

Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God.

Mark 4: ³⁹ He [Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ And they were terrified and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

'Who then is this?'

The question of the identity of Jesus, who He is, was raised throughout Jesus' ministry in first century Palestine by the things HE said and did

Giving sight to the blind, making the deaf hear, raising the dead, stilling storms, casting out demons, feeding thousands – forgiving sins, speaking of God as His Father

And if you had heard Him speak of Himself, witnessed those events, it is a question you would be asking yourself.

Who is this man Jesus, who looks like me, speaks like me, yet says and does things that no other man can?

But the question of Jesus' identity is not just raised by Jesus' ministry.

It is also answered in Jesus' ministry, in His words and actions, especially in his crucifixion, resurrection and pouring out of the Spirit of God

An answer proclaimed in the Christian gospel, God's message for the world.

When the Spirit is poured out, Peter concludes his explanation of what is happening by saying something big about Jesus

Acts 2: ³⁶ "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

And Paul says that making a confession of who Jesus is is central to being saved

Romans 10: ⁹ If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The apostle John tells us he has written his gospel so that his readers would come to a conviction of who Jesus is

John 20: ³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Who is Jesus? According to the apostles He is Lord, Christ or Messiah, Son of God.

What makes us Christians is sharing the apostles' convictions about who Jesus is and as the Nicene Creed we are working our way through starts with Jesus as Son of God, that's where we will focus today

From the beginning believers have been convinced that when they have confessed the Lord Jesus to be Son of God they are confessing something more than that He an exalted man, someone adopted as God's son, more than an ordinary man who for his faithfulness was given the title son of God as a reward, as a kind of earned honour.

For the apostles were taught by Jesus that He was the eternal Son become flesh, God present amongst them as a man, someone who was God and man

Jesus spoke of God as His Father, and of Himself as His Son

When questioned about healing a man on the Sabbath Jesus said

John 5:17 Jesus responded to them, “My Father is still working, and I am working also.”

And the Jews got the point,

¹⁸ *This is why the Jews began trying all the more to kill him: Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.*

Now this is a deadly situation, and Jesus could have said no, no no, you’ve got it all wrong, I never meant what you are thinking I am saying, explain himself better - but He kept Getting himself into more, not out of, trouble

Saying things like

John 5:19 “Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” and the Father shares these things, including having life in Himself, giving life and judging, so that ‘all people may honour the Son even as they honour the Father.’”

That is not an apologetic clarification, but an assertion of His unique relationship and glory as the only Son of the Father.

Later [John 10:30-39] He will say, “*I and the Father are one*”, and again, in the face of their determination to stone Him He does not back down but justifies calling Himself Son of God from the Scriptures and says ‘*Know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father*’

Jesus taught He was the unique Son, and more - that He had been sent into the world

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and I am here. For I didn’t come on my own, but he sent me.

Someone who pre-existed His human birth

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Someone who had the glory of God’s Son in eternity – a glory that was His as Son, not earned by any obedience on earth

John 17:5 Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed.

And Jesus claimed He exercised the authority of God on earth, and not just over nature

Speaking to the paralysed man lowered through the roof by his friends Jesus said

Mark 2:5 Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ *But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts: ⁷ “Why does he speak like this? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*

And the religious authorities rightly said Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

To which Jesus replied Mark 2:8-12

Mark 2:8 Right away Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat, and walk’? ¹⁰ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he told the paralytic— ¹¹ “I tell you: get up, take your mat, and go home.”

¹² *Immediately he got up, took the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”*

That's not backing down from a claim to exercise God's authority on earth as Son of Man, but a demonstration of it.

Jesus taught that He had come from God, was the Son of the Father existing in glory before time began, who did God's work with God's authority and spoke God's Word

And the apostles, taught by the Lord Jesus through His Spirit, taught in turn that Jesus is God and man, the eternal Son of God, who is God, taking on our life in full, becoming flesh

Consider the beginning of John's gospel

John 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

In the beginning the Word is already there, with God, and is God while not all the God there is, and all things come into being through Him

And this Word becomes flesh, becomes one of us while still being the Word, still being, v. 18 the unique, the one and only, Son who can uniquely reveal the Father

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him.

Listen to Paul in Philippians *Philippians 2:*⁵ *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,*

⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.

