

St. Edward the Confessor
RCIA Class on God, The Son – Nov. 20, 2011

C. Schiff

Mark 8:27-30 Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Narrative

"[W]ho do you say I am?" This question, posed by Jesus to the apostles during his ministry, seems deceptively simple. After all, we've heard this passage from Mark many times in the gospel reading. From an early age, we've been taught how to answer and we can deliver on cue when asked. The answer is so common that even people who are not Christian can give it. Unfortunately, for many of us, we give this answer more by reflex than by reflecting on what it means (reflexively vs. reflectively). But what does it really mean to say "You are the Messiah" or, as it is also rendered "You are the Son of God"?

Usually scholars and theologians, trying to help us understand how enormous the concept of the "Son of God" is, will tell us to imagine that we ourselves are one of the apostles. They will ask us to strip ourselves of two millennia of cultural thought, analysis, and commentary, and picture the world as a Hebrew did, living under Augustus. They then tell us that if we are capable of transporting our minds in this way, then we will be in position to better understand how radical an idea it is to call Jesus the Christ. I am not sure that any of us can really do that. I know I can't.

Instead, I ask you to consider the following situation. Suppose that I brought someone new to RCIA. Imagine that I walk in with this person, let's call him Fred, and we both sit down. You look at him and you find him to be an ordinary person – he looks like the rest of us, is dressed like us, and is not noticeably special. I speak up and say "Let me introduce you to Fred. He is Comedy". Note that I didn't say that he knows Comedy or that he likes Comedy, but rather that he *is* Comedy. You may chuckle and think that I am playing a trick or role your eyes and mutter that I am being eccentric. But suppose, I really try to convince you that Fred is in fact Comedy. Most of you, I am sure would be inclined to think I am crazy. And why not, what I am declaring is radical – that somehow, Fred is the joining of something abstract and universal with the human. Perhaps, some of you will believe. In either case, I am willing to bet that you will have made a choice and picked a position. At question here is something too large to just ignore. This situation has compelled you to make a choice.

In the case of Jesus, the implications are far greater than the embodiment of an abstract idea in human form. For Jesus to be the Son of God means that the architect of everything that exists, from the smallest fleck of matter to the grandest celestial design

has come personally to us as a human being. Walking on Earth is a Man whose spiritual nature is one with God the Father, who continuously wills creation into existence. Joining us on our daily activities is a Man united by love with God the Spirit, who breathes life into the world. Sitting at dinner with us, is a Man who is one third of the Holy Trinity and yet completely inseparable from it. Father Barron, in his video series Catholicism, states that Jesus Christ, in a similar way, also compels us to make a choice. Why? Because the implications associated with Jesus being the Son of God are so profound and staggering, that either one believes he is who he claims to be or one must believe him to be a dangerously insane man. There is no middle ground.

Bible

- John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word as with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- John 3:16 God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Creed

Nicene Creed: 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, one in being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. 1

For us men and our salvation He came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. 2

For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures: 3

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. 4

Apostles Creed: ...in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord 1

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit
Born of the Virgin Mary 2

Suffered under Pontius Pilate
Was crucified, died and was buried. 3

On the third day, he rose again

He ascended into Heaven
and is seated at the right hand
of God, the Father Almighty.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

4

Introduction

We understand the salvation provide by God through Jesus Christ (see the excerpts from the Creeds above) as being built on 4 basic ideas: 1) that Jesus is God, 2) that Jesus came into the world as man (but not losing an attribute of being God), 3) that by his life, death, and resurrection he shows us our full human dignity as creatures made in the likeness of God and how much God loves us, and 4) that after his resurrection he ascended into heaven.

Chapters 7 of [USCC & SG] deal with God sending his Son into the world (points 1 & 2) and Chapters 8 deals with the salvation achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ (point 3 & 4).

The core belief in God the Son as “True God” and “True Man” (points 1 & 2) is the concept of the Incarnation – that the Son of God came into the world as man. The Incarnation is presented in a profound sense in the Gospel of John (John 1:1-5) and is often summarized as the “Word made flesh.” The Incarnation is fulfillment of the promise of salvation made throughout the Old Testament – from Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Moses, and David, to Isaiah, and the all of the prophets [SG].

The core belief in the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ through his suffering and subsequent glorification (points 3 & 4) is the known as the Paschal Mystery – that by his cross and resurrection, Jesus overcame sin and death and brings new life and grace in the Holy Spirit to the world.

Essentials (adapted from [SG] and [CCC])

The catechesis comes from Section 2, Articles 2-7 of the CCC and covers God the Son and the salvation he achieved for man.

- The Incarnation is the belief in the mystery by which the Son of God (the Word) assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation [CCC 423, 461-463]
- Two solemn moment affirm that Jesus is the beloved Son of God – Baptism and the Transfiguration of Christ [CCC 444, 554, 556]
- Jesus became truly man (human nature [CCC 470] - finite body [CCC 476] & rational human soul [CCC 471] were assumed) while remaining truly God [CCC480]. He is not a confused mixture of the divine and the human [CCC 464] nor is he God ‘pretending to be man’ or other such ideas [CCC 465-469].

