

## **The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 101**

St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church, Wilmington, DE

### **Topic 8: The Messiah: The Person and Work of Christ**

(resource book: *The Life*, Chapter 3)

Jesus once asked His Disciples: “**Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?**” (Matt. 1:13-19) This question is still of primary importance for every person on earth, including you and me. Every man must answer this question. How one answers this question will impact the *eternal destiny of one’s soul*.

Most people recognize that Jesus was a great man—a great **spiritual leader**. Jews, Buddhists, and even atheists may admire Jesus as an **ethical teacher**. Moslems even elevate Jesus to the rank of a **prophet**, “second” to Mohammed.

But was Jesus simply a great religious leader, one of the world’s foremost leaders in ethics? Was He just another holy man? Just another prophet? Or is He **much more**?

Jesus never wrote a book as many religious leaders have written (although His followers wrote their memories of His works and His sayings); He did not start a new philosophy like Plato or Aristotle. He did not open a great university.

**“The primary importance of Jesus Christ lies in Who He is and what He did.”** (*Life*, p. 33)

The Apostle Peter answered Christ’s question about **Who He was**:  
“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus **openly claimed that He was the Son of God**. He did not teach that He was merely a teacher, a rabbi, an ethicist, or a prophet. He went **much farther**:

1) Jesus taught that the **God of the Jews was His Father**.

John 8:54 “It is **My Father** who honors Me, of whom you say that **He is your God**.”

2) Jesus taught that **He interpenetrated the Father**, and vice-verse:

John 14:9-10 “He who has **seen Me** has **seen the Father**...Do you not believe that **I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?**”

3) Jesus taught that **He was one with God the Father** (in that He **shares** His Father’s **one Divine Nature**).

John 10:30 “I and My Father are **one**.”

4) Jesus taught that He was **Divine**; that He was the God of Abraham and Moses.

John 8:58 “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.**”

Many people got the point of Jesus’s message, and **rejected** it. His teachings about Himself—His claims of Divinity—they **refused** to believe. At one point some picked up stones to throw at Jesus:

John 5:18 “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that **God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.**”

John 10:33 “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because **You, being a Man, make Yourself God.**”

**However, some Jews did believe:**

St. Peter said: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

St. John wrote: “In the beginning was the Word, and the **Word was with God**, and the **Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1-3)

But Jesus did not just teach. He also worked. ***His miracles backed up His claims to Divinity.*** He consistently kept doing things that **only** the Creator God could do: like opening the eyes of a man born blind, or, raising a man who had been dead for four days.

Jesus asked His listeners to believe His radical claim to Divinity, either because of His **words**, or, because of His **works**.

“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the **sake of the works** themselves.” (John 14:11)

“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, **believe the works**, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.” (John 10:37-38)

## Jesus, one Son—of Mary and of God:

As the Son of Mary, Jesus was **the long-awaited Messiah** (“the Anointed” of God, in Greek, “The Christ”). He was that special long-awaited Saviour of humanity.

God saw humanity fall. He saw it dissolving back into the ground and into the nothingness from which He had made man.

“For Thou dost not wish, O Master, that the work of Thy hands should perish, neither dost Thou take pleasure in the destruction of men, but Thou desirest that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth.” (A prayer of St. Basil the Great, who is quoting 1 Timothy 2:4)

God announced a future victory for mankind over the devil. **The “protoevangelion”:** The first proclamation of the Gospel: In the Garden of Eden, God spoke of the day in the future when a Descendant of Eve would crush the Devil. This proclamation of victory of a man over the Devil was spoken by God to the Devil, the Serpent.

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your descendants and her Descendant. **He will crush your head, and you will bruise His heel.**”

God looked forward to the day when He, in the flesh, as a man—Jesus Christ—would trample on the power of the devil (sin, the passions, death). **This He did.** We sing: “Christ is Risen from the Dead, trampling down death by death!”

On the cross, God in His humanity was “**bruised**”, but the Devil’s head and powers were “**crushed**”.

