

March 15, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: I BELIEVE IN JESUS (Apostles' Creed #3)

Words are important. What does it mean when I say I am a Christian?

Since 1990 the numbers of those who call themselves Christian in the United States declined by 10%, down to 3 in 4 according to a news article last week. It is not that other faiths are gaining so much as that **more people are indicating they have no faith in God**. The declines came mostly in mainline Protestant denominations. Catholics are holding steady at 1 in 4, while Evangelicals are growing in number to 1 in 3. The Muslim population has grown to 6/10 of 1% but is still statistically small. Mormons are holding steady at 1.4%. The number of practicing Jews is also declining. (cf. *America Becoming Less Christian*, cnn.com, 3/9/09)

Questions of faith are being discussed and debated. The article listed contentiousness as one factor in the decline of those who would normally have listed themselves as Protestant.

In another article a cognitive neuroscientist theorizes that our belief system evolved along with other belief and social cognitive abilities. His theory comes from observing the parts of the brain that react when questions or statements about religious belief are shared. (findings in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, cf. Jeremy Hsu, *Scientists Locate 'God Spot' in Human Brain*, foxnews.com, 3/10/09)

In the adult Sunday School class that meets in the sanctuary, Chris Hoke is challenging us about how we are living out what we say we believe.

What we believe has tremendous implications, because it guides how we live. I can tell you how to live, and even why you should live a particular way, but unless that comes from a core of beliefs first, those beliefs won't be your beliefs. That's why we are emphasizing what the Bible teaches about basic Christian beliefs. **I find that when a person examines the core of what he or she believes in light of what the Bible teaches, it produces the most significant life change.** We grow up in the faith. We grow up together, using the gifts God gives. We grow up into Christ, Who is the head of the body.

This is how the apostle Paul describes it. *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*
Ephesians 4:14

So what does it mean to be a Christian? For the next several weeks we will look at doctrines or statements about our belief in Jesus Christ. It has been said that most cults stray on this key question. *Who do you believe Jesus to be?*

Today's message is a summary statement. *I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.* I invite you to think about what is meant and what you mean by each word and phrase. I believe in . . .

- Jesus

Through the prophet Isaiah the LORD criticizes those who follow idols, reminding that they cannot save. What are the idols we follow today? (Audience.) Then He gives this promise, *"I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel."* Isaiah 46:13 (cf. vs. 7)

Seven hundred years later the angel tells Joseph about the child his fiancée will bear, *"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* Matthew 1:21 This name given Joseph is independent of Gabriel's giving Mary the same name some days or weeks earlier (cf. Luke 1:31). When He was eight days old and circumcised, they name Him Jesus (cf. Luke 2:21).

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Joshua, meaning *the LORD saves*. Sometimes you will see the related names Yeshua (Jeshua), Yehoshua (Jehoshua) and Hoshea. All come from the word meaning *helper* or *savior* and related to the word *salvation*.

Jesus is the name that has prompted joy and derision, wonder and scorn.

Peter, speaking before the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, makes this statement mere weeks after they condemned Jesus to be crucified: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12 What do you mean when you say, "I believe in Jesus?" I believe in Jesus . . .

- Christ

Christ is not Jesus' last name. It is a **title**, meaning *Anointed One*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Jesus the Anointed One.

Christ tells us about Jesus' identity, Who He and others claim Him to be. Christ links Jesus with the promises of the Old Testament. When John identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Bible says that one of John's disciples, Andrew, follows Jesus, and along with another unnamed disciple, spends the day with Jesus. *The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.* John 1:41-42 (cf. vss. 29-34)

The Jewish people had a hope for the coming of Messiah. In Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well, she makes this comment. *"I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."* Then Jesus declared, *"I who speak to you am he."* John 4:25-26 Jesus rarely identified Himself as Messiah, at least until later in His ministry, because of the misconceptions people had that He would rule an earthly kingdom and throw off the yoke of foreign powers. To what ethnic group does this woman belong? This **Samaritan woman has the hope of Messiah as well.** This is significant because the Samaritans only considered the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as authoritative. (Before Christmas I will preach about these texts, i.e. Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Numbers 24: 17a, 19a; Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.)

Jesus uses a passage linked with Messiah of Himself before the hometown crowd at Nazareth, *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.* Isaiah 61:1-2 (cf. Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 13:54-58)

John shares His purpose for writing the book that bears his name. *These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* John 20:31 What do you mean when you say Jesus is the Christ? I believe in Jesus Christ . . .

- His only Son

His refers back to God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. We discover Jesus the Christ's relationship to the Father.

The Bible says, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only (begotten), who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:14 The KJV uses the phrase *only begotten*, but the NIV translates it with the sense of *unique* (cf. Hebrews 11:17). John calls Jesus the Word Who came from God. *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (begotten), who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* John 1:18 What do we learn from this verse? Jesus is called 2) God, 2) the One and Only, 3) at the Father's side (position of honor) and 4) has made him known (because Jesus is in a position to know God the Father).

John the Baptist says, *"I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."* John 1:34 (cf. Matthew 16:16)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son (only begotten), that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

God's love for this world includes giving His Son so that those **believing in him**, should not perish (in their sin), but have life that does not end. *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only (begotten) Son."* John 3:18 Perishing (vs. 16) is linked with condemnation (vs. 18), which stem from not believing in Jesus.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only (begotten) Son into the world that we might live through Him. 1 John 4:9

The term **begotten** is **not used in reference to being born**, but points to **Jesus' relationship with God the Father**. Unlike creation Jesus was not made. **The Son has a unique relationship with the Father as only begotten, but He has no beginning** (cf. Colossians 1:15ff). On more than one occasion Jesus was criticized for, in effect, claiming to be God (cf. John 5:18; 10:33; 19:7). Note this exchange between Caiaphas and Jesus at His trial. *The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.* Matthew 26:63-66 What do you mean when you say Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son . . .

- Our Lord

Lord is a title, which in other contexts means "sir" or "master." **When we say that Jesus is Lord, we use it in relationship to who we are**. He is Lord; we are not. He is in charge; we are not.

Throughout the New Testament Jesus is called *Lord*. Paul shares these well-known words with the believers in Philippi, *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.* Philippians 2:10-11

There is more to this ancient hymn, but it speaks of a day when **everyone everywhere**, all created things, whether they follow God or not, **will acknowledge that Jesus the Anointed One is Lord, and by it bring glory to God the Father**. That includes the demons. They know Jesus' identity as the Son of God (cf. Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Matthew 8:29).

Note that the Apostles' Creed does not just say that we confess Jesus as the Lord. It says **our Lord, indicating a personal belief in Him that leads to relationship**.

Remember Thomas' doubts about Jesus' resurrection? Jesus appears and invites him to put his finger into the nail prints in His hands and to put his hand into the wound in His side. *"Stop doubting and believe."* Thomas said to him, *"My Lord and my God!"* John 20:27, 28

The Bible says, *If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* Romans 10:9
One day all will acknowledge Jesus as **the Lord**, but is He **your Lord**?

Conclusion. Who would you say has the greatest authority, the greatest influence in your life? A parent, teacher, spouse, employer, author, politician? That person is Lord. If Jesus is Lord, I must follow. **Being a Christian is not about what I claim, but about Who has claim on me.** Jesus must have first place. What does my life say about who is Lord? Are you a Christian? What do those words mean? *I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.* (Pray.)