⁷ Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man,

⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

⁹ For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name

that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—

in heaven and on earth and under the earth—

¹¹ and every tongue will confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ Jesus – exists in the form of God before He became man, where form is not contrasted with substance, implying that He only had the appearance of God. Form has the sense of being God, having the reality of God, and so having equality with God

But in the incarnation He pours Himself out, empties Himself of His dignity, status and privilege, and humbles Himself to take the form of a servant, becoming truly a man – and this not by subtraction or exchange of His being God for being human, not by ceasing to exist as God, but by addition, taking on the likeness of our humanity, genuinely becoming human

The eternal Son of God taking on our flesh so that He could die on a cross

[Col. 1:15-20]

Or the beginning of Hebrews

Hebrews 1: Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ² In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. ⁴ So he became superior to the angels, just as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Again v.2, the Son is heir, legally entitled to all things – whatever God has; the Son is before the universe, and it, everything, is made through Him

And v. 3 as the rays of the sun are in unbroken connection with the sun and the way we truly experience the sun, so the Son is the radiance of God's glory, in unbroken connection with God and the way we know, experience God; He is the exact representation of His nature, bearing in Himself the character of God

Even that basic Confession of Jesus as Lord is more than a confession that He is a rival to Caesar, or that HE is boss, a man with power

It is that in Jesus the LORD, the God of Israel, had come to save

*Romans 10:⁹ If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, **Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,** ¹² since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. ¹³ For **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.***

The Lord we confess v. 9 is the Lord we call upon v13, and that is the LORD, the God of Israel whom Joel says, v. 13, will save all who call on Him from the day of the LORD

Joel 2:³¹ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.

³² Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved, for there will be an escape for those on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, as the LORD promised, among the survivors the LORD calls.

On calling on the Lord, Jesus, we are calling on God, and in confessing Jesus as Lord we are confessing Him as God, the ruler of the universe.

That Jesus is the Son of God who is God become flesh, the Son of God incarnate, is our confession and the basis of our conviction that

In Jesus we hear the word of God, God making Himself known – and we hear the final word, that we cannot know more of God than we can know in Jesus for He is the Son in whom the fulness of God dwells

That HE exercises the authority of God, so our forgiveness is secure with no one able to overturn His verdict. His verdict is the verdict of the last day

That the love we confess to have come to know in saying Jesus has died for our sins to give us life is the love of the eternal God, the love of the Father and the Son

And that we are brought into relationship with the living God by trusting the Lord Jesus where we are His Sons and can truly call Him Father

Now all that may be making your head spin.

Especially if you are just finding out about Jesus – just starting to come to terms with what He says and does

And have Never really thought about it before

Or if you have been content to think of Jesus as just a man, a good example or inspired teacher

If, in a sense, God does not feature much in your consciousness – so you think of Jesus pretty much in terms of this life only

You might have questions about what has been said, or the details of what particular texts say

Or you might have questions about the reliability of the texts on which our knowledge of Jesus rests – can I really believe that what John has written in the gospel was spoken by Jesus

Please come and ask – questions are welcome

Better – we can sit down and read the apostles' witness – in a sense see what they experienced that convinced them

But I am running through these sample passages to make the simple point that this is what Christians have always believed, from the beginning

That long before it was enshrined in the Nicene Creed Christians have believed the Lord Jesus who died and rose is the eternal Son of God, the Son who existed with God before the world began and who is God, come into our world by taking on our embodied human life in the womb of Mary.

But this answer to the who Jesus is question is enshrined in the creed

Right at its centre, just as conviction of who Jesus is is right at the centre of our faith, of our relationship with the living God, and of our assurance of eternal life

The Creed starts its confession of Jesus by saying

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit*

*he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.*

That is quite a mouthful, with a lot of ideas in there, but it is a good thing this confession of Jesus as Son of God is enshrined in the Creed for the temptation is always to think too little of Jesus – not to think about him too little, but to think too little of His greatness

To shrink him down to what we can imagine, to adapt him to the limits of our understanding, to what we or our age might feel comfortable with

In fact it was a challenge to Jesus' greatness that led to the formulation of this creed, so to understand exactly what this confession of Jesus as Son of God means we will ask three questions:

Why did those fourth century bishops think they needed to say this about Jesus? [Historical context]

What are Christians confessing in those lines? [meaning]

Why should we be thankful, even joyful, that we can make this confession – that this is the truth of Jesus? [significance]

Why did they think they needed to say it?

Here we need to do a little bit of history.

This creed is the result of church councils – one in Nicaea 325 AD, the other in Constantinople in 381 AD

And at the beginning of the 300's, in Alexandria in Egypt, there was a bloke called Arius, who was a Presbyter – that is you could think of him as a parish minister in one of the many churches in the city

Now he started teaching the Son, though exalted, was a creature.

