

***BluePrints: In The Flesh***  
***By Jason Huff***  
***June 28, 2014***  
***Jeremiah 31:33-34; Matthew 1:18-23; Philippians 2:5-11***

Friends, our final Scripture reading this evening is Philippians 2:5-11. I invite you to turn there in your Bibles. Let us listen to the Word of God. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Since we’re outside this week, I’ll get right to the point: what’s so special about Jesus? Every religion respects its founder, even if they don’t worship him. Moses, Mohammed, Siddhartha, Joseph Smith, and Sun Myung Moon – all figures in world religions. What makes Jesus different? Why do we regard Him not just as a prophet but as the Son of God, part of God Himself and worthy of our praise and worship?

Our view of Jesus is summarized in the third essential tenet of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The past two weeks, we looked at the first two essentials – Scripture and our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This week we focus directly on the person and work of Jesus. If you want to follow along with the third essential, it’s in your bulletin as today’s response of faith. Here’s what it says:

Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.

The third essential explains why Jesus is so unique. At the same time, it tells us why faith is necessary in order to believe in Him. So let’s dig into it.

*Jesus is extraordinary.* This tenet brings the most extraordinary things about Jesus together in one package. There are at least eight things about Jesus in here that can’t be applied to anyone else in the entire universe. First, He’s the living Word of God. God speaks through Him. Scripture tells us what Jesus did and what He said, and it is the Word of God, it’s incredible, but it’s still just a book. Jesus is the Word of God made alive. We relate to Jesus in ways we can’t relate to a book. We turn to the book to learn about Jesus, but we turn to Jesus Himself to have a relationship with God.

Second, He became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. You and I are here because God willed us to exist. But Jesus is different. His conception was made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. The Spirit touched Mary in a way that we've never seen before or since.

Right alongside this is that Jesus became flesh. We didn't become flesh; we are flesh. We started off as flesh and we will have a form of it in eternity. God promises a resurrection of the dead; all people will be embodied in eternity; we won't be spirits floating around. But Jesus existed before. Jesus existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit even before there was time. He was not flesh, but He became flesh. He took on a body. He became one of us.

Third, the Virgin Birth. Again, nothing like it in the history of the world. It is a physical impossibility to science. And Scripture does not explain it away. It says the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary; that's all. We've all always known how little people come about. This claim was incredible. If it's true, it sets Jesus apart.

Fourth, He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. This is truly amazing. He has taken on our humanity forever. He didn't just come in the form of a human being to discard it later. He will always be totally God and totally human. That makes Him unique even from the Father and the Holy Spirit. We love all three persons of the Trinity. The Father speaks and we obey; the Holy Spirit works inside of us and we follow. But Jesus is always like us in our humanity. He didn't give up anything of Himself but became human too. In this beautiful mystery, we know Jesus is in Himself the bridge between God and humanity.

We can always relate to God because Jesus is human. I don't know what it's like to be any other creature. Jesus knows what it is to be human. When He speaks to us, when He commands us, when He teaches us, He speaks as the only One who has truly lived out what it means to be truly, totally, and perfectly human.

Fifth, He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Everybody dies. That's a given. But no one else in history has died on behalf of our sins to take away the punishment we deserve from God. Romans 5 says, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Can you imagine that? Before you were born, knowing that you would be born with sin, God sent Jesus to die on your behalf so that through faith in Him, you could be saved from eternal death and separation from God. We can imagine sacrificing ourselves for someone we deeply love, a child, a spouse, maybe. We honor soldiers who have done it for their comrades.

But Jesus is aware of all our offenses against God. He knows every time we've done what we wanted rather than what God commanded. He knows every time we left something undone that God wanted us to do. He knows every hurt we've caused, every wrong motive, every lustful thought, every cruel idea. He knows the depths of the darkness in our hearts. He knows just how deep the sin goes. And He died so that we might be free of the chains of it all. He died for us in the midst of our sinfulness.

That's the beauty of it. He did not look down the hallways of time and say, "That one and that deserve to be saved because they're pretty good." No, He looked down the hallways of time and saw that there wouldn't be a single righteous person without His intervention. He said, "Though none choose me and my ways, though every last one would drive the nails into my hands, I love them enough to die for them." That's humbling. God's grace isn't earned. It's a free gift. The sacrifice of Jesus makes it possible for God to be perfectly just and show incredible mercy. It's more gorgeous than the most beautiful sunset. A picture can't capture it and we can't describe it; we simply experience it and say "wow."

