

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday After Christmas, January 2, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 90, 80:1, 104, 81, 78.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 18:15-22, Acts 2:29-36, John 7:11-39.

Sermon Text: John 7:40-44.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How would you answer the question “who is Jesus?” Or maybe more pointedly, ‘who is Jesus to you?’ ‘What does he mean to you?’

You heard in our Gospel lesson that many people had heard him speak, and his words were impressive. Even the temple guards, who had been sent to arrest him, were impressed with his words. But today, as we look at these words of Scripture, we want to ask again ‘Who is Jesus?’

ARE YOU SURE WHO JESUS IS?

- 1. On this day, many weren’t sure about who Jesus is.**
- 2. Some were sure he was the Christ, the Anointed, the Savior.**
- 3. What does he mean to you?**

We hear stories of the children of celebrities who didn’t know what the parent did, or how that person was regarded by others. Sometimes, when we think we know someone, we really just don’t know much about that person and what he or she does and who they are.

But we strive to tell our children about Jesus. Our first New Testament Sunday School lessons make it plain that Jesus is special, that he is the very Son of God, and we go on to teach about what he has done for us.

But it is sometimes difficult for us to explain to adults who Jesus really is and what he means to us. That was even happening when Jesus was alive.

Jesus had just made a big impression on many people. Many had seen his miracles. Many had heard his words. Both the words and the way in which Jesus spoke made a profound impression, but the people were impressed in various ways. This occurred at the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three major festivals among the Jews, remembering the time that God’s chosen people had spent living in the wilderness for 40 years.

People were divided on ‘who is this Jesus from Nazareth?’ Is he a prophet before Christ comes? Or is he the Christ himself? But others had doubts, knowing that Jesus supposedly had come from Nazareth. Some apparently knew that the Savior would be a descendant of David and come from Bethlehem, as Scripture plainly teaches but they couldn’t accept Jesus as that Savior.

Some of them were ready to believe that Jesus was that great prophet of whom Moses had spoken. Moses had said, by inspiration of God, that *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”* Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV)

But they did not recognize that the Messiah himself was that great prophet of whom Moses had spoken. Others had reached the conviction that Jesus must be the Christ himself, which was a great confession of faith. But others were present who ridiculed what they thought was his Galilean ancestry, because they believed that Jesus had been born in Nazareth in Galilee. They were familiar with the prophecy according to which the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem, and their assumption about his Galilean ancestry didn’t agree with this prophecy. So public opinion was divided about who he is.

In three of the four Gospels we find Jesus asking his disciples on at least one occasion about himself **“Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”** Matthew 16:13-16 (NIV)

But let’s remember what Scripture says about the names of Jesus. Jesus was the personal name the angel had told Joseph, the husband of Mary, that the child would have. Scripture tells us that **“an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”** Matthew 1:20-21 (NIV)

We also use the name, the word, “Christ” to identify the Savior of all mankind. The name “Christ” means “the Anointed One”, meaning the one anointed and appointed by God to save all mankind from all their sins. The word “Christ” from the Greek language is the same as the word “Messiah” from the Hebrew language.

A careful search of the 27 books of the New Testament will show that in the first verses of each book, the Savior is identified as the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed of God except for two books of the New Testament. The name Christ doesn’t come up until the third chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, although the first verses of that book plainly speak of God’s Son, the Savior. The other book is John’s third letter, which is only 14 verses long, and doesn’t use the name Christ at all to refer to Jesus.

We must remember that whenever there is a difference of opinion about the person and office of Christ, or about any doctrine of the Word of God, the reason is found in the perverse understanding of man. Next to completely taking away our faith, Satan wants nothing more than to spread confusion and misunderstanding about what God says in his inspired Word.

A careful searching of Scriptures and a diligent comparison of the various parts of Scripture will always result in absolute clearness with regard to all the doctrines which are necessary for salvation.

Some of the Jews on this day were so hardened to the proclamation of the Gospel that they wanted to arrest Jesus. But God himself prevented this, for the hour of Jesus to be crucified was not yet come.

The message of the angels at Jesus’ birth has been completely misunderstood. It is often misunderstood to imply that people will get along and that there will be peace among nations and between people. It really speaks of peace between sinful mankind and God. But sin pervades the world and even our lives. Do we think that Christ came to send earthly peace, that all would unanimously embrace his gospel? No, the effect of the preaching of his gospel would be division, for he himself says **“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”** Luke 12:51-53 (NIV)

While some are gathered to the Gospel, others will be gathered against it; and this will cause much dissension, even within families, but this is not the fault of the gospel.

On this very day some of the people said that this is the prophet of whom Moses spoke, who should be like him, not recognizing that Jesus himself was that great prophet, thinking like many in the Jewish church that such a man would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Others went further, and said ‘This is the Christ, not just a prophet but the Messiah himself.’ Many Jews apparently were looking for the Messiah, and expecting him to appear, but did not really know all the Old Testament Scriptures which clearly explained what the Messiah would really do. Many Jews were apparently ready to say ‘Look, here is Christ, or Look, he is there! Jesus himself warned against this. **“If anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.”** Matthew 24:23 (NIV)

Many were – and still are today – confused about who Christ is.

Many may think of him as a great prophet, but no more than that, as the Muslims do. Many have thought that he is the Christ, but could not persuade themselves to leave all and follow him.

Others were plainly prejudiced against him. Rather than really listening to what Jesus himself said, they were thinking that Jesus came from Galilee and the Scriptures plainly said he would be a descendant of David.

Some knew only some of the Scriptures. When we see – from Scripture – how those who opposed Jesus misstated and perverted the Scriptures it is easy to conclude that such faulty knowledge or picking and choosing passages they wanted to believe and use was something that was being used at this very time to attack Jesus. The leaders of the Jews generally had no use for Jesus but wanted to retain their own prestige and power over the people.

Immediately after our text we read: ***“Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why didn’t you bring him in?’ ‘No one ever spoke the way this man does,’ the guards declared. ‘You mean he has deceived you also?’ the Pharisees retorted. ‘Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law--there is a curse on them.’ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ‘Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?’ They replied, ‘Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.’ Then each went to his own home.”*** John 7:44-53 (NIV)

But who is Christ to you? Is he someone you just look at in the manger and forget that he will live a sinless life and then be crucified for all your sins?

Is he just a good man whose words you can pick and choose from, despite the fact that Jesus tells his followers plainly to ***“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

Are you one who can kind of wink at sins you – or others – commit and think, well, it’s OK if we don’t obey everything Jesus teaches in the Word of God? That is sin in our hearts which we must fight every minute of every day before it becomes sin in words and/or deeds.

May God preserve us! And may he preserve unto us the true Gospel of forgiveness, repentance, and turning to Christ humbly, confessing our sins just as we all joined in words confessing our sins earlier in our worship service!

Jesus is the Christ, the Savior come to take away your sins and the sins of all mankind. He paid for them! Believe that and live! Amen.