He said things like

"The Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning" [Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia]

'That the Son was the perfect creature of God', 'created before times and before ages' cf. New Eusebius p. 346

"He that is without beginning made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced Him as a Son to Himself by adoption."

"To speak in brief, God is ineffable [i.e. unknowable] to His Son. For He is to Himself what He is, that is, unspeakable" 'Being Son, He really existed at the will of the Father.' [Thalia N.E. pp350-351]

According to Arius the Son is an exalted creature, but still a creature deriving His existence from the will of God

'Son' then is a metaphor to indicate His rank amongst other creatures

And Jesus being Son of God, and his authority, depends on the will of the Father and not on His nature as the Son.

And being a creature He cannot really know God in Himself to make Him known to us.

Those of you who are familiar with the teaching of the Jehovah's witnesses will recognise that it is very similar, except they identify the pre-incarnate Jesus with the archangel Gabriel

'Before being born on earth as a man Jesus had been in heaven as a mighty spirit person.' [You can Live forever p. 58]

'He was created before all the other spirit sons of God, and that he is the only one who was directly created by God'

Again, the 'son' is a creature, exalted by his obedience – and really brings salvation by being an example of obedience and moral transformation

Now Arius' teaching had its attractions if you didn't think too hard about it

It Made some texts more understandable – like the Father is greater than I

It was easier to think of a creature being transformed into another creature than God becoming man

As a creature it explained how the Son could suffer and die when God could not suffer and die

And In a culture where Matter was suspected of being evil and the transcendence of God, thought of as an unknowable supreme being behind all things, was a feature of popular philosophy, this kept God uninvolved with creation, with matter, and unknowable

But the teaching of Arius was opposed and declared to be unacceptable right from the start.

The opponents worked through the individual texts Arius used, but they also pointed out its major faults

Firstly it was seen to be a departure from what was always believed about the Son, from the faith once for all delivered to the saints

For the Son from the beginning was confessed as Scripture taught to be on the Creator side of the Creator/creature divide – all things John 1:3, Col. 1:15-17 – and there was only one creator, God

And secondly, The Son was worshipped, and had been from the beginning – and it was wrong to worship a creature. That worship was expressed in Scripture. In fulfilment of the Father's intention that all honour the Son even as they honour the Father we see in Revelation the Lord Jesus, the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, separate from all creation, receiving the praise of heaven and all creation in conjunction with God, with the Father

*Revelation 5:*¹¹ *Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands.* ¹² *They said with a loud voice,*

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing!*

¹³ *I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say,*

*Blessing and honor and glory and power
be to the one seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb, forever and ever!*

¹⁴ *The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

And we know that worship of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, was the practice of Christians from the earliest.

Pliny, who was a Roman Governor of Bithynia around 112 AD, wrote to the emperor Trajan of his investigation into Christian practices saying "*that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god;*" N.E. p. 14

The teaching of Arius made this worship idolatry, the worship of a created thing and not the Creator.

And teaching that the Son was a creature was destructive of Christian salvation

It meant that believers could not know God for sure

There was always a god behind the son of God, whom the son, in Arius' teaching an intermediary who was not God, could not know and so could not make known without distortion. There was no guarantee of either true knowledge of God in the Son's words, or of a final because full revelation of God

And it meant believers could not be saved.

It is only as Jesus is God and man that He can be a true mediator who can bring us into the presence of God, who could reconcile us to God, genuinely in Himself establish fellowship between humans and God. Arius' Jesus was an intermediary, who in the end was neither real man or real God.

And it is only as Jesus is God and man that He can atone for the sins of the whole world. The death of one who is a creature is neither effective nor moral.

It is not effective for creatures die for their own sins, and the death of a creature, however perfect, cannot have an infinite and eternal effect as a substitutionary sacrifice, for the life of the creature and its value is finite.

Neither is it moral, for God does not give Himself in the Son to die, but a third person. The cost of forgiving is borne by the creature, not God, and the creature, not being God, cannot forgive sins against God.

Making the Lord Jesus to be son in name only, teaching that He is an exalted creature, is a departure from the faith delivered to us by the apostles and destructive of Christian worship, knowledge of God, and salvation.

You may think that opposing this error would be straightforward, but peoples' views shifted and changed as they kept thinking about it, finding the right language to think and speak about God proved challenging, and politics became involved. The emperors who succeeded Constantine favoured the views of Arius [Arianism].

It was for these reasons that after years of debate and many meetings the bishops, both to exclude error and to teach the truth, settled on these words to confess our faith in *one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,*

What are they saying with these extra phrases?

