

WHO IS JESUS?

For the last two thousand years, ever since Jesus was born, certainly since he began his public ministry, people have been asking “who is Jesus”. John’s gospel records that Jesus himself asked the disciples “who do you think I am”. It’s actually the most important question we have to answer as human beings, because if we don’t get the answer right we will never be able to accept the salvation that Jesus uniquely offers.

The beginning of John’s gospel that was our reading today – the Prologue as it’s usually called – is one of the greatest sections of any of the gospels and is a wonderful portrayal of Jesus. I find that each time I study this passage, Christ becomes a little bigger—something like Lucy’s experience with the lion Aslan (the Christ symbol in C. S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia) as she again gazed into his large, wise face.

“Welcome, child,” he said.

“Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.”

“That is because you are older, little one,” answered he.

“Not because you are?”

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

My hope is that as we grow together today and in the coming months, we will find Christ bigger and bigger and bigger.

So let’s start to look at our reading. You might want to open your Bibles at page 1063 so that you can follow this along with me.

Verses 1 and 2 of our reading says:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.”

(John 1:1-2 NIV)

This statement is even more emphatic in the Greek which is written in the imperfect tense. Verse 1 might be better translated:

“In the beginning was continuing the Word, and the Word was continuing with God, and the Word was continually God.” As Athanasius (a Patriarch of the early church) said “there never was when he was not”.

So the first thing we can learn about who Jesus is, is that he has always existed. Before that space time structure we call our universe was created Jesus was eternally co-existing with God in that wonderfully mysterious relationship we call the Trinity. You know that means our whole dating system is wrong – there never was a BC, there is no “before Christ”.

Verse 2 makes our notion of the Trinity even more intimate as it actually means “the Word was continually towards God” – Jesus and God were face to face. The second thing we can learn about Jesus is that he was completely and fully God, as the last part of verse 1 says “the Word was God”.

This is where many cults such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses go wrong, in that they don’t accept that Jesus was fully and eternally God.

This opening to John’s gospel reminds us of the opening words of our Bible “In the beginning God” in Genesis chapter 1 verse 1.

Next we learn that Jesus was the creator of our universe – see verse 3:

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:3 NIV)

So Jesus created everything from the smallest scale – the inner structure of the particles that make up the atoms of matter to the largest scale – the hundreds of millions of galaxies each

containing 100 billion stars or so that make up our universe. Jesus also sustains our universe. As Colossians 1:17 says “in him all things hold together”.

We can trust such a God with everything. Because he is Creator, he knows just what his creation, including us, his people, need. It was said of Charles Steinmetz, the mechanical genius and friend of Henry Ford, that he could build a motor in his mind, and if it broke down he could fix it in his mind. So when he designed it and actually built it, it ran with precision. One day the assembly line in the Ford plant broke down. None of Ford’s men could fix it, so they called in Steinmetz. He tinkered for a few minutes, threw the switch, and it started running again. A few days later Ford received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000. Ford wrote back, “Charlie, don’t you think your bill is a little high for just a little tinkering!” Steinmetz sent back a revised bill: “Tinkering—\$10. Knowing where to tinker—\$9,990.”

Only Jesus knows where the tinkering should be done in our lives to keep us in perfect running order. Christ always knows which screw to turn, which belt to loosen. So, are you resting in him? Have you entrusted your life to him? Considering the greatness of Christ, nothing else makes any sense at all.

To learn the next thing about who Christ is, I’m going to depart briefly from the order of our reading and look at the first part of verse 14

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”
(John 1:14 NIV)

In 1995 Joan Osborne had a hit with a song entitled “One of Us”. A part of the lyric went: What if God was one of us, Just a slob like one of us, Just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home.

But that’s exactly what God did – he sent his Son, Jesus, to be one of us, to live and dwell among us and experience pain and

suffering just like we do. Now why would God do that? A part of the reason is that God wanted to show that He wants to know us and be known by us. Unless he identified with us, became one of us, we could never come to know him.

In his book *The Jesus I never knew*, Philip Yancey tells a story about looking after fish in a marine aquarium. This is actually quite a difficult thing to manage and he expended a huge amount of energy looking after these fish – so you'd think the fish would be grateful Right? Well actually no! When his shadow fell across their tank they dived for cover. They showed only one emotion fear. Even though he dropped in food three times a day they responded to each visit as if he was going to torture them. To Yancey's fish he was like a god. He was too large for them and his actions were incomprehensible to them. He began to see that in order to relate to them he would have to come down to their level. He would have to become a fish and speak to them in a language they could understand.

