

29th June 2025, Reflection – The Creed (3): ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord’

More than 2000 years ago, there was a Person born contrary to the laws of life. This Person lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His relatives were inconspicuous and had neither training nor formal education. He did not travel extensively. Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived; that was during His exile in childhood.

In infancy He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in adulthood He ruled the course of nature, walked upon the waves as pavement, and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His service.

He never wrote a book, and yet perhaps all the libraries of the world could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. He never practiced psychiatry, and yet He has healed more broken hearts than all doctors far and near. He never marshalled an army, nor drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun; and yet no leader ever had more rebels surrender to him without a shot fired.

Who is this Person?

I'm sure you can guess! This quote is called 'The Incomparable Christ' and it reminds us that **Jesus of Nazareth has a unique life-story**. In our age of media manipulation and the cult of celebrity, it seems impossible to imagine that someone born in the sort of humble circumstances Jesus was, who spent all but three years of his life in obscurity, who never held public office, never fought in a military battle and, after his return to his homeland, never again travelled outside it, could be by far the most influential figure in all of human history.

The well-known atheist writer Philip Pullman has his own take on this. A couple of years ago I read his book called 'The good man Jesus and the scoundrel Christ.' Pullman argues that Jesus was just a good man, a humble teacher, and it was his friends who formed a cult around him after his death.

According to Pullman, Jesus never really carried any grand illusions about his identity, it was others who created those for him. Driven by their own insecurities and ideologies, they made Jesus into the global religious figure he is today.

There's just one small problem with that analysis: **if you actually read the gospels, it's clear that Jesus was very clear about who he was and what he came to do**. You have to believe that everything recorded as being said by Jesus in the gospels was just made up by his friends – in which case, Mr Pullman, why on earth are you bothering to write a book about an obscure holy man 2,000 years later? If it was all bunkum in the first place, it would never have outlasted his friends' lifetimes.

How many of you have heard of Simon of Peraea? Or Athronges the Shepherd? These were both contemporaries of Jesus who claimed to be the Messiah, led an uprising and were executed by one of the Herods. Now almost totally unknown, except to Google. How does a bunch of mostly ill-educated blokes, who ran away at the first sign of trouble, have any hope of creating some sort of a worldwide myth on the scale of what became the Jesus movement? The idea that Jesus of Nazareth was just a humble, holy man whose legacy was misused by unscrupulous friends is the biggest bunkum of all.

And the reason that any follower of Jesus can be confident that Mr Pullman is simply wrong comes down to **the question of identity. There's a reason why in the Creed we begin by declaring who Jesus was, before we declare what he did**. And there are three titles which we give Jesus, each of which is profoundly important: I believe in Jesus... – Jesus who? Jesus **Christ**, God's only **Son**, our **Lord**. Christ, Son and Lord. Today we'll reflect briefly on what each of those mean.

First Christ – or to use the Jewish word, Messiah, or in Hebrew *mashiach*. The word means anointed one, and in the Old Testament it refers to special individuals who were set apart for specific roles through anointing with oil, signifying divine appointment. There were three types of anointed one:

kings, prophets and priests. They all acted as intermediaries between the Lord God and God's people, in different ways. But as the story of the Old Testament went on, and God's people kept moving away from God, leading in the end to conquest and exile, the word Messiah took on a specific, bigger role.

One day, the Messiah would come: a divinely anointed and appointed rescuer, who would be a prophet, priest and king all rolled into one – a spiritual leader who would restore God's people.

Fast forward hundreds of years, and after a period of spiritual preparation a young rabbi appears in the unfashionable northern territory of Israel declaring: 'The time has come, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.' Jesus doesn't explicitly say 'I am the Messiah', but this is the language of Messiah. So is the name he gives himself: 'Son of Man', which he uses about 80 times (so not by accident). This is not just God's name for the great prophet Ezekiel, but also the name of the figure in Daniel's extraordinary vision who comes victoriously into the throne room of heaven, right into God's very presence, and is given all authority, glory and sovereign power – one of the great prophetic visions of the Messiah.

Jesus is very clear: he is the Christ, and everyone understood that was what he was claiming to be.

When he's arrested, the High Priest asks him, 'are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?'

They *know* what Jesus is claiming to be, and how much of the crowd thinks he is. And Jesus says: 'I am.' 'Ego eimi' – the Greek version of God's Holy Name.

That was enough for the religious elite – and it's enough for us. Jesus is the Christ, God's anointed human rescuer come to save his people. But it also reminds us that this Christ was considered to have divine status too. The High Priest talks about the Messiah as being the Son of the Blessed One – i.e. the Son of God. We'll think next week in more detail about why it's so important that Jesus was both fully human and fully God – but today, let's acknowledge that **Jesus is not just the Christ, but also the divine Son**. 'Before Abraham was born, I am,' he tells his astonished listeners in John. Elsewhere he claims to be able to forgive sins and judge the world – things only God could do. God came to this earth to rescue it – and he did so in the form of his Son, Jesus of Nazareth. A Son who was proved to be truly who he said he was through his resurrection. Only God could do that. Hallelujah!

Finally, because of all of this, we can call Jesus 'Lord'. This is the version of God's special name 'Yahweh', which became the main way to address God in the Old Testament, because God's special name was considered so holy – but for us today its main purpose and power is that it reminds us that **Jesus is not just to be praised as the Saviour – the Christ – or worshipped as the Son, but also obeyed**. He's the Lord, the boss. When we have baptisms, I ask the parents and godparents not just to turn to Christ as Saviour – that's the easy bit – but to trust in Christ as Lord – that's the hard bit. Jesus is Lord. As I shared a couple of weeks ago, that's the very first Creed, and in many ways the most vital. Whatever other name you give to Jesus, he is the Lord. He is my Lord. Is he your Lord?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord. Let me finish with some more of The Incomparable Christ: The names of the past, proud statesmen of Greece and Rome, and all empires in between, have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone. But the name of this Person multiplies more and more. Though time has spread two thousand years between the people of this generation and His birth, He still lives! His enemies could not destroy him, and the grave could not hold Him. This Person stands forth as the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by His people and feared by devils, as the risen, personal Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Or, to quote Paul, a man who came to understand deep in his soul what it meant for this person, Jesus of Nazareth, also to be Christ, Son and Lord: 'Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' Amen.