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=47998

- God revealed the answer through Peter ... not just any God, but the God of heaven, Christ's Father.

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Backdrop

When I was a kid, one of my first real jobs was getting paid as a busboy for an Italian restaurant. Of all the lessons I learned there one of the greatest was in making pizza. Up until that point I was the guy that put anything and everything on my pizza. One day the cooks allowed me to make a pizza. They watched as I put every topping imaginable on it. I placed it in the oven, cooked it, and when it came to eat, the magnificent creation I thought I'd birthed turned out to be a half baked, wet, sticky dough, concoction with the bottom falling out with every bite I went to take. The cooks all laughed and chuckled the whole time I made that pizza because they knew exactly what was going to happen. Once everything was said and done, one of the cooks "re-made" me a pizza, all the while helping me understand that in order to have a great pizza, with a great crust, that was fully cooked, and actually tasted good, I couldn't have "everything" on it, but I had to choose the essentials and focus on those. He helped me understand that if I tried to make it the extra "everything" meal, the bottom would always fall out.

I believe our Christianity potentially suffers from the same fate that the pizza of mine suffered from: we want it to be the extra "everything" of religions, or spiritualities, or faiths, but instead of using tomatoes, pepperoni, onions, hamburger, and olives, we use Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Catholicism, and many other faiths & religions. We may unspokenly pile on the toppings of other belief systems in an effort to make our Christianity more appealing, when, in reality, we are making it easier and easier for the bottom of who we are to fall out.

But how does that happen, you may ask? Think on this, even as Christians there are parts of Scripture that we struggle to understand and sort through, as non-Christians and those who originate from other non-Christian belief systems, there are even more problems and difficulties. And what happens when what we think in our mind comes face to face with what we see in Scripture? One thing will have to give and it almost always will be what we read. We begin to excuse it away: that was written by a bunch of white men a long time ago. Our belief and trust in Scripture begins to crack. Our belief and understanding of who God is begins to crack. And then, our belief and focus on who we as a church is begins to crack. And when we begin to focus more on what we think verses what God says, our bottom falls out - all because we're piling too much stuff on top of the cross.

I know it's hard for us to understand and remember, but in light of us serving, befriending, reaching out, and loving everyone around us no matter who they are, that does not mean that we must become the same persons we serve. We must still recognize who we are without piling "everything else" onto top of Christ. In the same way some of us may know and love people who smoke, or do drugs, or [insert whatever here] yet we still resolve not to walk in the same path they do, so, too, must we be with Christ. The church that stands for everything will stand for nothing.

I believe this is one of the core reasons Jesus approaches the disciples and asks the questions: "Who do people say I am?" and "Who do you say I am?". To see if they really understand who He is, and not just who the world may say who He is/

"Who do people say that Jesus is?"

Close isn't close enough

13 When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

You've heard the saying, close only counts in lawn darts and horseshoes? That's because close doesn't count in parts of life.

Do you score if you drop one yard before the goal line?

Do you score if your golf ball stops one inch away from the hole?

Do you score if the basketball gets wedged right in between the net and the backboard?

Do you score if you are "mostly" correct about who Jesus is?

Matthew 15:8 8 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Mark 12:28-34 (New International Version) The Greatest Commandment

28One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] 30Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'[b] 31The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[c]There is no commandment greater than these."

32"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

You can knowedgable, you can know scripture, you can know history, you can say the right things, and even do the right things but still not know who He is - you can be so close yet so far away.

- He paved the way and spoke with power, like John the Baptist, but He wasn't John
- He was a prophet and had miraculous power like Elijah, but He wasn't Elijah
- He cried, had emotion, and offered powerful prophecies like Jeremiah, but He wasn't Jeremiah.

Are you just close? See how many times you say Jesus is "like" someone or something?
Are you close enough? You are only if you have the right answer to this question:

"Who do you say that Jesus is?"

There is a correct answer

15 He pressed them, "And how about you? Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

On July 06, 2000, Hugh Downs, the guest host on the Larry King Live Show, lead a round table discussion on the questions, "Who is Jesus? And why is there such a fascination with that question now?" Among his guests was Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, Dean of Oxford L'chaim Society. During the discussion, Boteach said, "Jesus was a great teacher, a very ethical, moral, human being -- perhaps in our opinion, not a prophet, but certainly a phenomenal teacher and Christianity is a great world religion . . . **and while I agree he is a great light, once we say he is the only light, this is what leads to all kinds of spiritual racism and a division between Jews and Christians.**" ²

To believe that Christ is the only light is not a matter of spiritual racism, but rather a matter of spiritual conviction. It is the ultimate core and foundation for anyone who calls themselves a Christian. Yes, historically Christians have used this principle to destroy, cause pain, and promote personal gain, but I argue that it is not what Christ intended. To this day we learn from Scripture and Biblical study that the people of Christ's time were expecting a political Messiah who would re-institute a new government and civic power - and we know fully that is NOT what Jesus came to do.

To be a Christian, to follow Christ, there is a right answer: He is the only way to God and He is God.

Peter's confession revealed several things for which Jesus was looking.

1. **His confession revealed that he believed Jesus was the only way to God.** The word Christ refers to the Messiah. Throughout the Bible the Messiah is referred to as the one who would deliver men from their sins and bring them access to God.

John 14:5-7

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

7 If you really knew me, you would know[a] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Acts 4:12

12 "And there is salvation in(A)no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

1 Timothy 2:5

5 For there is (A)one God, and (B)one mediator also between God and men, the (C)man Christ Jesus,

2. Fresh Illustrations, www.freshministry.org/illustrations... Contributed to Sermon Central by: James Wilson

2. His confession revealed that he believed Jesus was God. Those are bed-rocks of the Christian faith. Jesus is the only means of access to God. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. He is totally God. He is the right answer to the divine quiz. There is no other answer.³

John 8:58 NIV

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

John 17:5 NASV

"Now, Father, (A)glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had (B)with You before the world was.

John 8:24 (New American Standard Bible)

24"Therefore I said to you that you (A)will die in your sins; for unless you believe that (B)I am He, (C)you will die in your sins."

John 8:24 (The Message)

23-24Jesus said, "You're at a dead end. If you won't believe I am who I say I am, you're at the dead end of sins. You're missing God in your lives."

And that is what we confess when we give our lives to Christ

17-18 Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.

Story of Jeslyn giving life to Christ. Didn't come from books or from great teachers or sermons but from simple conversations.

3. Leeland Patrick; http://sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=81935