

5th Sunday After the Epiphany, February 5, 2006, Liturgical Year "A"
ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

"Is Jesus Really God?" (part 4)

REVIEW OF LAST SERMON

If you have been with us, you know we have been doing a sermon series on the question, "Is Jesus Really God?" As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ it is imperative that we know the One whom we profess to be our Lord. It is essential that we know why Jesus is God in human flesh. In other words, can we defend our faith? The Bible gives us all that we need to be able to defend Christ's deity and articulate it to those who ask us "Why is Jesus God?"

We first began answering the question, "Is Jesus Really God" by looking at four key areas of Jesus' life here on earth: **1) How He identified Himself? 2) What He taught? 3) What He did? And 4) What He promised? (Please see previous sermons)**

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

This morning we will look at the Apostles' teaching concerning Jesus' deity in the New Testament. We will go directly to the texts themselves.

Please turn with me in your pew Bibles to **John 1:1-4, 17-18**: ***"In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God and the WORD was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...And the WORD became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth...the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten of God, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."***

Note that St. John's use of the term "word," which in the Greek is "logos." We all know that words are necessary for communication. In fact, in order for us to communicate and get anything done we need to use words, don't we? Even if there aren't words communication cannot take place unless there is some sort of language (e.g. sign language for the deaf.) So while *logos* certainly carries with it this meaning, that is, the expression of personality in communication, *logos* means more than just communication. St. John is also conveying the meaning of "Word" (*dabar*) in the Hebrew. For in the Hebrew, the Word of the Lord also meant the expression of divine power as well as the accomplishment of the divine will. In addition, for the ancient Greeks, the *logos* meant the rational mind that controlled the universe. So all of these meanings are encapsulated by John in his use of the term, **LOGOS – THE WORD**. The WORD is the source of all that is created, the WORD is the power behind all creation, the WORD is above all of creation, and the WORD is a PERSON! And as a PERSON, the WORD communicates to creation.

Now note who is the Word? The Word is God, but the Word is also with God, and the Word is Jesus! The Word became flesh. Only God is full of grace and truth, and Jesus, full of the same grace and truth, discloses God to us because He is both the WORD and GOD.

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Now let's look at **Jn. 20:28**. What do find near the end of John's Gospel? The Apostle Thomas declaring to Jesus, **"My Lord and My God!"** In the beginning was the Word. The Word is Jesus. And Jesus is Lord and God.

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW

Let's go to another passage, this time to **Philippians 2:5-11**. Here the Apostle Paul writes:

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form ("nature") of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be held onto, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In this passage, St. Paul highlights the dual natures of Jesus. Jesus is both divine and human. In fact, Jesus is equal with God. And yet, we are told in the Scriptures that God has no equal. Only God is equal to God. So this is another example of the truth of Jesus' deity. Paul then highlights the human nature of Jesus. He is both God and man. Jesus emptied Himself (limited His divine power) to become man. Like when the son of King Henry VIII switched places with a poor boy in London in Mark Twain's book, *"The Prince and the Pauper,"* so too did Jesus limit His rights and privileges to become one of us.

As a result of His obedience and submission to the Father, Jesus was exalted in the flesh and there is coming a day when every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father. That means, not just Christians, but every Moslem, every Buddhist, every Hindu, every Jew, every atheist, every communist, every evolutionist, every angel, every demon, even Satan himself – **EVERYONE** who has ever been created shall bend the knee! So it shouldn't surprise us when we find in **Isaiah 45:23** that God swears by Himself that ***"to Me every knee shall bend, every tongue make solemn confession."*** If God says that every knee shall bend to Himself *before* Jesus even came to earth, the implication is clear. Jesus must be God. He is none other than the Yahweh of the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore, there is only one choice when it comes to Jesus Christ: as Lord, He is also God. Jesus said, ***"You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve."*** (Mt. 4:10, Lk. 4:8).

