



**What Christians Believe
The Apostles Creed
(5) I Believe in Jesus Christ
John 1:1-18
May 31st 2020**

Introduction - why people don't go to church

There's an odd statistic in the UK—about 60% people say they believe in God but only around 5% are attached to any church. "I believe in God, but I don't want to connect to a church." I'm sure there are many reasons for this, but I wonder if one of them is that the impression the church gives about God puts people off:

- "A genial grey-haired figure up in the sky"
- "A God who is concerned with petty rules"
- "A God who is only concerned with certain kinds of people"
- "A God who blesses the good guys and condemns bad"
- "A God far away and not really interested our live."

If any of those are your impression of God, Jesus tells a very different story. Jesus reveals to us a God who, though he is majestically and gloriously transcendent is deeply concerned with of our lives, and who loves us dearly.

Have you visited one of those cathedrals which has an amazing painting or fresco on the roof? But because you have to strain your neck to see it, you never really appreciate perhaps the best artwork in the place!

Some of those buildings help their visitors with a big mirror at waist height, and by gently looking down, you can easily see the majesty above. That's what Jesus is—he's the accessible mirror that fully reveals the glory of the invisible God.

If you have been with us over the past few weeks, you'll know we've been slowly making our way through the Apostles Creed, a wonderful short summary of the Christian Faith. And we've arrived at the lines which read:

*I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit*

and born of the virgin Mary.

This middle section of the Creed about Jesus Christ is the longest part because Jesus is the mirror who perfectly reveals God to us. Christianity is all about the Person of Jesus Christ. Knowing him, following him, trusting him.

Christianity is not a set of starchy rules and rituals and regulations, it's a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ, who is alive in the world today. And as we begin exploring this section of the Creed about Jesus Christ, it's our hope and prayer that you will want to trust and follow him too.

If someone wanted to introduce me to you, they might use my name and titles. They may say, "his name is Roy, he's a father to four sons, he's a husband to Yvonne, and a pastor to Manor Park Church." And if they explained those four names and titles Roy, father, husband, Pastor, it would be a fair introduction to me.

The Apostles' Creed does something like that, it introduces the Person at the heart of Christianity with four names and titles,

- His name is Jesus
- He is Christ
- He is God's Son
- He is our Lord

There is so much more to say about Jesus Christ in the weeks to come, but may I introduce you to him with these four words: Jesus, Christ, God's Son, Lord.

His name is JESUS (a real human being)

Jesus was his proper name. If you met him you might have said "Good morning Jesus." Jesus was a very common name in the first century, and it reminds us that Jesus was and is a real human being like you and I. Jesus wasn't a mythical character like Zeus or Santa Claus, but a real man who lived in history. The Roman historian Tacitus, describing Nero's' persecution of Christians in Rome writes:

"Christus (that is Christ) from whom their name (that is Christians) had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus."

Jesus was born in first century Palestine to an ordinary woman by the name of Mary, in an ordinary town called Bethlehem, and was brought up in an ordinary village called Nazareth. He grew up just as we do through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood and became a carpenter, as Joseph was.

At the age of 30 he gave up carpentry and became a travelling preacher for the next three years. He went all over Palestine teaching and healing and doing good.

As he did so, he stirred up the jealousy of the religious leaders who plotted for him to be crucified by the Romans under Pontius Pilate around 33AD. But on the third day he rose victoriously from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

Let me pick out two important lessons from this potted history of Jesus' life.

First, Jesus passed through the full spectrum of human experiences and emotions, from the good things such as love and joy, to the difficult things such as deep anxiety, bereavement, frustration, anger, sadness, rejection and pain. So when we come to Jesus we know he understands our lives and sorrows from the inside.

Secondly, Jesus identified especially with the poor and the outcast. The religious leaders condemned him from hanging out with "publicans and sinners" but Jesus had a soft spot for the outsider, the poor, the outcast, the people no-one else loved. Maybe part of that was because he himself came from an ordinary background.

The home I grew up in Wolverhampton was like a railway station for outsiders, people on the edge of society. I didn't realise this at the time (because what you're used to as a child, you think is normal, but this was not normal). When I got older I realised why: my parents were Christians who shared Jesus' compassion for the poor and needy.

And so if you feel like an outsider, know that Jesus understands you and welcomes you!

So his name "Jesus" introduces us to a real human being. The next word "Christ" teaches us that he was more than a man. (Each of the four words takes us to a higher plane...)