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.*

Taken as a whole they are insisting that the Lord Jesus is – the only Son of God, uniquely the Son [John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18] because of His unique person, sent into the world to save, and that the Son who takes on our flesh is really and truly God, Son by nature, sharing with the Father the creation of the world, and that whatever it is to be God the Son is.

Some particular phrases

Eternally Begotten of the Father

This is a phrase descriptive of the Son's unique relationship with the Father.

It is meant to deny, not suggest, that the Son had a beginning or an origin in the Father, either in or outside time, and is therefore less of a god than the Father.

It is not talking about a birth process, and so was never meant to suggest any kind of physical relationship between God and Mary, as it appears Mohammed misunderstood Christians to believe [Quran 5:115]

It is used to assert that the Son is to be distinguished from all created being – who are all made – because of this unique relationship which is eternal and never changing, where the Son is always the Son of the Father and the Father always the Father of the Son

But it does suggest a legal relationship where the Son is heir of the Father, that all that is the Father's also rightly belongs to the Son, and a sharing in nature – that all the Father is the Son is, except the Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son,

God from God, light from light, true God from true God

Not some secondary or lesser God or separate God

Begotten not made

Emphatic - Begotten rules out the Son being a creature,

A different relationship with the Father than all made things and persons, from all creatures

Of one being with the Father.

The Son, as the Spirit, share with the Father the being of God.

Here you have the heart of our trinitarian confession, that the living God is

Three persons, one substance

So divinity of the Son and Spirit is not less than the Father

Not just like the Father in being, but of one being

Distinct, not separate

Through whom all things were made – note the full stop in the previous phrase

Shares with the Father in creation, and all things are made for Him and will find their fulfilment in His exaltation

Taken together it is an emphatic confession that the Son is God, and the one God we know and who saves us is Father, Son and Spirit

Why should we be thankful this is the truth of Jesus?

And we should be thankful for and rejoice in this confession as believers

For it says - God saves. The Christian faith is not speculation about God, not made up, but a response to the initiative of the living God who Himself has first purposed and then come to save us, to rescue us from death and bondage and judgement

And Christian faith is faith in the One and only God – the God who has made Himself known to us in His Son. When we are trusting Jesus' words we are not trusting the words of some intermediary who is not God, but God Himself speaking to us, the Son making the Father known, the Son promising what only God can do – reconcile us to Himself and raise us from the dead.

And confessing that the Son who became flesh is God is saying for all the world to hear that at the heart of our faith is a glorious love – the love of God, Father and Son, for the world, bound up with the eternal and immutable love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father.

A love which is self giving, that puts the interests of others before its own

This is what the gospel proclaims

John 3:16 For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

And it is only true, and we can only sense its immensity, where we confess the Son to be the eternal word who is God become flesh

Here we get a measure of the self giving of God – to give up, not a creature, but His own beloved Son, who is always the Son, loved from eternity – for those who have failed in love, of God and of those made in His image, over and over again

And here we get a measure of the self humbling of the Son, equal to God, who voluntarily leaves the glory He had with the Father before the world was made

It is in this confession that we have not just the heart of Christian faith, but of Christian life

This confession tells us that being a Christian, repenting and believing in the Lord Jesus

Means those who humble themselves to tremble at God's word have a Sure knowledge of the almighty, living, God

A Secure salvation brought by the One Mediator who is God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus, whose death as the Son of God is sufficient to cover over all our sins – forever, and whose word is the word of God, of the judge on the last day and will never be reversed

It means we know a Gracious God as our Father, who has loved us now and forever with a great love

And we have a Glorious present as His children, welcomed into the relationship of the Father and the Son, and an even more glorious future as those who will see His face, transformed to be like the eternal Son who abides in the presence of His Father [John 17:24-26; Rev. 22:1-5]

This is a confession worth making and understanding.

The world thinks you park your brain at the door when you come to church, but to meet God in His word is to be challenged not just in your behaviour or your emotions – but in your thinking. It is to be willing to allow God through His Spirit to take you beyond the limits of what you experience, beyond what you can imagine, to know Him in His word.

The Creator God for whom the limitations of our body, of our speech, are no limitations to Him making Himself known, to achieving His saving purpose

The One God who in the person of the Son can, for our sake, become man and suffer and die.

Let the confession of the Creed stop you from shrinking the Lord Jesus, to keep on recognising and relying on His greatness so that we give Him the trust and worship He deserves

We believe

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.*

Amen, and of that incarnation from the Virgin Mary we will hear more next week.