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Now turn with me to **Colossians 1:15-20**: ***"And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,***

and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

Here we have another illustration of Christ's deity. Paul says that Christ is the image of the invisible God. Now let me ask you, what's an image? An image is an exact representation of something. When we look into the mirror we see our image. When we look at Jesus we see God's image. Paul is teaching us that Jesus is the exact visible representation of God in human flesh. While as human beings we have all been made in the image of God, Jesus IS the image of God, for He is God.

Then we see that St. Paul uses the term, "first-born." Some like to say that the word, "first-born" means that Jesus was a created being (especially Jehovah's Witnesses). But that's not what Paul had in mind. In the Greek "first-born" means the preeminence one has as being the first-born son. In the ancient world, to be the first-born meant that you had the honor and privilege of receiving the family inheritance. In the same way, Jesus takes preeminence over all creation not as a *created* being, but as Creator. Jesus is the heir of all things. That's why Paul then says that Jesus has first place in everything. Note Paul's words (very similar to what St. John says **Jn. 1:1-5**) namely that by Jesus *all things were created, He is before all things* and that *in Him all things hold together*. Think of that for a moment. Christ is the glue that holds our universe together!

GOD AND SAVIOR

Here are a couple more passages where Jesus is identified not only as Savior but as God:

Titus 2:11-14: ***"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."***

St. Peter says the same thing in **2 Peter 1:1:** ***"Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."***

THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE

And then there is the first epistle of John, where St. John highlights over and over again the truth that one can not have eternal life or fully know God without first knowing the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He concludes his epistle by boldly stating that the Son Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life: **1 John 5:20:** ***"And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."***

(Other passages that speak of Christ's deity include Acts 2:36, Romans 9:5 and Hebrews 1:3, 8.)

LORD, LIAR OR LUNATIC?

So we have seen that Jesus lived and taught as if He were not only the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures, but as if He were God in the flesh. And we have seen that the first followers of Jesus, indeed the apostles and first Christians understood that Jesus was not merely a good teacher, spiritual guide or even a great prophet but the very Son of God, coequal with the Father and the Spirit, and God in human flesh. That’s why one day every knee will bow before Jesus Christ, not as a mere man of high stature, but as the Lord God of all creation.

So there are really only three choices. Either Jesus is who He said He was – Lord and God, or He is a liar or a lunatic. He could not have been simply a good moral teacher or a great prophet as the other religions of the world contend, or even one of the gods for that matter.

If Jesus believed He was the Son of God but really wasn’t, that would mean He was crazy. But Jesus did not exhibit the characteristics of lunacy. He spoke with authority, consistency, and clarity. He wasn’t consumed with self but with the well being of others. He demonstrated incredible self-discipline, compassion and wisdom. Lunacy was not part of Jesus’ character or life.

But if Jesus said he was Lord and at the same time knew he wasn’t all along, that would make him a liar and a hypocrite. It would make everything he said and the whole Bible and the Church for that matter a sham. Worse, it would make him diabolically evil. For he taught that our eternal destiny depends on belief in him. And of course, it would make him a fool, for he died for His own lie.

Such an option, however, doesn’t add up. Anyone who has ever read and heard the things Jesus taught and the things His Word teaches knows that teaching and living such a grotesque lie is the very antithesis of what Jesus and the Bible are about. Truth, righteousness, and selfless love are at the core of Jesus’ teaching and what we are to be about as Christians. In fact, He left the world with the most profound moral instruction and example anyone has ever left. That’s why the world over, all world religions and most people view Jesus’ moral teaching with respect and awe. That’s why so many acknowledge Jesus as one of the greatest teachers and spiritual leaders of our world.

And yet, as I mentioned earlier, this is not a viable option, because Jesus lived and taught as if He were God. No, there is really only one option left: Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus is the God of Creation. He is Lord of all.

Hopefully, everyone here not only recognizes this truth, but also believes in their heart that Jesus is Lord. And if you do believe Jesus is Lord, then it means you have work to do. It means that we are called to bring every area of our lives under His control. It means that we are to be living 100% for Him. It means we must be seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

Brothers and sisters, we indeed have been blessed with a great salvation. Let us then, as the Word of God exhorts us, run the race that is set before us. Let us bring glory to our great God and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!