He is Christ (the long promised Messiah)

"Christ" is not a surname like Smith or Jones, it's a title, like "Sir" or "Doctor" or "President." (The title Christ and Messiah are the same.) And these words "Christ" and "Messiah" teach us that Jesus did not come out of the blue, but his coming was preceded by a great cloud of prophecies found in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament, the first thick part of the Bible written before Jesus was born, is filled with prophecies about someone who was due to come into the world one day:

In Genesis, the first book of the OT, chapter 3, the start of the Old Testament, after Satan tempted Adam and Eve, God promised that a human being would one day crush the serpent's head.

In Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi says that “The Lord” will come—and send a messenger beforehand to prepare the way.

And everywhere in between Genesis and Malachi, God promises to send this Christ/Messiah:

- He will be like King David, but rule over the whole world
- He will be the dazzling Son of Man Daniel sees in his vision (Daniel 7)
- He will be the suffering servant of Isaiah
- He will be like the prophets, priests and kings of the Old Testament, but ramped up a thousand fold

Jesus was the great Messiah predicted by prophets of old, and the one who fulfilled all of those prophecies.

No-one predicted my birth and I suspect that no-one predicted yours! Our births weren't important enough! (Not to mention the fact that no-one can sneak back in time to place a prediction there about a future birth, if you see what I mean!)

Jesus is totally unique. He is the only one of whom it can be said that the world was waiting for him to be born, history was on tip-toe waiting for the fullness of time to arrive.

The name Jesus teaches us that he was a real human being, the title Christ tells us that he was the great predicted Messiah; our third word exalts Jesus even higher!

He is God's Only Son (He is God)

He is God's only Son. In brief this title says that Jesus Christ is God. Son of God is a divine title.

The Bible teaches that though there is only one God, there are three Persons in the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, all co-equally God.

And the first Two Persons of this Trinity are called “Father” and “Son” because of a special relationship between them. In some mysterious way the Son is the Son because of the Father. But the Father did not create the Son, rather this relationship of Father begetting the Son has existed eternally, backwards in time. It's the second great mystery of the Godhead.

The Son of God is called “the only” Son, because of this unique relationship in the Godhead. You and I are adopted sons and daughters, but The Son of God is the one and only true Son of God the Father.

And then one day God the Father sent his Son into the world on a rescue mission:

“For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

And in a moment shrouded in mystery, inside the womb of Mary, the eternal Son of God took on a human nature so that the baby born in Bethlehem was both God and man.

Because Mary's son was also God's Son, Joseph had nothing to do with the conception. An angel told Mary that the conception would be a miracle. "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." (Luke 1:35)

Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God: fully Man and fully God, two Natures combined in one Person. This is a high mystery, but someone tried to explain it like this: Suppose we place an iron in the fire and heat it up to red hot. The iron is not the fire and the fire is not the iron, but they are both at the same temperature.

In the same way Two Natures, one human and one divine, combine in the Person of Christ. Jesus is both Fire and Iron, God and Man.

Wonderful comfort flows out of the truth that Jesus Christ is both God and Man.

For one thing, we now know that God understands human joys and sorrows, because the Son of God became a real man and passed through all the ups and downs of our life.

In one of Richard Wurmbrand's dark moments in a communist prison he tells of a former judge—prisoners couldn't speak with each other but somehow worked out how to communicate through the wall with taps—was it Morse code? - this judge said he regretted every prison sentence he had meted out because he had passed sentence without knowing what it was like to be in prison.

And, Wurmbrand argued with God, "You judged men without having lived and suffered and being tempted. You needed the experience of becoming a man; you were enriched by the experience of our Son becoming man."

No-one can say, and none of us needs to feel that God does not understand. Because God became human, he understands all that we have been through and all we are going through today.

And the greater comfort of this high truth is that Jesus Christ was able to be the perfect mediator between God and man. He had to be a human to represent human beings, and he had to be God to bear the great weight of all our wrongdoing on his shoulders, on the cross. Salvation is possible, because Jesus Christ our Saviour, is both Fully Human and Fully Divine.

(4) He is Lord—Supreme Ruler

The title “Lord” means “Supreme Ruler” “King of the Cosmos.” It sums up all the other names and titles and teaches us how we should respond to Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly gave up his throne in heaven to become a man and suffer for our sins on the cross....

*“God exalted Jesus Christ to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.”
(Philippians 2:9-11)*

If Jesus Christ is Lord then we should fall at his feet and worship him, for he is worthy

If Jesus is Lord we can face the future with hope and not fear, because Jesus Christ rules the world.

If Jesus Christ is Lord we should obey everything he asks of us

And if we are not yet his followers we should hear his call “Come and follow me!” and obey him today, for he is Lord over all.