

3 - JESUS, THE CHRIST



Alvaro Pirez d'Evora, The Presentation in the Temple c.1430

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel' (Luke 2:29-32).

Background info

The word 'Christ' comes from the Greek word 'chrīstós', meaning 'anointed one'. It is used in Christianity both as a name and a title referring to Jesus. So, we find in the Bible 'Christ Jesus', meaning 'the Messiah Jesus', 'the Christ', and eventually 'Jesus Christ', a more familiar name which speaks of the belief that through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus was the fulfilment of the messianic prophesies in the Old Testament.



a) Jesus recognised as the Christ

(Read Luke 2:25-32, John 1:35-41, John 4:22-29)

As devout Jews, Jesus' parents travel with the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, for the traditional rites of purification for a woman forty days after the birth of a child. There was also the presentation of a firstborn to God, and the dedication of a firstborn into the Lord's service.

In the temple they meet Simeon, and it has been suggested that as the shepherds symbolised the ordinary person at Jesus' birth, Simeon represents the wise and devout elder walking closely with God,

here waiting expectantly for the Messiah that God's Spirit assured him would appear within his lifetime. And so it is that Simeon enters the temple courts just as the family arrive and recognises his moment has come; 'For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations...'

In the early days of Jesus' active ministry, his focus was on team building to support him then and in the future. Two of John the Baptist's disciples are quick to connect

with Jesus, after he was introduced to them by John as 'the Lamb of God'. One of them, Andrew, finds his brother Simon Peter and declares, 'We have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ)'.

The Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at the well is surprised at his knowledge of her personal life, acknowledging him as a prophet, and as their conversation turns to the spiritual, she openly admits her lack

of understanding, putting her trust in the hoped-for Messiah (or Christ) to make all things clear. Jesus responds that he is that very person, so she hurries back to town, encouraging others to meet this man who might very well be the longed-for Messiah.

We are told many believed, not just because of her words, but from their own conversations with Jesus.

Discussion...

Q) How important is Simeon's role in the story of Jesus, and indeed that of the prophet Anna, who was also at the temple when Jesus' family brought him to Jerusalem (Luke 2:36ff)?

Q) Andrew was nudged toward Jesus by John the Baptist, and the Samaritan woman met him as a stranger at the well. How do we meet Jesus today?

Q) What do the responses of these two people say to us?

b) Grounds for affirmation

(Read Matthew 2:1-6, Acts 10:36-38, Luke 24: 24-32)

The traditional Advent readings from the prophets of the Old Testament are interpreted by Christians as ultimately finding fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

One of Matthew's aims in telling the story of the Magi may well have been to contrast the eagerness of these foreign visitors to pay homage to Jesus (despite their limited knowledge), with the rather dismissive approach of the Jewish leaders and those in Herod's court (who had Scripture to inform them as to where the Messiah might be born).

The Magi are convinced that this person is to be born King of the Jews, rather than this status being conferred upon him later. Matthew is also letting his readers know that if Jesus had not been born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2,4), this claim would eventually have been challenged.



Anonymous, Cusco School, Adoration of the Magi, Google Art Project, c1700

In his message to those gathered with the centurion Cornelius, Peter gives a brief precis of the life and power of Jesus Christ, from his anointing with the Holy Spirit to his death and resurrection. He emphasises that he and many others 'are witnesses of everything (Jesus) did...'

In the post-resurrection story of Jesus walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we find two confused and frightened men taking time out from what

has been a traumatic and painful time. Their inability to recognise Jesus only adds to the drama of the situation as he joins their conversation.

They seem devoid of hope. So, Jesus leads them through the words of the Prophets, emphasising that all he has been through had to happen, and gradually the disciples realise who has been walking with them.

Discussion...

Q) How important, when looking back at any major event, is the variety of witnesses who contribute to how it is remembered, and why might there be strength in that variety?

Q) Where has your personal route to an understanding of Jesus taken you, and was it mainly by reading or listening?

Q) Does the story of the road to Emmaus speak into your own journey of faith?

c) Jesus and the church

(Read Ephesians 1:18-23, Galatians 3:26-29, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

Paul's words in Ephesians form a lovely blessing for believers, as he prays that all might become aware of the amazing riches of God they will inherit. The former Israel was promised an inheritance on earth; the new Israel is promised an eternal inheritance and spiritual riches beyond compare. Christ has been raised from the dead and appointed as head of all things, including the church, which is his body, says Paul.

In writing to the believers in Galatia, Paul talks not just about Jew or Gentile but all who have learned, through their acceptance of Jesus as Saviour, to know that they are children of God through faith. It is this 'all-ness' that is at the heart of God's plan, an 'all' that become 'one' in Christ Jesus. To Paul, baptism is a sign of this transforming identification with Christ.

It's not that baptism replaces circumcision, or that anyone is saved by baptism, it is an outward sign of what already exists through faith.

In the union that believers have with Christ, we become 'Abraham's seed', inheritors of the promise made to Abraham – and in Paul's eyes this applies to the whole church by virtue of it being Christ's body.

Paul certainly knew the strength of God's Spirit in him, suffering opposition to his personal calling from Jesus Christ from the beginning of his missionary journeys. He now considers himself and his team to be servants of all the towns and homes they are welcomed into. And so it is that the Church of Christ becomes established and finds life and growth by the selfless giving of those bringing the message.

Discussion...

Q) How do you understand the term 'body of Christ' in describing the church?

Q) Should a firm knowledge of Jesus Christ be at the heart of all our journeys of faith, and how best can this be encouraged at a local level?

Q) Is the one-ness of all believers reflected in the way your local churches work together, and is there more to be done to encourage this?



Let's pray...

For those who face Christmas alone, through bereavement, family breakup, or simply because they have no one with whom to share this time. May they find the hand of friendship within their local community and church.

Quotes

'There is no better time than now, this very Christmas season, for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the principles taught by Jesus the Christ. It is the time to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart - and our neighbours as ourselves.'

— Thomas S. Monson

'Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son. The only requirement is to believe in Him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life.'

— Corrie Ten Boom