In the Garden of Eden man had been conquered by the Devil. The Fall had left humanity very weak and very broken. On our own, we could not fix ourselves up, nor could we restore communion with God, nor could we conquer the Devil or sin or the passions, nor could we break out of Hades, nor could we raise ourselves from the dead.

However, since mankind had been conquered by the devil, who had tempted Adam to use his free will to become his slave, therefore humanity needed a man—a New Adam—who (using his free will) could conquer that same Devil, defeat Death, not succumb to the sinful passions, who would have a restored Image of God, and who could attain to the Likeness of God (which was our original purpose in the first place.)

Adam and Eve had obeyed the Devil, becoming his slaves—the slaves of sin. We needed someone who would NOT obey the Devil. This Someone would save us from the Devil.

The Lord knew that **none** of us could do such a thing by ourselves. “Without Me,” said Christ, “you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) **So God came down to us, as a human, to do for us what we could not do by ourselves. God came as a human (without setting**

**aside His Divinity) to do battle with the Devil, to defeat him and sin and death...and to raise us all from the dead.**

To prepare Himself a human body, the Lord needed a human family.

To have a family into which He could be born, the Lord needed a nation.

To prepare that nation, the Lord selected Abraham and gave him promises.

God gave **special promises** to Abraham and to his descendants, the Hebrews, that they would become a nation from which would arise the **Messiah**, the Saviour of the Jewish people. This Saviour would be the light of the gentiles, the Saviour of the whole world.

To teach His chosen nation, God gave the Ten Commandments and the Law.

To guide His chosen nation, God selected men and women known as prophets and prophetesses who spoke His word to the Jews.

But finally, at the right time, God sent His own Son to speak to His people, as one of them, face to face.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds.”  
(Hebrews 1:1-2)

### **The eternal Son of God.**

Jesus Christ, as the **Logos** (“the Word”), is the eternal Son of God. There was never a time when He did not exist. God exists outside of time, in eternity, before all creation. (Time itself is an aspect of creation.) The Logos, as the Eternal Only-Begotten Son of the Eternal Father, exists outside of time, in eternity, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

**God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son** into the world that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

The Father sent the Son into the world in order to bring the world back into communion with Himself and to **destroy** the works of the Devil.

“God was in Christ **reconciling** the world unto Himself.” (2 Corinth. 5:18)

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might **destroy** the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8)

### **The Son of God becomes the Son of Mary.**

When the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35), it was one Divine Person, the Son of God, the Logos, Who was born of her. One Person (the Logos) entered her womb to become Incarnate on the Feast of Annunciation, and it was that SAME One Person (the Logos) Who was born NINE MONTHS later at Christmas. The Logos entered her womb—and later—the Logos came forth from her womb. To His Divinity, He added her humanity.

In His Incarnation He remains One Divine Person (one “hypostasis”) with two natures, fully Divine and fully human. Each nature has its own proper energy and will.

“Jesus Christ is both God and man, uniting in Himself both humanity and divinity so that we too might share in the divine life of God.” (*The Life*, p.35)

### **Four truths about the fact that God became man.**

- 1) Since “Jesus Christ is the Son of God made man, He is able to reveal God in a way that no prophet or holy man ever could.” (*The Life*, p. 35) We now get to talk to God, face to face.

John 14:9, 10 “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...Do you not believe that **I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?**”

- 2) “Because Christ is the eternal Image of the Father’s Person (cf. Col. 1:15 and Heb. 1:3), He alone is able to renew the image of God in man.” (*The Life*, p. 37)

The spoiled portrait of humanity is repainted; the subject of the original painting—the Logos, the Image of the Father, in Whose Image humanity was created—comes to sit once again so that His image can be re-drawn.

- 3) “Because the Son of God has assumed our human nature, He has united it with His divine nature. This means that we, who are creatures, are able to share in the life and glory of God Himself.” (*The Life*, p.38)

We are able to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) in and through Christ.

- 4) “Because Jesus Christ led a sinless life in full communion with God, He has opened the way for us to live life as it was meant to be.” (*The Life*, p.38)

“As many as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:27)

“Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24)