

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 101

St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Topic 9: The Incarnation: “Who do you say that I AM?”

(resource: *The Faith*, Chapter 6.)

“Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” (Matthew 16:13)

Jesus Christ is the only eternal Son and Word of the only eternal living God Who, without suffering any change to His divinity, became man and restored humanity to its original glory.

The “Liar/Lunatic/Lord” question

The Ultimate Question For Each Person:

Who is Jesus to you?

This is the most important question that we will ever be asked, for the answer will determine our eternal destiny. What we believe about Jesus Christ determines how we will relate or fail to relate to Him.

Divine or not Divine: What is HE to you? If He is Divine, and you are found on Judgment Day to not be His friend, you lose big time. If Divine, and you are found on Judgment Day to be in love with Him, you win big time.

God’s immediate presence will be to those who love Him the very bliss of heaven, and to those who hate Him the very fire of hell. “The fire of hell,” said one of the Desert Fathers, “is the love of God.”

Those who prefer their self-contained individuality, exulting in their slavery to the passions, will rise from the grave only to be confronted by the One Who is the eternal antithesis of their spiritual disposition. Those for whom “hell is other people” (the philosopher Sartre) will stand before the Eternal Other. His love will condemn their hatred. His selflessness will condemn their self-centeredness. His gift of eternal life will be their curse of eternal death, and they will take their place with their spiritual kindred, Satan and his angels.

If Jesus is Who He claimed to be, our relationship to Him is of decisive importance. Liar, Lunatic or Lord.

The Answer:

“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Said by Simon-Peter

- the long-expected Messiah of Israel
- the hope of all the world.
- Jesus is eternal God, the Son of the Father (the only eternal God), Creator of the Universe

The fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God means:

- He is One of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Who are One in Essence and Undivided),
- The only-begotten eternal Son of the only eternal God (His Father)

He took upon Himself our human nature in its entirety and became man:

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14)

Jesus Christ is both God and man.

The Church’s teaching about this is called the *doctrine of the Incarnation* (meaning “enfleshment”) and may be summarized in this way:

(1) Jesus Christ is One of the Holy Trinity; the eternal Son of the eternal Father. (He – the Son – always and eternally has existed as the Eternal Second Person of the Eternal Triune God)

- He and the Father share One Divine Essence
- He did not cease being God, when He became man.
- He sums up within Himself the whole of the Godhead (the Divine Nature).
- “For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2:9)
- All God’s angels worship the Son, whose throne is forever. (Hebrew 1:6-9)

- (2) Christ became a *real man*, having a human body and rational soul.
No aspect of humanity was missing; only He had no sin.
- “Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17; see also Phil 2:5-8)
- (3) In becoming man, Christ assumed human nature in *its entirety*.
- He is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit according to His Divinity, and one with each of us according to His humanity. He is united essentially to every man, according to His humanity. (Hebrews 2:14,17 – He took on flesh and blood in every way like us).
 - (Almost all heresies make their mistake by denying Christ either a complete humanity, or a complete divinity.)
- (4) The Divine and human natures in Christ remain *distinct*.
- His Divinity did not swallow up His humanity, but rather perfected it and made it what it was originally intended to be. He did not become a strange new “third” type of thing.
 - Not “monophysite” (the “one nature” heresy). Not “miaphysite” either (these are the contemporary moderate monophysites).
 - The Divine and human natures in Christ exist “without mixture or confusion.” (Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, 451AD)
 - That which is Divine remains Divine, and that which is human remains human; but the human now exists in a Divine way, because it is united with the Divine. (i.e. After the Resurrection, Christ’s glorified human body could eat fish but also enter through closed doors.)

(5) Jesus Christ is *one Person*, not two.

- His two natures remain distinct and are *united*. “Without separation or division.” (Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, 451AD)
- The principle of their union (what unites the Divine and human natures) is the one Person (“hypostasis”) of the Son of God. This is called the “Hypostatic Union.”
- In His Person, the Son and Word of God took upon Himself our entire human nature and made it His own.
- The Word did not “adopt” or attach Himself to an already existing man named Jesus. (That would be the heresy of “adoptionism”).
- There are not in Christ Jesus two separate persons. You cannot separate the Christ of faith from the Christ of history. Not two people, or two persons, living in one body. (That would be the heresy of “Nestorianism”). (Jesus is not possessed by the Logos.)
- Jesus Christ, as God Incarnate in human flesh, has two wills—one Divine and one human. To say otherwise (to say that He has “one will” or has a forced fusion of two-wills-into-one-will) makes the Garden of Gethsemane to be utterly meaningless, and destroys the Orthodox understanding of the New Adam Who undoes the disobedience of the first Adam by always keeping His human will voluntarily obedient to the one Divine will. (No one-will or fused-will miaphysitism allowed here.) “Thy will be done” requires two wills—His human and His Divine—freely cooperating for our salvation.

We need a true and living Faith and Trust in Jesus Christ to be saved.

The Apostle Peter did not come to the knowledge of Who Christ is all by *himself*, but by *revelation* from God the Father. The true knowledge of Christ comes only by revelation of God.

In turn, Christ reveals the eternal Father to man, and the Father confirms that Christ is indeed His eternal Son.

At both the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Christ, a voice from heaven proclaimed, “This is My beloved Son.” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Thus, God the Father Himself witnesses to the Divinity of Christ.

No man can genuinely call Jesus “Lord” except by the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:3)

Peter’s confession of the fact *that Jesus is the Christ*, the Son of the Living God, is the rock and establishment of the Church. (Not the person of Peter; but the faith and confession of Peter.) This was the majority opinion of the early Church Fathers on this verse.

Faith in Christ is *not an abstract philosophical proposition* but a *relationship* with Him, and this relationship is the life of the Church.

It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, One of the Holy Trinity made flesh. There is a difference between *belief that* versus *belief in*. Demons have a knowledge of God, yet they do not lovingly trust and obey that God.

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” (James 2:19)

The true Orthodox confession of the Doctrine of Christ must come from the innermost heart; it must come out of a living relationship with Him. We must pass beyond knowledge about Christ to an intimate, personal knowledge of Christ. A true and living **personal relationship with Him!**

Icons are the revelation of the Incarnate God.

Icons are the visual equivalents of the Divine Scriptures. Icons are not simply pictures, but are vehicles of revelation, sacraments of God’s presence. Just as we encounter Christ in the Scriptures, so we also encounter Christ and His Saints in the holy icons. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (AD 787) decreed that the Church must proclaim Her Faith in the Incarnate Lord “in words and in images.” Thereby, the Church safeguards Herself from those who would deny that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. We do not worship wood and ink, nor do we pray to wood and paint. We *venerate* the images of the saints and speak to the actual saints, as we stand before their holy icons.