

Class 3

Who is Jesus?

It was this question that Jesus Himself asked His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (Luke 9:18-20). He then asks the disciples and Peter answers, “The Messiah of God” Since Jesus is without doubt the most central figure in Christianity, discerning His identity is of paramount importance. The most basic answer to this question is that *Jesus is fully God and fully man in one person.*

In the early centuries of the Church this was discussed and debated and out of which came heresies and what we now call orthodoxy encapsulated in our Creeds.

“We all teach harmoniously [that he is] the same perfect in godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; homoousios (same substance) with the Father in godhead, and the same homoousios with us in manhood ... acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” (The Council of Chalcedon 451)

Let’s explore each of these three aspects in sequence.

What we know about Jesus.

He existed – as well as the Gospel accounts pinpointing his birth, both Jewish (Josephus) and Roman (Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius) record his existence.

The Bible accounts state:

He was a Jew –

He was sent by God to save – the name Jesus (Hebrew Joshua/Yeshua) means ‘God saves.’

He was born to a virgin called Mary by the Holy Spirit

He states he was the Messiah/ ‘annointed One, Son of God/ and human – Son of Man – (means human).

3) Who does the Bible say Jesus is?

The Bible implies that Jesus is God (explicitly?). John 1 is the classic statement to this effect. There Jesus is called “the Word” who was with God in the beginning, and who Himself is “God”

(John 1:1). Paul expresses the same point in Philippians 2:6, where he says that Jesus was “in the form of God” and possessed “equality with God” before coming to earth as a human and in Colossians 1, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...” and “For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether in earth or in Heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

Secondly, the Bible unequivocally asserts that Jesus is truly man. Numerous passages in the Gospels present Jesus doing the things that are suitable for a man to do rather than for God to do. For example, Jesus was thirsty (John 4:7), His spirit was troubled (John 13:21), He wept (John 11:35), and, most importantly, He died on the cross as a common criminal. Each of these activities are something that God in Himself would not be capable of because He does not have a body and does not experience need or lack like human beings do.

The Scriptures appear to state therefore that Jesus is God and man *at the same time* and *in a single person*. He is not divided into two separate individuals but is now and always will be both God and man. And the wonderful truth is that He is both of these things *for us*, as the perfect mediator between God and humanity.

In the Old Testament, Jesus is prophesied, ‘patterned and promised’ and some would say present (Daniel’s mysterious fourth person in the fire Dan. 3:25).

The Scriptures are said to be fulfilled in Him; the promised Messiah the Son of Man, (Daniel) the ‘suffering servant’ (Isaiah)

4) Who does Jesus say he is?

God?

Jesus is not recorded as explicitly saying, “I am God” but, take for example the words of Jesus in [John 10:30](#), “I and the Father are one.” We need only to look at the Jews’ reaction to His statement to know He was claiming to be God. They tried to stone Him for this very reason: “You, a mere man, *claim to be God*” ([John 10:33](#), emphasis added). The Jews understood exactly what Jesus was claiming deity. When Jesus declared, “I and the Father are one,” He was saying that He and the Father are of one nature and essence. [John 8:58](#) is another example. Jesus declared, “I tell you

the truth ... before Abraham was born, I am!" This is a reference back to [Exodus 3:14](#) when God revealed Himself as the "I AM." The Jews who heard this statement responded by taking up stones to kill Him for blasphemy, as the Mosaic Law commanded ([Leviticus 24:16](#)).

Jesus was especially self-revealing in his "I Am" statements found in the gospels (specifically in the Gospel of John). These descriptive statements explain the character and nature of God through significant phrases that all begin with "I Am." These are not Jesus' *only* statements about himself, but they stand out in a unique way.

The gospels are not the first time that one of these "I Am" statements were used in Scripture. The first time it appears is early on in the Old Testament. In [Exodus 3:14](#), God explained to Moses that His name should be called "I Am who I Am" (or "ego eimi" in the Greek), which means "I exist" or "I be."

'Before Abraham was, I am'. ([John 8: 48 - 59](#)) Jesus is intentional with his words. He is deliberately invoking the name of God and applying it to himself. In calling himself "I Am" Jesus is radically proclaiming his divine identity.

The "I Am" Statements of Jesus in Johns Gospel:

- I am the bread of life ([John 6:35](#)): Jesus offers us nourishment, strength, and spiritual satisfaction.
 - am the light of the world ([John 8:12](#)): Jesus illuminates what is true about this world, and about ourselves.
 - I am the gate for the sheep ([John 10:7](#)): Jesus provides a way to know God fully, and deeply.
 - I am the resurrection and the life ([John 11:25](#)): Jesus bestows the free gift of eternal life to all who come to him in faith.
 - I am the good shepherd ([John 10:11](#)): Jesus watches over us, guides us, and protects us.
 - I am the way, truth, and the life ([John 14:6](#)): Jesus reveals the fullness of God's identity, truth, and activity.
 - I am the true vine ([John 15:1](#)): Jesus gives us his life as a source of refreshment and vitality. Jesus lives in us and flows through us.
- When Jesus says that he is the "I AM", he establishes himself as the touchpoint for all the blessings of God. We can trust the

promises that Jesus brings into our lives. His blessings are not simply for show; Jesus does not simply say things we want to hear. Jesus has the power, the capacity, and the will to transform our lives, and offer us salvation. We can be confident in this because Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I AM."

Man

Jesus' favourite designation, in referring to Himself, was the "Son of Man." The Gospels record some seventy-eight times that Jesus used this title for Himself. For example, when He asked His disciples the question about His identity, He said,

Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? (Matthew 16:13).

Though the Bible does not define its exact meaning, the title "Son of Man" probably refers to the fact that Jesus was perfect humanity. He, as God, came down and lived among us as the perfect human being. By doing this, He fulfilled the Law of Moses and did what no other human being was able to do. By using this title, He is identifying with the people He had come to save. The Son of Man is a title that was used exclusively by Jesus - His disciples never addressed Him as such. Jesus used it to emphasize His humanity. The title goes back to the Book of Daniel where the Son of Man would inherit the everlasting kingdom of God. It is a designation of the Messiah. At His trial Jesus acknowledged that He indeed was the Son of Man - the one who would bring in God's everlasting kingdom. When the religious leaders heard this, they accused Him of blasphemy - making Himself equal with God. The purpose of the title seems to be Jesus' own emphasis on His humanity.

The language Jesus uses is always in a 'relational' sense with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He speak in terms of what we describe as The Trinity emphasizing his humanity and His unique relationship with God the Father, who He refers to literally as 'Daddy'. ('Abba').

The 'historical' Jesus and the 'Cosmic Christ'.

John 3:16 - Not just a 'rescue mission'?

Our accepted knowledge of Jesus only covers his birth and the last three years of His life.

The tragic split of the Western and Eastern church in the eleventh century has created two 'halves' - one, the Western Church or Roman Catholic and Protestant churches generally stress the life of Jesus up to His crucifixion and account of His resurrection in the Gospels. The other half, the Eastern Church picks up what the Resurrection means and where it is taking us, i.e. Transfiguration, transformation, deification. That the cross of Jesus Christ, (the Cosmic Christ), the saving act of God the Father through His Son, is at the centre of the universe and is how the universe is getting back to its perfect condition at its creation.

“The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means, from a Christian perspective, evolution has a purpose and aim, a true unity in divine love incarnate. Jesus Christ can be seen as God’s irreversible bestowal of God’s very self to creation.” (Karl Rayner)