- The Word became flesh to make us “partakers of the divine nature” [CCC 460]
- Jesus is the one mediator between and God [CCC 464-469]
- Jesus gave us our model of love, forgiveness, and holiness [CCC 588-589]. His life is a template for us to follow in our own lives. “Love one another as I have loved you [John 15:12].
- Jesus has many other titles or names, including the Christ or the messiah (meaning the One Anointed and chosen by God) [CCC 436], the Son of God (reflecting his divine nature as a member of the Trinity), Lord (reflecting his divine power over the world), and the Son of Man.
- Jesus fulfilled the messianic hope of Israel in his threefold office of priest, prophet, and king [CCC 436]
- The Church believes that the purpose of human history is to found in Jesus Christ [CCC 450]
- The chief mysteries of Jesus are his birth and the Paschal Mystery of his Resurrection and Ascension [CCC 557, CCC Article 4]
- The Paschal Mystery (Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection) are at the center of the Good News of the Gospel [CCC 571]
- God’s saving plan was accomplished once and for all in the death of Jesus [CCC 599, 601, 613-614, 624]
- The Paschal sacrifice, which is unique and which completes and surpasses all other sacrifices, overcame our disobedience to God and is the mean of our reconciliation with God [CCC 613-614] making us adopted children of God [CCC 422]
- The Paschal Mystery is a manifestation of God’s love for Man [CCC 599-618]
- We participate in the Paschal mystery through the sacraments, especially in the Baptism [CCC 628] and the Eucharist
- Christ’s resurrection is a historically attested to event [CCC 638-658] and glorifies God [CCC 434]
- Christ ascended into heaven and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead [CCC 659-682]

Commentary

Some commentary on the points above:

1. Frank Sheed, in his book ‘Theology for beginners’ (Chapter 5), walks the reader through the argument that:
 - Since the Father’s nature is infinite the Son’s must be as well
 - Saint John gives us a term for the relationship between the Father and Son –The Son is the Word of God
 - Since God is pure spirit any word he utters must be akin to a thought or idea.
 - The only idea of God’s that could possibly be God is God’s idea of himself
2. If you are like me you might tend to think that John 15:13 ‘No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.’ only refers to dying. But

recently, events (providence) have pointed to other forms of ‘laying down one’s life’ including the kind of self-sacrifice that Mother Teresa had in dedicating her life to the poor.

3. Jesus’ temptation and death were not ‘fakes’ or ‘shows’ – they were real tests or a real human being, who unlike Adam, remained steadfast and faithful to God.

Q&A

79. What is the Good News for humanity?
80. How is the Good News spread?
81. What is the meaning of the name “Jesus”?
82. Why is Jesus called “Christ”?
83. In what sense is Jesus the Only Begotten Son of God?
84. What is the meaning of the title “Lord”?
85. Why did the Son of God become man?
86. What does the word “Incarnation” mean?
87. In what way is Jesus Christ true god and true man?
88. What does the Council of Chalcedon (in the year 451) teach in this regard?
89. How does the Church set forth the mystery of the Incarnation?
90. Did the incarnate Son of God have a soul with human knowledge?
91. How did the two wills of the incarnate Word cooperate?
92. Did Christ have a true human body?
93. What does the heart of Jesus exemplify?
94. What is the meaning of the expression “conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit...”?
95. “...Born of the Virgin Mary”: Why was Mary truly the Mother of God?
96. What does the “Immaculate Conception” mean?
97. How does Mary cooperate in the divine plan of salvation?
98. What does the virginal conception of Jesus mean?
99. In what sense is Mary “ever Virgin”?
100. In what way is the spiritual motherhood of Mary universal?
101. In what sense is the life of Christ a Mystery?
102. How did God prepare the world for the mystery of Christ?
103. What does the Gospel teach about the mysteries of the birth and infancy of Jesus?
104. What does the hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth teach us?
105. Why did Jesus receive from John the “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3)?
106. What do we learn from the temptations of Jesus in the desert?
107. Who is invited to come into the Kingdom of God proclaimed and brought about by Jesus?
108. Why did Jesus manifest the Kingdom by means of signs and miracles?
109. In the Kingdom, what authority did Jesus bestow upon his Apostles?
110. What is the meaning of the Transfiguration?
111. How did the messianic entrance into Jerusalem come about?
112. What is the importance of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus?

113. What were the accusations by which Jesus was condemned to death?
114. How did Jesus conduct himself in regard to the Law of Israel?
115. What was the attitude of Jesus toward the temple in Jerusalem?
116. Did Jesus contradict Israel's faith in the one God and Savior?
117. Who is responsible for the death of Jesus?
118. Why was the death of Jesus part of God's plan?
119. In what way did Christ offer himself to the Father?
120. How is Jesus' offering expressed at the Last Supper?
121. What happened in the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane?
122. What are the results of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross?
123. Why does Jesus call upon his disciples to take up their cross?
124. In what condition was the body of Christ while it lay in the tomb?
125. What is the "hell" into which Jesus descended?
126. What place does the Resurrection of Christ occupy in our faith?
127. What are the signs that bear witness to the Resurrection of Jesus?
128. Why is the Resurrection at the same time a transcendent occurrence?
129. What is the condition of the risen body of Jesus?
130. How is the Resurrection the work of the Most Holy Trinity?
131. What is the saving meaning of the Resurrection?
132. What does the Ascension mean?
133. How does the Lord Jesus now reign?
134. How will the coming of the Lord in glory happen?
135. How will Christ judge the living and the dead?

References

- [CCC] – Catechism of the Catholic Church
- [Con] - Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church
- [USCC] – United States Catholic Catechism for Adults
- [SG] - Study Guide for the USCC