Next extraordinary truth: on the third day Jesus arose bodily from the dead. The Bible tells us of a few folks who were resuscitated – but only one came back to life permanently, and that's Jesus. He's also the only person we see come back to life after having suffered a violent death. All the resuscitations were of the sick. Jesus' body was ruined by thirty-nine lashes and the destructiveness of crucifixion. Yet not only does He come back, He does not die again. That separates Him out from even the most incredible resuscitations we've seen throughout history.

And directly related to that – He ascended into heaven. The Father approved of Jesus and showed it by taking Him to heaven where He would never die again. Jesus is justified by the resurrection; it proves what He said was true. But the ascension is an additional proof for us. Jesus tells His disciples that He went away so He could send the Holy Spirit to them. He ascended so that the Spirit would descend, on them and on us. But there were other purposes for the ascension, other reasons for leaving, which is described in the final part of the essential.

Jesus is at the right hand of the Majesty on High, where He now is our High Priest and Mediator. He eternally stands in the gap between the Father and us. When we say Jesus is our High Priest, it means He leads us in worship of the Father, having provided the sacrifice necessary for us to come close to Him. As mediator, He says to the Father, "This person, that person, they are covered by my righteousness." Ephesians 2:18 says we have access to the Father through Jesus by the Holy Spirit. When we pray, it's because of Jesus that the Father hears us. Our sin is no longer a blockade to the Father because Jesus has removed it from us.

Jesus is extraordinary, and our trust in Him must be extraordinary. Our essential doesn't describe what's easy to believe about Jesus – that He was a good teacher, moral, that He lived a laudable life. The essential describes what we can only believe by faith. All of its parts we just described are revealed to us through Scripture. All of them hold true only for Jesus. And they are the components of a living and active faith in Jesus through which God saves us from sin.

The content of our faith matters. Anyone can believe Jesus lived and died. Not everyone can believe He lived again. Anyone can believe He was human. Not everyone can believe He was God. Anyone can believe He was crucified. Not everyone can believe that He died for our sins, and that by faith alone in Him He takes our sins away. It doesn't mean that if you missed part of it you aren't a true believer. But as we learn, we accept these things as true. We not only believe in Jesus, we believe Jesus. We take what He said about Himself as true.

That leads to my final thought of the day: let's say we have faith. We believe this essential. What is our appropriate response? It's found in our passage from Philippians 2. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!"

If I were to summarize that for you in six words, I'd say this: trust Christ; serve others; humble yourself. That's the faithful life in a nutshell. Trust Christ. Make Him Lord of your life. Do what He says to do. When He goes, you go; when He stays, you stay. Trust that He knows what is best for you even when it's not what you want personally. A lot of times, we think trusting Christ instead of doing what we want is like having to go to bed early rather than staying up late to watch fireworks. It's more like a dad making sure his children don't swim in shark-infested waters. He knows what's best. Trust Him.

Serve others. Jesus gave of Himself sometimes to the point where the disciples wondered when He ate or slept. But He also gave everything on the cross to us. As Jesus' followers, we do as He did. We serve. We serve with imagination and creativity – we serve in ways God is calling us to serve that the community needs that nobody else might be thinking of. We need to do it together – every faithful believer serving so we don't miss what God is calling us to do.

And we need to do it without regarding ourselves first. We need to serve when it's not convenient, when it costs us something, when serving means we give something up. We don't serve because it gets us points with Jesus. We serve to be like Him. We serve because Jesus taught us that whatever we do or do not do for the least among us, we do or do not do for Him.

Finally, we humble ourselves. Jesus had no reason to be humble. He could have shouted from the rooftops, "Hey look, I'm awesome," and He would have been right! He's the Son of God, through whom the universe was made. But He became nothing. We have every reason to be humble. We are sinners saved only by the grace of God. Even the faith by which we are saved is a gift from Him. We are blessed simply because God loves us. We humble ourselves because the only One worthy of true honor is He who loves us and poured out His grace on us through Jesus. When we humble ourselves, God is glorified, and we then find our own honor in being His children.

Jesus, the Son of God, became flesh for our sakes. He lives and reigns with the Father forevermore. Stop doubting and believe, step out in faith, and you will know not only that Jesus is extraordinary, but you are saved by His extraordinary gift to you on the cross.