That's part of the reason why God, Jesus took on human form. He didn't just remain distant, uninvolved and unapproachable, he has come to us in person. He came down to our level so that we could relate to him. The infinite became an infant for our sake. He became flesh, which means he took on all human weaknesses, frailties and vulnerabilities.

Next we learn that Christ is light – see verses 4 and 5:

“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”
(John 1:4-5 NIV)

Now Christ is light in a physical sense for he appears as such in his glory, but here the emphasis is on his spiritual, life-giving light in a dark world. Verse 5 starts “The light shines in the darkness.” Literally, this means it shines continually in the darkness, meaning that Christ is continually bombarding every corner of our hearts of darkness through the work of his Holy Spirit in nature, conscience, and the Scriptures.

Unfortunately the world does not want to receive the light of Jesus, as verse 5 says “the darkness has not understood it”.

Verses 10 and 11 amplify this:

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” (John 1:10-11 NIV)

Christ was unrecognized and rejected by his own creation and yet he still shines his saving light upon us trying to pry his way into hostile hearts – Amazing love, Amazing grace. Think about just how amazing it really is.

Yet to reject Christ is to turn from God himself and continue in spiritual darkness and death. Only Jesus offers true light and life.

The next two verses 12 and 13 contain one of the most stupendous statements in the whole of the Bible:

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13 NIV)

Those who receive the light become children of God. This is a stupendous truth. Apparently John never got over it because when he was an old man he wrote, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). This ought to be the refrain of our lives if we have believed in him.

Now if we become children of God then we are adopted children. Under Jewish law natural children could be disinherited, but adopted children could never be disinherited. Just think of that, as God’s adopted children our status as God’s heirs will never be taken away from us! Furthermore as John

says in his epistle (1 John 3), as God's children we shall become like his son Jesus. What an amazing prospect.

Furthermore coming into this wonderful inheritance couldn't be simpler. As it says in our verses we just have to receive him and believe in his name

We also learn that Jesus is full of grace and wants to bless us. Look at the second part of verse 14 and verse 16:
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14 NIV)
"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." (John 1:16 NIV)

The grace of Jesus is so full and plentiful that it can never be exhausted. As Martin Luther said:
"Even if the whole world were to draw from this fountain enough grace and truth to transform all people into angels, still it would not lose as much as a drop. This fountain constantly overflows with sheer grace."

Now the last thing I want to do is to encourage you to sin, but even when we sin and no matter how great our sins ample grace is available to us. As Paul said: "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20).

Finally we learn that Jesus makes God known to us and explains to us what God is – see verse 18:
"No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." (John 1:18 NIV)

In conclusion then, this morning we've learned that Jesus was and is eternally God, at one with the Father in the Trinity. We've learned that Jesus created and sustains the universe and everything in it. We've learned that God in Christ took on human form and became just like one of us, to identify with us and make God known to us by coming down to our level.

We've seen that Christ is light and that he shines that light into the darkness of our sinful world. We've learned that Christ gives us the right to be adopted as children of God and to become just like him simply by believing in him and accepting him as our Lord. And finally we learned that Christ blesses us in the fullness of the inexhaustible fountain of His grace.

Let's close with a few words of prayer. Father I pray that all those of you who have not already done so will accept Jesus Christ as savior and Lord and become children of God even now today. Having become children of God may we continue to have our concept of God raised each day! As Aslan said to Lucy, "... every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

As we noted earlier, we do need to respond to God's humbling of himself, his becoming one of us and ultimately dying for our sins and our response needs to be a turning to Christ in faith. I'm sure that most of us have done that, and can be fully assured of our salvation – that we will become children of God and enter into eternal life with You. But, there may be some who haven't done that, or who are not sure that they have really committed themselves, and yet others who would like just to renew their commitment this morning. So for these people I'd just like to lead us in a simple prayer of commitment which you can say quietly with me in your hearts and if you don't want to do that I'd just ask you to remain silent for a moment.

Father we have heard many things today about your son Jesus. Father its good to learn more about you and about him, but we know that all we have to do to receive your free gift to us of salvation – becoming your children and enjoying eternal life with you – is to accept that gift by believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus and acknowledging him as our Lord and this we gladly do right now. In the coming days and months and years we ask you to infuse us again and again with your Holy Spirit so that we may grow in righteousness and become more and more like your Son. In Jesus' name we pray Amen.